



Sleep – A Sociological Perspective¹

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Abstract

The sleep is a new topic in sociological study. The first three studies date from the second half of 20th century. These remained without any echo till the end of 20th century¹. From then on there were published more articles on this theme. In this article I intend to present a synthesis of the researches about sociology of sleep to highlight the social nature of this phenomenon that in the scientific sphere was assigned either to biology or psychology.

Key words: sleep, body, the process of civilization, practices of sleep, health

1. Introduction

First of all, I shall go for the understanding of the reasons for that the sociology ignored, until recently, a third of its subjects' life, overlooking the sleep from the researches. Thus, in this part I shall debate the possible answers to the question: 'Why did the sociology neglect sleep?' In this way I proposed three possible reasons. The first one is related to considering sleep as a physiological act; its study should have remained in the biological and medical sciences area. The second reason refers to the framing of sleep in the common sector, in the usual and natural aspects part, the study of which cannot contribute significantly to the society understanding. The third one comes in the context of the tendency in the sociology to tackle more themes that can be 'recovered by expert researches' and less from 'fundamental researches' (Kaufmann, 2009: 10). Here, the sleep disregarding, of which questioning was not seem to resolve a social problem much more a sociological one (see Jderu, 2012). So I try to underline that sleep is not a simple physiological act, which it is not an anti-social action, but that the sleep involves a number of patterns that varies culturally, socially and historically.

Secondly, I shall present a synthesis of social themes from the sociological research of sleep. Thus, in the study of sleep as a social act can be identified a number of themes as: civilization and sleep cultures (Elias, 2002; Shilling, 1997; Steger & Brunt, 2003); techniques and practices of the sleep (Mauss, 1934/1973; Taylor, 1993; Williams & Bendelow, 1998); sleep, gender and age (Aubert & White 1959; Williams et al. 2007; Williams 2010; Arber et al., 2007); sleep disease and health (Williams, 2002; Arber & Hislop, 2003; Williams et al., 2008) or sleep and work (Williams, 2005; Meadows et al., 2008; Maume et al., 2010). These themes suggest the multitude of explanations

¹ This paper is a result of a research made possible by the financial support of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project POSDRU/159/1.5/S/132400 - "Young successful researchers – professional development in an international and interdisciplinary environment".

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that the study of sleep offers compared with the understanding of society functioning. By presenting these I tried to show the importance of a sociological study of sleep.

2. The Restoration of the Ignored Third

In the second part of the 20th century, in the growing interest context for the body themes, in sociology, the third ignored part of human existenceⁱⁱ, the sleep is proposed as a study object by Vilhelm Aubert and Harrison White through the publishing of the article *Sleep: A Sociological Interpretation* (1959a, 1959b). Nowadays the sociology of the body is recognized as a specialty field in sociological research, together with the sociology of sport, of food and eating, of ageing or of death and the 'sleep' theme starts to conquer a distinctive place. However, the number of empirical studies about sleep is still reduced, approaching a limited palette of themes. Why was the sleep so late tackled by sociology? Why even nowadays is not studied extensively and intensively? Why the third of life employed by sleep was ignored?

Simon Williams, one of the contemporaneous sociologists who dedicates himself to the study of sleep, together with Gillian Bendelow (1998) offered some answers to these questions. Taking into consideration their opinion, the sleep became late study object because this, as a 'study of the society and of social forms geometry', was mostly concerned about the investigation of wakefulness time and less about the investigations of the characteristics about the consciousness alteration (Williams & Bendelow, 1998: 171). Offered in this manner, the answer would suggest that the sociology did not investigate the death too, but the sociologist's growing interest for the death study is remarked in the admission of the sociology of death as a part of the sociology of the life course (Williams & Bendelow, 1998; Williams, 2001; see Bryant & Peck, 2007). Other reasons of ignoring the sleep as a study object for sociological investigation, would be that the sleep is a physiological action that must be left to the natural sciences analysis; another explanation lies in the 'sociological imperialism' that can be observed in the extension of sociologists' interest for medicine specific areas, without making important researches (Williams & Bendelow, 1998; Williams, 2001).

Further, I shall claim three reasons that made sociologists classify the sleep out of their investigation area: 1) on one hand, the sleep was considered just a physiological phenomenon the study of which concerning the natural sciences; 2) then, the consideration of sleep as a right natural act, common, the study of which cannot contribute to the development of sociology science; 3) never the last, the sociology was interested more in social problems than in sociological problems. Thus, augmenting these three reasons I intend to evidence that although it is a physiological act, the sleep is also a social act the study of which can be developed by the sociologists concerned about the solving of social problems, but also of some sociological problems.

