MODERN CONCEPTUAL-THEORETICAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

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Scientific discussion on political leadership increasingly takes on the form of interdisciplinary argumentation, in which different research perspectives, models and explanatory conceptual grids overlap. This state of affairs is on the one hand dictated by the contemporary trends in scientific research, especially in the broadly defined social sciences, where the cognitive, explanatory or descriptive relevance is achieved only by taking into account a broader, inter-disciplinary nature of scientific knowledge. In this sense, a thorough, reliable research practice consists primarily in crossing the formal borders of scientific disciplines, where researchers renounce the “complex” of detailed and firm definitions of their own subject of study to turn instead towards integration of knowledge from various, often very different, areas. The above is mainly due to the dispersion of objective scientific knowledge, which is conditioned, among others by: scientific and technical progress, the phenomenon of intertextuality (modern researchers in humanities concentrate their research effort on the texts and practices associated with this phenomenon, which means that their primary method in analyses of political phenomena is to fortify the text – specifically, to prepare the scientific text in such a way as to meet the standards of scientific writing and withstand criticism.
in the absence of the writer\(^1\)); as well as conceptual-theoretical pluralism present in social sciences. On the other hand, it is the result of scientific analysis of the given forms and practices of leadership, where nowadays greater attention is paid to the multi-dimensionality of leadership processes in politics, related to: the multi-level nature of concepts and research (meso, micro and macro-theoretical level analyses) and the need to take into account a large number of variables in the study of leadership (personality and environmental, situational, institutional factors, economic, political or religious variables). The consequence of this state of affairs is the multi-paradigm character of leadership, which in this case means that very often highly different ways of defining and explaining the complex relationship between a particular political leader and followers co-exist within the discipline\(^2\). In addition, the multiplicity of paradigms of political leadership is a feature demonstrating the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge generated by political science, where various claims, theses, observations or conclusions complement each other, for example those originating in disciplines such as sociology, law, psychology, management sciences and cultural studies.

The purpose of this article is to present the modern transformations, the changes occurring in the conceptual-theoretical field as regards the definitions and explanations of the relationship of the interface political leader ↔ followers. In other words, the article aims to show the current status of research, where researchers of leadership phenomena increasingly emphasize the need to take into account the progressively deepening relational nature and factual complexity of intra-subjective and structural systems, in which a given political leader operates. The starting point of the article is the problem of complexity, understood as an empirically observable megatrend in political practice. Further on, the concept of political leadership will be defined. On this basis, the author will discuss two conceptual-theoretical transformations related to the process of

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political leadership, and their consequences and implications for future scientific political science analyses.

**THE INCREASING COMPLEXITY AS A POLITICAL MEGATREND**

Competent observers of socio-political life increasingly emphasize the irreversibility of certain processes or phenomena on a global scale. Most frequently, these changes take the form of developmental megatrends of development, i.e., certain regularities of social, economic and political character, noticeable on a global scale. Without a doubt, one such trend is the phenomenon of complexity, which has now become synonymous with such notions as development of the information society, post-capitalist structures and network governance. At the same time, complexity can be considered as a specific social condition that has its origins in:

1. Phenomenon of *fuzziness* – observable state of multiplicity and variability of phenomena, factors and mechanisms having direct or indirect impact on the process of formation of modern societies (mechanism of blurrings the potential causes and factors in the scientific analyses, resulting in lack of a definite answer).

2. Practical *chaotics* – observable invariance, substantially limiting the predictability of specific phenomena or processes, associated in turn with limited controllability, leading towards objective chaos. Hence in scientific publications the appearance of the mechanism of recommended caution in formulating statements or judgments about the socio-political reality (avoiding categorizing, hasty or excessive generalization) and taking into account its multi-possibility nature in scientific argumentations [taking into consideration the so-called alternative variant and multi-option thinking, focus-

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ing on the *impact assessment* of given mechanisms, trends, processes, and collective or individual actions]⁴.

3. **Turbulent environment** – overall external conditions for leaders, where four characteristic patterns are visible: increase in the novelty of changes – lack of convergence of the former experience of the leader with the current events; increased intensity of the environment – the need to increase the amount of work a leader expands in building relationships with followers; growth of rate of change – dynamics of the environment resulting from increased innovation in the environment, including enterprises shortening product life cycles; increasing complexity – increase in the number and diversity of elements of the external environment the leader (the acting subject) needs to take into account⁵.

