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**On the actuality of sociological institutionalisation.  
The upheaval and decay of interwar sociology  
in Central and Eastern Europe**

Considering the present state of rural sociology in most European countries, we must admit that during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, rural sociology experienced a worldwide crisis and loss of identity, a decay that can be related to the 'disappearance of the rural'. As Long (1985) argues, rural sociology has lost the grounds for its claim of being a distinctive discipline with its own special object of investigation.

This is why in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is quite appalling to read a very extensive presentation on the grounding and establishment of militant (rural) sociologies from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that has only been recently published. The anthology entitled *Upheaval and decay. The Sociology of Gusti in Central-Eastern European context after the Great War* (MĂRIRE ȘI DECĂDERE. Sociologia gustiană în context central-est-european după Marele Război) was published in 2022 at the Eikon Editure from Bucharest.

It is very difficult to make an 'honest' review of the anthology of articles and studies included in this volume. Coordinated by Văcărescu Theodora-Eliza and Rostás Zoltán, two mainstream sociologists from Romania who are members of the group of the history of sociology 'The Gusti Cooperative', the anthology includes a series of articles and analyses of the history of the sociology from the interwar period in Central and Eastern European countries. The two coordinators admitted that they were surprised by what this volume turned out to be since it was originally meant to be an 'honest' collection of the presentations at the conference organised by the

University of Iasi to mark 100 years since the appearance of the review archive for science and social reform (Arhiva pentru știința și reformă social), founded by one of the most important forefathers of the interwar sociology in Romania (Dimitrie Gusti) in 1919.

Looking at the table of the contents, it is obvious that the volume is far more than just a collection of presentations from the centenary conference. The coordinators have admitted that they wanted to go further and include presentations of studies on the history of sociology from the young, newly founded states of Central and Eastern Europe. These studies give a detailed description of the (re)organisation and institutionalisation of sociology and social reform that occurred after the first World War (WW). In these countries, some of which had just been formed or extended due to new political structures (except for Hungary, which had its territory largely decreased), sociology underwent a very complex social and economic transformation. The novelty of the anthology lies in the angle from which it views history, emphasizing the role the afterwar situation played in the establishment of sociology structures in these countries. The studies included in the first part of the volume share a very interesting perspective on the way sociology was built in Eastern and Central European countries in the interwar period. According to the coordinators, the revelation can be explained by the fact that unlike former historians of sociology who tended to study the establishment of sociology in the context of the development of Western sociology, recent studies analyse the situation in each country. I found it interesting that the studies presented in the volume also included the afterwar conditions and that development of the sociology as a social science in each country is presented as a result of their situation. Bulgaria, Hungary and Russia are presented as being disadvantaged after the war, and this has had repercussions on the establishment of sociology in them.

The book is very well structured; in the first half, it presents the studies on the evolution of sociology in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Russia and Hungary, and in the second part is the 'honest' collection of the presentations at the Dimitrie Gusti centenary in 2019 in Iasi.

In her article 'Sociology in Bulgaria in the interwar period', after a consistent theoretical and methodological introduction of the history of Bulgarian sociology, Svetla Koleva gave a very detailed presentation on the social and political realities that have influenced, to a great extent, the creation of sociology as an independent science in Bulgaria. The author,

in her article, highlighted the mainstream historical events that impeded the institutionalisation of Bulgarian sociology in the afterwar period. She emphasised that despite the availability of human capital and well-trained academics who could have built an independent social science, the hardships caused by the struggles to establish a viable state (the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 and the casualties from the Balcanic war in 1913 and the first WW) delayed the development of Bulgarian sociology in the interwar period. According to the author, political and economic instability (there were 22 governments in the interwar period)<sup>1</sup> have been the main causes of the delay in social modernisation in Bulgaria.

