the world’s problems require a sociological imagination for their solution, but that imagination is losing
ground as an academic discipline and as public knowledge.
M. Burawoy, Chapter 2 in this Handbook

More than 15 years have passed since the opening speech by Michael Burawoy to the
American Sociological Association that discussed the meaning and perspective of (organic)
public sociology. According to Burawoy's by now classic definition, public sociology is ‘an
alternative type of public sociology … in which the sociologist has direct access to publics,
in which the sociologist and public enter into an unmediated face-to-face relation. Instead of
a broad, thin, passive, and mainstream public, organic public sociology encounters or creates
narrow, thick, active counter-publics’ (Burawoy, 2021, p. 18; see also Burawoy, 2005). That
speech triggered a debate which has grown steadily over time, fuelled by dozens of articles,
books, websites and forums in which favourable and critical positions jointly confirm the
extraordinary interest aroused by the theme.

The aim of this Handbook is to provide an overview of public sociology by focusing on four
main points:

- the reasons for the enduring importance of public sociology in the current context and in
  light of ongoing changes in the social world;
- the connections between public sociology and other approaches which, in the social
  sciences, develop dialogues and conversations of different kinds and levels;
- the construction of a thematic agenda consistent with the scientific programme underlying
  public sociology; and
- the applications of public sociology in empirical research and teaching.

Therefore, our intention in this Handbook, as well as in this chapter, is not explanatory; nor is
it to systematically develop an already-established analytical programme. Rather, we assemble
some features of public sociology that appear most promising, and we explore its potential for
collaboration and hybridization with research paths that move at its borders and/or traverse
some of its directions of development.

POSSIBLE AND IMPOSSIBLE

In his latest book, Burawoy (2021) traces the scientific, academic and personal trajectory
along which his theory of a public sociology has developed since 2004. In what follows, we
mainly refer to the reflections proposed in his book, and to some of the focuses and issues that
it addresses.

We begin by pointing out that a good part of Burawoy’s reasoning is centred on sociology
tout court, in a manner that is broader and more detailed than elsewhere. His intention is to
clarify as much as possible the general framework in which to locate public sociology. The key feature chosen to discuss the origins and purposes of sociology is its relationship with values. Burawoy declines this relationship in light of the concept of utopian thinking, identifying three phases. The first phase is simply the desire for a better world: ‘We become sociologists not to become rich but to make a better world, whatever better might mean – more equal, more free, more cooperative’ (Burawoy, 2021, p. 2). Sociology is therefore imbued with values which generate the impulse that impels people to become sociologists. The second phase, which Burawoy terms ‘anti-utopian’, centres on the analysis of society in regard to how ‘the realization of values are [sic] systematically obstructed – how inequality, domination, egoism are reproduced by the social institutions we inhabit’ (ibid., p. 3). This analysis leads to the third phase, that of the elaboration of values into visions of an alternative world (ibid., p. 3).

In order for alternative worldviews to gain strength, it is therefore necessary to consider the real conditions and limitations that they encounter. In this regard, Burawoy recalls the notion of ‘real utopia’ developed by Eric Wright, who was Burawoy’s colleague and lifelong friend, emphasizing the tension between imaginations and real practices that underlies the concept. On the one hand, utopian ideals are not an abstract design but are grounded in the real potentials of humanity. On the other hand, ‘what is pragmatically possible is not fixed independently of our imaginations’ (Wright, 2010, p. 6).

The tension between utopia and anti-utopia from which sociology originates is equivalent to the tension between the possible and the impossible:

Sociology excavates the often-repressed desire for a different world, a better world, and explores the conditions of and obstacles to its realization. Sociology is caught between the possible and the impossible: between the utopian imagination reaching beyond the constraints their existence and power and the anti-utopian science that reveals their existence and power. By ‘anti-utopian’ I don’t mean ‘dystopian,’ which refers to an undesirable or ‘bad’ society, but the limits on the realization of a ‘good’ society. (Burawoy, 2021, p. 2)

Placing the tension between possible and impossible at the centre means that the desire to change the world must take the limits of the possible into account. It must identify and understand them so that it can modify them and discover alternative worlds without utopia turning into dystopia. This, then, is the founding core of sociology: ‘the realization of the possible is through the pursuit of the impossible. Or to put it slightly differently, the pursuit of the impossible shifts the limits of the possible’ (ibid., p. 4).

From this derives the idea that sociology is an archaeology of social reality: ‘Suspended between their utopian aspirations and anti-utopian constraints, sociologists become archeologists excavating the world for emancipatory possibilities, now and in the past, here and there. The sociologist is impelled to discover the embryos of alternative worlds by an incessant lament directed at the existing world’ (ibid., p. 3).

Burawoy’s account of the relationship between sociology and utopia should be discussed much more extensively than is possible here, given the questions that it raises in regard to the foundations and status of knowledge. Certainly, it lends itself to being criticized; for example, in regard to the meanings attributed to Weberian ideal-types or because it too hastily has the reasons of sociology linked to a precise historical and institutional context coincide with the reasons of sociology tout court. It goes without saying that Burawoy’s position reflects many of the arguments and approaches to knowledge that invite us to overcome the most reductive approaches of a scientific matrix: consider, for example, civic epistemologies (Jasanoff,
2005), post-normal science (Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1993), the debate on post-colonial theory and epistemologies of the South (de Sousa Santos, 2018; for a discussion see Pellizzoni, Chapter 12 in this Handbook). This does not only concern sociology, of course. In various disciplines, this cluster of issues – which has to do with the relationship between knowledge and empirical reality even more than the relationship between knowledge and engagement – has given rise to discussions of great breadth and richness. Here it is obligatory to refer to Hirschman (1971), and his notion of possibilism. The chapters in Part II of this Handbook show how these issues traverse numerous bodies of knowledge.