At the same time, one can determine the consequences of such non-linear (non-uniform) changes on the global scale, including the consequences of networking and their real impact on political practice, among which special attention should be paid to:

1. The creation of a complex policy area, where the contradicting trends of prioritizing and decentralization coexist (traditional structures are bifurcated and / or separated, the power structures transformation goes in the direction of *organized anarchy*, a typical example of which is the *garbage can model*, where political decisions are adopted in the absence of linearity and hierarchy).

2. Appearance of emergences, i.e. new non-additive qualities at higher levels of the organization of the social and political world, as a consequence of the increasingly complex policy processes, including interaction and the activity of various actors in the political sphere, as well as global linkages and institutional and organizational practices of multilateral and transnational character⁶.


THE NOTION OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Among the many definitions of leadership, in political science special attention should be given to such theoretical and research approaches that explain the essence of leadership by the occurrence of a specific (leadership) relationship in the interaction between the leader and followers. In this interpretation, the role and importance of authority as such is stressed, and more specifically power (authority) of a particular leader, which has a direct impact on the understanding and explanation of leadership\(^7\). In literature on the subject it presents at least two types of power, well reflected in the practice of leadership:

1. Power resulting from position (*position power*) – with three power subtypes: *legitimate power* based on legitimized relation of subordination, power resulting from the distribution of rewards (*reward power*), power based on coercion (*coercive power*).

2. Power resulting from the individual characteristics of subjects possessing the authority (*personal power*) – with two sub-types: *expert power*; and power built on of “adoration” and / or complete identification of followers with the leader (*referent power*)\(^8\).

In this interpretation, political leadership is synonymous with an actual asymmetric relationship between the subject (both individual as well as collective leader) and the social environment (followers, defined in a number of ways). It should be borne in mind though that the building and creation of a leadership relationship is voluntary, and the followers have full autonomy – the leadership relationship is not due to coercion or violence, but is a consequence of gaining trust and approval of followers by the leader. This relates only to the circumstances where the legitimacy of a particular leader has to do with his or her position, authority, the created personal image, competences or skills.

One should not forget at the same time that political leadership, interpreted as an asymmetric relationship at the interface leader \(\leftrightarrow\) followers,

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can be considered in a micro – or macro-theoretical perspective. In the first instance, the description and explanation of the leadership process is focused on the leader and personality and psychological factors (in this research approaches, analyzes focusing mainly on the leader’s skills, leadership styles, leader’s psychological profiles, competences or emotional intelligence of the leader, or situational approach predominate). By contrast, in the macro-theoretical approach the crucial element is the multi-level analyses, which take into account the social, environmental or organizational context in which the leader operates (with predomination of research focused on distributed leadership, where the leader operates in a dynamic and complex environment). As examples of such a model may be used the leadership theory of Mary Uhl-Bien and Russ Marion, or leadership explained as complex responsive processes of Ralph D. Stacey.

**LEADERSHIP IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF COMPLEXITY**

This traditional epistemological reflection on the phenomenon of political leadership and, specifically, its being defined by the real asymmetry between the subjects commanding and subordinate, and theoretical micro-macro distinction increasingly depend on the world of politics, which generates factual complexity. Therefore, many researchers of leadership practices are forced to develop new research instruments, where leadership is analyzed in the dynamic and emergent perspective, i.e. the relationship at the interface of the leader ↔ followers is considered through the lens of temporal complexity. In other words, it is a set of theories, in which the explanation of political leadership takes place in a broader research context (multi-level analysis), which involves the inte-

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gration of different research techniques. Largely simplifying, it can be said that such a theoretical-methodological approach to the phenomenon of leadership results in:

1. Expanding the focus of leadership from isolated, role-based actions of individuals to the innovative, contextual interactions that occur across an entire social system.

2. Extending current theory and practice by focusing on micro-strategic leadership actions across all organizational levels and across organizational boundaries.

3. Increasing the relevance and accuracy of the leadership theory by exploring how leadership outcomes are based on complex interactions, rather than „independent” variables.

4. Highlighting the relational foundations of change in emerging organizational fields, through the idea that leadership occurs in the “spaces between” agents.

