From Theory To Practice: Using Sociology To Develop Fair Economic Policies In An AI-Driven World

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Abstract: The terrain of everyday life is being dramatically reconfigured in unprecedented ways. In sectors ranging from health to finance, AI is becoming pervasive, posing questions around the treatment and distribution of people. It is therefore natural that sociologists will seek to interrogate these developments. That being said, the kind of social theory deployed in technology studies has often focused on the social constitution of technology might be too narrow from the perspective of macro sociological traditions emphasizing economy, policy and uneven distribution. In working through these complex issues, it is essential to draw from multiple disciplinary sources throughout.

Keywords: theory, practice, economic policies, AI

1. Introduction

This is especially important given that accounts of the AI economy and policy can at first glance appear either highly technical, opaque, or speculative. In attempting to provide practical purchase on the relationship between artificial intelligence and policy, it is necessary to consider the configuration of contemporary macro economy that AI is used to trace, regulate, or shape. In the census alone, the nature and orientation of AI technologies under its apprehension is highly opaque. This obscurity is a policy problem in and of itself. However, AI is also being adopted by governments and private industries worldwide in ways that are challenging the vision of citizens, scholars and market actors alike. In light of its widely perceived transformative potential, it is vital to ensure that such distribution is equitable and just. AI's ability to treat and surveil people has already created new dilemmas for regulators, as has its deepening entanglement with finance. Efforts to understand and govern these and other economic dynamics are hampered by the boundary between its technical and social permeability as well as the industry's desire to manage commercial confidentiality and promote obfuscation (Zajko, 2020). In general, the AI economy has fostered alliances between large tech companies and capital, causing waves of policy activity that traditional policy and innovation studies are often hard-pressed to trace.

1.1. Background and Rationale

The increasing intersections between sociology and economics over the last decades, much of it prompted by the spread of RoS (Robotics and Software, including Artificial Intelligence) in the economy. The most visible slice concerns the labor market: job market turns into a combination of pure, well-paid, well-protected jobs, and unprotected, flexible, low-waged ones. The attention economical analysis devoted to social and

organizational structures and how these affect economic behavior and performance is on the increase. From the seminal approaches to the economy couched by Marx and Weber, sociologists have taken advantage of a broad and heterogenic arsenal: these range from Homan's Social Exchange Theory to feminist crits to economics. MVT will put a particular order in these practices, stimulating also the evolution of new ones. Sociology has clearly something to say about RoS use and finance.

There are a broad array of studies focusing on the relations between network structures and economic behavior and outcomes. Different approaches have shown that network location affects actors' performance, turnover and wage. A number of analyses pointed out on regimes of cumulative processes in which inequality tends to increase because the most powerful actors are the best fit to gain new resources, while the others lag increasingly behind. Richness and reach of social networks affect economic behavior, market access, risk assumption and innovation. Structural properties of social networks can work as a factor of economic fitness. The new economic sociology has focused on these and related issues, prompting also the emergence of a number of ICT tools to investigate network structures. On the one hand MVT prompts a refinement in the present theoretical and methodological approaches; on the other, traditional analytical tools – starting from standards micro and neo-classical economy – look too partial to investigate MVT connections. As Trigilia underlines (Trigilia, 2005), the coeval spread of SSL and RSA on the one hand, focused on managing financial dealings according to network structures, and socio-economic analyses of the consequences of these technologies on the others does represent an example of MVT unbalanced growth between theory and policies. Now I ask: can Sociology provide a useful framework to address in a more proper way the RoS side of the question? To this aim, a critical review of the economic sociological means to focus on RoS will lead current debate on an axiomatic approach to sociology of economics. Now let me add a specific and quite innovative, I think, proposal to sociological approach to banking inquiries.

1.2. Scope and Objectives

With Economics at a turning point with Artificial Intelligence (AI) as fair economic policies are needed, this essay seeks to explore how a sociologist can contribute to the development of fair economic policies; particularly regarding the rise of AI in economic practice. Stemming from a sociological perspective, the essay intends to unpack the black box of economic processes considered too complex for non-economists, enabling sociologists to engage more actively in the development of economic policies. Drawing insights from the literature, the arguments posit that this engagement is of pressing importance at a time when landscapes of markets and welfare states are reshaped by the advance of digital technologies (Zajko, 2020).

