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cultural practices. These shared elements contribute to a sense of belonging and cohesion within the tribe. Tribal societies tend to have an intimate relationship with the natural environment. They rely on hunting, gathering, or simple agricultural practices that are often sustainable with nature. Their survival and well-being are closely tied to the availability of natural resources. In tribal societies, social roles and labor are often divided based on gender and age. Men and women may have distinct responsibilities and tasks within the community. Elders often hold positions of respect and influence due to their accumulated wisdom and experience. Tribal societies often exhibit egalitarian social structures. Power and authority are usually shared among community members, and hierarchical structures are less prevalent compared to more complex societies. Decisions and resources are often distributed in a manner that promotes cooperation and collective well-being. Oral traditions and storytelling play a significant role in tribal societies. Knowledge, history, and cultural values are passed down through generations through oral narratives, songs, dances, and rituals. These forms of cultural transmission preserve tribal heritage and reinforce collective identity. Each tribe has its own unique cultural practices, belief systems, and social dynamics. Tribal societies represent an important stage in human history, characterized by close-knit communities, kinship ties, collective decision-making, and a strong connection with nature. Postmodern Society Postmodern society represents a distinct phase in societal development characterized by a range of interconnected characteristics. One key feature of postmodern societies is the presence of diverse cultural influences. These societies are marked by the global flow of ideas, information, and cultural practices, resulting in the blending and hybridization of diverse cultural traditions and expressions. The interaction between different cultures contributes to a rich tapestry of cultural diversity within postmodern societies. Postmodern societies challenge traditional social structures and institutions. They question established norms, values, and beliefs, often rejecting overarching metanarratives or grand theories that claim to provide universal explanations for human existence. Instead, postmodern societies tend to emphasize cultural relativism, recognizing and valuing the multiplicity of perspectives and experiences. Individualism is valued in postmodern societies. There is an emphasis on personal autonomy, self-expression, and the freedom to choose one's own path in life. The individual is seen as having agency and the ability to construct their own identity, often in a context where traditional social categories and roles are fluid and subject to reinterpretation. Postmodern societies are characterized by a high degree of cultural diversity. Multiple cultural identities coexist within these societies, leading to a mosaic of beliefs, practices, and languages. This cultural diversity is celebrated and recognized as a source of social richness, creativity, and innovation. Rapid social change is a prominent aspect of postmodern societies. Technological advancements, globalization, and shifts in social values contribute to the dynamic nature of these societies. Social norms and practices are subject to continual reevaluation, and new ideas and social movements emerge at a fast pace. This rapid change challenges the stability and predictability of social structures, leading to a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity. In postmodern societies, boundaries between various social categories become blurred. Traditional distinctions based on gender, sexuality, race, and class are questioned and deconstructed. Fluidity and flexibility in identities and social roles are embraced, allowing individuals to explore and redefine their identities beyond traditional societal expectations. These types of societies are not mutually exclusive, and societies can exhibit characteristics of multiple types depending on various factors such as geographical location, historical context, and cultural dynamics. It's also worth mentioning that these categorizations are a simplified representation of complex social phenomena. Societies can exhibit diverse characteristics and can be further subdivided or categorized based on more specific criteria or cultural contexts. Learn More- Social Institutions Last Updated on December 13, 2022 by Karl ThompsonSociety is a concept used to describe the structured relations and institutions among a large community of people which cannot be reduced to a simple collection or aggregation of individuals.’ (1)Sociology is the study of the relationship between society and individuals and how and why societies change over time, so clearly having a working definition of this concept is very important for sociology students.This post explores some competing definitions of society including the idea that globalisation has reduced the relevance of the old ‘bounded’ concept of society which was so fundamental in early modernist sociology.The concept of society can be traced to the fourteenth century, when the primary meaning was companionship or association, a meaning which still exists today. However, the specific sociological meaning of society was not developed until the nineteenth century.A strong argument can be made for the view that it was Emile Durkheim who first developed the sociological meaning of ‘society’ which he used when he established sociology as a new discipline which dealt with the collective reality of human life as opposed to studying individuals.Durkheim argued that society has an independent reality from individuals, and exists in its own right, exerting an influence over individuals within a ‘bounded territory’, which for Durkheim essentially meant the ‘nation state’.However, the relevance of bounded-societies has been questioned since the 1970s due to globalisation, and the increasing amount of people, money, and communications moving across national borders.Because of this, some sociologists argue that sociology should shift its analysis from ‘societies’ to (global) mobilities.The concept of sociology has been fundamental to sociology’s ‘self-identity’, with most text books using the concept to define the discipline, with the ‘study of societies’ often being part of the definition of sociology in most text books and society in turn being defined as large communities, existing within nation states.Talcott Parsons added another important defining characteristic of society - that it should be self-perpetuating, or able to reproduce itself without external assistance.For most of sociology’s history, sociologists have studied and compared societies, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the historic division between ‘first’, ‘second’ and ‘third’ world societies, and in theories of development such as modernisation theory, which outline why certain societies (or ‘nation states’) are less developed in comparison to other ‘more developed’ societies (or ‘nation states’).There have been many attempts to understand social change by focusing one specific driving force, for example sociological theorising has developed the following conceptualisations of society:Industrial societyCapitalist societyPost-industrial societyPostmodern societyThe knowledge societyRisk societyThe network society.However, the problem with a ‘bounded sociology’ which limits itself to cross national comparisons is that it tells us little about inequalities within societies.A dualistic conception of society as a thing apart from the individual may be more of a reflection of the dualistic legacy of western philosophy rather than being based on actual empirical reality.To this end, many sociologists have proposed focussing more on interactions rather than ‘society’ and the ‘individual’. Norbert Elias was one of the first to develop a sociology which focused more on social processes, concentrating more on shifting relationships at a variety of levels, from individual interactions to inter-state conflicts.Globalisation has also put into question the usefulness of focussing on individual nation states: large TNCs are now more powerful than most nation states, and criminal organisation and social movements cut across national borders, making them seem less useful as a focus for social analysis.John Urry’s (2007) social mobilities project, which focuses on the study of processes of movements across national borders is one way in which sociology has moved its analysis away from the nation state in response to globalisation.John Urry has suggested that sociology might usefully move its analytical focus ‘beyond societies’ – as global networks and flows become more effective and powerful, they tend to cross national boundaries, which are now seen as more permeable than ever. The concept of society thus seems less relevant than ever, and the job of sociology is to devise ways of understanding the varied range of mobilities and what kind of social life they are producing.One sociologists who argues that the concept of society is still relevant is Richard Outhwaite, who argues that ‘society’ is a collective representation which still resonates with people’s perception of social reality as it actually exists.For example, ‘national identity’ (however confused) still has meaning to many people and politicians can still draw on the concept of the nation to pull people together, as the case of Brexit in 2016 suggests.Also, nation states are the only collective entities capable of generating the kind of income necessary (through taxation) to maintain nuclear arsenals and standing armies, along with mobilising popular support to use these in support of their aims.I usually teach this material as part of an introduction to sociology, the concept of ‘society’ is after all one of the key ones students need to understand!To return to the homepage – revisesociology.comSources1) Giddens and Sutton (2017) Essential Concepts in Sociology Last Updated on June 28, 2025 by Karl ThompsonDiscover essential A Level Sociology revision resources for papers 1, 2, and 3. 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