The development of Bulgarian sociology is seen by the author through the Foucauldian notion of 'nucleums of experience'<sup>2</sup>, the importance of the interactions in the sociological activity between the social scientists and the subjects of investigation that have led to the development of a sociology as an empirically-based social discipline. The development of academic institutions where sociology can be taught from the late twenties onwards, as well as the interaction of sociology with a developing professional network of sociologists and social actors, has been the driving force behind the uprise of autonomous Bulgarian sociology. After 1945, the new regime prohibited sociology and labelled it a 'bourgeois science'.

In her article, Svetla Koleva concluded that the interwar period had been the golden age of Bulgarian sociology and that today, there is sadly no real interest in Bulgarian sociological thinking for a better and in-depth recognition of the complex sociological heritage of the interwar period.

One of the 'success-stories' of the interwar sociologies is that of Czechoslovakia, which was presented in Marek Skovajsa și Jan Balon's article 'The rise and breakdown of the Czech sociology between 1918 and 1950'. As in all the countries in this region, the afterwar period brought a series of political and socio-economical particularities, and Czech, besides being on the side of the winners of the first WW, also had the forefather of the modern Czechoslovakian state Tomáš G. Masaryk (a sociologist himself) as its first president after 1918. As a result, the level and complexity of construction and diversification of sociology in Czech is superior to

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<sup>1</sup> Koleva, S., p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Koleva, p. 28.

those in the neighbouring countries; besides the institutional construction in 1925 the first professional association has been established. However, in the thirties, there was a shift from the mostly theorising, philosophical Masarykian sociology towards a largely empirical scientific research, the study of social problems. As numerous researchers have pointed out, besides the Nazi occupation between 1939 and 1945 and the insertion of the Stalinist regime, the afterwar period was one of real construction for the Czechoslovakian sociology. Unlike some countries in the Eastern Bloc, sociology as a self-standing social science has been preserved in Czech mostly because after 1945, Czechoslovakian sociologists were largely protective of and positive about the new regime rather than critical of the new orientation. Sadly, even though sociology was no longer prohibited and developed without significant restrictions from the sixties onwards, the scientific quality of Czechoslovakian sociology decreased after 1945, and most of the prominent sociologists had either emigrated or died in the fifties and sixties.<sup>3</sup>

The interwar situation of Polish sociology was also presented in the volume through Włodzimierz Winclawski's article 'Polish sociology between 1918–39'. Even if the title refers to the postwar period, the author makes a short presentation of the first experiments in the foundation of sociology as a distinct discipline, empirical researches as well as the activity of the "flying universities"<sup>4</sup> founded in 1888.

As in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, the institutionalisation of Polish sociology is connected to the rebirth of the Polish state after 1918. As the author points out, Poland was lucky to have professors of sociology who had arrived from Western universities after 1918. One of them was Florian Znaniecki, who is well known for his significant role in the development of sociology and who, after a fructuous scientific activity in universities in Switzerland, Paris and Chicago, came to develop sociology as a modernizing discipline in Poland. He tried to organise independent structures for the development of sociology, which, as Winclawski wrote, reached new heights in the 1930s, when Polish sociology assimilated models based on the Western, mostly American, experience. In the early twenties, all universities

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<sup>3</sup> Skovajsa, M. et Balon, J., p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> W. Winclawski: p. 86.

had professors of sociology, but this was not exactly an idealistic situation as the other social sciences considered sociology with misoneism<sup>5</sup>. Besides the academic sphere, the government, through newly built institutions, helped construct sociology; the Central Office of Statistics and Institute of Social Economy were founded in 1919 and 1920, respectively, and in 1928, the Polish Sociological Institution was established as an autonomous institution.

Winclawski also highlighted the role of the multiethnicity of the young Polish state in the establishment of research centres for minority groups (in 1920, 35% of the Polish population was of other ethnicity) which led to the rise in sociological research centres. The Jewish minority (10% of the citizens of Poland) has formed an impressive network of cultural and scientific institutions that has led to the proliferation of research and the development of sociological reviews. In 1930, the *Przegląd Socjologiczny* [Review of sociology], the first review dedicated solely to sociology, was published.