Whatever the case may be, Burawoy’s clearly stated position has the merit of reviving the debate – in recent times rather feeble – on how sociology should or can refer to the parameters of objectivity at the basis of scientific knowledge in modernity. Incidentally, it should be recalled that even Max Weber, who also clearly supported the principle of value-freedom of sociological knowledge, never believed that the problem of how to achieve it could be completely resolved, at least in practice. Furthermore, as Abbott (2007) points out, the relationship between facts and values is much less linear than a large part of sociology seems to believe, because ‘sociology is at one and the same time a cognitive and a normative enterprise. When we pretend that it is not, our work becomes arbitrarily deformed’ (ibid., p. 209).

That said, we are not interested here in problems of an epistemological kind. Rather, our concern is to point out that, in order to understand the meaning of Burawoy’s notion of public sociology correctly, it is necessary to consider the more general framework that gives it meaning: that is, the tension between possible and impossible that underlies sociology itself. Outside this framework, there is the risk of corroborating trivialized agendas of public sociology, which range from a pinch of extra engagement to approximations of participated science.

We can only agree with Burawoy that sociology has to do with ‘expanding the limits of the possible’. But we are sure that many of our colleagues do not agree at all. At a time of the irresistible rise of abstract empiricism – as Wright Mills called it – such a view tends to be rejected out of hand as ideological, naïve and unscientific. However, it is a known fact that sociology has been driven since its origins by an emancipatory thrust towards social change. And it is also known that this is not the only thrust to consider. In fact, the entire history of the discipline is based on the coexistence of, and tension between, a progressive soul and a conservative one, both of which occupied a great deal of space in the way in which the precursors and founders of sociology sought to account for the characteristics, problems and dynamics of change in modern societies. Certainly, Burawoy cannot be reproached for ignoring these matters, since the alternation between progressive and regressive phases forms the core of his descriptions of events in American sociology over recent decades. Instead, what should be considered the distinctive features of his treatment are these: (1) the choice to align clearly with one side – that of the possible, in the form outlined above – conceived as the core of the discipline; and (2) the related choice of highlighting the role of public sociology in this regard. These choices are obviously questionable.

At this point, it is important to describe the specific ways in which public sociology deals with the tension between possible and impossible that Burawoy associates with sociology in general. In the first place, and very briefly, we can state that they consist in the modes whereby the relationship between sociologists and their research domains, between observers and observed, is built; modes in which the public dimension of sociological knowledge and research takes concrete form. ‘Public’ in what sense?
PUBLIC AS PUBLICNESS: A PROCESS MORE THAN AN OBJECT

In Burawoy’s approach, an ‘organic public sociology’ basically means interaction with counter-publics: that is, active publics that participate in the knowledge process in different, even conflicting ways. Burawoy is keen to draw distinctions with respect to traditional public sociology which, from his point of view, has the merit of promoting discussion on issues of collective importance, but has the shortcoming of addressing publics that are ‘generally invisible in that they cannot be seen, thin in that they do not generate much internal interaction, passive in that they do not constitute a movement or organization, and they are usually mainstream’ (Burawoy, 2005, p. 5). In organic public sociology, instead, knowledge is built by interacting with a ‘visible’, ‘dense’, ‘local’ and often ‘antagonistic’ public. This is a public that does not pre-exist the process of sociological knowledge but, if anything, develops thanks to the process itself and the interactions that take place therein.

Several scholars have criticised Burawoy’s notion of the public as vague. It should be said that it is the concept of ‘public’ as such that has numerous indeterminate features, starting with the fact that ‘public’ does not mean ‘state’ (Clarke, 2004; de Leonardis, 1998), and the public and the private are not two clearly distinguished spheres of action (Fraser, 1997).

Burawoy has developed his approach in the wake of the theories that brought the public dimension of knowledge to the fore. Charles Wright Mills (1959), a central reference in Burawoy’s intellectual biography, conceived social science as a kind of apparatus of public intelligence. Even more evident is the link to John Dewey’s (1927) pragmatism (see also Cefaï, Chapter 3 in this Handbook), according to which a public ‘consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for’ (Dewey, 1927, p. 69).

As in Dewey, so in Burawoy: public sociology conceives ‘public’ as a process and as a (possible) result of this process, rather than as a substance. The goal of public sociology is ‘to make the invisible visible and to make the private public’ (Burawoy, 2005, p. 8). Resonating in this process-based setting are the classic theories on the public sphere and space. Consider, in particular, the centrality that the processes of visibilization have in these theories, through which problems and viewpoints leave the private, or hidden sphere, leading to arenas of discussion and critical examination (Arendt, 1958; Habermas, 1989). According to French pragmatic sociology, visibilization is made significant by the processes of ‘generalization’ through which particular viewpoints and claims activate a framework of references, making them accessible to the judgment of others and acceptable as legitimate (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991; Cefaï, 2002).

Therefore, the public is not taken as an entity given in advance; and the consequent logic of audience, based on supposed given preferences, for structuring (also) the relationship between research and its publics, is abandoned. The emphasis on the process-based dimension of the public stresses the importance of how learning dynamics are achieved, which is even more important than what is the final content of these learning dynamics. What matters, therefore, is the specific quality of the relationship that binds the sociologist to their audience: for both of them, the relationship is a learning process – a process of shared discovery (Cefaï, Chapter 3 in this Handbook).

