

## BOOK REVIEW

***Limitele supraviețuirii. Sociologia maghiară din Transilvania după 1945, Székedi Levente, Editura Institutului pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale, 2021***

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In his study on the Hungarian Autonomous Region in Romania between 1952-1960, the Italian-Hungarian historian, Stefano Bottoni, documents the impact the development of national-communism and implementation of nationalist Romanian cultural policies had on Hungarian communities in Transylvania (Bottoni 2021). During the late 50's these policies aimed also at cancelling Hungarian intellectual life and limit education taught in the Hungarian language with the general aim to assimilate the Hungarian population from Transylvania. It also restricted institutional autonomy of the educational system by merging Hungarian with Romanian schools. The apex of this nationalist culturalization process was the trial of Transylvanian-Hungarian intellectuals that were preparing a handbook of Hungarian literature for students in Romania and the merging in 1959 of the Hungarian Bolyai University with the Romanian Victor-Babeș University (Bottoni 2021).

In spite of this traumatic event for the Hungarian intellectual life in Transylvania we have very few studies that document the way the intellectual Hungarian field reproduced itself during the communist period and the role the new Babes-Bolyai University played in this. Székedi Levente's book brings an important contribution in understanding the intellectual life in Transylvania during the Communist period and focuses on the reconstruction of how sociology survived as both within and outside academia. By including in this analysis the cultural production of the intellectuals around the periodicals Korunk and Utunk, Székedi manages to reconstruct the activity of one of the most important cultural centre of Transylvania during the communist period. This book follows another important study written by Martin Ladislau Salamon - *Un aliat uitat. Relațiile româno-maghiare în sociologia interbelică* (Tractus-Arte, 2013) that

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focused on development of Hungarian sociology during the interwar period and the intellectual exchanges between the young Transylvanian sociologists (*Erdélyi Fiatalok*) and Gusi's monography school.

The interwar period has received considerable attention in the Romanian historiography and history of sociology. What followed next and the role played by sociologists in shaping intellectual life and the production of social and political knowledge during real-existing socialism has been little researched. Székedi Levente picks up the research from the immediate period after the Second World War and explores in-depth the development of Hungarian intellectual life in Transylvania and the significant role played by sociologists. This study is one of the best documented research available in the Romanian language about the history of Hungarian sociology in Transylvania during the first part of the communist period. Unlike many other attempts to analyse the history of sociology in Romania which focus on generic institutional aspects or biographical elements, this study has an in-depth focus on the specific research topics, sociological ideas and paradigmatic mutations that took place in the Transylvanian Hungarian sociological field. The author analyses a tremendous number of books and articles written in Transylvania in the last 80 years. The book contains as well a vast number of annexes with summaries and translations of articles from Hungarian to Romanian that otherwise would be hardly accessible to Romanian readers. The entire bibliographic apparatus is impressive - starting with the review of the scientific production of that period and ending with the manuscripts that remained unpublished after the completion of important research. This is an outstanding book that reconstructs an important part of Transylvanian history. It is remarkable that the author published this volume in the Romanian language and made a substantial effort to familiarize the readers with the development of Hungarian intellectual life in Transylvania. In the context of re-emerging nationalism on both sides in the region and worrying growth of right-wing Romanian political parties in the Parliament, this book brings an important contribution to inter-ethnic dialogue. The Romanian educational system has been marked in the past century by the reproduction of a nationalist culture that prevented many Romanian intellectuals to get in contact with the rich social, cultural and religious diversity of Transylvanian history. Hungarian sociology from this region played a fundamental role in researching and generating knowledge about Transylvania. A Romanian book about the ways in which this sociological knowledge was produced in this region should be appreciated as an important endeavour.

The book impresses not only with its clear presentation of how sociology developed as a discipline but also because it carefully elaborates a sociology of sociological thought and it analyses the political and social context, outlines the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania after the unification 1918 and explores the international networks in which the local production of sociological

knowledge was embedded. In this way the book constitutes also a useful resource in understanding the genealogy of intellectual fields and the dynamic of cultural formation in multi-ethnic spaces.