The exploration is based on the insight that economies are inseparably economic and sociological. While economics is dedicated to analyzing the allocation of scarce resources

to meet unending human demands, this allocation is situated within networks of social relations negotiated and maintained by power structures. Further, the market is one of many institutions through which these power relations are articulated. It follows that besides being economic, the market is also intensely socio-political. Tension, thus, pervades between the 'virtuous circle' of economic efficiency enhancing welfare or promoting social justice and the 'vicious circle' of employment destruction with welfare cuts. Navigating between these extremes lies the dilemmatic zones of economic governance. In essence, the sociological argument directs attention to a key insight developed by cultural sociology, amongst others, on the role of socially constructed meanings that shape economic processes. Mode of governance, the governance instrument, and the subject of governance are all saturated with social frames of understanding that inform interests of dominant stakeholders.

Following an examination of the role AI has come to play in economics, its implications on market governance policy, particularly there where it is instrumental in altering the meanings upon which economic decisions have been based, are addressed. Further, the focus is extended by reflecting on how new economic practices in which AI is central have ethical implications. As far as objectives are concerned, the paper is aimed at: (1) disentangling how AI is beginning to play an important part within a selection of economic processes; (2) exploring the implications of these for policy-makers using the case of market governance policy; (3) reflecting on the ethical aspect of the deployment of AI itself. Concerns are raised that the development of AI economic practice may perhaps lead to ethics being exploited as a gatekeeping heuristic to quell political contestation of its essentially political nature. The old maxim knowledge is power is reprised to underline that control of the knowledge upon which AI conclusions are based is inextricably linked to the economic interests and profits of a handful of influential stakeholders. Moreover, as AI economics is by nature probabilistic, its strategic application might be the construction of the appearance of ethical duty towards certitude in options proffered by AI. Such certitude conforms to the technocratic model of policy-making and may result, for instance, in the exclusion of certain viable morally suspect outcomes from the policy agenda.

2. Part I: Understanding Sociology in Economic Policy

In most basic terms, policies reflect a set of choices about what we prioritize, such as types of housing and areas which merit protection in the law, or planning which helps to determine the path of growth, the organization of firms and the management of conflicts in society. What is ultimate central to policy is redistribution - especially with jobs and money - through both direct and indirect means. Policy is achieved by social agents: political education which divides power and attention in a society, implementing policy which manages specific aspects of life, and intellectual communities. It is a central part of the governance of social life.

While standard economics argue that they study this very subject and that sociologists have little to add, it is important to understand that the subject is itself problematic. A first issue is that economics understand 'the economy' in a particular way: as a self-evident, self-contained, and self-causing variable. On the other hand, sociologies comprehend the 'economy' as a parti-colored realm, often outsourced to a wanting hand of people, which guards over but at the same time is also subject to a much broader social world. A second way of taking up the issue is to point to how 'the economy' gets made and sustained as a kind of outside 'thing' with its own social scientists, statistical organizations, as well as rules and calculative practices of classification and delegitimization, sustained above all by a particular account of the 'social' regulated by some kind of 'Whig sociology'. This sees it as a vast incoherent mire of disorder which can only be scientifically understood through a great act of abstraction into a hard coherent kernel of rationality as in like atoms, markets, individuals, and money (Rogowski, 2017). Both of these doubts about the nature and constitution of that which is being dealt with also inform somewhat more actor-centered accounts of economic behavior.

Not unlike the surrounding physical environment, the economy plays an ontological trick, appearing as a taken-for-granted 'thing' with a life and force of its own. Policy, then, deals not with the economy nor with economies, but with an ordering of social life that produces peculiar economic relations. Economic policy itself refers to instruments to compensate for the reduction of output, reduction of capital, or increasing competition, so government may address wealth and health of advanced nation's people in the economic domain using trade policy (Trigilia, 2005). This can take a number of forms. Give as grants and aid to firms with the promise of enhancing investment. Make net public infrastructural investment in order to draw other private investment; or raise demand directly through public spending, thus creating new jobs for those who economy has left behind.

