

The Relationship Between Structuration Theory and Agency According to Giddens and Walters

Mhd. Dayrobi*, Hanafi Urwatil Usqo, Fauziah Lubis

Postgraduate Islamic Law Department, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara
Jl. William Iskandar Ps. V, Medan Estate, Kec. Percut Sei Tuan, Kabupaten Deli Serdang, Sumatera Utara 20371, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Received June 26, 2024

Revised July 19, 2024

Accepted September 8, 2024

Keywords:

Agency
Anthony Giddens
Social Action
Social Change
Social Structure
Structuration Theory
Walters

ABSTRACT

This research aims to understand social action through the lens of Structuration and Agency Theory, with a special focus on the thought of Anthony Giddens and Malcolm Walters. Giddens' Structuration Theory emphasizes the dialectical relationship between agency (individual action) and structure (social rules and resources), where structure not only constrains but also enables action. The concept of duality of structure shows that structure is both the medium and the result of social action. Walters expands this concept by highlighting how individuals, through reflexive capacities, can reproduce or change social structures. This research uses library research methods. The research results show that a deeper understanding of the interaction between agency and structure can enrich sociological analyzes of social change and the sustainability of social structures.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



Corresponding Author:

Mhd. Dayrobi
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara

INTRODUCTION

In social science studies, understanding the dynamics of social action has become a primary focus for explaining how individuals act and interact in society. One theoretical framework that has provided significant insight in this regard is Structuration Theory, developed by Anthony Giddens. This concept highlights the importance of the dynamic relationship between social structure and individual agency in shaping patterns of social action. As this theory has developed, several scholars, including Raymond Walters, have offered additional views and critiques of Giddens' theory. To understand Social Action through Structuration and Agency Theory, as viewed by Giddens and Walters, provides a deep understanding of human interaction in society. According to Anthony Giddens, Structuration Theory emphasizes that social action is not only influenced by internal individual factors (agency), but also by existing social structures. Giddens emphasizes that social structure and agency cannot be strictly separated, because both are interrelated in shaping social action. Social structures, such as norms, values, and institutions, provide a framework for individual action, while agency refers to an individual's ability to act and provide meaning within that context. In Giddens' view, social action is the result of continuous interactions between structure and agency.

Meanwhile, Raymond Walters' views offer an additional perspective on Structuration Theory. Walters emphasizes the importance of cultural, political, and economic context in influencing individual social actions. He underlines that social structures are not only entities that exist outside individuals, but are also formed and maintained through social practices carried out by individuals. In doing so, Walters highlights the complexity of the relationship between social structure and agency, and emphasizes the importance of considering specific contexts in analyzing social action. Overall, Giddens and Walters' views on Structuration and Agency Theory

provide a strong foundation for understanding the dynamics of social action in society. They highlight the importance of considering the complex interactions between existing social structures and individuals' abilities to act, and offer valuable insights into how societies are shaped and maintained by individual social actions.

By combining these perspectives, we can develop a deeper understanding of how individuals engage in social action and how social structures influence their behavior. This discussion aims to provide a general overview of the main concepts in Structuration Theory and further developments proposed by Walters. We will explain the historical context in which this theory emerged, introduce the concepts of structure and agency, and explore the ways in which Giddens and Walters' perspectives can provide valuable insights into social action. We need to know the relevance of understanding social action in this modern context, by looking at the implications of structuration and agency theory in understanding social change, identity and conflict in increasingly complex societies, which includes exploration of main concepts, evaluation of Giddens and Walters' perspectives, as well as offering new insights or expanded understanding about understanding social action through the lens of structuration and agency theory. Therefore, it is hoped that readers will get a clear picture of the theoretical landscape that will be explored in this journal, as well as the importance of this research in enriching our understanding of human social behavior.

