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SOCIETUM AS AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Problem. Contemporary social philosophy still lacks an integrative analytical category that can explain deep social change without reducing it either to institutions, to individual actions, or to isolated sectoral reforms. In this context, the concept of «societum» becomes relevant because it makes it possible to analyze social integrity as a multi-level configuration of structures, practices, meanings, historical memory, and value orders. Clarifying its ontological status is therefore necessary for a more precise interpretation of societal transformations and their mechanisms.

Purpose. to substantiate the concept of «societum» as a category of social philosophy and to construct an analytical framework for describing societal transformations; to specify its ontological status, define the limits of its application, and outline the logic of its further empirical operationalization.

Methods. The study is theoretical and methodological in nature. It uses conceptual analysis to clarify the content and scope of the key category, comparative reconstruction of classical and contemporary theories of social integrity, and critical interpretation to identify internal contradictions, risks of reification, and analytical limits. The argument is additionally grounded in critical realist methodology, especially the ideas of stratified social reality, emergence, and causal mechanisms.

Results. The article demonstrates that «societum» can be defined as a historically concrete, multi-level configuration of institutions, practices, normative expectations, and symbolic orders reproduced through agency but not reducible to subjective intentions. A five-component ontological matrix is proposed, incorporating the structural-institutional, agentic-practical, meaning-communicative, temporal-historical, and value-normative dimensions of social reality. This framework allows societal transformations to be interpreted as changes in regimes of legitimation, power distributions, collective memory, narratives, and value-based justification. The article also shows that the heuristic value of the societum category lies in combining structural and semantic mechanisms of social change and in providing an interdisciplinary framework for further empirical research.

Key words: societum, social ontology, societal transformations, values, cultural trauma, critical realism.

Introduction. The category of «society» in philosophical and sociological traditions often functions as a general designation for the social whole, without specifying its internal structure or reproduction mechanisms. In applied research, this generates at least three methodological errors. The first is the reduction of societal integrity to institutions without analyzing how exactly they are interconnected and why their interaction produces complex effects. The second is the reduction to aggregated individual actions and beliefs, where social changes are explained by shifts in moods or consciousness, even though actual everyday practices remain unchanged. The third is sectoral particularism – explaining societal transformations through a single subsystem while ignoring the mutual reinforcement or mutual blocking of changes.

The concept of «societum» is used as an attempt to overcome these reductions and to capture society as a multidimensional system in which institutional, cultural, value-based, historical,



and civilizational aspects interact. This allows one to speak not merely of society as a static system in a narrow functionalist sense, but of a configuration of relations, meanings, and norms that produces a specific type of collective identity and legitimation. In this sense, *societum* is potentially productive for analyzing deep transformations – those that simultaneously concern rules, practices, modes of argumentation, memory politics, and value orientations.

At the same time, the concept of «*societum*» is methodologically vulnerable. It is often used as an equivalent to society without criteria distinguishing it from concepts of «the social», the «social system», civilization, nation, etc. The second vulnerability is reification, where integrity begins to be interpreted as a «supra-subject» possessing its own intentions and will. The third is normative substitution: in discussions about societal transformations, descriptive and evaluative judgments are often mixed, complicating the empirical verification of arguments.

Given this, the problem of this article lies in clarifying the ontological status of *societum* and developing an analytical instrument for researching societal transformations. The research questions are formulated as follows: What is the ontological status of the *societum*? Which levels of social reality does it encompass? How can societal transformations be distinguished from changes in subsystems? How can structure, agency, meanings, memory, and value orientations be combined within a single framework?

An analysis of publications shows a strengthening of scientific interest in social ontology, particularly within critical realist approaches and discussions on deep ontologies in the social sciences [1; 2]. Parallel to this, there is growing attention to temporal mechanisms of transformation – collective memory, narratives, cultural traumas, and identity politics as factors of (de)consolidation. Coordinating these lines requires an integrative category that does not dissolve structure into discourse and does not reduce meanings to a superstructure, but enables their analysis as part of the mechanisms of social dynamics.

Purpose and objectives. The aim of this study is to substantiate «*societum*» as a category of social philosophy and to propose an analytical framework for describing societal transformations. To achieve this aim, the following tasks are set: (1) to perform a critical reconstruction of key theoretical approaches to understanding societal integrity; (2) to propose a definition of *societum* that minimizes the risks of reification and reductionism; (3) to construct an ontological matrix of *societum*; (4) to outline the limits of the application of the *societum* concept and directions for its empirical operationalization.

Research methods. The research is of a theoretical-methodological nature. Its main methods are: 1) conceptual analysis – to clarify the content and scope of concepts; 2) comparative reconstruction of theories – to compare ontological assumptions and explanatory schemes; 3) critical interpretation – to identify internal contradictions and the limits of category application. Additionally, elements of critical realist methodology are used, within which the conception of a stratified social reality and the emergence of structural properties is formed [3; 4].