2.1. Biological and social in the study of sleep

Sleep is a physiological need, often characterized by loss of balance, of consciousness, by changes to the level of blood flow, to that of respiration, but also by appearing, in dream conditions, of a fast eyes movement. Regarded just as a basic need (Maslow, 1943), as a biological necessity, as a fundamental element of 'the organic system', together with the need to drink or to eat (Turner, 1996/2008: 17), or with those of sex, sickness, ageing or pain (Aubert & White, 1959a) or as a part of 'animal functions' in relation to 'senses, faculties and pain' (Foucault, 1963/1998: 86), its social character wasn't noticed.

The importance of sleep as a biological act is irrefutable. In the medicine of sleep, the Nathaniel Kleitman'sⁱⁱⁱ (1895-1999) disciples (Eugene Aserinsky, William Dement), considered the father of somnology and of oneirology, showed that without sleep, the human locomotive and cognitive capacities decay; without sleep, the society and its institutions could not be possible (see Williams, 2001). Moreover, they indicated that the human models of sleep cannot be fully decoded counting only the physiological bases, that the sleep cannot be reduced to the eyes closing,

to the choosing of some posture, or to the presence or absence of the rapid eye movement. More than that, the sleep can't be reduced either to the organism regenerating function; some fluctuations that appear in the sleep practice being socially determined (for example: the student's insomnia during exams session can have as cause exams emotions or the noisiness from its hostel room and not a severe mental disease symptom) (see Cappuccio et al., 2010).

The social characteristic of sleep presentation was the goal of the first sociological ingressions on this theme (Aubert & White, 1959a, 1959b; Schwartz, 1970; Taylor, 1993). Their authors – starting with some anthropologists' remarks (Mauss, 1934/1973; Benedict, 1946/1989), historians' (Wright, 1962/2004), or with the rediscovery of some social researchers' works (Elias, 1939/2002); Foucault, 1976/2004; Melbin, 1978) – highlight its social character that comes out from its cultural, social and historical variations, which will be stated in the part about the importance of the sleep studying by sociology.

In the sociological study of sleep, Taylor (1993) gives the biggest heed to a clear determination of the difference between social and biological. To this effect, he recommends two notions *being asleep* and *doing of sleep* (Taylor, 1993: 464). The first one can be found to the common sense level, would intercept the physiological nature of sleep that is set to the biology field. The second one would be a 'pliable' one on the sociology interests, would capture the sleep reasons, language, significations, methods and discourse. The *doing of sleep* (Taylor, 1993) appears no matter if it satisfies or not a biological need; it forms and it is, on its turn, formed by the society (for example: the children are socialized by their family style and schedule). To these two notions, Taylor (1993: 464-465) adds the research questioning differences that exist between sociology and biology. If biology tries to find the answers to some questions as 'what is sleep for? which are its forms?' and 'why?'; sociological questions as 'how, when and where the persons sleep? and 'with whom?' (Taylor, 1993: 465). Taylor (1993) also sustains that it is necessary a last distinction in the sleep sociological interest area – the dreams and the dreaming should let to be studied by philosophers and psychologists. So, the sleep, as a sociology study object, is framed by Taylor (1993) in his answer to four questions: where, when, how and with whom does the people sleep?

The difference between biological and social, proposed by Taylor (1993) for the sociological study of sleep, is assumed and developed by Williams (2001, 2002, 2003). He marks the sociological importance of the sleep study by its social dimensions. To the 'doing of sleep' (Taylor, 1993), Williams (2001, 2002, 2003) adds the temporal dimension, the bodily dimension through the concept of 'body techniques' (Mauss, 1934/1973), the historical dimension through the concept of civilization in Elias' (1939/2002) terms to which he adds social modelling of sleep, the commercial activities and sleep industry (Williams, 1998, 2001, 2005). Thus, to the difference made by (Taylor, 1993), between sleep as a study object for biology and sleep as a study object for sociology, Williams (1998, 2005) brings a significant contribution through the proposed dimensions, that come as possible answers to the questions proposed by Taylor (1993) (*i.e.* where, when, how and with whom does the people sleep). The empirical researches of the last years (see Chatzithechari & Arber, 2009; Maume et al., 2009) enforced the incipient observations about the sociological dimensions of sleep, proving that where, when, how and with whom does the people sleep and the significance that they offer to this activity fluctuates historically, socially and culturally.