RESEARCH METHODS

The method the author uses in this research is the library research method. Literature-based research is a form of research that uses literature as an object of study. Researchers study and obtain data through literature, writings and sources that are closely related to the problem being studied. Data collection is carried out by researchers by looking for data sources such as books, journals and existing research both offline and online that are related to the discussion carried out by the researcher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Action Through Structuration Theory According to Giddens

The problem of the relationship between humans and society or social action and structure is at the core of social theory and the philosophy of social science. The debate relates to which is more important, the individual and the structure. Usually, some of the solutions taken are focused on one term while ignoring others, both social structural which is taken as the main object of application of the analysis and tools which are effectively redundant. Or individuals who are only seen as the main elements of groups of social action and reaction. In social theory there are questions that are sometimes asked as a strong desire to build on an established analysis, such as the question "how" and "in what way" the actions produced by individual agents are related to the structural features of the society in which they live. Structuration Theory as part of an example of the results of the debate over agent-structure relationships (in Europe), and macro-micro relationships (in America). Giddens offers a re-conceptualization between 'macro' and 'micro' in relation to the way in which interactions in the context of face-to-face encounters are structurally involved in systems spanning broad space and time, in other words, how such systems span broad sectors. from space and time. Structuration theory emerged from the absence of action theory in the social sciences.

The main issues being debated are around how the concepts of action, meaning and subjectivity should be explained and how they relate to ideas about structure and constraint. If interpretive sociology is based on subject imperialism, functionalism and structuralism emphasize the imperialism of social objects. One of the main goals of formulating Structuration theory is to end each of these imperialisms. Giddens begins his thoughts by criticizing Functionalism and Structuralism. There are 3 Giddens criticisms of Functionalism, first, Functionalism eliminates the fact that members of society are not stupid people. Individuals are not robots that move based on a script. Second, Functionalism is a way of thinking that claims that social systems have needs that must be met. And third, Functionalism removes the dimensions of time and space in explaining social processes. Meanwhile, regarding Structuralism, Giddens considers that Structuralism too excludes the subject of Structuralism and Functionalism strongly emphasizes the superiority of the social whole over its individual parts. Structuralism strongly opposes the Hermeneutic tradition which is considered to give subjectivity power as the center of culture and history. Likewise with Functionalists, Functionalists oppose the tradition of interpretive sociology. Because, in interpretive sociology, action and meaning have a main position in the explanation of human behavior. Structural concepts are not considered very important and there is not much discussion of restraints. However, Functionalism and Structuralism took precedence over action and the restrictive nature of structure was emphasized.

Functionalism and Structuralism are perhaps the most prominent intellectual traditions in social theory over the past three or forty years. Both Functionalism and Structuralism, if traced, the roots of their thoughts still go back to Durkheim. However, in compiling Structuration Theory, Giddens also borrowed several terms from Structuralism and Functionalism. Even though Structuration theory tries to find a common ground

between agent-structure or macro-micro relationships, Structuration Theory still has the nuance of putting pressure on agents. Giddens agents have more power. This is different from the theory developed by Bourdieu. Bourdieu emphasizes Habitus more, so that the nuances of the theory he builds are more mechanical. In compiling Structuration Theory, Giddens is more or less indebted to the ideas of Structuralism. This can be seen in Giddens' notes on Structuralism, namely:

1. Structuralist theory shows the importance of creating space through differences in the processes of language and society constitution,
2. Structuralist thinking seeks to incorporate the dimension of time into the center of analysis itself,
3. Structuralist thinking shows that 'distance in time' is in some important aspects the same as ethnographic distance',
4. Structuralist theory offers the possibility of a more satisfactory understanding of the social totality than that offered by Functionalism. According to Functionalism, society can be depicted as a pattern of relationships between 'parts', while Structuralist Theory proposes the idea that society, like language, is best viewed as a "virtual system" with a repetitive nature, and
5. In Structuralism Theory there is a movement to go beyond subject/object dualism.

On the other hand, symbolic interactionism emphasizes the view of social life as an active achievement of knowledgeable and purposeful actors, and symbolic interactionism is associated with subject theory, as Mead explains the social origins of reflexive consciousness. Symbolic interactionism is believed to be a 'micro sociology' dealing with interpersonal, small-scale relationships, while the broader tasks of macro sociology are handled by functionalism. For Giddens, what symbolic interactionism explains is inadequate to explain human behavior. For Giddens, human agency, first, must be linked to a theory of the subject in action, and second must situate action into space and time as a continuous flow of behavior, rather than treating goals, reasons, etc. as something held together. The same. The behavior of actors in society must be treated as the result of a combination of social and psychological determinants, when social determinants dominate the determinants addressed to normative elements.