Results. Classical approaches to societal integrity can be presented as alternative answers to the question: what makes social order possible and stable? In the tradition of the «social fact», order is conceived as external to the individual, coercive, and normative [5; 6]. This is important for critiquing psychological reductionism; however, it complicates the explanation of changes occurring through conflict and reflexive agency. The functionalist perspective emphasizes the systemic interdependence of subsystems and mechanisms for maintaining integration but tends to devalue power asymmetries and historical contingency, as well as substitute mechanisms with teleological «system needs» [7].

Structuration theory proposes the concept of the «duality of structure», where rules and resources simultaneously constrain and enable action. This solves part of the «structure-agency» problem but generates another: if structure is conceived as a «memory of practices», a clear analytical criterion for distinguishing structural mechanisms from current events disappears [8]. M. Archer's morphogenetic approach introduces analytical dualism, where structures and agency are distinguished in time, allowing for the identification of mechanisms of change and reproduction [9; 10].

R. Bhaskar's critical realism, in turn, adds the principle of stratified ontology, according to which observed events do not exhaust reality, as there exist mechanisms and causal powers that do not always manifest in the same form [3]. At the same time, social constructionism makes visible the processes of the institutionalization of meanings, objectification, legitimation, and the «self-evidence» of everyday knowledge [11; 12]. J. Habermas's theory of communicative action demonstrates that social integration has a linguistic, procedural nature, where legitimacy appears not merely as a function of efficiency, but as a result of the possibility of justifying norms and decisions in communication [13]. N. Luhmann's systems theory radicalizes the autonomy of communication. In it, society appears as a system of communications, not as a simple aggregate of individuals [14]. Its heuristics are useful for analyzing self-reference and complexity but may lead to insufficient attention to agency and the normative dimension.

Thus, the concept of *societum* must be constructed in such a way as to account for the coerciveness and normativity of institutions, not dissolve structures into events, possess an instrument for describing conflicts and changes, and maintain a connection with meanings, memory, and values as real mechanisms of transformation.

In this context, it is appropriate to define *societum* as a historically concrete, multi-level configuration of institutions, practices, expectations, and symbolic orders. Such a configuration ensures the reproduction of the social bond and collective identity, possesses emergent properties, is reproduced through agency and communication, and is normatively legitimated. In this definition, «*societum*» appears as a reality of a special type, a configuration of causal powers and mechanisms – including emergent structural properties – that form relatively stable patterns of interaction, reproduction, and change [1, 2, 3].

Within our research, we have proposed five dimensions for analyzing the concept of *societum* and societal transformations, each of which sets its own type of research questions. They are presented as interconnected matrices that allow for the decomposition of integrity without destroying its logic. For applied research, this general matrix is actualized as a map of questions.

Table 1

Ontological matrix of *societum*

Dimension	Analytical Questions	Indicators
Structural-Institutional	What rules, institutions, and power relations organize interaction? Where are resources localized?	Laws, regulations, budget procedures, institutional architecture of responsibility.
Agentic-Practical	What practices reproduce order? Which coalitions of actors initiate or block changes? What resources of agency are available?	Network maps of actors, cases of rule implementation, coordination data.
Meaning-Communicative	What narratives and categories legitimate the social order?	Media corpora, public debates, court decisions, educational standards, analysis of frames, categories, symbolic boundaries.
Temporal-Historical	What events and traumas structure collective memory?	Memory politics, memorial spaces, changes in dominant plots and figures of responsibility.
Value-Normative	What values and norms legitimate institutions? Where is the gap between the declared and the performed? What criteria of justice dominate?	Constitutional principles, codes of ethics, strategies, disciplinary practices, transparency indicators.

Societal transformations should be distinguished from sectoral reforms. We refer to changes that redefine the institutional order, practices, symbolic structures, memory, and normative expectations. The shift in values in this sense cannot be explained solely by discursive fashion; it requires an analysis of the institutional mechanisms of education, media, and law; conditions of agency; communicative regimes; and temporal mechanisms of interpreting events as the basis of identities.

Schematically, societal transformation can be described as a transition between regimes of legitimation: from the dominance of traditional, patrimonial systems to procedural, legal, or

value-oriented ones. Or as a change in the balance between systemic imperatives and the lifeworld, where meanings and trust are produced. Research on cultural trauma shows that trauma is not merely an event, but a social process of meaning production. It can consolidate a community through shared narratives, but it can also support destructive cycles through retraumatization, exclusive identities, and moral polarization [15]. Postcolonial approaches, in turn, allow for the analysis of symbolic hierarchies and «epistemic» dependencies that influence frameworks of legitimation, the language of society's self-description, and which models of modernization are considered the norm [16; 17; 18]. Combined with the matrix, these perspectives help view value choice as a configuration of institutions, discourses, and memory.

Societal dynamics rarely have a linear character. More often, it involves feedback loops – a discursive redefinition of a problem may open a window of opportunity for institutional reforms. In turn, institutional changes alter the incentives for practices. New practices create a demand for different legitimation, and memory politics are capable of either maintaining trust or generating polarization. In this sense, the matrix allows moving from describing spheres to analyzing mechanisms, identifying exactly which connections between dimensions trigger cascades of change and which block them due to institutional inertia, conflict of interest, or symbolic barriers. This is particularly important for investigating situations where formal reforms do not lead to expected results.