The sleep research plan proposed by Williams (2005) is evaluated by Lee (2008), as being one that opens the sleep to the sociological imagination, but just to its social context. Sleep itself or *being asleep*, remaining in the biological sciences field, while *becoming asleep* is given to the philosophers' and psychologists' study (Lee, 2008). For the sociologists to approach 'sleep' and the sleep properly, Lee (2008: 59) suggest a 'rethinking the analysis conditions' in order to develop a vocabulary that could be used by the both sides of the border between the wakefulness and sleep. For this goal he proposes a parallel between *becoming person*, taken from the studies about childhood, and *becoming asleep*. He draws a parallel, following the passing of a child from awake to asleep, through the concepts of 'transitional object' (Winnicott, 1971) and that of 'affect' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988), in the

interactions analysis between child and parents, child and objects, objects and parents. Follow-up the analysis, he shows that through the concepts as 'person', 'identity' *agency* and 'voice', the sociology can claim 'being asleep' and also 'becoming asleep'. The Lee's (2008) undertaking is a bearish one as a result of an analysis effort that combines theories from psychology, philosophy and sociology. However, his proposal shows one more time that sleep is not just a physiological act, more, it shows that the sociology disposes of concepts to go beyond the social context of sleep in order to interrogate 'becoming sleep' and 'being asleep'.

Thus, taking into consideration the just presented situation, one can conclude that the sociologists, who want to approach sleep, have two options: either they study the social context of sleep, assuming the tackling outlined by Taylor (1993) and Williams (2005); either, they achieve interdisciplinary analyses by the help of the theories from sciences as psychology, philosophy or from medical sciences (see Lee, 2008).

As for the study of dreams and dreaming in the same time with the sleep investigation, even though sociologically relevant (Aubert & White, 1959a, 1959b; Williams, 1998, 2002, 2005), the dreams and the dreaming incline nowadays to determine the outlining of a specific field in sociology (see Fine et al., 1993; Anton, 2006). The goal of this paper is to propose a sociological research of sleep, thus the first approach is embraced, that of studying the social context of sleep and of doing of sleep, using the borders of where, when, how and with whom does the people sleep.

2.2. *The commonplace in the sleep study*

Another reason of the ignorance of sleep by the sociology, would be that it was regarded as a natural act, routines, and thus, in an indirect way, it was regarded as a lack of social activity, as a period of social absence. Many times, scenes from the daily life screen (e.g. eating, drinking, sleeping or sunbathing) are placed to *miscellaneous* category, considered to be common, without any importance, without any value for a further sociological questioning. To interpret the frames, the sociologists avoid the *alternative materials* (Jderu, 2012), but the familiar is not negligible, 'the daily commonplace is not a cliché theme, but a first importance social process, building the social reality by producing the unspoken, the incapacity to detect the important features' (Kaufmann, 1995/2009: 12).

The questioning of these frames allows the identification, the understanding and the explanation of some social realities that underlie to the social balance. These social frames help to identify the mechanisms that underlie social equilibrium. They are those that prevent the paralyses which would appear before the multiple possibilities that we have (see Bruce, 1999/2003: 31). Their study, their sociological investigation has the potential to underline the structure of some society, its functioning mechanisms, discovering the informal structures that govern. Thus, the quotidian, the common, the familiar seem to offer the most rich themes of sociologic interest, the possibility of rethinking, reevaluation and modernization of sociology (see Jderu, 2012), exhaustless source of themes. It bears witness the great diversity of themes met in today sociological studies that approach sides considered till now to be self-explanatory or that would be the object of the study for other sciences (e.g. emotions, sleep).

The sleep is an act, that, sooner or later during the day, if they want or not, all people do in certain constancy; the exceptions are few and refer to those that suffer chronic disorders of sleep. Situated in the common category, the sleep, as a part of the daily activity hardly starts to be studied. Even the actual studies incline to focus on sleep disorder and on their consequences on some aspects of the society performance.

2.3. *Sleep and social problems*

The sleep was ignored, probably also because does not seem to be a real social problem. The origin of this observation finds itself in the dichotomy social problems – sociological problems (Bruce, 1999/2003). During the time, the sociologists focused more on in solving social problems, through applied studies, and less in fundamental

studies that would follow to classify some sociological problems (Jderu, 2012). Much more, the sociologists seem to have studied social problems of the society as if these were always day, as if the society exists only by day time, the social problems of the night staying out of the analyses (see Aubert & White, 1959a, 1959b; Melbin, 1978; Williams, 1998, 2001, 2002; Steger & Brunt, 2003).