Giddens understands that subject theory includes a personality stratification model which is structured based on three layers of relationships, namely the unconscious, practical consciousness and discursive consciousness. This will later become the fundamental of Structuration Theory. Giddens attempts to traverse these diverse orientations by rethinking purpose, and the relationship between action and structure. The term used is structural duality. "By the duality of structure", Giddens means that social structures (both) exist in social institutions and at the same time these structures become very simple rules. Every act of production simultaneously means an act of reproduction: a structure that allows an act to be developed. For Giddens, the main object of social science is not social roles as in Parsons' Functionalism, not hidden codes as in Levi-Strauss's Structuralism, nor situational uniqueness as in Goffman's Interactionism. According to Structuration Theory, the domain of study in the social sciences is social practices that occur throughout space and time. This means that social activities are not presented by social actors, but are continuously created by them through means of expressing themselves as actors. In and through their activities, agents produce the conditions that make those activities possible. The concept of Structuration Theory lies in the ideas of agents, structures, systems, and the duality of structure.

Agents And Actions

Many social theories, especially those related to structural sociology, view agents as not having much knowledge, even though the opposite is true. For Giddens, individuals are agents who have a lot of knowledge (knowledgeable agents) and the ability to understand their own actions. They are not mere cultural layers or supporters of social relations, but they are skilled actors who have a lot of knowledge about the world in which they work. All social actors are social theorists and must be so to be true social agents. One of the distinctive contributions of phenomenology is to show that (1) the operation of social life continuously involves 'theorizing activity', (2) even the most enduring habits of nature or the most established norms involve continuous and detailed reflexive attention. Routines are an important element of social life; but all routines are always uncertain and potentially fragile achievements. Lay actors themselves are theoretical social theorists. They play a role in forming activities and institutions which are the object of study by social researchers or social scientists, this is what is called double hermeneutics. The first interpretation is carried out by actors, while the second interpretation is carried out by social scientists. There is no clear boundary between conscious sociological reflection by lay actors and similar efforts by experts. Social scientists have absolutely no right to monopolize innovative theories or empirical investigations of what they study.

The various aspects of action and agency are part of what Giddens calls the "stratification model of action." This model illustrates the limitations of attempting to analyze action by focusing on individual agents. Giddens describes actors and their actions in the stratification of actions. Meanwhile, what is meant by

rationalization of action is that actors - also routinely and mostly without debate - maintain a continuous 'theoretical understanding' of the foundations of their activities. Action rationalization refers to the reasons offered to the agent in explaining his action, so "action motivation" refers to the motives and desires that encourage the action. Giddens differentiates between reflexive monitoring and rationalization of actions in terms of motivation.

Structure and Duality of Structure

The aim of Structuration theory is to explain the dialectical relationship and mutual influence between agents and structures. Thus, agency and structure cannot be understood in isolation from each other. Agents and structures are inseparably intertwined in human practice or activity. They are dualities. Human activity is not a one-time result by social actors, but they continuously recreate it in some way, and in that way they also express themselves as actors. In and through their activities, agents create the conditions that allow these activities to take place. In general, Giddens focuses on the dialectical processes by which social practices, structures, and consciousness are created. Giddens interprets structure as rules and resources that are arranged as properties of a social system. Structure only exists as 'structural properties'. 'structural properties' or more precisely 'processing properties' refer to the processing properties that make it possible to 'bind' time and space in social systems. Giddens argues that these traits can be understood as rules and resources, which are continually implicated in social reproduction. Structure is present paradigmatically, as a series of invisible (virtual) differences, which are only 'present' temporally in fleeting form, in the moments that form a social system. Structure can be conceptualized abstractly as two aspects of rules, namely normative elements and marking codes. Resources also have two types, authoritative resources, which originate from the coordination of the activities of human agents, and allocative resources, which derive from control over material products or aspects of the material world. Structure originates from habits that are established as standards and, as such, is closely related to institutionalization and gives shape to the very dominant influences in social life. Giddens differentiates between structure as rules and resources (in unity), and structure as a set of rules and resources (separately) for the following reasons, namely:

- a. rules are often understood as formal provisions, rules in social reproduction in general are not like that,
- b. rules are often understood as a single form, even though in Giddens' structure this is not the case,
- c. rules cannot be conceptualized separately from resources, which refer to the ways in which transformative relations are actually involved in the processes of production and reproduction of social practices. Therefore, structural completeness shows dominance and power
- d. rules presuppose 'methodical procedures'. Rules primarily relate to social practices in the contextuality of certain encounters,
- e. for them, rules have two aspects and it is important to distinguish them conceptually, because a number of philosophical writers tend to combine the two aspects. Giddens interprets such a structure to break away from the fixed or mechanical character of the use of structure in orthodox sociology. The concepts of systems and structuration dominate so much that 'structure' helps explain a lot.

In social analysis, structure refers to the structuring features that enable time-space 'binding' in social systems. These features enable the existence of social practices in very diverse ranges of space and time while also giving these social practices a 'systemic' form. To say that structure is the 'real order' of transformative relations means that social systems, as reproduced social practices, do not have 'structure', but rather display 'structural completeness'. This means that the structure exists, as a presence of space and time, only in its manifestation in these practices and as memory traces oriented towards the behavior of intelligent human agents. Structure should not be confused with restraint, but nevertheless structure is both restrictive and enabling. Of course, this does not mean that the structured features of social systems do not move, in space and time, outside the social control of individual actors. The structural features that are most firmly rooted and involved in the reproduction of the totality of society are called 'structural principles'. Meanwhile, practices that have the greatest spatial and temporal expansion in totality are called institutions.

Social systems involve regular relationships of mutual dependence between individuals or groups, which can usually best be analyzed as repeated social practices¹³. Systems, in this terminology have structures, or more accurately' have structural properties; the system is not the structure itself. Structure is automatically a property of a system or collectivity, and is characterized by the 'absence of a subject. Studying the structuration of a social system means studying the ways of producing and reproducing that system in interaction through the application of common rules and resources and in the context of undesirable outcomes. Giddens interprets structure as rules and resources that are arranged as properties of a social system. In an effort to emphasize the importance of resources as structural properties of social systems, Giddens emphasizes the primacy of the concept of power for social theory. Power is defined as the ability of (a) actors to realize their desires, even at the expense of the desires/interests of other people who may oppose them, (b) power is seen as a common property (collectivity). According to Thompson, studying structural principles at the level of

structural analysis is a very abstract part of analysis. At a somewhat abstract level of analysis, the structural features of social systems can be observed as 'structural devices'. It is through this structural device that Giddens interprets the rules and sources and then specifies them in terms of groupings of mediation relations. Giddens' separation of analyzes is very confusing. Understanding structure as rules and sources, assuming that conversation produces grammar, will not be sufficient to explain social development (reproduction). According to Thompson, the problem of social development will only be better if it is solved partially, by separating the development of institutions and the development of social structures. Institutions are usually characterized through the rules, regulations, and conventions of society, through differences in the type and amount of resources, and through the hierarchical relationships of power contained in institutional positions. When agents act according to their rules and regulations or exercise powers that are institutionally advantageous, they can be said to 'develop institutions. Furthermore, if institutions are able to fulfill certain structural conditions, in the sense of understanding the conditions that limit the area of institutional variation and the conditions that emphasize structural distinctions, then agents can be said to 'develop social structures'.

Dialectical Relationship between Agency and Structure

Malcolm Walters emphasizes that the relationship between agency and structure is dialectical. This means that both influence and shape each other. Walters adopts Anthony Giddens' view which states that structure not only limits action, but also allows that action to occur. Social structures provide resources and rules that individuals follow or modify in their actions. In other words, agency is not completely free from structure, but it is also not completely bound by it.

