

Dušan JANÁK et al.

## **The Beginnings of Sociology in Central Europe: a Study on the Formation of Sociology as a Science in Poland, the Czech Lands, the Slovak Republic and Hungary**

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The publication *Beginnings of Sociology in Central Europe* is a collective work under the guidance of Dušan Janák whose field of study has long been the institutionalization of sociology in Central Europe and its neighbouring regions. Apart from the main author, a team of seven authors from the V4 countries participated on the book, including a diverse range of authors from students to university professors, whose brief profiles are available on pages 269-271.

The authors decided to search for answers to the following questions: Where are both Central Europe and the Central European sociology situated? Was the formation of sociology in Central Europe just catching up with the moving train of western sociological mainstream? What differences are there among the ways sociology was established in Poland, the Czech lands, the Slovak Republic and Hungary? Who were the main Central European sociologists in the starting period of sociology as a discipline and what did they research? What was the overall contribution of each national sociology and how strong was their mutual influence?

In his introduction, Janák presents major pitfalls of research in the Central European context among which, and I agree with this fully, also belongs the very territorial demarcation of the Central European space. The main author then systematically describes the reasons that led to the chosen method of research, and finally mentions the need for further research for the development of a more comprehensive synthesis of the beginnings of sociology in Central Europe in a comparative perspective comparable to productions for the history of western or world sociology.

The non-trivial grasp of the issue largely affects the nature of the first chapter, which is largely devoted to methodology and to the definition of Central Europe and Central European sociology. Attention is paid to the genealogy of the concept of Central Europe and the definition of cultural and geopolitical research approaches to the Central European territory. The geopolitical approach becomes determining for the book. In conclusion, the chapter discusses basic sources and literature on the issue of formation of sociology in Central European countries which the authors pursue.

The core of the work consists of four chapters devoted to the Czech, Polish, Slovak and Hungarian national sociology. Janák explains the reasons for the definition and limitation of Central Europe to the area of the so-called Heartlands for the purposes of the publication in the methodological chapter and parts of the text. The structure of the core chapters is

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identical especially in regard to achieving comparable results. The introductory sections provide brief summaries of the social and political development during the formative years of the sociological discipline. The reader is thus introduced to the context of the time, social relations and issues that burdened the individual countries, which can be particularly beneficial for students for whom the study text is primarily intended. The largest space within the central chapters is occupied by description of the institutional plane of the issues concerning the formation of sociology as a science. Attention is paid to professional journals, research organizations, scientific societies, and higher education. The ends of the chapters introduce key figures of sociology and their impact on the development of the field on the discursive plane.

The last chapter presents the findings introduced in the core part in a comparative perspective. Janák compares the development in Central European countries on the institutional and discursive plane, and contextualizes the findings with the development of sociology in Western Europe and the world. Key information of the comparative perspective are illustrated in well-arranged tables and diagrams of the institutional developments on pages 216-218, displayed on a time-line, and given on the discursive plane of a comparative typology of key personalities on pages 229, 231 and 234.

The publication of Janák and his associates meets its initial ambitions. The book was published in the edition of Study texts in the Sociological Publishing House, and is primarily intended for Czech students, who have so far had significantly more difficult ways to become familiar with the origins of the Central European social thought through the barriers of national languages, let alone get the possibility to gain information in a comprehensive and comparative perspective. The main objective to arrange the basic facts about the development of sociology, or about the beginnings of the field in Central Europe on both the institutional and discursive side was undoubtedly achieved. The final chapter brings a new summary of the findings in a comparative perspective which can be inspiring in many ways, and serve as a basis for further research of the history of social thought in Central Europe on the fields of history and sociology.

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