But the manner in which humans sleep can evidence some social problems and sleep disorders can have social impacts on individuals. Only after the medical sciences point out the sleep importance (on the duration aspect and on the conditions it takes place) in diseases remedial, in preserving the health, on children's growth, on the individuals' physical and intellectual capacities (see Chokroverty & Thomas, 2005; Cappuccio et al., 2010) the social problems of sleep start to be analysed by the sociologists. Probably, in this way can be explained that in the empirical studies about sleep, the sociologists started to focus on social effect that medical problems of sleep have.

Thus, nowadays there are studies on the consequences that the sleep schedule changing has on social interactions in the family framework, but also outside of it (for example: Wiggs, 2007; Martin & Bartlett, 2007); there are also studies on the sleep disruptions among the middle age women (Hislop & Arber, 2003) and among senior women (Bianchera & Arber, 2007) and on consequences that these disruptions have on their lives; on social-economic patterns found amongst self-declared sleep problems (Arber et al., 2009) or about the consequences of lack of sleep amongst soldiers (Ben-Ari, 2003). Gradually, besides the sleep social problems, the sociology inclines to introduce in analysis less negative characteristic of sleep, leading to different aspects of the sleep practice incorporation (see the 14th number of the magazine *Body & Society* 2008), about the sleep management in couple relations (Hislop, 2007; Lowe et al., 2007). In other terms, progressively in the sleep study, the sociologists establish themselves a 'work schedule' following the terms indicated by Bruce (1999/2003: 107) – follow 'the interesting aspect from the sociological point of view, and not those problematical from the social point of view'.

3. The Importance of Sociological Study of Sleep

Forward, I shall present the themes that can be identified in the sociological study of sleep – civilizing and cultures of sleep; techniques and practices of the sleep; sleep, gender and age; sleep, disease and health; sleep and work. By this, the goal is to show the importance of the sociological study of sleep and to notice that sleep contributes to find answers to 'the essential question [...], basic question of the sociology': 'what is society, how does it function', concerning which Kaufmann (1995/2009: 9) noticed that are often omitted by 'the sociologist challenged with social demands'. In the same train of ideas, referring to Kaufmann's (2009) observation, Jderu (2012: 16) notices in his intrusion sociology of emotions that 'more the sociologists question themselves frequently, there are more chances to develop the sociological theory'. Further, I shall detail the actual theme of interest between the sleep sociologists, in order to show the importance of the sociological study of sleep that can be revelatory concerning the different aspects of the society (for example work, social class, gender or age).

3.1. Civilizing and Cultures of the Sleep

'The doings of sleep' (see Taylor, 1993; Williams, 1998, 2002) are associated to some 'patters of social organization' (Williams & Crossley, 2008: 6). The German sociologist Norbert Elias (1939/2002) in the statement of the civilizing process, in which tracks the genesis of modern societies, he that finds the transformation of human behaviour to a more pronounced control of 'the emotional reactions and implicit of the experiences', to 'a movement of shame bar', to a introversion of 'exterior compulsions' (Elias, 1939/2002: 7). He noticed this transformation in the synchronic and diachronic analysis that he makes on behaviour changes during time table, nose blowing, and slaver or on the behaviour changes in bedroom.

Regarding sleep, Elias (1939/2002) observes that this falls back in the social life backstage, after being firstly a public activity, a collective one. In the Middle Age, as the German sociologist shows, people were sleeping

anywhere anytime. The physical place where the sleep happened, being often used by many people: owners and slaves, men and women, hosts and guests. Analysing works about elegant manners, from the 16th and 17th centuries, he concludes that ‘it was very common for many persons to sleep in the same room, that in the superior class the master slept in the same room with his servant’ (Elias, 1939/2002: 205). Starting with the 16th century and rapidly progressing through the 17th and 18th centuries, as also with the other body ‘necessities’, the sleep became one of the most ‘private’ and ‘intimate’ sectors of human life (Elias, 2002: 205).’