This idea of ‘public’ is to a certain extent also oriented towards the politicization or repoliticization of everyday life. Public sociology introduces a perspective glance that seeks to highlight the links between, on the one hand, situated and specific experiences (needs, prob-
lems) as they take shape in the daily lives of individuals; and on the other, the public sphere in which the specificity of those issues and experiences is interpreted and transformed into public issues. In this perspective, public sociology counters the many processes of depoliticization that transform collective problems and issues into technical matters which only expert languages are authorized to deal with. Public sociology (also) endeavours to show how those technical definitions of social problems incorporate assessments and representations also linked to worldviews and conceptions.

POSSIBLE CONVERGENCES? PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY AND BOTTOM-UP COSMOPOLITANISM

The orientation towards expanding the limits of the possible; the public dimension as a process and as a (possible) result and not as an entity given a priori; the repoliticization of everyday life: these are all elements that can be potentially intertwined and, at least partially, merged with other investigative approaches. Among the various interpretative keys that can help provide insights into these intertwinnings and mergers, the general stance identifiable in terms of ‘bottom-up cosmopolitanism’ seems to be a useful framework. From our point of view, in fact, it is possible to trace various points of contact between the public sociology approach and various others that here we try to circumscribe through the concept of ‘bottom-up cosmopolitanism’.

It is first necessary to clarify what we refer to by means of this concept. ‘Cosmopolitanism’ is a term with a long history and to which many possible meanings have been given. Our interpretation of this concept shares with the more conventional and widespread form of it as ‘the urge to expand one’s current horizons of self and cultural identity’ and a universalistic inspiration (Appadurai, 2013, p. 198). However, our interpretation strengthens its critical potential by stressing ‘the mutual implication of centre and periphery and local and global levels as a transformative process’ (Delanty, 2006, p. 38). Already apparent at this very general level is a consonance with the public sociology approach. More specifically, we conceive ‘bottom-up cosmopolitanism’ as a (scientific, cultural) perspective based on a critical appraisal of the public sphere as a space of emancipation that resumes and revises Polanyi’s concept of ‘counter-movement’. Assumed as a key dimension of this revision is a third social move (beyond the first one, disembedding as marketization, and the second one, embedding as reaction in terms of social protection): that is, emancipation.

The notion of emancipation plays an important role in the perspective that we propose here. By identifying the exploitation caused by disembedded markets and commodification, without ignoring forms of domination produced in non-market social practices (that is, embedded) – patriarchalism, for instance – emancipation introduces more complexity into a dualistic interpretation of (negative) movement (due to the market dynamic) and (positive) counter-movement (social protection). ‘Avoiding both wholesale condemnation of disembedding and wholesale approbation of reembedding’ – as Nancy Fraser (2011, p. 145) wrote – ‘we must open both marketization and social protection to critical scrutiny. Exposing the normative deficits of society, as well as those of economy, we must validate struggles against domination wherever it roots’. In this sense, struggles for emancipation challenge ‘oppressive forms of social protection, while neither wholly condemning nor simply celebrating marketization’ (ibid., p. 145). Emancipation as a key component of a critical appraisal of social reality enables
us to introduce a specific realm otherwise indistinctly conflated with society in a dualistic market/social protection scheme. This realm is the public sphere, in which both society’s doxa and the market’s claims of efficient modernization can be scrutinized, discussed, criticized and revised. Once again, we stress this yet another point of contact between the theme of the centrality of the public sphere and the public sociology approach.

It is in the public sphere that bottom-up cosmopolitanism must be developed and exercised, on the assumption that it is a form of ‘deep democracy’ intended to transform the ‘constitutional bourgeois ideals into daily forms of consciousness and behaviour, in which debate can be respectfully conducted; in which the voices of the weak, the very poor, and particularly women are accorded full regard’; and in which these voices can fully take part in the social production of knowledge and information, framing the policy-making mechanisms (Appadurai, 2013, p. 212). This is terrain for social research as a ‘conversation among many voices’ (Connell, 2006, p. 262), in which different forms of knowledge and experience of social problems can interact according to that dialogic logic on which public sociology is also based.

In this framework – which, as said, is only one among those able to make possible intertwinnings and convergences intelligible – there take shape bases for collaboration among research approaches aimed at promoting emancipation, capability (Sen, 1999), and development of the voice (Bonvin and Laruffa, 2018) of the most vulnerable individuals.

Accordingly, bottom-up cosmopolitanism is a promising perspective from which to profoundly reconceive the ‘interpretative space’ which is, according to Wagner (2001), our modernity. More in particular, it is an interesting perspective because it contributes to a critique of the historically hegemonic capitalist translation of that ‘space’ without substituting it with an already structured monological theoretical system. A theoretical system, in fact, is monological in the sense that it is based on a single point of view, which assumes itself as the centre, whereas all the other possible points of view are peripheral. The cosmopolitan approach that we advocate instead tries to combine its own conventional effort to escape sociocultural parochialism with an emphasis on the programmatic conversation among different voices, in particular the peripheral and weakest ones. Here again we can see similarities with Burawoy’s proposal. Experiences of social injustices are many and diverse. They range from cases of exploitation linked to working conditions, to the living conditions of people completely excluded from wage labour, and to those facing ‘land expulsions, water privatization, and more broadly, degradation of the environment’ (Burawoy, 2008, p. 384). Herein lies, as said, a promising terrain for convergence that consists in a relationship between sociology and critique that ‘should be about pertinent questions and not about correct answers’ (Schuurman, 2009, p. 841), giving space to research efforts that try to bridge and mutually transform scientific knowledge and people’s knowledge based on their own experiences of exploitation and inequality. In this role, to use Bauman’s terms (as Burawoy himself does; Burawoy, 2008, p. 385), sociologists should act more as sensitive interpreters than as omniscient legislators. A sensitive interpreter is interested in the coevolution between their own scientific vocabulary and the heterogeneous knowledge resulting from social actors’ experiences of different issues. Table 1.1 illustrates the terrain of possible convergence that we are talking about. A major source of our table is Luc Boltanski’s (2011) exploration of terrain that we have already identified with the relationship between sociology and critique. Boltanski draws a seminal map of possible sociological postures of observation, presenting some possible configurations of the ways in which our key relationship can be conceived. He discusses two possibilities of dealing with the social reality as a (critical) researcher (Boltanski, 2011, pp. 75–76).
Table 1.1 Public sociology and its possible entanglements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Social world definition</th>
<th>Researchers’ practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical sociology</td>
<td>Narrative of a world already made</td>
<td>A description, from the top, of objective social structures; critique as expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology of critical capacities</td>
<td>Narrative of a world in the process of being made</td>
<td>A bottom-up description of actors’ (critical) competences; critique as a structural part of social life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom-up cosmopolitanism</td>
<td>Enacting a world of coevolving (scholars/publics) practices (possible worlds)</td>
<td>A mutual education (scholars/publics) aiming at possible worlds-making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Based on Boltanski (2011) and Burawoy (2005).