Walters refers to Giddens' concept of the duality of structure, which means that structure is dual: it is both the medium and the result of action. In this sense, social structures and individual actions are interrelated in a continuous cycle. For example, when individuals follow social rules, they reproduce those structures; however, when they modify it, they produce changes in the structure.

Walters also highlights the important role of agency in the reproduction and transformation of social structures. Each individual action has the potential to maintain or change existing structures. Agency enables social change by enabling individuals to act differently from existing norms or rules, thereby creating opportunities for structural transformation. Walters also argues about reflexive capacity which is the ability of individuals to reflect on their own actions and the social context around them. Walters asserts that this capacity is important because it allows individuals to assess and modify their behavior based on their understanding of social structures and the consequences of their actions.

Examples of Social Action

To provide an illustration, consider a social activist fighting against injustice. Social structures may include laws and policies that support the status quo. However, through their agency, these activists can choose to protest, raise awareness, and advocate for policy change. In this process, activist actions are not only influenced by existing structures, but also have the potential to change these structures, for example by pushing for legal reform.

Walters's account of structuration and agency theory emphasizes the complex interactions between individual actions and social structures. Through concepts such as dialectical relationships, duality of structure, and reflexive capacity, Walters provides a deep understanding of how individuals can act within the framework of existing social structures and how those actions can reproduce or change those structures.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the study on Understanding Social Action through Structuration and Agency Theory according to Giddens and Walters' views illustrates the importance of these concepts in understanding social dynamics and human interactions in society regarding the Duality of Structure and Agency: Giddens' structuration theory highlights the importance of understanding the complex relationship between social structures which provides a context for human action, and agency, namely the individual's ability to act and provide meaning within that structural framework. It rejects deterministic views of social action, while also avoiding views that rely entirely on individual agency. Although Giddens' structuration theory has become an important reference point in social thought, there have been criticisms and developments proposed by other scholars, including Walters. Such criticisms may include ambiguities in the concepts of structure and agency, as well as arguments that the theory does not take enough account of the cultural and political factors that influence social action. Although these theories were developed decades ago, the concepts of structuration and agency remain relevant in analyzing contemporary social phenomena. In an era of globalization and growing social complexity, understanding how individuals act in changing structural contexts is critical. It is hoped that in the future it will include more in-depth empirical research to test and develop existing theories, as well as

exploration of how structuration and agency theories can be applied in specific contexts such as information technology, the environment, or public policy.

REFERENCES

- [1] Dallmayr, Fred. 1982. *The Theory Structuration: a Critique*. Dalam Anthony Giddens. *Anthony Giddens Profile and Critiques in Social Theory*. Los Angeles:University of California Press.
- [2] Giddens, Anthony. 1979. *Problematika Utama dalam Teori Sosial; Aksi, Struktur, dan Kontradiksi dalam Analisis Sosial*. Terjemahan oleh Dariyatno. 2009. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- [3] Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *Teori Strukturasi Dasar-Dasar Pembentukan Struktur Sosial Masyarakat*. Terjemahan oleh Maufur dan Daryanto. 2010. Yogyakarta:Pustaka Pelajar.
- [4] Giddens, Anthony. 1993. *Metode Sosiologi Kaidah-Kaidah Baru*. Terjemahan oleh Eka Adi Nugraha dan Wahmuji. 2010. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar. Loyal, Steven. 2003. *The Sociology of Anthony Giddens*. London: Pluto Press. Pierson, Christopher. Giddens, Anthony. 1998. *Conversation Anthony Giddens Making Sense of Modernity*. Nottingham.
- [5] Priyono, B. Herry. 2000. *Sebuah Terobosan Teoritis*. Dalam Basis Nomor 02. Tahun ke-49, Januari-Februari 2000.
- [6] Ritzer, George. Goodman, Douglas. 2003. *Teori Sosiologi Modern*. Terjemahan Alimandan. 2004. Jakarta: Prenada Media.
- [7] Thompson, John. B. 1984. *Analisis Ideologi; Kritik Wacana Ideologi-ideologi Dunia*. Terjemahan oleh Haqqul Yakin. 2003. Yogyakarta:Ircisod.
- [8] Walters, Malcolm. *Modern Sociological Theory*. Oxford University Press, 2003.