Elias’ (2002) statements regarding the historical transformation of human behaviour include, in Shilling’s (1997: 93) opinion, ‘an implicit theory of bodies civilization’, namely ‘a long term image about individualization, rationalization and socialization of the body, that helps to explain what means to be incorporated in a certain historical era’. Similar to Shilling’s (1997) observation, Williams (2007) concludes that the transformation of the *etiquette of the bedroom* is a proof of civilizing process that the sleep passes on all its social aspects, not only of bedroom behaviours.

The sleep patterns do not differ only in a historical chronology, as Elias (1939/2002) shows but they differ from a culture to another, in the same historical era. Steger and Brunt (2003), researchers in social sciences, analysing the sleep practices in North America, Europe and Asia, identify a number of cultural differences between them that they group in three sleep cultures. These are as it follows: *mono-phasic* sleep cultures (in North of the Europe and North America), in which the sleep is consolidate in just one nocturnal period. Steger and Brunt (2003: 17) consider that in this type of culture ‘the healthy adults should not sleep during the day time’. Cultures of the *bi-phasic* sleep (nocturnal + siesta) defined by a short sleep in the afternoon and one longer by night. In these environments, the sleeping during the day is practiced and valorised (for example in Greece and Spain). Cultures of poli-phasic sleep (China, Japan, India) in which, apart the nocturnal sleep, then ‘when the circumstances allow’ appear some short sleep periods during the day (Steger & Brunt, 2003: 19). From this perspective, the sleep during the day, practiced to the work place, can be a good indicator of social, cultural and economic changes. The authors observe that in the countries that register a rapid economy growth, as China and India, the sleep during the day is endangered. In contrast, the advanced societies (occidental one) the sleep to the work place tends to be valorised, especially in cognitive domains of the economy, as a strategy of creative activity growth.

3.2. Techniques and Practices of the Sleep

The sleep is on one hand, as a physiological act, an involuntary act, but it is equally a social act, a practice (see Taylor, 1993; Williams, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2007a) to which patterns differ culturally and historically, as it was seen in previous sequence of this article. The sleep practices register cultural changes not only concerning sleep evolution in one or more sequences during the day, but also concerning body techniques. As Mauss (1934/1973) said, in his classic essay about bodily techniques, there is no ‘natural’ manner for adults bodies. In each society ‘everybody knows how (to act) and they must know to learn what they have to do (with their bodies) in all circumstances’ (Mauss, 1934/1973: 85; 1950/1979: 97). The way the humans use their bodies, inclusively movements and gestures, attitudes, tastes and values differ socio-culturally.

Also, Mauss (1950/1979) shows that even sleep has its techniques. He remarks this after the experience he has in the First World War that taught him to sleep ‘everywhere’ – on the back horse stopped or in movement; standing up in mountains or propped on a block of stones. In spite that, he continues by stating that he never succeed ‘to change his bed without insomnia’, only in the second night being able to fall asleep quickly (Mauss, 1950/1979: 113). Moreover, the war experiences helped Mauss (1950/1979) observe that in the world, from a society to another, from a culture to another, it can be seen many and different ways to sleep. According to the French anthropologist, it can be made a difference between the societies where its members sleep on the ground, do not have something on which they can lay, and societies in which the members benefit by what he calls ‘instrumental assistance’

(1950/1979: 113). There are people that have pillows to support their heads and people who sleep without pillow, people that sleep on mat and people who sleep without; population which lay down on the ground, very closed one to another, in a circle in which they have a fire or they sleep without. Then, there are the others who sleep in vertical position, as those from Masai population, who are used to sleep standing up. As in some area from Africa the people are resting in a strange position, in which it seems to be, in the occidental's opinion, 'fields of storks', some are sleeping in a foot, with or without a stick to prop (Mauss, 1934/1973, 1950/1979).

Mauss (1934/1973) findings, 'suggest that the sleep is a physical inactivity form' (Williams, 2002: 179) that implies a number of corporal techniques 'especially in preparatory phases and in environmental rituals' (Williams, 2002; see also Schwartz, 1970: 491). Mauss' (1934/1973) corporal techniques overlap on that, four decades later, Turner (1996/2008: 161) calls 'the works' of the body (for example eating, sleeping, cleaning, physical exercise), 'bodily practices' 'that link us to natural world, when our bodies are average... localizing us in a dense system of rules and social settlements'. The sleep techniques and the practices identified by de Mauss (1934/1973) and Turner (1996/2008) show that although not totally taught the sleep follows patterns built by other members of the society in which the individuals live (see Williams & Crossley, 2008); these differing socially, culturally and historically (see also Wright, 1962; Melbin, 1978; Ekirch, 2001, 2005; Summers-Bremner, 2008).