2.1. Insights 1: The Intersection of Sociology and Economics

Unbalanced Growth - Why Is Economic Sociology Stronger in Theory Than in Policies? (Trigilia, 2005) is a reflective look at the ten years of the author's research on unbalanced growth. Instead of engaging with a normative policy discussion of how to correct unbalanced growth, the paper redevelops its theoretical implications.

Theoretical Reasons for Economic Sociology The main goal of (Rogowski, 2017) is to present economic sociology as a sub-discipline, introducing the widely understood theoretical and empirical reasons for its development (in the first instance). A highlight of the argument is that sociology can offer a specific view of economic life (defined in opposition to economism). The article points out that using the sociological approach for analyzing economy (or economic topics) has a great research potential, which has not been fully exploited (an approach, not widely spread in the field). The creation of a

bridge between economics and sociology can provide benefits to this sub-discipline. Three groups of arguments showing the potential of sociology's perspective in explaining economic processes are presented. It will be extremely useful for policy-makers and firms. At the same time, the sociological approach to new themes, topics, or aspects of economic life, promises a better understanding of economic processes. Since we may say that some new, visible economic processes, or situations, have appeared, the sociological approach to such problems will be very useful. Due to its nature, the paper is mainly focused on the sociology of markets.

2.2. Insights 2: Key Sociological Concepts for Economic Policy Development

The focus of this book is primarily on the analysis of the ways that sociological variables affect behavior related to economic activities. Aspects of the sociological findings that investigate economic behavior will be emphasized: first, to set up a general indictment of the existing state of knowledge of the topic for economic policy restricted to rational choice and adjustment costs; and second, to articulate those sociological ideas and findings that have been found more useful in the design and implementation of concrete economic policies. There is no ambition to discuss the whole of economic sociology – not much would be new and, possibly, nothing original. Instead, this should be regarded as a step back from the specialized knowledge of economic sociology applied to industrial and banking sectors in order to discuss more generally how economic outcomes are influenced by social structures – an exercise not necessarily foreign to mainstream disciplines, but one which is not done often enough.

One major aspect of economic sociology is represented by an array of mainstream variables relevant to economic outcomes, ranging from social capital and corporate governance to networks and the role of cultural norms and cognitive paradigms in rational economic behavior. It is argued that sociological insights suggest the need of completing the existing explanation of economic phenomena exploring the influence of non-economic, institutional frameworks. But there is another, less technical, field of interest. Analysis of the literature from the perspective of what has been most successful in fostering transfer makes an attempt to identify sociological principles that seem closer to empirical information and analysis; that is, a set of broad sociological variables, which, while necessarily riding roughshod over the complexities of the sociological corpus, would offer insights nevertheless quite relevant to the design and implementation of economic policies at both sectoral and macro level. At an extensive but important tangent to that, interest in industrial sociology has recently devoted to the analysis of collective behavior and community dynamics, supporting the observation that activities such as investment, savings, capital formation, and technology transfer are less often the simple sum of atomistic strategies, geographic proclivities, or microeconomic inclinations, and more frequently collective decisions, embodied into communities and expressing shared identities and historical bonds. A more in-depth understanding of these occurrences may

suggest a clearer framework for policy makers to foster economic activity with beneficial effects on the broader community. Consistently, that body of knowledge is considered extremely valuable in the instrument of interventions which, while more difficult to adjust to in standard economic analysis, at the same time may represent the only effective solution to promote development aiming at equity and inclusivity.

3. Part II: AI and Its Implications on Economic Policies

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly being integrated into the development and execution of economic policies. As with any new technology, AI has the potential to dramatically change policy outcomes. AI can perform nearly unlimited integration and statistical analyses simultaneously, giving it great potential to flexibly address some of today's most difficult policy concerns. Yet AI has challenges as well. There are significant risks that AI will be used to amplify social bias or be used to suppress advocacy for policy changes that challenge the status quo. Its deployment will have powerful impacts on society and must be done with recognition of its social and ethical implications. To better understand the role of AI in the development and execution of economic policies that today's society engages with, it is necessary to also critically examine the deeper sociological concepts of how and why economic policies are enacted.