5. Providing a new and rich foundation for explaining the constructive process of collective action as well as the influential “behaviors” of collective actors.

6. Connecting to innovative methodologies that can enrich our understanding of how leadership gets enacted and received in complex environments\(^\text{11}\).

It is clear that complexity of the political sphere, interpreted as a civilisational megatrend, has reoriented the existing ways of defining and explaining political leadership, towards a brand new approach to the relationship of leadership. This particular school goes beyond the traditional explanatory models, towards more synthesizing methods, which in the spirit of methodological triangulation attempt to create an adequate explanatory mechanism for the varying form and content of leadership practices. At the same time, crossing the formal theoretical and conceptual limits pluralism is synonymous with approbation of scientific pluralism,

thanks to which the scientific explication of leadership is often based on different points of view, inference schemes or theoretical schools.

**TRANSFORMATIONS OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP**

It is worth noting here that in modern political changes occurring in the way the science approaches and explains the notion of political leadership are easily observable. Among the many theoretical and conceptual transformations of the definition of political leadership, special attention should be paid to two trends:

1. The move from static to a dynamic approach to the process of political leadership.
2. The move from the simple (one-element approach, single-level analysis) to the complex (multi-dimensional approach, multi-level analysis) method of defining the relationship at the interface political leader ↔ followers.

As for the first transformation, we are dealing with the departure from the static understanding of leadership towards its dynamic interpretation. This means we observe the specific research moment, in which individual theorists in the scientific process of explanation of leadership practices, base their conclusions less and less on repetitive, and more importantly stable and / or unchanging patterns of behavior, activities or schemes of gaining social support. In other words, this means moving away from fixed patterns in building the relationship of the leader ↔ followers, towards instead the relative uniqueness of the emergence of the leadership relationship in specific socio-political conditions, where the process of leadership, its distinguishing features, characteristics, components are dependent on a situational context, as well as cultural, socio-political, economic or religious determinants. Therefore, one cannot refer to a single, unchanging pattern or model of emergence of political leadership. On the contrary, in the dynamic socio-political world, there are an infinite number of options of appearance of a leadership relationship, where very often completely different, sometimes conflicting factors, variables, properties, states of affairs etc. come into play.
For the political science analyzes of leadership, this means objective “instability” as regards the subjective personality characteristics of a given political leader (the phenomenon of departure from the clear and unchanging psychophysical and / or interpersonal features of a leader and leadership styles preferred by followers, shifting towards to a multitude of characteristics and skills, where the role of the leader, his or her level of competence, charisma, authority and achieved accreditation is not a straight line repeatable and imitative process, but a dynamic one, dependent on the situational and social context). In this approach, authors define leadership rather as a process, where it is analyzed for a variety of interactions occurring at the interface leader ↔ followers; where leadership is interpreted as a continuous process of exchange between the person with authority and the subordinates, i.e. it is synonymous with a particular sequence of events, facts, states of affairs and the need for specific skills and competencies, which favors the emergence of leadership in given circumstances.

In the second transition, a shift from the simple understanding of leadership (one-element approach, one-level analysis) to the complex one (multi-dimensional approach, multi-level analysis) occurs, changing the ways of defining the relationship at the interface of the political leader ↔ followers. Currently, leadership is examined as a complex and multi-layered socio-political phenomenon. Within this framework, references are made to the process of leadership which is “distributed” in a social and structural environment – the process is not only related to a specific, single entity in power (isolated political leader), but mainly results from the dynamic interaction between the participants / actors in a particular political, organizational or community space. Therefore, there are at least four basic statements that accompany the comprehensive theories of leadership, and most importantly they can provide an important platform for the integration of often conflicting explications of leadership, including political leadership, at macro-theoretical level:

1. Leadership is a dynamic process – a process of interaction between agents and / or entities in a given environment (a designated social, structural, organizational, political arena etc.). At the same time, the environment is understood as a complex system of communi-
cation, in which leadership takes on many forms (for example, it may be formal, emergent, have community character). Here, the political space is interpreted as a multi-level interaction and / or communication between agents, i.e. individual / collective, overt / covert participants of political life.