3.3. *Sleep, gender and age*

The socio-demographic characteristics and the socio-economic status represent other unsettled elements of which measurement contributes to a better understanding of the different ways in which the sleep is socially modelled. In the course of life, the empirical studies showed that for children it represents another area to socialise in the family way to sleep (Aubert & White, 1959; Taylor, 1993; Williams et al., 2005; Williams, 2005); that in the children sleep disorder cure, on the basis of which the parents establish if they sleep sufficiently for their age, it should be realised, on one hand, depending on their biological sleep need, on the other hand, to be related to the parents' sleep pattern and to the derivation from this.

In the study of children sleep, the nature incorporated to their sleep is another aspect on which the sociologists reflected. Williams et al. (2007) follow the children attitudes and feelings regarding sleep practice (*i.e.* going to bed, bedroom and intimacy and the place where they sleep) connecting them with the begging sociological works about sleep and the sociological study about childhood. The temporal dimension or the rituals before sleeping are some other aspects surveyed in the children sleep study (see Williams, 2005; Arber et al., 2007; Moran-Ellis & Venn, 2007; Ben-Ari, 2008; Tahhan, 2008). The sociologists take into account the differences between the adults' night and children's, and also the building of the last as a result of the inter-generational interactions (Moran-Ellis & Venn, 2007). It was also noticed the fact that the teenagers see as night also the time they could spend sleeping, as a time resource used to interact with the peer group (Moran-Ellis & Venn, 2007; Arber et al., 2007).

For adults, the sleep researchers showed that the sleep is organised by gender, work, family responsibilities or socio-economic rank (see Hislop & Arber, 2003; Arber et al., 2007; Meadows et al., 2008; Arber et al., 2009; Williams et al., 2010). Hislop & Arber (2003) show that during the adult life the sleep experience presents also gender differences, they noticed that women sleep practices are structured by their gender role – wives, mothers, daughters. Basing his analysis on Schwartz (1970), Williams & Bendelow's (1998) works that demonstrate the existence of some obligations and rights associated to the role of sleeping person, Hislop & Arber (2003) indicate that the roles that the women accomplish in the family frame lead to losing the rights that they would have as asleep. In another works, Arber et al. (2007) add that distinctive primary responsibilities in the family as a cause of the inequalities between women and man in the sleep practice. Underlining the difference between the efforts that women put to protect the sleep of their family members, compared with men Venn et al. (2008) uses the expression 'the fourth shift' that refers to the their physical and emotional work (see also Hislop, 2005).

Apart from these gender differences, Hislop (2007) examined the negotiations that have place in couple, regarding sleeping space (*i.e.* the bed). He concludes that these negotiations reflect the gender roles and the power relations between partners (*idem*; see also Steger, 2003; Meadows et al., 2008). To this analyse, Lowe et al. (2007) added the results of a study about the way in which, in written press, ‘the marital bed’ is built to be one heterosexual. The negotiated nature of sleep in couples is investigated by Venn (2007) also in the one partner roaring context (see also Arber et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2008a).

A number of articles continue to investigate sleep during the course of life, examining the relation between the sleep practice and ageing. Thus, there were investigated: the changes that appear in the middle aged women’s sleep practice, as a result of the nursing they must offer to elders (Bianchera & Arber, 2007, 2008); the importance of sleep practices in the decision taken by the seniors to go to asylum (Fairhurst, 2007); the way in which sleep quality is constructed among the women in residential care centre (Davis et al., 2007); or the importance of sleep for the senior that suffer of dementia (Martin & Bartlett, 2007).

3.4. *Sleep, disease and health*

Sleep is essential for health and for the good social functioning and even since the sleep recurrence into the sociologists’ attention the interest themes are the social problems of sleep that appear: as a result of diseases people suffer (for example: dementia), diseases that affect their sleep practices, but also their influence on the sleep of the persons that nurse them (see Martin & Bartlett, 2007). Also, sociologists, starting from the somnology studies results, conclude that sleep deprivation for long periods has consequences on persons’ locomotors and cognitive capacities, affecting dramatically their work and their social interactions (see Williams, 2002, 2005). Starting from this observation, there were realised a number of studies on the diseases of sleep (*i.e.* the excessive somnolence) as a result of prolonged working hours (see Chatzithechari & Arber, 2009); on the way that are managed sleep interruptions, by calling the help of a doctor (see the studies about medicalization of sleep Williams, 2002, 2005; Hislop & Arber, 2003b, 2004), by adoption the healthy life practices (see the studies about sleep healthicization Williams, 2005) or by using some drugs (see studies about sleep pharmaceuticalization Williams et al., 2008b).