The first possibility consists in describing ‘a social world already there’. The description, in this case, works as a cartography of structures strictly structuring and conditioning actors’ behaviour. This is what the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000, p. 71) terms ‘History 1, a narrative resulting from the unfolding of the abstract logic of capitalist development. It is a history already made, in which all places and persons are “exchangeable with one another”’. Here, descriptions are drawn from the top, ‘more or less bracketing human persons envisaged insofar as they act (as actors)’ (Boltanski, 2011, pp. 43–44). A second possibility refers to a description according to which reality is a social world in the process of being made. Again borrowing Chakrabarty’s vocabulary, we can see here what he terms ‘History 2’: that is, a narrative approach beckoning us ‘to more affective narratives of human belonging’, in which life forms cannot be exhaustively subsumed in the abstract categories of History 1. In other words, by taking seriously into account the ways individuals enact and perform their reality, and pointing out their ‘moral economy’ (Thompson, 1967; Fourcade, 2017), according to this second possibility descriptions are ‘bottom-up’ made and their privileged objects are situations, prioritizing ‘actors’ interactive and interpretative competence’ (Boltanski, 2011, p. 44).

Of course, it is easy to recognize two sociological traditions where the first strategy corresponds to a so-to-speak more ‘Bourdieusian’ critical sociological perspective, and the second to a pragmatic sociological approach to social actors’ critical capacities (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006).

However, more than in emphasizing the specificities of these two perspectives, we are interested in highlighting the aspects more useful for strengthening the possible convergence explored in this section. In this sense, the perspective developed by Burawoy (2005, p. 264) and, more specifically, his oft-mentioned insistence on the distinctly dialogic, mutually educational, and transformative relationship between the sociologist and their audience, enables us to discern a third possibility. In this case, the sociologist refuses to confine their role to a technical problem-solving (even if ‘engaged’) sociological expertise, and is involved in all the phases that a public goes through when dealing with a problematic situation, from the problem-setting to the problem-solving ones. This is an involvement in which the sociologist has to combine their specific competence, which ranges from ‘top-down’ to ‘bottom-up’ description, through a third kind of (critical) effort that is the ‘reflection-in-action’, which develops and grows through, in Burawoy’s (2005, p.8) words, a ‘process of mutual education’ between the sociologist and their public.

On the one hand, the objective nature of the social world has to be recognized as, in a way, already ‘made’ and of which it is necessary to point out the rules and mechanisms; a history to be narrated as ‘History(sociology) 1’. However, it is possible to point out social actors’
critical capacities and to develop a ‘public sociology’ through which scholars (scientific communities and languages) and their publics (with their own critical capacities, competences, interpretations, and so on) mutually change each other. What we here identify in terms of bottom-up cosmopolitanism represents a broader framework in which public sociology efforts can find helpful alliances with which to move towards objectives of ‘cognitive justice’ (de Sousa et al., 2007) and emancipation.

PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY TODAY: POLITICS OF UNCERTAINTY AND HUMAN RIGHT TO RESEARCH

Marketization, Uncertainty and Pandemic

On several occasions, Burawoy has illustrated the fading of the transformative dimension (utopian thinking) of sociology by linking it to two sets of related issues: the marketization of contemporary societies, and the neo-managerialization of academic institutions. Both fuel the need for public sociology and at the same time strongly restrict the possibility to practise it:

Public sociology, in particular, lies suspended between two intersecting fields. On the one hand, it battles for expression within an external field shaped by the forces of capitalism – forces that simultaneously inspire the need for but also circumscribe the possibility of sociological engagement. On the other hand, public sociology is produced within an academic field that is itself shaped by the same capitalism. (Burawoy, 2021, p. 170)

The forces of capitalism are, concretely, those which have driven the third wave of marketization, for the analysis of which Burawoy employs the Polanyian concept of the ‘double movement’. Besides dealing critically with some limitations of Polanyi’s reasoning, Buroway insists on the need for sociology to conceive worlds alternative to those profoundly shaped by the mechanisms of commodification. In accordance with a broad debate, he attributes these mechanisms to financialization and the crisis processes that derive from it in a multiplicity of interconnected fields: the environment and climate change, work, migrants and refugees, healthcare and the Covid-19 pandemic, and so on. This is why today more than ever it is important to engage in public sociology.