Imagine a scenario in which government officials allow a model to determine economic policy without understanding how the results were derived. This is a potential outcome of policies prioritizing blind machine learning model accuracy. There are compelling reasons to predict that the functional concept of equitable treatment in policy is incompatible with the practical realities of how economic policies are formed and executed by the modern sociotechnical system of government and AI (Zajko, 2020). There is also good reason to think government policies are biased against this type of equity by design. Nonetheless, equitable policy remains an important goal and there is insight to be gained from envisioning what kind of policy system would be conducive to equitable policy. Since its inception, AI has both formalized and reshaped a number of empirical social processes. In contrast, sociological concepts of fairness are grounded in an understanding of equity, rather than formalization of historical trends (ABRARDI et al., 2019). Moreover, while modern sociotechnical systems are capable of extremely data-intensive analyses with high predictive capacity, they are not demonstrably capable of integrating or synthesizing alternate or opposing views on society-wide policy changes. This is clear from the literature review, revealing a fundamentally opposed scientific philosophy between empirical social research and predictive AI research.

3.1. Insights 3: Overview of AI in Economics

Sociology has a long tradition of dealing with norms of behavior in society and potential interventions to influence these norms. It is the discipline that looks at the ways in which people connect as groups. In the same way that confederation can be modelled as a macroeconomic approach to unions, sociology can be taken as a population-based, top-

down approach to behavioral economics (ABRARDI et al., 2019). Instead of inferring individuals' behavior or utility from background assumptions, it looks at how groups of people interact. In light of analytics and big data, this focus can help to explore how behavior might be clustered within a population, and develop best-fit policies that respond to patterns of grouping.

There is a huge literature which has been used by education authorities to analyze the efficiency of schools, in terms of testing, attendance, and graduation rates. Conversely, little has been done with the models themselves. The present work is a step in linking these models back to the social science they emanate from, however in reverse, looking at how models can be constructed from sociological theory. The extraction of questions is therefore a good discipline with which to begin, as the objectives of education, to pass tests and find work, are explicitly modeled. This allows one to approach the construction of data-models in education. Such development is important as it lays a groundwork from which population based modeling can be considered across sectors.

3.2. Insights 4: Ethical Considerations in AI-Driven Policies

It has been firmly established in Insights 1 that AI systems are already making policy decisions, but does AI make the policies themselves? In principle, AI could be directly responsible for the development of economic policies. After all, there are AI-authored poems and short texts, as well as AI-designed products. While it is practically feasible to replace policymakers with AI, that would not be ethically just (Zajko, 2020). Why not? This question is discussed with two concerns in mind: bias in the AI being used to make policy and biases and discriminations that would result from the policies themselves.

Insights 4: Ethical Considerations in AI-Driven Policies delves into just that. First, potential bias in AI-driven economic policies is discussed. Bias in many facets of policies can carry over consistently from training data, the algorithm, or the developer. The enforcement of an algorithmic decision would then carry over that bias to grant reduced employment or increased interest rates to certain groups. The dark. Second, discriminatory outcomes stemming from the policies' AI-driven decision-making may result from the policies or their enforcement. A system may, therefore, be designed and perpetuated to harshly enforce a larger penalty on one economic group (in the form of higher interest rates, for example) as a deterrent, whereas that same group may get a pass from any sort of penalty if the same conditions of being in trouble were applied to another group. Biases and discriminatory outcomes from all sources have the potential to be counteracted by thoughtful policy formulation. The following section frames policy making with AI systems in the context of fairness and accountability. Ethical frameworks are then used to discuss the formation of AI-driven economic policies to promote research on related topics. The final section discusses concerns over the surveillance and monitoring required for AI-created policies, including the privacy of sensitive data and the related implications for individual rights. By understanding the difficulty of tackling

crime without using traditional metrics, the pervasiveness of racially biased politics and how this can affect public opinion to the detriment of any individual or policy, and the complexities of restructuring economies in transition, higher-income countries could be better equipped to develop similarly fair and just AI-delivered economic policies. Furthermore, governments may be better positioned to circumvent potential mass protests and conflicts over AI political decisions.