This period was the golden age for Polish sociology and Znaniecki's dream of establishing a 'new sociology' that would combine the European and American experience.

Through the creation of educational structures<sup>6</sup>, the elaboration of scientific writings and the consolidation of professional structures (for example, the Congress of Sociology in 1935), sociology has become one of the most dynamic social sciences in Poland, and through research activities, independent branches of sociology have been established. Winclawski highlighted that after 1935, a new generation of sociologists emerged, most of whom are considered to have been followers of Znaniecki, and through them and their activity, Polish sociology reached the level of global sociology in the thirties, with some important elements of originality. The role of empirical research in Polish sociology was significant, and through this, a methodological arsenal was elaborated, most of which play an important role even today. Józef Chałasiński, one of the most important new sociologists, is considered the author of a model of sociological monography. The author of the article mentioned the important personalities

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<sup>5</sup> W. Winclawski, p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> The University of Cracovia has established a Department of Sociology; several universities developed habilitation structures for students

of Polish sociology in present times: Józef Obrębski, the innovator of the study of nationalities; Stanisław Rychliński, who established the sociology of the city in Poland following the model of a school in Chicago; Kazimiera Zawistowicz-Adamska, who has an interest in studying the rural area; and Stefan Czarnowski, who has researched the life of students. There have been independent sociological branches but the most important has been rural sociology; the rural sociology course was elaborated by Władysław Grabski in 1930, and in 1936, the Institute of Rural Sociology was established and the Annals of Rural Sociology (*Roczniki Socjologii Wsi*) was edited. As the author concludes because of the Nazi occupation from 1939 onwards until the communist regime from 1948 this new promising sociological thinking and the representative personalities of the new generation have disappeared and after the loosening up after 1956 the Polish sociology had to develop a new theoretical and empirical solutions for those times.

The anthology also includes Larisa Titarenko's article on Sociology in Russia in the period between the two World Wars. As Larisa pointed out, sociology existed since 1908, when a department of sociology was founded at the Institution of Neurology in Sankt Petersburg. Titarenko described Russian sociology as being a rather critical science that, throughout the last century, has tried to be equidistant, explaining this as the reason both the Tzarist and bolshevik regimes tried to minimise the influence of sociologists who, through their modernising mission, wanted to help in the social development of Russia. After the establishment of the Bolshevik regime, most sociologists had to leave the country, and the Russian sociology had to (re)invent itself. Because of the impossibility of free professional practice in the interwar period, many sociologists either left or were eliminated by the Stalinist terror; in these circumstances, where not even Marxist sociology was tolerated, an independent, institutional sociological thinking could not be spoken of. In that time, the modernising mission of the Russian sociologists was not taken into consideration. The personalities who gained international recognition are Pitirim Sorokin, who, after 1922, left the country and moved to the USA where he became a professor at Harvard University and never went back to the USSR,<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sorokin was one of the most important sociologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whom we have to thank for elaborating the concept of *social mobility*.

and G. Gurvitch, who emigrated to France and became one of the most prominent sociologists. Other sociologists, like Chayanov, had the tragic fate of being executed<sup>8</sup>.

Therefore, an important Russian diaspora was founded after the twenties, and as Titarenko outlined, this had a positive impact as many of the social scientists continued to publish studies and books about Russia to aid a better understanding of the Russian society; as a result, the international scientific literature after 1920 includes publications on the Russian realities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The author has stressed that in Russia sociology has been more dependent on the political power than the other social sciences,<sup>9</sup> and has developed also an underground thinking until the sixties when the “defrost” made it possible for sociologists to develop its autonomous profile, with an academic depending on the proper political climate, socio-cultural context and the most important social problems of the period has elaborated articles and organized public research debates in non-sociological journals. Until this period, even sociology as science<sup>10</sup> term was changed, and when it came to the analysis and research of social problems, historical materialism was used.

The author concluded that the ideological taboo on interwar sociology lasted until 1991 in Russia, and the significant sociological heritage (even that of the diaspora) is now studied and included in Russian sociology.