Albeit in a pluralist vision, which takes into account the different possible ways to practise sociology, Burawoy’s thesis is, as said, that fundamental for expanding the limits of the possible is the activation of ‘mutual education’ relationships between the researcher and their audience able to enhance multiple forms of knowledge (expert and non-expert; internal and external to scientific circuits, and so on), and to involve those who experience the problems being researched. Indeed, Burawoy’s position raises more questions than it provides answers to. The issues concerning the commodification of knowledge and the managerialization of universities are obviously central to the theme of the ‘public’ and are treated with extraordinary acuity. However, some issues persist. Several chapters of this Handbook deal with a highly contradictory picture in which both the reasons for doing public sociology and the problems that limit its development increase.

Unfortunately, we do not have much to add on how these issues can be resolved, but we certainly agree that it is urgent for sociology to return to the archaeology of social reality, to ‘wake
up and take a grip on itself” (Burawoy, 2021, p. 214). And, to conclude, we would like to add a few more reasons for doing so, focusing briefly on the relevance of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The case of Covid-19 shows all too well how the marketization of healthcare services has greatly reduced the adequacy of the response to the pandemic (Bifulco and Neri, 2022). Moreover, the debate on the ‘syndemic’, launched by Richard Horton, editor-in-chief of The Lancet, has highlighted the relationship between damage caused by Covid-19 and social stratification, and especially conditions of poverty and inequality (Horton, 2020). This helps to understand why strategies to manage the emergency have proved insufficient in several countries. Certainly, apparent is a problem of ‘preparedness’; a term that denotes the timely reaction to emergencies and potentially disastrous situations in order to deal with their destructive aspects. Regardless of the techniques foreseen, the concept underlines the need to manage an increase in uncertainty of a fundamental or radical nature without the traditional methods based on risk and its predictability.

The pandemic is only the most recent in a series of events that highlight the ubiquity of uncertainty as a condition that permeates the contemporary world (Beck, 1992) and induces people to find new ways to cope with it (Scoones and Sterling, 2020). The fact is that concrete strategies tend to favour interpretative and operational frameworks that naturalize issues and have a large technological component. As the critical debate on the post-Covid prospects (Madden, 2021) has highlighted, there prevail pure problem-solving logics that do not help to understand the set of factors underlying the social and health crisis of the pandemic, nor to address them in a structural way. The tendency towards the naturalization of problems, and the prevalence of a technocratic form of action strategies, therefore proceed hand in hand, fuelling each other.

By insisting on the importance of incremental learning and pluralism, public sociology is one of the approaches to knowledge able to foster a different type of preparedness, and to redefine problems such as the pandemic by bringing systemic crisis and long-lasting factors to the fore. This is what Scoones and Stirling (2020, p. 6) have called a new politics of uncertainty, centred on inclusive engagement across diverse knowledges and experiences, negotiation of outcomes along complex, plural pathways – an opening up to options and knowledges.

### Beyond Scalability: Alliances and Strategies of Public Sociology?

At the core of the new politics of uncertainty lies the nexus between knowledge and planning. With respect to this node, the public sociology approach can make a synergistic contribution to the various interpretative approaches framed by the notion of ‘bottom-up cosmopolitanism’; more specifically, a contribution to the development of strategies alternative to the configuration of the relationship between knowledge and project (not surprisingly, a theme explored in several chapters of this Handbook). We find here, on the terrain where the ways in which knowledge, experience and voice configure the ability of social actors to change their living conditions, a significant porosity among different critical perspectives, especially in relation to the horizon of renewed uncertainty discussed above. The public sociology, in fact, intervenes precisely in the transition from knowledge about and experience of problems to the formulation of policies. It transforms the former (knowledge, experience) into the ‘informational basis’ of policies. This concept of ‘informational basis’ comes from Amartya Sen’s theory of capability (see also Bonvin and Laruffa, Chapter 4 in this Handbook) which, despite its very promising potential (Borghi, 2018), ‘has remained largely unnoticed by sociologists’ (Kremakova, 2013,
Every collectively important decision and action is based on what Sen terms the ‘informational basis of judgement for justice’. More precisely, the informational basis ‘determines the factual territory over which considerations of justice would directly apply’, and for this reason ‘the real “bite” of a theory of justice can, to a great extent, be understood from its informational base: what information is – or is not – taken to be directly relevant’ (Sen, 1999, pp. 56‒57). Any ‘convention’ (Borghi and Vitale, 2006; Diaz-Bone and Thévenot, 2010; Diaz-Bone, 2017) through which the external world is categorized in order to be addressed is rooted in an ‘evaluative structure’ establishing that ‘some types of factual matters are taken to be important in themselves’ (Sen, 1991, p. 16), whereas ‘the truth or falsehood of any other type of information cannot directly influence the correctness of the judgement’ (Sen, 1990, p. 111). Hence, the definition of what and whose knowledge is taken into account as the ‘informational basis’, and the decision about what kind of cognitive and knowledge gaps can be assumed (usually through technical devices) as legitimate areas of social indifference, have crucial effects. Informational basis is particularly important because it embodies ‘definitions of problems and targets, categorizations of individuals and social groups, as well as complex systems for assessing actions against objectives’ (de Leonardis and Negrelli, 2012, 17).

The historically dominant conception of the relationship among experience, knowledge and world-making is based on the approach to the ‘informational basis’ that Anna Tsing (2012) defines as the progressive expansion and naturalization of ‘scalability’. The key aspect of the scalability mode of interpreting the relationship among experience, knowledge and world-making is ‘the ability to expand – and expand, and expand – without rethinking basic elements’ (ibid., p. 505): scalable projects ‘are those that can expand without changing … Scalability projects banish meaningful diversity, which is to say, diversity that might change things’ (ibid., p. 507; see also Mukerji, 1983); and this concerns both the material and immaterial dimensions of our forms of life. In general, the ‘efficiency of the capitalistic process … presupposes capitalizing on, intervening in, or meticulously planning, certain kinds of moral orders, including imaginaries and hierarchies of worth’ (Fourcade, 2017, p. 668); and, also due to increasingly controlled synchronization of the sociotechnical systems characterizing the contemporary capitalism of infrastructures (Borghi, 2021), social actors’ experience and knowledge are more and more structurally engaged in this process.

