# HUMAN BEING DEVELOPMENT: RESEARCH PROTOCOL FOR A HOLISTIC AND COMPLEX REVIEW ON THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to lay the foundation for the building blocks of the social development of human beings in a contemporary democratic society; more broadly, it focuses on the research protocol with used to conduct a holistic and complex review on the social dimension of the human being. From a cross-reading of the thoughts of ancient and contemporary authors, a number of structural, conceptual and dynamic elements related to this subject emerged. This article, based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach, establishes a first foundation of knowledge synthesis on the social dimension of human beings. *Initial Warnings.* Current knowledge of the requirements of good development and good functioning of human beings allows for the definition of new guidelines to redirect our education systems towards the implementation of education and training programs that allow every human to better know oneself and to realize optimally their potential. We want to put into perspective the knowledge generated by several authors to synthesize their approaches and draw the guidelines for this new orientation that is necessary and more respectful of human development. This article is a proposal for the basis of work on which the experts of different fields mentioned in the text will be able to continue the reflection and co-build this holistic framework with us. More than ever, we believe in the importance of this exercise to redefine humanism and education that truly places human beings in what they are, and is most fundamental and in the optimal conditions for them to succeed.

*Keywords: Human being, development, social dimension, Bronfenbrenner, ecological model.*

## 1. Human beings in relation – contemporary democratic society

This work focuses on the social dimension of human beings, placing them at the centre of a reference system: the ontosystem. Parmentier gives this definition of the person: "to be thinking, reasonable, capable of reflection and to consider oneself as a thinking being in different times and places" (2002). Therefore, the present research takes for reference any being who is part of the process of thinking about the world in which he lives, as well as his history and his future, and to think in this world.

This human being is able to endorse a number of statutes, including that of worker or citizen, which O'shea (2003) defines as "a person who has skills related to understanding and knowledge related to a given society and culture, but also skills that relate to living well with the family and in the local environment." The external characteristic peculiar to our reference must be related to a modern democratic environment since such a regime helps to construct the "social being" (Huchon, 2002). In this context of democratic application, the person possessing the internal characteristics related to the affective, cognitive and behavioural structures necessary for the proper functioning of each of the systems that result from it could be able to develop its social dimension in the best possible way.

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## 2. Methods

The realization of this work was orchestrated around a grouping of points of view and related knowledge on the social dimension of human beings, stemming from currents of thought and different times. Therefore, all the notions used are the result of reflections or work already existing, and the present study of qualitative type was the subject of a content analysis, which "consists of dismantling the structure and the elements of this content to highlight its different characteristics and to make their meaning clear" (Laville & Dionne, 1996). In other words, we have analyzed authors' concerns more closely around lexical fields in order to extract a selection of content of interest around the social development of human beings.

While the emergence of different social contexts was the result of cross-readings by ancient authors belonging to a Western literary tradition and more contemporary researchers, their arrangement

was made, among other things, around the conceptions of Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach (1979); an approach widely used in developmental psychology syntheses (Bee & Boyd, 2003; Berger, 2000; Papalia & Olds, 1989).

## 2.1. First step: review of key authors of the Western tradition

We decided to begin our research with a historical-cultural study of man rather than an inventory of current writings on the subject of his social development. This allowed, first, to keep an open mind, a "naive" look, little influenced by contemporary conceptions, and necessary for the inductive and progressive development of this type of work. Then, sweeping through such a great period of Western history appeared as a pledge of confidence in the emergence and recurrence of different elements of a possible summary table. Therefore, the field of this research is based, firstly, on a census of writings concerning key thinkers of the great periods of human history and Western societies. We initially sequenced our documentary pool according to the following periods: the Greek period (between the 3rd century BC and the 1st century), the Roman period (between the 1st and 5th century), the Middle Ages (between the 5th and 15th century), the Renaissance (15th to 18th century), the century of Reason (18th century) and the modern era (19th and early 20th century). For each epoch, we drew up a spontaneous list of thinkers. It was expanded following the meeting of researchers from different fields (e.g., History, Philosophy, Sociology) to which we explained our approach.