On the same way, in studies like *Waking Up to Sleepiness: Modafinil, the Media and Pharmaceuticalization of Everyday/Night Life* (Williams et al., 2008) and in *Politics of Sleep: Governing (Un)consciousness in the Late Modern Age* (Williams, 2011) it is debated the more frequent using of drugs which facilitate sleep appearance, but also of some drugs like Provigil, psychoactive drug. The drugs from this category allow the extinction of the wakefulness period for the persons that suffer of excessive sleepiness or of narcolepsy, in which the patients have the critical need to sleep. These types of drugs are used also by soldiers (Ben-Ari, 2003) or by individuals that intend to obtain a competitive advantage, by reducing the number of sleep hours and using the time won in order to work more than the other employees or colleagues.

3.5. *Sleep and work*

Regarding the relation between sleep and work, the studies oriented to features as: working in shifts, the consequences of the work and society changes on the sleep quality or on the way that the sleep is questioned by the media; on the tendency of occidental societies to adopt a poli-phasic culture of sleep in contrast with their mono-phasic sleep practice, by including sleep periods in the working schedule.

In the last years, by works as that written by Stella Chatzithechari and Arber (2009), in a quantitative analyses of the results obtained by *UK Time Use Survey*, it was found a reverse relation between the length of working hours and the (reduced) time of sleep, which was more powerful for men than for women. Also, Maume et al. (2009), approaching sleep patterns of American retail workers, showed that gender differences appear in sleep interruption; the women’s sleep being more often interrupted than the men’s. These remarks were confirmed by the authors also

in their work *Gender, Work – Family Responsibilities, and Sleep* (Maume et al., 2010). In that study from the data obtained after a qualitative survey, realised on families where the mothers were working by night it was proved that women sleep is interrupted mostly by the housekeeping activities or by the children's needs than that of a man even though they work in a night shift, and the men just by day. To the understanding of the relation between sleep-work-gender contributes also the work of R. Meadows et al (2008) about the significances given to the sleep by men, from which it results that the work paid is considered the main cause of the reduced quality of sleep by the work compulsions and pressure.

The globalisations and the economical developments of the last years determined the sleep reconsideration to the working place. For a long time a forbidden practice, the sleep is 'kept to work' (Williams, 2010: 6). Williams (2005, 2010, 2011) observes that the sleep during the day stops to be deviation from the mono-phasic model of the sleep culture that has 'an 8 hours night time sleep as ideal' (Steger & Brunt, 2003: 17). Napping on the job becomes more valorised for its refreshing effect that it can have in the cognitive areas of economy. The modernity, according to the 'civilizing process', brings the sleep management which withdraws in the backstage of social life (Elias, 1939/2002). Napping on the job, intercepted also by Gunter and Kroll-Smith (2005) signals the starting of the process of sleep de-management, of its transformation in a productive feature in the pronouncement period of reflexive modernity.

4. Conclusion

In this article I monitored to compile a synthesized presentation of the sociological studies of sleep. On one hand the goal was that to underline the social individuality of this phenomenon which was considered for long time as an object to be studied by biology or by psychology. On the other hand, to sustain the importance of sociologic study of sleep in constructing of new theories it means to allow the understanding of the society basics.

I argued that in order to understand the importance of sociological study of sleep it is necessary to bear in mind the reasons of the ignoring of it by the sociology, taking into consideration that in essence, they are connected by considering the sleep as a physiological act. After presenting three possible reasons of sleep disregard by sociology, the social importance of sleep was accentuated by an intrusion in sociological studies of sleep.

The synthesis of the sociological literature of sleep was compiled by grouping the studies in five great themes: civilization and sleep cultures, techniques and practices of the sleep; sleep, gender and age; sleep disease and health; sleep and work. Each of these themes was presented, proving the main empirical studies that discussed upon and presenting also their theoretical basis. Thus, the studies that take into consideration the civilizing and the sleep cultures rest on the theory of the civilizing process described by Norbert Elias (1939/2002) and on the three cultures of the sleep that were identified by Steger and Brunt (2003) in their introductory study about night. On this theoretical basis, the empirical analyses keep an eye during the centuries on the conversions through which sleep practices passed, in order to emphasise sleep space (Crook, 2008), sleep etiquette, the socialization that it includes or its private nature that it has today, compared with previous centuries (Williams & Bendelow, 1998; Williams 1998, 2005, 2007).

