

Systems Thinking or Systems Dreaming?: Predictive, Normative and Prescriptive Approaches in Applications of Systems Thinking in Social Sciences

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Abstract

Cybernetics, systems thinking or systems theory have been viewed as an instrument of enhancing predictive, normative and prescriptive capabilities of the social sciences, beginning from microscale - management and ending with various reference to the global system. Descriptions, explanations and predictions achieved thanks to various systems ideas were also viewed as supportive for potential governance of social phenomena. Chaos theory and its interpretations have undermined the old wishes of “system” in which mathematical models of social phenomena supported with statistical research and simulation models were viewed as helpful in predicting developments in social systems at various levels of social hierarchy. The main aim of the paper is to examine what could be the possible applications of modern systems thinking in predictive, normative and prescriptive approaches in modern social sciences, beginning from management theory and ending with global studies. Attention is paid not only to “classical mathematical systems models but also to the role of predictive, normative and prescriptive interpretations of analogies and metaphors associated with application of the classical (“first order cybernetics”) and modern (“second order cybernetics”, “complexity theory”) systems thinking in social science.

Back to [main](#) page.