The last article in the first half of the volume is that of Viktor Karády, who gave a thorough description of social thinking, especially sociology in Hungary in the interwar period. With institutional premises from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one might say that the conditions for sociology becoming an independent discipline were created. The author highlighted the importance of founding the Society of Social Sciences in Budapest by Oszkár Jászi (1901) and the Galilei (1908) and Sunday (Vasárnapi Kör) Circles, as well creating publications like the *Huszadik század* (20<sup>th</sup> century). Victor Karády emphasised the importance of these workshops which are aimed at modernising the

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<sup>8</sup> Chayanov in international rural sociology has become well-known among both Western and Eastern scholars due to his theory on peasant economy.

<sup>9</sup> Titarenko, p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> In the Soviet Union as well as in Romania, until the seventies, sociology as an independent social science was prohibited as it was considered a 'bourgeois science'.



society of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Karády gave a very good description of the historical frame of this period, where Hungary, as one of the main losers of the first WW and as a result of the Treaty in Trianon in 1920, has remained with almost 40% of its historical territory and population. This has resulted in social, political and economic instability, which has influenced the evolution of the country. The First Hungarian Republic (which developed a red terror within a short time) founded in 1918 with the help of the countries of the Antant was destroyed, and a country with a 'Christian regime'<sup>11</sup> was founded. As a result, the very short period of institutionalisation of sociology through the development of academic structures (Oszkár Jászi was named as professor of sociology at the University of Budapest) ended because of the instauration of the red terror of the left-wing Republic of Communes in 1919. Karády highlighted that the afterwar regimes, starting from the Red regime to the more conservative regime of Miklós Horthy, made it more difficult for sociologists to work as an independent group of intellectuals.<sup>12</sup> As Karády mentioned, there remained domains or auxiliary activities where sociology continued to develop in these trying times that proved to be helpful after 1945; these activities included the educational reform by Kunó Klebersberg, who was the minister of Education between 1922 and 1931. This period led to an increase in the funding of higher educational projects as well as alphabetisation, measures to increase the cultural capital of Hungary and grants for meritorious students. Another important step that led to the eventual institutionalisation of sociology was the development of auxiliary sciences, namely statistics, human geography and sociography, and the establishment of a series of institutions like the Central Institution of Statistics, the Bureau of Statistics from Budapest, the Hungarian Society for Statistics (1922) and the Hungarian Institute for Economical Research (1928).

Besides this institutional backing, the establishment of scientific societies and research action groups played an important role. Karády mentioned the Group for Social Research (which was involved in the study of the Hungarian village) founded by younger intellectuals to make a more

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<sup>11</sup> Karády, V., p. 138.

<sup>12</sup> Many of the significant sociologists, like Jászi Oszkár, Mannheim and later on Fejtő Ferenc had to leave the country because of the increase in antisemitism from the thirties onwards.



thorough analysis of the realities of rural Hungary. Their research activity largely led to the establishment of rural studies, rural anthropology and rural sociology in Hungary. Karády, in this article, made a very interesting statistical overview of the most significant 'influencers' of that time, gathering from the Hungarian articles published during the interwar period and the references of the main sociologists of that time. He admits that this in fact is only a kind of 'indicator of celebrity' than that of how the sociologist who was been referred to has influenced the Hungarian sociological thinking. An analysis of the data revealed that the most frequently mentioned sociologists are those who came from the Durkheimian school, the founders of sociology—A. Comte and Herbert Spencer.

The only sociologist who was not a member of any Western school was the Romanian sociologist Dimitrie Gusti, who made a very important contribution to the development of the methodology of research and appeared in the references mainly after the development of the so-called 'folk-researchers' (népiesek) movement in Hungary in 1931.

Karády concluded that the acceptance of the social innovation of Gusti was a sign of the open-mindedness of the social scientists in Hungary during the interwar period since after the tension-filled relations between Hungary and Romania after 1920, they were still interested in the intellectual achievements of their neighbours and open to accepting them.

