REFLEXIONS ON THE NATURE AND USE OF SYSTEMS MODELS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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The paper starts with a discussion about the various meanings in which the concept "model" has been employed in the literature. Following Achinstein and Bunge we distinguish between semantical and theoretical models and model objects. The relationship between models and the part of reality they are supposed to model, is also discussed. The "use" aspect of models is focused upon first in the comparison of various criteria of goodness of models and, secondly, in the context of problems attacked and generated by General System Theory. The most wide-spread models in the social sciences are based on — more or less adequately supported — behavioral similarities between models and their referents. However, the organizational aspects of models also deserve a careful attention (1) because much of what is known about social reality is related to its organization, and (2) because most of what can be done about social reality is concerned with the "inside" of behaviorally defined systems. Finally, an example from the social sciences is presented to illustrate the arguments of the paper.