Another theme accentuates the incorporated nature of sleep. Starting from the anthropologist Marcel Mauss's (1934/1973, 1950/1979) considerations about sleep techniques, the sociologic studies underlined the cultural differences that exist between the world cultures regarding its practices. The sociologists analysed the different way in which it is directed, the corporal positions or the objects that assist the sleep, showing in this way that even though it is not totally a taught technique, it implies a number of taught patterns that can differentiate from a culture to another, not just in a historical arrangement as it is discovered by following the civilizing process (see Williams & Bendelow, 1998; Williams & Crossley, 2008).

To these two themes there are added the gender and age, sickness and health and work studies. The last ones focus on the social consequences of the absence of sleep or on the consequences of the roles accomplishment of sleep practices (for example the mother's role that supposes also to survey the babies' sleep). The social construction was as well pointed concerning the absence of sleep to different ages, to the issue of new diseases of sleep and on the way these are managed – all these studies lifelong, with the gender differences that emerge (see Williams et al., 2005; Williams, 2005, 2010, 2011; Moran-Ellis & Venn, 2007; Martin & Bartlett, 2007; Hislop & Arber, 2003b, 2004; Ben-Ari, 2003; Maume et al., 2010).

I note, on the five themes basis, that although in full expansion the agenda of the next studies is busy. Till now, the accent was pointed more on social problems of sleep, not long before them too ignored. Even though it is often used the phrase of sleep sociology, this cannot be considered another specific area of sociology, but the sleep appears as a theme in the disease and health sociology or in the medical sociology (see Williams, 2002), in the deviance sociology (Nettleton et al., 2011) but the most of the studies appear in the sociology of the body (see Shilling, 2007; Turner, 2007). In these conditions, for a future sleep sociology it is needed the establishing of a theoretical frame of this but also the identification of the most adequate methods for the empirical study of sociological problems connected to the sleep, not only to the social ones.

As a consequence of the realised synthesis, I noted that the sociological studies about sleep follow the classification of the studies about the sociology of the body, as this was established by David Le Breton (1992/2000). He, in his introductory work on sociology of the body, distinguishes three stages, three ways to approach the body as a field of sociological analysis. In analogy, it can be sustained that, in sociology, sleep has been tackled in three ways. It is about: an implicit sociology of sleep (*'une sociologie implicite'*) - that does not contest, does not exclude from the analysis the sleep, but also does not study it in a direct, explicit manner - it can be noticed this type of approach mostly rereading the classics who have small fragments and reflections about sleep. The second approach would be the atomist one (*'une sociologie en pointille'*) – which delivers fragmented analyses of the sleep; this is mostly specific to the contemporary period in which sleep appears in studies as those from sociology of the body, disease and health, or ageing. The third one being the sociology of sleep – that contains studies focused on sleep in a specific manner, on the social and cultural relevance of the context of sleep, of its practices, subsumed to the generic concept of sleep as a social act.

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ⁱ The moment of emergence of sleep as a legitimate object for the sociological investigations is the year 2001. In this year two events happened. The first one is represented by the workshop *The 'Dark Side' of Life in Asia and West – Night Time and Time to Sleep*, organized by University of Vienna. This workshop took into consideration the temporal dimension of sleep, analysed from the sociological, anthropological, historical, cultural perspectives. *Part of the presented works were published in the volume Night time and Sleep in Asia and the West* (Steger & Brunt, 2003). The second event took place at the University of Surrey where the sociologists Jenny Hislop and Sara Arber started their empirical multidisciplinary studies about sleep and ageing.

ⁱⁱ See the first studies from somnology that pointed the necessity to study the physiological act that takes, as average, 8 hours per day from each individual life (for example Dement & Kleiman, 1957; Dement & Vaughan, 2000). Counting on these researches, the sociologists started to study the sleep, to which they referred as 'the third part of our life' (see Williams & Bendelow, 1998; Williams, 2003).

ⁱⁱⁱ American neurophysiologist and psychologist having Bessarabia origins, considered the father of sleep medicine. In 1953 together with two of his students, Eugene Aserinsky (1921-1998) and William Dement he discovered the existence REM (*rapid eye movement*) state during sleep. The three formed the first research team in sleep domain (cf. Lavie, 1993/1996).