



The Reorganization of Hungarian Sociology after the 1956 Revolution

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Abstract. The history of Hungarian sociology in the state-socialist period can certainly be described in terms of a general Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) historical model, the most important feature of which is the undivided power of the Communist Party. Under such conditions, the Soviet Union and local political power holders had a direct influence on the institutionalization and functioning of sciences, including sociology. The study contributes to understanding the social impact of the 1956 revolution, particularly its crushing effect on the development of Hungarian sociology in relation to the general model. Firstly, the early development of sociology in the Soviet Union and most state-socialist countries in the 1950s was blocked in Hungary by the 1956 revolution. The trauma of the 1956 revolution made all groups of society, including the intelligentsia, realize that the system could not be changed in the long term. At the same time, it made it clear to the political authorities that the system could not be maintained in the long run with methods of the past. As a result, Kádár's consolidation relied heavily on a compromising intelligentsia, needed for its expertise (in this case, modern sociological expertise) and legitimizing the system. Consequently, sociology in Hungary started developing and became institutionalized in the early 1960s. In this situation, sociology represented both a critical point of view opposing the system and, at the same time, a tool of its – covert or overt – legitimization.

Keywords: history of sociology, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Hungarian sociology, 1956 Revolution

Introduction

When speaking about national sociologies, such as Hungarian sociology, we need to look for their basis in the complex network of social, economic, and political circumstances by which the nation is determined and in which “national” sociology develops and operates. Its cultural, historical, and social structure, traditions, and geographical location place Hungary in the category of Central European countries or, rather, the Central and Eastern European (CEE) ones

(besides the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Poland) (Lewis 1998). “These are sometimes called the ‘Lands in Between’: in between Russia and Germany, Europe, and Asia, East and West. This is a frontier country, part of Europe, but on the edge of it and not fully integrated with it” (Batt 1998: 1). Accordingly, the pre-1945 structure of Hungary can be characterized by some imagined or hypothetical models of a Central and Eastern European (CEE) country (Szűcs 1981, Mucha 2009). These models describe Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries as traditional and agricultural societies, the main features of which are “political dependency and a resulting delay in the development of indigenous and autonomous political structures; economic underdevelopment and the consequent maintenance until World War II of an agrarian economy along with its peasant class (...) and the emergence in the 19th century of a multifunctional group of ‘intelligentsia’, an educated urban class” (Mucha 2009: 509).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the representatives of Hungarian sociology, as other CEE sociologists, had to adapt to these Central and Eastern European (CEE) frameworks. On the one hand, Hungarian social scientists, familiar with the works of Western sociologists of the time, constantly attempted to build academic sociology, based on the rules of universal sociology developed in the West (Karády 2020).¹ On the other hand, they sought to give a more accurate picture of the state of society by using various empirical methods, thus helping its development (following the Western model). The members of this group were thus oriented towards scientific questions and social reform, i.e. political and scientific goals at the same time. The first sociological periodical in Hungary, i.e. *Huszadik Század* [The Twentieth Century] was first published in 1900, and the first sociological association, Society for Social Science, was formed in 1901. In its charter, it was set down that its members had to participate in social, political, and pedagogical work besides their activity as researchers. In the 1920s and the 1930s, the resolution of political and socio-political issues became more relevant in social science works (Némedi 1985).

After the Second World War, Hungary became part of the Soviet Bloc, and so its operations after 1945 were bearing the most characteristic features of state-socialist states, as defined by János Kornai (1992). The most important of these is the undivided power of the Communist Party. The state-socialist period in Hungary lasted for more than 40 years between 1948 and 1989. In order to understand the history of Hungarian sociology during this period, we need to come to terms with the specific form of state socialism in Hungary that provided the context for the development of sociological studies there.

As in other socialist countries, after 1948, the year of the turnaround, Hungary, too, was dominated by the state-socialist power structure and the totalizing central

1 Despite the similarities, there seems to have been little scientific communication between intellectuals in the region during this period; for instance, “there were no translations of works of scholars from other CEE countries” (Mucha 2009: 511).

power of the Communist Party.² Although the democratic institutions continued to exist for a short period of time after the end of the war (between 1945 and 1948),³ all the power was concentrated in the hands of the Party⁴ leaders and in the hands of a small group called the “Moskovites”, i.e. those who were in close contact with the Party leaders in Moscow.⁵ Between 1948 and 1953, Stalinism was implemented in Hungary under the direction of this handful of people. Their methods included forced industrialization, the collectivization of agricultural land, the appropriation of companies and banks by the state, the development of an institutional system of dictatorship, the oppressive power of the authorities responsible for internal affairs and security, a general cult of the leaders, show trials, political cleansings, internments, and the levelling of the standards of living. Like all other social institutions, the running of science came under the control of the Party. “Academic reforms were affected by the general rule, implemented by Stalinism, that no autonomous, privately organized cultural and social movements, agencies and publications should be tolerated, except those adopted and strictly controlled by the new authorities” (Karády–Nagy 2019: 83). The situation was similar to that in Czechoslovakia, for example, where in 1948 the Departments of Sociology were closed down, and the teachers were removed from the universities (Musil 1998). Likewise, in Hungary, Sándor Szalai, Head of the Departments of Sociology between 1946 and 1949, was imprisoned in 1950.⁶ In 1948, following the Soviet pattern, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) and the Central Institute for Statistics (CIS) were reorganized, too. In 1948, under the direction of György Péter,⁷ the head of the