Public sociology, together with the various approaches that we have tried to connect through the notion of bottom-up cosmopolitanism, is a fundamental opportunity to counter the project of a ‘social physics’ that this capitalistic mode of capturing experience renews (Adolf and Stehr, 2018) in order to extract formatted information, coherently with the ‘scalability’ framework. Whilst this project hinges on a paradigm of modernity as a programme of constant expansion of the controllability of the world, in which the experience–knowledge–information relationship is driven by the ‘desire to make the world engineerable, predictable, available, accessible, disposable in all its aspects’ (Rosa, 2020, p. viii), the perspective we are trying to define here leads to a transformative-oriented interpretation of that relationship. Hence, to assemble the various threads woven so far, a social research grounded on a ‘process of mutual education’ (Burawoy, 2005, p. 8) between the sociologist and their public, constructed through a ‘conversation among many voices’ (Connell, 2006, p. 262), and aimed at recognizing ‘meaningful diversities’ (Tsing, 2012), provides an effective opportunity to scrutinize how ‘informational basis’ building is conceptualized. It is an opportunity to give space to the possible (Tarantino and Pizzo, 2015; Borghi, 2019), as something always embedded in the real, on which a heterogeneous range of sources converge. From the perspective of capability for voice...
(Bifulco, 2013) and of capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2013), through Benjamin’s ‘opening-up of history’, to the ‘contre-fatalité’ that always survives even in the darkest times (Lowy, 2005; Didi-Huberman, 2018), there are many conceptual tools that we can consider. Possibilism, in this sense, looks at the social world and stresses ‘the unique rather than the general, the unexpected rather than the expected, and the possible rather than the probable’, widening ‘the limits of what is or what is perceived to be possible, be it at the cost of lowering our ability, real or imaginary, to discern the probable’ (Hirschman, 1971, p. 28).

In other words, a matter of human rights, the human right to research (Appadurai, 2013), is at stake here. This right pertains both to researchers and their publics, as a shared, collective and public responsibility. At stake is the right to access research, redesigned as ‘not only the production of original ideas and new knowledge (as it is normally defined in academia and other knowledge-based institutions)’, but also as ‘the capacity to systematically increase the horizons of one’s current knowledge, in relation to some task, goal, or aspiration’ (Appadurai, 2013, p. 282). Because without aspiration ‘there is no pressure to know more’, and because ‘without systematic tools for gaining relevant new knowledge, aspiration degenerates into fantasy or despair’ (ibid., p. 283), the importance of an approach ‘bottom-up’ to the knowledge-making process is evident. More than re-proposing an updated role of the ‘engaged intellectual’, it is a perspective aimed at a ‘reflexive practitioner’ (Schön, 1983), who refuses to be limited to a technical, problem-solution-based sociological expertise and who participates in the frequently mentioned ‘process of mutual education’ between the sociologist and their publics, in which both are transformed and coevolve. In this sense, public sociology (together with the many different approaches that we here organize within the frame of bottom-up cosmopolitanism) can help to pave the way ‘towards creative care rather than calculative control’ (Scoones and Stirling, 2020, p. 11) as demanded by a politics of uncertainty.

PUBLIC SOCIOLOGY: CONVERSATIONS AND ITINERARIES IN THIS HANDBOOK

The Handbook is organized into four parts. Part I, ‘Connections and Conversations: Authors and Research Perspectives in Dialogue with Public Sociology’, is devoted to authors and research perspectives in dialogue with public sociology. Here Daniel Cefaï (Chapter 3) re-examines Michael Burawoy’s project of a public sociology with a pragmatist outlook. The chapter refers in particular to the work of John Dewey, who developed a philosophy of the public as a political community. This perspective is also linked to the progressive movement of the 1890s and 1920s, in which the following issues were particularly useful in relation to the perspective of public sociology: the relationship between experts and citizens; the involvement of citizens in public affairs; conceptions of participatory democracy based on power-with and common learning; the possibility of reformulating the notions of the ‘public’ as ‘recipient’ and as ‘counter-public’.

In Chapter 4, Jean-Michel Bonvin and Francesco Laruffa explore the contribution of Amartya Sen’s capability approach to a public sociology. Starting from a theoretical discussion of the capability approach and its epistemological and political implications, the two authors use the concepts of ‘positional objectivity’, ‘informational basis of judgment in justice’ and ‘reason to value’ to show how the integration of experiential knowledge into the scientific process is justified from this perspective. The discussion is reinforced by reference
Public sociology, a perspective on the move

Part I is closed by Rainer Diaz-Bone (Chapter 5), who introduces the economics of convention as an approach to linking quantification and public sociology. The processes of quantification of knowledge and evaluation are an emerging field in which sociology interacts with numerous other disciplines. Quantification and measurement, according to the economics of conventions, are based on measurement conventions that link numbers, but also categories and data in general, to a common good; a sociology that focuses on this connection, between quantification (and categorization) and public issues, debates and concerns, can thus make an important contribution to public sociology.