## 2.2. Second step: systematic review of contemporary authors

We have selected a number of relevant books. We have tagged our research around several lexical fields and keywords (social development of the person, human development, citizen, citizenship, socialization, personal fulfillment, happiness, living together, live happily, interpersonal relationships, social space) that have been associated with each author. The databases of the catalog of the library (Ariane), but also Francis, Eric, Sociology Abstract, among others, were questioned to sweep the period from antiquity to the present day. Subsequently, the selection was followed by a summary reading (summary, introduction, conclusion, table of contents) in order to first identify the notions and lexical fields that appeared relevant to an integrative model used as a basis for social development of human beings. This targeted reading strategy allowed faster access to relevant information. Therefore, it is easy to understand that all the works consulted for this research have not been read in their entirety. However, they all contributed to the development of the integrative model through the concepts they addressed, the precision they offered about the author consulted or even the context of the time when the writings appeared. This inductive approach has allowed us to shape our thinking and develop our model as we read and collect data from the Grounded theory perspective (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

## 2.3. Third step: organization and data collection

The collection of data was organized around the division of contents. A selection of relevant elements was made within the collected documentation. Thus, everything relating to the various lexical fields mentioned above was taken into consideration in order to constitute a database of important data with respect to the social development of the human being, especially to perceive the emergence of the themes in the thought of the authors, their recurrence in their writings, but also between the different authors of the same time.

## 2.4. Fourth step: categorization data analysis

All this information, once harvested, has been categorized. These emerging categories have been defined according to the open model; that is, they "are not fixed initially, but take shape during the analysis itself" (Laville & Dionne, 1996). In this conception of the approach, the categories emerged at the end of a "regrouping" of periods. Three sets have been created: (a) the Greek, Roman and Middle Ages, (b) the Renaissance and Reason centuries and (c) the modern period. In order to make the synthesis of ideas functional, double-entry tables (Authors/Categories) have been drawn up for the different groups presented previously. Thanks to this progression, it was possible to "obtain a first set of rudimentary categories. This set is the starting point of an approach which, in successive stages, will lead to the final categories" (Laville & Dionne, 1996).

## 3. Anchoring the ecological approach of Bronfenbrenner

The constitutive elements of our research emergent categories of our readings crystallized from contemporary authors and took shape within a dynamic structure: Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach (1979). Very often used in the developmental theories of the human being, this conceptual framework makes it possible to arrange the elements related to the development of the person, as much as to reveal the links and the reciprocal influences.

The ecological environment to which Bronfenbrenner refers is detailed in four systems: *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem* and *macrosystem*. These systems make it possible to consider a way of structuring the various social contexts in which the developing person lives the *ontosystem* both in their

content and in the links that unite them. 1) *Microsystem*: "The microsystem is a dynamic of activities, roles and interpersonal relationships experienced by the developing person in a setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In short, it is the direct interactions of individuals in their daily lives, whether between friends, husbands, colleagues, etc. 2) *Mesosystem*: The "set of [links] and processes that take place between two or more microsystems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) is the mesosystem. For example, the child attending school allows two microsystems the family and the school to create a direct link. 3) *Exosystem*: the "place or context in which the individual is not directly involved, but which nevertheless influences his life" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). As an illustration, the learning that a child achieves in the school stems, among other things, from the programs set up by a ministry of education (exosystem), and these governmental directives will influence the development of the school child through the teacher. 4) *Macrosystem*: is the set of "contexts of development [...] composed of traditions, values, beliefs of society" (Berger, 2000). It is the last system that participates in human development and encompasses all the other systems previously listed. Also, 5) Bronfenbrenner talks about an additional system in his model, the *chronosystem*, linked to the passage of time.

All these systems, linked to the environment or the individual, are the object of reciprocal interactions that influence the development of the person: "Development is the result of continual and reciprocal interactions between the individual organism and its environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These interactions are called "bottom up," called "centrifugal dynamics" in this research, with regard to the influence of individuals on their more or less immediate social contexts and "top down," or "centripetal dynamics," regarding the inverse influences.

## 4. Next steps

The construction of this model responded to the desire to collect and synthesize the largest number of constitutive elements about the social dimension of human beings, a construction site still too fragmented. If several studies are interested in the process of socialization of individuals to make them "functional citizens," little interest in circumscribing all the constitutive elements of the social dimension from a developmental perspective of the person to tend, deliberately towards higher levels of humanity.

This ambitious research project has become more than necessary as several authors have shown (Fortin, 2007; Legendre, 2002; Marcotte, 2015; Morin, 2000, 2011). Not only must the characteristics of the human being be studied and articulated together, but more than that, they must target the improvement of human development to truly take a step closer to a more humanizing education that goes beyond the instruction. A future step would be to make this tool applicable to the reading of the current reality and this, in several contemporary social contexts. Humbly, we are now inviting other specialists in the social dimension of human beings and related themes or issues to pursue, revisit and enrich this work so that it can achieve the ambition it sets for itself. The path is still long, but if the human efforts meet around a clear target and are well oriented, the march will be faster.

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