2. Leadership is not only synonymous with the formal division of tasks / resources – leadership in a complex and dynamic socio-structural environment and can also emerge as a response to various types of tensions or conflict. In this sense, the leaders (leaders among agents) use the relative influence by participating in the tasks/ resources of their environment – the collective of agents. It should be noted that their leadership is based primarily on: reputation, i.e. referent power; skills and knowledge, i.e. expert power. Therefore, the dynamics of emergent leadership is primarily a function of task interdependencies, codependences of awards, and frequency of distributing new tasks in a specific team, more widely – in a socio-structural environment in which diverse agents operate.

3. Leadership is the agents’ co-evolution – the evolution of interdependent agents in a particular spacer, where individual agents act in a dynamic environment consisting of a network of interactions. The above environment creates also a specific context – morphological field, in which agents co-evolve among themselves and in relation to a changing environment.

It is clear that the consideration of political leadership according to the complexity paradigm is on the one hand an intellectual and theoretical challenge to traditional conceptualizations of leadership relationship, and on the other hand it is based on several theoretical axioms, which make it possible to lay the foundations and / or strong starting point for future research, in particular comprehensive analyses of various types of leadership practices. Certainly among such irrefutable claims, included in the paradigm of complexity, and associated with the scientific study of leader-

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ship, especially organizational leadership, are, for example, the argument of *non-linear* interaction between participants of a given social whole – in the case of leadership, consequently, it is not possible for the leader to predict the effects of his or her own actions and / or to measure the real impact and actual influence in a specific socio-structural environment (among followers). This state of affairs is largely a consequence of an innumerable amount of interactions between the participants of collective life, the nature of which is unpredictable. Other factors are the assumption of *far-from-equilibrium conditions* – a departure from the equilibrium towards the state of instability, where in the organization it is synonymous with many tensions and conflicts within the structure, and the assumption of *emergent self-organization* – a “turning point” in the theory of complexity, where the phenomenon of emergence is treated as a new, consistent and observable phenomenon at a higher level of complexity of the organization\(^\text{13}\).

For political science research on leadership, adoption of the paradigm of complexity means a shift from one-dimensional theorizing towards multi-level or contextual analysis, where the leadership process is interpreted as the resultant of subjective-objective factors. (The subjective plane is connected in this case with the leader as such – research on this element takes into account the individual psychological characteristics. The objective plane means analyzes of socio-structural conditions in which the leader operates, including the impact of the external environment and followers onto the leadership process).

Studies of the phenomenon of leadership from the emergence perspective shows an anti-reductionist approach to thinking about complexity, where the social world, explained as a cross-level reality, becomes a social whole, which in turns creates characteristics and / or features of a higher order – i.e. properties that cannot be deduced from or/and reduced to components of that whole (research focuses inter alia on: *contextual emergence* – the description of features of a system at a particular level of

description offers necessary but not sufficient conditions to derive the description of features at a higher level; supervenience – the description of features of a system at a particular level of description offers sufficient but not necessary conditions to derive the description of features at a higher level; radical emergence – the description of features of a system at a particular level of description offers neither necessary nor sufficient conditions to derive the description of features at a higher level)\textsuperscript{14}.

In other words, we witness a moment when leadership is considered and studied in the context of complex, dynamic and emergent reality, with its qualitative variety of phenomena, connected directly with the fact that political practice becomes a reality characterized by discontinuity of properties (emergence is treated as an absolute, general quality of political reality). In such conditions, the process political leadership is not simply a function of predispositions of a particular political leader and expectations of his or her followers, but in every case becomes a relative, contextual and complex process of dialectical exchange between the leader and the followers.

To sum up, we can conclude that the modern science of politics is increasingly remodeling the traditional patterns of explanation and understanding of the relationship of the interface leader ↔ followers. Among the many new trends relating to the attempt of formulating an adequate description or explanation of the political leadership phenomenon, special attention should be paid to two conceptual-theoretical transformations. The first raises the fact of transition from a static to a dynamic understanding of leadership in the political practice. The second directs nomological analyses of multi-dimensional leadership practices towards multi-level and/or multi-dimensional case studies, where such phenomena as emergence or higher order integers. At the same time, it is clear that both transformations, understood as a different way of explaining or perceiving the leadership relationship, are in fact a response, a reaction to the complexity and complication of modern leadership practices.