In Part II, ‘Forth and Back Across (Disciplinary) Borders: Ways of Thinking and Practicing Public Research’, several scholars debate how to design and conduct public research in different scientific fields. Didier Fassin (Chapter 6) proposes adopting a non-normative approach and addressing the stakes and implications of the public presence of social research in a descriptive and analytical manner. Of significance is reference to the figure of Claude Levi Strauss, who while shunning all the main arenas of public debate of his time, was long considered the most influential intellectual in his country. Fassin identifies and discusses two dimensions of popularization: popularization, which consists of making research sympathetic and accessible; and politicization, which includes involvement in the public sphere and contribution to policy-making. The chapter closes with a discussion of the crucial role of criticism in the encounter with publics and counter-publics, and the complexity of popularization and the role that the researcher plays in such contexts. Then, in Chapter 7, Serge Noiret focuses on public history. The chapter examines the definition of the discipline, its historical roots and main transdisciplinary features. In this regard, Noiret provides a definition of public history according to which history is brought into direct contact with the evolution of the mentality and collective sense of belonging of different communities around the world. Thus, it is not only a popularizing mode through which to engage a wide audience in the discussion of issues related to the past: the study of collective identities and memories also becomes a process that complements historical research.

In Chapter 8, Salvo Torre reflects on some trends in public geography. The chapter deals with the development of geographical thought in the past two decades, the emergence of a demand for change in research methodologies in the context of, for example, the debate on decolonial epistemologies, or the critique of patriarchal systems of hierarchy and classification of the world. In the internal discussion about the redefinition of geographical knowledge, the reference to the category of public geography is increasingly asserting itself as an innovative space for reflection and action in public contexts. Marco Cremaschi, in Chapter 9, explores some critical points and crucial issues that public sociology shares with urbanism. On the one hand, the applied field of planning involves specialized aspects (technical aspects, spatial ecologies of groups and societies, regulatory constraints) that are far from the interests of public sociology. On the other hand, some planning practices address issues at the heart of public sociology, such as collective action, the focus on the practices and normative role of imagination and social justice, and the political dimension that dissatisfaction with colonial imprinting and the strategic turn of the 1990s helped to emphasize. Supriya Routh (Chapter 10) analyses the relationship between the legitimacy of law and the expertise of public sociology. His analysis refers to a dual idea of legislative legitimacy, in which both the freedom of
a community to represent its interests and legal standards play a central role. Public sociology can play a significant role in overcoming the risk that such interest representation may reproduce community biases. It can provide an epistemological basis for developing independent narratives, while at the same time not producing a conclusive ‘expert opinion’.

Part II then closes with the debate developed by Julie Froud, Angelo Salento and Karel Williams on the foundational economy (Chapter 11). The chapter emphasises that the innovative approach of foundational economy constitutes a scientific perspective that has significant resonances with public sociology. It combines multiple forms of knowledge, insisting on the importance of repoliticizing everyday life, and adopting an experimental and open approach in which an analytical capacity coexists with a pluralist and non-ideological normativity. The ensuing analysis shows how the well-being of citizens, based on collectively provided, high-quality and affordable basic goods and services, has been strongly compromised by the logic of extractive and short-term private business and a dramatic reduction of public investment in the basic economy. It is thus a question of profoundly rethinking the rules and operations of the latter.

Part III is devoted to ‘Themes and Research Issues: Deepening PS Potentialities Dealing With Different Fields’, in which public sociology encounters other approaches and perspectives. In Chapter 12, Luigi Pellizzoni interprets public sociology in relation to science and the environment. He investigates the link among public, science and environmental policies; a link that has been profoundly transformed. Indeed, both the authority of experts and trust in technoscientific progress have been significantly weakened by the conflict between depoliticization and politicization that has (also) involved science. This has led to the paradoxical outcome whereby, despite the demise of the dualisms characterizing knowledge in the West, the ‘neo-liberalization’ of science and nature have further increased exploitation instead of limiting it. Laura Centemeri and Davide Olori (Chapter 13) focus on the sociology of disasters as a field of application for public sociology. Also on the basis of a public sociology case study conducted by the Emidio di Treviri research group on issues of land recovery in the aftermath of the 2016 earthquake in the central Italian Apennines, Olori and Centemeri show how, in a more general context of worsening ecosystemic crises, a critical and ‘reconstructive’ sociology of disasters – actively engaged in both denouncing structural inequalities and collaborating with social movements, affected citizens, and reflexive practitioners in prefigurative experiments – can be particularly helpful. Paul Blokker’s Chapter 14 focuses on the relationship between public sociology and populism. The author introduces the most common meaning of the term ‘populism’ and its origins are critically discussed. Blokker then deepens the call for a ‘populist sociology’ and explores the critical and emancipatory forms of left-wing populism. The result of this analysis consists in the proposal of a ‘democratic’ or ‘civic’ populism that can be understood as a social basis for a public sociology able to resist a governmentality that treats individuals as mere objects.

Tatjana Sekulić’s Chapter 15 investigates the new history of migration that began with the fall of the Berlin Wall. The author adopts three different scales of analysis: that of the nation state, the transnational scale within Europe, and the global scale. Several themes are considered in terms of each of these analytical levels: from the ‘failure of multiculturalism’, through the dialectic between the residence and labour mobility regime of European Union citizens, to the dramatic ‘refugee crisis’. The scientific and public combating of the symbolic and actual violence that these dynamics have generated is a fundamental task for the ‘public face of sociology’ and its social justice goals.
Marisol Garcia’s Chapter 16 is about the connection between the institutionalization of citizenship and local democratization. The chapter describes the way in which, during different historical phases, the civic capacity of people has played a decisive role in the democratization of European cities. Moreover, the forms of citizen participation that go beyond representative democracy express a demand for involvement that also extends to local social welfare policies and governance. This context sees two specific perspectives being compared: one that emphasizes a performative conception based on ‘acts of citizenship’, and one that emphasizes a collaboration between social innovation actors and local governments based on ‘bottom-linked governance’.