The second part of the volume gives a detailed description of the process of institutionalisation of Romanian sociology, with an emphasis on the interwar period and of course Dimitrie Gusti and the sociological school he had built as a promoter of Romanian sociology.

As Rostás Zoltán relates in his study on the Romanian Social Institute and the Publication Archive for Science and Social Reform, the main promoters and witnesses of the institutionalisation of the Romanian interbellic sociology made their first steps even before the first WW in the former Kingdom of Romania in 1910, when Dimitrie Gusti started his sociological course at the University of Iași; as a result, although others can be considered the forefathers, Gusti was the first to have habilitation and the official acceptance of the Ministry of education. The next steps, just like in the case of the other countries in Eastern and Central Europe, were made for the balcanic and the first WW in 1918. Besides the fact that the course of sociology was created in Iași, the Association for Science and Social Reform was also formed there. Dimitrie Gusti initiated this professional

association to mobilise public opinion in despair after WW 1. The mission of the association, which included scientists from different fields, was to modernise Romania through research work in various fields. In 1919, the association edited its own publication. Through the analysis of the review, Zoltán Rostás presented the main steps taken in the institutionalisation of sociology in Romania. As for the other countries in Eastern and Central Europe, WW 1 was a great turning point. However, the situation was different since Romania was on the side of the winners of the 'Great War' and this influenced the Romanian sociology. After the formation of Greater Romania, Bucharest became the new capital; therefore, in 1920, Professor Gusti moved to the University of Bucharest and professionalised the association by establishing the Romanian Social Institute, maintaining its same aims and members and continuing to edit the same publication. Gusti's wide viewpoint can be seen in the way he organised the activity of the Institute, involving not only sociologists but also scientists and academics from other social sciences. From 1924 onwards, he tried to attract scientists from Western countries to write articles for his publication in order to increase their influence upon the activity of local scientists. Simultaneously, he planned a campaign for field research in the rural area, and for the first time, the methodology was going to be based on his social monography. This novel methodological tool intrigued social scientists from Hungary and other Western countries where the field research that was being carried out in the Romanian villages was highly appreciated. The first results of the research were published after 1929 in a book, and the former members of the research group transmitted their results to the students of the University of Bucharest. The real acceptance was obtained in the thirties, when, backed by the Royal Cultural Foundation, Gusti's research team was able to start the social intervention and finally, in 1934 Gusti's publication, the Archive for science and social reform (ASSR) became the official organ of the International Institute of Sociology. The steps towards the real international acceptance of an independent Romanian sociology based in Bucharest were taken at the Congress in Paris in 1937. Gusti had been vested as president of the 14<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Sociology, which was meant to be hold in Bucharest in 1939 but which unfortunately got delayed *sine die*. As Rostás points out at the end of his article the sociology in Romania has grown through the interactions between the publications and the researchers, through the ASSR and from

1936 the Romanian Sociology (*Sociologia Românească*) where the results of the monographic researches were published. The author recommends an in-depth analysis of the content of the ASSR to obtain a better overview of the stages of institutionalisation of sociology in the interbellic Romania.

The second article, written by Theodora Eliza Văcărescu, also referred to Dimitrie Gusti and his militant activity in the context of the social modernisation of Romania, for whom sociology had a mission in the interbellic Romanian society. The author emphasised the effect of gender on institutionalisation and pointed out the importance of Gusti's pioneering action of integrating young women, mostly students, in the field work during the monographic research, in all stages of the work that was carried out during the thirties. In the introduction, Văcărescu stated that the integration of women in scientific research was not common even in the more developed Western societies and that what made Gusti's action even more brave was the fact that women in Romania were publicly invisible at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, meaning that they were deprived of their civil and political rights<sup>13</sup> and had no right to own properties or even have a profession. This is why Gusti's movement and the network of organisations that were founded after 1920 had a very important effect on the social realities of those times, proving that its mission of social modernisation was indeed a response to the social and intellectual needs of interwar Romania.