The proposed framework has a number of advantages, but also principal limitations. First, «societum» as an integrative category raises the level of abstraction. Second, there is a danger of reification – when societum is described in the language of a subject. Methodologically, it is more correct to interpret societum as a configuration of conditions and mechanisms that make certain trajectories more probable and others less accessible. In a critical realist perspective, this means focusing on mechanisms and causal powers rather than on the metaphorical intentions of the whole.

Third, communicative and value dimensions require specific argumentative discipline. Values are not «pure ideas» detached from institutions. They are stabilized through procedures, interests, education, and media, as well as through symbolic resources: authority, prestige, and the moral boundaries of the community. Therefore, it is incorrect to explain transformations by a change in consciousness without analyzing who transforms values into socially binding rules and how, and what mechanisms ensure their enforcement.

Fourth, the temporal-historical dimension emphasizes the problem of trauma and memory as resources and risks of transformation. Theories of cultural trauma show that traumatic experience can be transformed into an instrument of solidarity or an instrument of exclusion. This requires the researcher to distinguish between the description of trauma as a fact of experience and the analysis of trauma as a social process of constructing meanings, responsibility, and community boundaries. Ultimately, the proposed matrix does not replace empirical work; it only sets the structure of questions. Its verification is possible through application in specific cases where claimed changes can be compared with the real restructuring of practices.

Conclusions. Based on the above, we can state the fact that the category «societum» has analytical value when its ontological status is defined as a multi-level configuration of institutions, practices, meanings, memory, and values that is reproduced through the interaction of agents and possesses emergent effects.

The proposed five-component ontological matrix allows avoiding one-dimensional explanations of societal transformations and formulating research approaches to mechanisms of change: legitimation regimes, discursive structures, memory politics, and normative expectations.

Methodological risks of applying the concept of societum and societal transformations are associated with excessive abstraction and reification. These can be minimized through a clear distinction of dimensions, institutional-practical operationalization, and an orientation toward mechanisms. Future prospects for this research include empirical investigations of societal transformations using the matrix as a scheme for data collection and interpretation, the development of sets of indicators for each dimension, as well as comparative studies of different social systems aimed at identifying types of societal dynamics.

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СОЦІЄТУМ ЯК ІНТЕГРАТИВНА РАМКА АНАЛІЗУ СУСПІЛЬНИХ ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЙ

Актуальність проблеми. У сучасній соціальній філософії аналіз масштабних суспільних змін часто ускладнюється через редуцію соціальної цілісності або до інституцій, або до індивідуальних дій, або до окремих секторів суспільного життя. За таких умов бракує інтегративної категорії, здатної одночасно охопити структурні, практичні, смислові, темпоральні та ціннісні механізми змін. Саме тому уточнення евристичного потенціалу поняття «соцієтум» є методологічно значущим для дослідження глибинних трансформацій суспільства, зокрема змін легітимації, ідентичностей, режимів пам'яті та нормативних порядків. Це особливо важливо для інтерпретації нелінійної суспільної динаміки.

Мета. обґрунтувати поняття «соцієтум» як категорію соціальної філософії та запропонувати аналітичну рамку, придатну для опису соцієтальних трансформацій без редуції їх до окремих інституційних або дискурсивних процесів; конкретизувати його онтологічний статус, визначити межі застосування та окреслити логіку подальшої емпіричної операціоналізації.

Методи дослідження. У роботі використано концептуальний аналіз для уточнення змісту й обсягу поняття, порівняльну реконструкцію класичних і сучасних теорій соціальної цілісності, а також критичну інтерпретацію для виявлення внутрішніх суперечностей, ризиків реїфікації та меж застосування категорії. Додатково залучено принципи критичного реалізму, насамперед ідеї стратифікованої соціальної реальності, емерджентності та каузальних механізмів.

Результати. Уточнено, що соцієтум доцільно розуміти як історично конкретну, багаторівневу конфігурацію інституцій, практик, нормативних очікувань і символічних порядків, яка відтворюється через взаємодію агентів, але не зводиться до їхніх намірів. Запропоновано п'ятикомпонентну онтологічну матрицю аналізу, що охоплює структурно-інституційний, агентно-практичний, смислово-комунікативний, темпорально-історичний і ціннісно-нормативний виміри. Показано, що ця рамка дає змогу досліджувати соцієтальні трансформації як зміну механізмів легітимації, конфігурацій влади, колективної пам'яті, наративів та режимів нормативного виправдання. Доведено, що евристична цінність категорії «соцієтум» полягає в поєднанні структурних і смислових механізмів соціальних змін та у створенні підстав для міждисциплінарного аналізу.

Ключові слова: соцієтум, соціальна онтологія, соцієтальні трансформації, цінності, культурна травма, критичний реалізм.

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