2 According to Bottoni (2009: 791): “There is wide consensus among scholars that until 1948 Sovietization made slower progress in Hungary, a defeated and occupied territory, than in any other Eastern European countries. While Bulgaria, Albania, Yugoslavia, Poland, and, to a certain extent, Romania were almost fully Sovietized in 1947, Czechoslovakia and Hungary remained at a pre-Sovietized level until mid-1948, when the local communist parties finally took over the state apparatus. This aversion could also explain why Hungary became, in 1956, the scene of the largest anti-Soviet popular uprising in the Soviet Bloc.”

3 On the history of Hungarian sociology between 1945 and 1948, see Szabari (2021).

4 In 1948, after the formation of a coalition between the Hungarian Communist Party (*Magyar Kommunista Párt*) and the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (*Magyar Szociáldemokrata Párt*), the Hungarian Workers' Party (*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja*, MDP) was founded, and a Soviet-type centralized political power was developed in Hungary.

5 The members of this group were Mátyás Rákosi, Ernő Gerő, Mihály Farkas, and József Révai.

6 The Department of Sociology was founded in 1946 at Pázmány Péter University in Budapest. The appointing of Szalai was the result of an agreement of the political parties. Szalai was the head of the intellectual department of the Social Democratic Party. A vivid intellectual life developed in the department. Its library included international sociological literature, the classical works of the time, and the department also published two handbooks: *Social Reality – Sociology* (Szalai 1946) and *Introduction to Sociology* (Szalai 1948). Both books described the history of sociology (primarily the theories of August Comte and Karl Marx) by criticizing them from the point of view of Marxism and explained the problems of sociology of the time (Szabari 2012, Tóth 2015).

7 From 1932, György Péter participated in the illegal communist movement, and in 1935 he was sentenced to 15 years in prison. He served in the Szeged prison until 1944. His mates were some

Institute (CIS) at the time, Hungarian statistics was radically transformed, as during its reorganization the most excellent sociologists were removed. These parallel processes show that after 1948 it was not the local sociological tradition that shaped the development of sociology in this early phase of the state-socialist regime in the CEE region but, rather, the intrusion of the centralized power (Vorisek 2011).⁸

The Significance of the 1956 Revolution for the Development of Hungarian Sociology in the 1960s

“Well, we’ll live here then” – says the mother after the
defeated revolution in the iconic Hungarian film
Time Stands Still (1982),
directed by Péter Gothár.

However, the state-socialist system itself cannot be regarded as a completely homogeneous one. First, because the countries of the Soviet Bloc had many country-specific characteristics, and, second, because the state-socialist period can be divided into different phases according to the functioning of the system.⁹ Besides similar operating mechanisms inherent in the system, directives and direct interventions also played an important role in the functioning of state-socialist countries. The Soviet Union played a leading role in both the guidelines and the elimination of possible deviations from the model. The 20th Congress of the USSR is an example of a guideline, while the military suppression of the Hungarian (1956) or Czechoslovak (1968) revolutions represents direct intervention. The 20th Congress of the USSR, the confrontation with Stalinism, and the increasingly pressing issue of modernization and economic development played a decisive role in the development of science, including the (re-)institutionalization of sociology in the countries of the Socialist Bloc. Although this process of (re-)institutionalization of sociology involved several and diverse actors and interests, “in all the countries the Party was in a position to approve and control these developments” (Vorisek 2008: 91).

After Stalin’s death, the Soviet leadership ordered political changes in Hungary, too, with Imre Nagy replacing Mátyás Rákosi as Prime Minister. However, the

of the later communist directors, but we know almost nothing about Péter’s contacts with the others. In 1944, when the prisons were opened to prepare the deportation of the prisoners to Germany because of the imminent arrival of the Soviet troops, he managed to escape. In 1948, he was appointed Head of the Central Institute for Statistics (KSH), which was unambiguously a party mandate.

8 Even in Poland, sociology was banned in the 1950s (Karády–Nagy 2018: 94).

9 According to Kornai (1992: 19), “three prototypes may be distinguished in the social system”: revolutionary-transitional, classical, and reform system.

changes in Hungary went beyond Soviet expectations. The outbreak of the October 1956 revolution was followed by direct intervention.