Theodora's article focused on the gender aspect of Dimitrie Gusti's strategy of reform and modernisation of the social life in Romania. In the first part of the study, the author made an inventory on the proposal and practices of women, starting from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the interbellic period; 1918 was also the turning point for women in Romania. In July 1918, as a result of the weekly public debates organized by the feminist activists at the University from Iași, where cultural and political personalities were also an association was established. The aim of the Association for Civil and Political Emancipation of Romanian Women was to help women from all social backgrounds to obtain their basic civil and political rights. Văcărescu mentioned Dimitrie Gusti's role in the institutional and self-empowerment of women as well as the role these

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<sup>13</sup> Văcărescu, p. 201.

militant women played in the monographical research. Concluding, she mentioned the positive and constructive role the women who participated in Gusti's monographic research played in the elaboration of the strategies of social intervention and stated that the inclusion of women can be considered a win both for the Romanian women and for Gusti's research and strategies for social intervention and modernisation.

The third article in the second part of the volume was signed by Dana Costin. The study entitled 'Scientific and intellectual context of the publishing of the *Archive for science and social reform*' presented the most important associations and publications from 1919 to -1924, the period that Dana considers to have structured scientific life in Romania. These elements are considered to be the scientific background for the founding of the Association for Study and Social Reform and its publications in the twenties. The author highlighted the importance of the publication *Archive for science and social reform* in the description of the development of social sciences other than sociology. Costin gives a very exact description of the main stages of development of the ethnography as the most important social science of the interbellic period with a significant regional development, also at the academic level, so in 1926 at Cluj the Faculty of ethnology and folklore. Costin mentioned the economic and social upheaval as being the main conditioner of the other social sciences, i.e. the linguistics and economical sciences. As mentioned in the article, during the formation of Greater Romania in 1920, intellectuals considered it their mission to actively contribute to the social and economic modernisation and progress of Romania. One of the major ways they did this was to ensure the spread of research results and the proposals for a social strategy made in the interwar period in Romania through a developing network of publications.

After the formation of Greater Romania in the context of a dynamic development of the modern Romanian economy of the interwar period, the increase in the labour force necessitated the grounding of trade unions. This has become one of the problems of the association led by Dimitrie Gusti. Victor Rizescu's article entitled 'Sindicalist federalism and juridical socialism. Two points of the social reform in the interwar Romania' gave a very good description of the international theoretical framework of the social reform of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with an analysis of how both the French and German schools reflect on the problem of labour and syndicalism. This article also focused on the role D. Gusti and

his association, the Social Institution for Reform, played in the twenties in the elaboration of the modern tools of social protection in Romania and the institutional framework, the Department of the Social protection founded in 1920.

The last article in the volume, Ionuț Butoi's 'Nature and culture in the Sociological School from Bucharest. A conceptual analysis of Dimitrie Gusti's first programmatic writings' made an analysis of the main concept of the nation, as well as its theoretical grounding on the relationship between nature and culture as it appears in the modern social sciences. An important element the author reflected upon in the article was the formation of Greater Romania, which led to the appearance of several discussions on nationalism, racism, eugenism and biopolitics in scientific, cultural and political discourses. The author gave an interesting overview of these concepts through a comparative analysis of the prominent Romanian scientists of the interwar period: Dimitrie Gusti, A. D. Xenopol, Grigore Antipa and Vasile Pârvan. In this group, Gusti is the one with the rationalist standing, distancing himself from the biopolitical and eugenistic stream. The study gave an interesting presentation of the mainstream cultural models of the interwar period in Romania.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the importance of reading the book and not just by those who would like to get a better understanding of the sociological heritage of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Central and Eastern Europe. The lecture on the anthology might be a good entry point for those who are interested in comparative research projects but can also be a good example of the militant position intellectuals and scientists took in the early 20<sup>th</sup> to promote strategies of social modernisation and progress in their own countries.