4. Part III: Case Studies and Applications

Part III presents a series of case studies for a critical and robust policy evaluation of varying types of AI-related policies—the training of a biased algorithm, automation in the fast-food sector, healthcare predictive analytics, and AI safety-training. Each case analyzed here synthesizes empirical data with the theoretical approaches discussed in earlier Insightss, revealing how these policy settings can further compound AI's economic inequality.

Overall, the goal of Part III is to provide a series of case studies to bridge theory and practice in the development and implementation of fair AI-related policy. As the fourth industrial revolution progresses alongside the enaction of a flurry of AI-related policy, this critical inquiry seems more important than ever. In other disciplines, there have already been calls for sociologists to "raise fundamental questions about how AI is used and who and what it serves" (Zajko, 2020), questions which are becoming all the more urgent as AI continues to drive deeper wedges into existing economic cleavages. There are far fewer inquiries, however, into how concepts and methods within sociology can directly lend themselves to the shaping of good AI-driven economic policy. At their heart, these case studies generally involve an empirical question: what happens at the intersection of various strands of sociological and AI-related economic thought within a given policy setting or system of case studies? The approach taken is an attempt at a comprehensive response to this query, finding that a nuanced understanding of such interdisciplinary insights may be critical for the design of economically fair policy.

4.1. Insights 5: Case Study 1 - Impact of Automation on Employment

Insights 5's focus is on the impact of automation on employment. This topic is constructed to provide a succinct overview of the empirical evidence regarding automation's effects on employment across a range of different industries. This is a particular focus because automation is currently the most dominant example of AI, and possibly in the future, a principal sphere in which AI will be deployed. This Insights constructs an analysis of the positive and negative consequences of automation; outlining possible policy responses and interspersing a discussion-case study of recent and early automation.

It is the intention to make use of this and the following Insights as a foundational element underpinning the other empirical Insightss. There is an extensive literature on automation

within economic traditions, but this Insights incorporates sociological insights to consider who is affected by automation within the labor market, and explores the extent to which patterns of automation trigger job displacement or rather the creation of new job roles in different industries. Organizational and political aspects of automation shedding additional light on why certain patterns of automation are adopted are also considered. The data analyzed is more fine-grained than in most previous literature, and this nuance incorporates an examination of how skill levels, education, and other demographics pertaining to each employment type can specialize the general mechanisms of displacement. Therefore, this work is intended to serve as an empirically grounded introduction to how sociological research can be applied to the examination of the labor market in an AI-driven world. In the spirit of Foucault, this work views the transfiguration of the economic policy field in an AI-driven world as a vast laboratory, and has undertaken to contribute to the theoretical tools needed to navigate it (Fleming, 2019). With this said, attention is paid to pragmatic applications such as the policy case study and intended legislation analysis.

4.2. Insights 6: Case Study 2 - Bias in AI Algorithms

This Insights explores bias in AI algorithms and its consequences for economic policy. With the recent increase in AI-driven economic practices, policy making, and service providing, there is growing interest in the determinants of bias in algorithmic decision-making and its implications for equity of diverse outcomes. Research on how training data may lead algorithms to unfairly exclude or diminish marginalized communities has gained attention, but little concerns the potential bias in datasets currently ready to be used for analyzing economic policy alternatives (Zajko, 2020).

This section considers this later topic, specifically focusing on the question of what happens when algorithms are biased and policies are designed accordingly. The discussion begins with a consideration of several factors by which biases can emerge in the algorithmic decision-making process, and of the tendency for biased algorithms to simulate or exacerbate existing historical inequalities in a dataset. Attention then turns to the stark consequences of this on policy effectiveness, and discusses why and under what conditions policy makers might intentionally or unintentionally design purposefully biased algorithms. Throughout, the imperative importance of making economic AI systems more auditable and discrepantly monitoring existing practices is stressed, and it is argued that sociological traditions are especially well-suited to developing a research agenda that map and potentially address the challenges considered. By way of conclusions, a set of actionable recommendations for policy evaluators are presented and what an emergent sociology of (economic) algorithmic bias might previews discussed. Four case studies at the end of the framework outline demonstrate the implications of biased AI algorithms for economic policy.