Bruno Frère and Jean-Louis Laville’s proposal (Chapter 17) is that of a sociology which, instead of dissolving all ties with the political dimension, is oriented towards supporting and helping to shape the critical representations and instituting practices that exist among the actors of civil society and that can be linked to the dominated collectives. The author contextualizes public sociology as a set of different currents of thought and methodological approaches (participatory inquiry, socio-analysis and intervention collectives). They can be summarized in what he calls an ‘associationist’ perspective, which can be traced back to the conception of common sense and working-class and popular knowledge to be found in sociological approaches of which Proudhon was an important precursor. Sandro Busso’s Chapter 18 considers the field of social policy and poverty research. According to Busso, the ‘four souls’ of sociology have become progressively more distant and less able to interact with each other. In particular, it is the increasing contact between research on those topics and the policy system that heavily conditions the development of a public sociology of social policies. However, in order to pave the way for ‘unthinkable politics’, a significant repoliticization of the subjects and issues at stake is indispensable.

In Chapter 19, Mark Banks reflects on how work and employment in the cultural industries can become fairer and more just. He refers to the concept of ‘creative justice’: that is, a fully realized opportunity for all publics to participate in the process of professional culture-making. His analysis explores three kinds of sociological approach, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each as a foundation for theorizing ‘creative justice’: an ‘objectivist’ critical sociology informed by political economy and cultural studies; the work of Pierre Bourdieu; and the pragmatic sociological theory. Then, in Chapter 20, Romuald Normand focuses on how the development of the public sociology of education has profoundly renewed its perspective to consider transformations in education beyond national spaces and to study globalizing and Europeanizing effects on education systems and policies. He argues that the inadequacies of national statism and methodological nationalism have induced this new public sociology of education to better analyse the role of transnational networks and actors, as well as political assemblages that govern numbers worldwide, but also the limitations of neo-liberalism. Gil Eyal (Chapter 21) compares three versions of public sociology of expertise to evaluate how they respond to the current crisis of mistrust in experts: Collins and Evans’s proposal in which public sociologists of expertise essentially police the boundaries of public debate; his ‘networks of expertise’ approach, in which the public sociological task is to open up public discourse; and an emergent approach wherein the public sociologist focuses on the triangulation of relations of trust and mistrust at the access points of expert systems, and seeks to intervene in these relations to increase the possibilities for dialogue. Eyal explains why these approaches should be considered as complementary rather than alternative. In Chapter 22, Enrica Morlicchio and Dario Tuorto review some of the most common social representations of the
poor and of poverty, and they explore the link between such categories and the corresponding policies. Their analysis shows that new forms of blame and moral condemnation of the poor have emerged. It sheds light on one aspect of poverty that is less commonly investigated (even by sociologists), but which is of great importance for public sociology, namely the lack of recognition, or the misrecognition, of the poor. Part III of the Handbook closes with Magdalena Chiara’s Chapter 23 on some of the problems in health policy analysis that were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. It focuses on the relationship between state agencies and society; the area in which the health system’s problems and the difficulties faced by reforms attempting to resolve them become evident. The chapter concludes with a provisional agenda for research into these phenomena using the public sociology approach.

Part IV, ‘For a Public Academia: Public Sociology and Public Academies’, is focused on the applications of public sociology in empirical research and teaching. Eeva Berglund (Chapter 24) discusses relational issues that arise between academia and public concerns, as they appear in the Anthropocene discourse. This is a prominent part of teaching and research in a sustainability-focused Master’s programme at a Finnish university. The institution has a very corporate style, bringing with it many of the problems that critical commentators have identified with the contemporary university; yet it offers opportunities to develop rather than undermine the learning that public life now needs. Then Vincenza Pellegrino (Chapter 25) presents a particular type of public sociology, which she calls ‘teaching-as-research’: a sociological enterprise which is both ‘professional’ since it is carried out by teachers in the classrooms of public universities, and ‘critical’ since it is carried out through a cognitive process that involves both students and social groups. The chapter seeks to overcome the epistemological and operational division between sociological research and teaching in academia, and to rethink the division between the ‘first’ (teaching), ‘second’ (research) and ‘third’ (knowledge positioning) university ‘missions’. In the last chapter, Chapter 26, Manuela Boatcă, Sina Farzin and Julian Go discuss the relation between post-colonialism and sociology, and its impact on engagement with public causes and current policies. The authors argue that, while post- and decolonial approaches have had a significant impact on the humanities, their reception in sociology has been more reluctant. The reasons for this difference are discussed against the background of the perceived opposition between scientific objectivity and political activism.

NOTES

1. As Abbott (2007, p, 208) acutely points out:

   The aim of social science is to explain or understand social life. But the social process is constituted – among other things – of values; human life as an activity consists of assigning values to social things and then pursuing them. This means that even an arbitrary choice of explanandum will involve taking something as natural, as not needing explanation; the act of explanation categorizes social phenomena into things needing explanation and things not. Since the things so categorized themselves involve values (because values permeate the social process), the act of explanation entails implicit value-choices even if investigators are magically universalist. Indeed, even if explananda were selected arbitrarily, that selection would still impose values … There is, therefore, literally no such thing as ‘professional sociology’ – a sociology without any values in it. Even the most apparently objective categories of analysis are just so many congealed social values … by coding people into reified categories, positivism contributes in turn to the reification of those categories – racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, occupational, and so on. By ignoring values, that is, it hides them, transforms them, presents ideology as fact, and so on.
2. Preparedness is today central to the guidelines issued by the World Health Organization on health threats and pandemics. It entails the ability to deal with surprise, hidden development and sudden outbreak (Lakoff, 2017).

REFERENCES