What is a bit problematic in the book is the liberal tone of the way in which Transylvanian sociology is reconstructed. It is clear that there was an ideologized language of the time with multiple problematic references to the revolutionary role of the proletariat, the genius of communist leaders and several dogmatic rewritings of the history of Transylvania. Nevertheless, this is not as this does not happen today when many of the research and expertise narrate the sociological and economic capitalist reality in pre-established frameworks that constantly highlight the need of resilience, entrepreneurialism and the messianic role of attracting capital investments in order to generate a neo-liberal management of communities and encouragement to develop themselves in accordance with the opportunity structures that the market offers. The important question has to be the following: can we identify behind this ideologized idiom the existence of substantial sociological studies that couple with the important problems that the socialist society was facing? Is sociology producing relevant knowledge for understanding the economic and social dynamics of that period? And in this sense, it is hard to oversee the fact that during the communist period sociological studies are increasingly being interested in class-formation processes, social inequalities, rural-urban divides which have been amplified by the capitalist transformations during the interwar period and which have generated significant changes in the economic and social structure of Transylvania which the socialist policies seek to address. We have for example studies related to how capitalist industrial development was achieved with precarious rural workers that had to supplement their insufficient wages with agricultural work, or we encounter studies that focus on the proletarianization of women in rural areas and the existing precarious living conditions.

In terms of educational policies this 'bleak' socialist period played an important role in the dislocation of the reproduction of middle and higher classes that were excluding children with a rural and proletariat background from attaining higher degrees. It is very hard to miss not only the tremendous economic growth achieved during the socialist industrialization period, but also the social mobility which this society enabled. Sociology during this period played a substantial role in generating the research for such transformations to take place. For sure a problematic bureaucratic ideological language was employed by sociologists and by the party members in order to implement such policies, but the research from that period cannot be seen solely through its political rhetoric - it has also to be analyzed in its substance and in the way it managed to change the research and educational spaces for such social and economic changes to be implemented. This, I think, is a limit of this wonderful study: it

tackles only in a limited way the role sociology played during the socialist period in mediating the knowledge formation processes needed for vital and economic transformations to be implemented. A liberal reconstruction of sociology captures generally the dogmatic and ideological aspects of Marxist sociology showing its irrationalities and bureaucratic idiosyncrasies and gives a limited attention to the role it played in generating social change. The liberal de-politicization of sociology is producing today a reverse agenda of research - one in which the capitalist transformations, unequal development and forms of exploitation of cheap labor are only rarely questioned while they celebrate market freedom.

But this is rather a critique of perspective. The book is excellent and extremely well documented and constitutes a mandatory sociological reading for everyone interested in the local production of social knowledge in Transylvania. Unfortunately, the research stops in 1964 when the political rehabilitation of sociology in Romania has been to a great extent completed. This is due to the extensive and thorough analysis the author devotes to the topic of the subject and its attempt to cover the distinct period in great detail. More promising studies are to be expected from this author as he talks also about the important period of 1965-1976 when sociology underwent a re-institutionalization process and the last part of communism when sociology was again marginalized. The author hints to extensive data, archival material and interviews his research already produced on these periods.

One of the wonderful aspects of the book is that it aims explicitly to generate an important space of discussion between the present-day Romanian and Hungarian scientific communities that are becoming more and more enclaved. The author shows at great length, just like Martin Ladislau Salamon showed in his book about the interwar period, the collaborations, exchanges and reciprocal influences between Romanian and Hungarian-Transylvanian sociology that existed during the communist period. The post-communist period generated a dislocation of these forms of intellectual partnerships and the author, rightly so, sees this as a problematic abandonment of a local tradition that has played an important role in the formation of Transylvanian sociology.

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