5. Part IV: Sociological Perspectives on Policy Implementation

Engagement with stakeholders is one of the crucial components of successful policy-making, considering the need for legitimization and acceptance on the part of the citizens, who are most affected by public decisions (Trigilia, 2005). Public involvement is particularly important when policies are related to new technologies and issues, which may be considered ethically controversial, and for these reasons elicit an elevated level of public concern. Furthermore, stakeholder engagement has acquired a recognized role in the early identification of impacts and risks, which are present but not yet discernible or measurable. It allows the participation of all societal components in political decisions, implying both a concern for the quality of the environment and social justice. Participation can be cast as an empirical dimension in the evaluation of policy effectiveness. An efficiency approach, casting participation with simple input or output criteria, aims at improving the quality and legitimacy of public decisions. Yet it is fundamental to look at the process that led to it. Policy success has often been evaluated against how far it has actually attained the desired goals. However, from a sociological point of view, it is also relevant to look at how far societal components – particularly those affected by the policy – were involved at the policy design phase. In a rapidly changing world, the long time needed to implement sanctions may turn out to be an element endangering the policy itself. Part of any policy-making task relies on the choice of the most effective measures to achieve the desired goals, and valid decisions have necessarily to rest on the 'best scientific knowledge' as well as on the 'prudent' estimation of risks and impacts. In an attempt to meet this requirement, several methodologies and tools have been developed, providing models and scenarios on the basis of which predictions and forecasts can be consistently made. Model frameworks, however, are based on specific hypotheses and normative perspectives, generally reflecting preconditions with varying degrees of uncertainty.

5.1. Insights 7: Stakeholder Engagement and Participation

Insights 7 engages with the pivotal role of stakeholder participation in fair and effective policy design. Front-loaded in the policy cycle, eminently before implementation begins, stakeholder engagement is shown to enhance policy success rates. It can give policies a stamp of legitimacy, improved public trust, and potential for lasting relevance. When citizens are involved, their own buy-in and ownership of policy grows, accepting personal responsibility for compliance. This is why it is paramount to ensure that truly diverse voices are heard, recognizing the skills and knowledge of all those who've a stake in the policy outcome (Delgado et al., 2023). Stakeholder dynamics are central to modern-day policy-making and have a clear sociological underpinning. These key stakeholder dynamics are characterized by power, but also trust and history. Facilitating stakeholder engagement requires an understanding of this power distribution, taking into account formal, informal, and information power. Power dynamics are not necessarily linear, and they can change with the redistribution of resources. Trust is seen as both an

individual and collective asset and is nurtured online and offline, at the same time in the background but also shaped by explicit moments of the material interactions.

When mishandled, trust deficits can easily escalate and lead to the maligning of legitimate public input. Shared history might act as both a trust-builder and an effective barrier. Communities and legislators should draw lessons and insight from these historic episodes, making sure that they inform instead of impede future collaboration. Suggestions for enhancing productive stakeholder interaction are laid-out, combining both formal and informal instances. A range of engagement tools and formats are explored throughout the Insights. These examples range from earlier conceptualization meetings, through the organization of focus group discussions, to the issuance of e-consultations and open calls for feedback. Finally, stakeholder engagement is itself policy: the new European Urban Initiative provides for the development of placemaking measures, as tools for grassroots bottom-up planning of public spaces. These successive steps are the construction of Urban Labs. However, as the subsequent Urban Actions shows, marginalized stakeholders tend not to engage. A more structured, longer-term approach is advocated and one that seeks to actively correct for uneven power balances.

5.2. Insights 8: Addressing Inequality through Policy

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take a toll on lives and livelihoods, governments all over the world are struggling to develop economic policy responses. This struggle arrives even as publics and policymakers cope with the legal and ethical implications of using artificial intelligence to make decisions that will have profound consequences for the future (Zajko, 2020). This Insights is an opportunity for reiterating what those with a background in the sociological study of inequality should do to inform economic policymaking. Drawing on the following core insights of sociology, the structural and systemic causes of inequality should be identified. Sociologists have long recognized the importance of a range of actors and institutions—and their interactions—in determining economic outcomes. An equity-focused approach is a necessary counterweight to the dynamic efficiency considerations that often dominate economic policy discussions. Policymakers need more than economic data to make fair and effective decisions. Sociologists have long understood economic and social outcomes to be deeply intertwined. As such, a full understanding of the determinants of economic outcomes would require knowledge of the wide range of social determinants that shape those outcomes. Broad lessons from sociology can inform the development of economic policy, just as it can inform legal and ethical discussions about the use of AI in the public sphere. Economic policy should operate at the intersection of a diverse set of feedback effects in a complex system, and therefore will never be a topic for which we can definitively say everything that needs to be said. Thus, the exposition that follows is an endeavor to suggest ways that policymakers can develop policies that make use of

sociological insights to address the inequality currently present in the economy and to necessitate that economic systems are both fair and work well for everyone.

6. Conclusion and Future Directions

Sociology has always been seen as a powerful science closely related to social policy. In fact, one of the great “fathers” of sociology, Emile Durkheim, has historically been called to be one of the first sociologists to work as an official consultant to the French government. Why is it then that space for the contributions by labor economists were larger as compared to that from economic sociologists? Carlo Trigilia argued that the answer to this question may lie in the different way in which economic sociologists and labor economists have approached labor market studies. In the past two decades, economic sociology resorted to detailed empirical studies of firm organization aiming at assessing the efficiency of alternative labor management practices. But despite these important empirical studies, a consistent body of policy making prescriptions for a labor market tackling a strategy has not emerged (Trigilia, 2005).

6.1. Summary of Key Findings

This paper aims to summarize the main arguments contained in the research to make the research clear and more easily digestible for the reader. From theory to practice? Although it provokes a smile, few questions in economic sociology are more pertinent. For the most significant change in the field over the past twenty years as the outliers of the 1990s have become central to the point that a thin economic sociology has been established (Trigilia, 2005).

That said, in terms of economic policies, the balance appears to remain unstruck, or, perhaps more accurately, as unbalanced growth. So the main idea to be corroborated in this paper is that adopting sociological insights in policy matters offers a more comprehensive and persuasive way to grasp economic phenomena. The fact that conventional policy recommendations relate mainly to economic data is argued to result from an imperfect response to the analytical needs of complex managerial and industrial evolvements. By comparison, social and organizational measures require the embedment in analogous background that shields their internal consistency and further legitimization. Toward this aim, a summary of the main sociological content is made, together with speculative policy implications. Along the way, the different analytical trends and the mutual estrangement between research and policy circles within the broader domain of democracy and market economic implications are detected. Two case studies are presented to underline how sociological conception can in fact illuminate the sectors of economics otherwise bound to remain shadowed.

6.2. Recommendations for Future Research

The quest for policies fostering a more equal distribution of wealth and income has always represented a key theme in Sociology. The economic role of knowledge and

information in the production process and their growing importance in structuring contemporary economies have provided to economic sociologists new issues and problems to investigate and inspired new attempts. Aims and methods of New Economic Sociology (NES) are first sketched. Then its continuing dialogue with mainstream and institutional economics is examined, emphasizing the potential for policies of a richer economic sociology (Trigilia, 2005). As a final point, some critical notes are outlined concerning the present NES treatment of policies. Keynes motto “In the long run we are all dead” is now widely seen as a condemnation of short-run stabilization policies centered on simple reactive economic forecasting. Such a quote actually signals the strongly unequal distribution, criticism and control existing among different kinds of knowledge, both scientific and lay. Knowledge plays a material role, an inspirational one too, in structuring the way in which economic actors perceive the own alternatives and how they try to pursuit them (Zajko, 2020). From such awareness, the interest in the understanding of the impact of new economic domains endowed with an information and knowledge content for the structuring of the social action has grown up in economic sociology over the past two decades. Of course, economists have always concerned with knowledge, technology and institutions and have made pioneering contributions by stressing the role of tacit, sticky knowledge, routines, standards and institutions for the generation and exploitation of economic knowledge.

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