Even though the Hungarian revolution was unsuccessful and followed by severe repression, the fact that it took place had a significant and lasting impact on the development of the socialist model in Hungary and, therefore, on the functioning of sociology in Hungary. In my opinion, the revolution and its lessons for the authorities, the intelligentsia, and for the period of consolidation that followed constituted the defining specific elements in the history of Hungarian sociology, which determined the divergence from the general model of Central and Eastern European countries. This also means that while I agree with many of the substantive findings of Vorisek's (2008) studies, I dispute his claim that the (re-)institutionalization of sociology in Hungary can be described as a "Soviet-type" development (Vorisek 2008: 93). I hope that my paper will also highlight the fact that, in addition to institutional history, an analysis of the broader historical context is essential when examining the history of sociology in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

The 1956 revolution marked a redefinition of possibilities and limits. For all Hungarian social groups, including intellectuals, the crushing of the revolution meant that there was no alternative to the communist regime and the Soviet hegemony in the foreseeable future. In 1956, after the fall of the revolution and the end of Rákosi's regime, Moscow chose János Kádár as the political leader of Hungary. Kádár's first measures were aimed at ending the revolution by force, punishing the "counter-revolutionary" elements, and consolidating his power. Kádár's aims and tools did not diverge considerably from the practices of the 1950s. After the revolution, the harder policy made itself felt also in the field of social sciences.¹⁰ One of the consequences of 1956 was that the processes of reform in the social sciences, which had started in the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries at the end of the 1950s, could only begin belatedly in Hungary.

The Soviet leadership had good reasons to support sociological research in the Socialist Bloc. Partly, it was interested in developing practical expertise and knowledge of economic development, and partly it wanted to increase the presence of socialist countries in international public fora with the aim of winning supporters in the international committees and associations (Vorisek 2008: 93). By 1955, many of the great figures of Western sociology and political science had been invited and had visited the Moscow Philosophical Institute, and in 1958 the Soviet Sociological Society was founded (Karády–Nagy 2018: 94). Furthermore, in 1959, a Soviet delegation, along with other socialist delegations, took part in the World Congress of the International Sociological Association

10 For example, the economists who began their careers in the mid-1950s and who lobbied for economic reforms were pushed into the background.

(ISA) at Stresa.¹¹ By contrast, although there was a Hungarian delegation at the ISA at Stresa (Dupcsik 2022: 313–314), the question of sociology could not arise in Hungary after 1956 up until 1960.¹²

At the same time, the long-term consequences of 1956 put certain groups of Hungarian intellectuals in a special position, as the Kádár regime had to establish its internal and external legitimacy, both of which depended on reconciliation with the intelligentsia. János M. Rainer wrote in this respect that “the Kádár system was a permanent reflection on 1956” (Rainer 2006: 1190). 1956 also suggested to the authorities that there was not enough reliable information about the opinions of the members of society, which information was readily available using modern (social) scientific tools. All of these led to an increase in the value of sociological knowledge.

The Classic Kádár Regime: The “Golden Age” of Critical Sociology (1961–1973)

The consolidating power of Kádár’s policy aiming at a general reconciliation in Hungarian society really started to make itself felt by the beginning of the 1960s. Kádár’s famous slogan was first spoken out in 1961: “Anyone who is not against us is with us” (Huszár 2002). With changes in the early 1960s began the development of the “Hungarian model” of socialism, often referred to as “Kádárism”, characterized by a certain degree of independence of social and economic subsystems, attempts to render everyday life devoid of politics, as well as efforts to satisfy people’s desire for consumption and modernization. In the classic years of Kádár’s leadership, the Stalinist dictatorship was replaced by a less oppressive and less ideological system that improved living conditions, introduced a consumption-oriented economic policy, and was internationally

11 The Soviet delegation was headed by Pyotr N. Fedoseev, who spoke about the prominent role of Marxist sociology and concrete sociological research in the Soviet Union, criticizing some Western sociological trends. According to Fedoseev: “A general Marxist sociological theory is based on the sum total of all social facts, it takes into consideration the actual historical development and reveals the main social problems suggested by life. (...) The need for concrete sociological studies is the direct result of the general aim of Marxism, namely that philosophers must not only interpret the world but assist in transforming it in the interests of a progressive development of mankind” (Fedoseev 1959: 178). This concept of Marxist sociology was one of the significant reference points for the Hungarian intellectuals who wanted to rebuild sociology in Hungary.

12 The congress was attended by Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Poland, among the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Poland’s large delegation included big names such as J. Chalasiński, S. Ossowski, Z. Bauman, and Jan Szczepański. Romania was represented by T. Ionescu, G. Ionescu, A. Joja, Ch. Joja, V. Malinski, M. Manescu, and M. Ralea. There was not a single sociologist among the Hungarian delegation. Erik Molnár, the leader of the Hungarian delegation, was a Marxism historian.

open. These changes gradually and considerably raised a sense of security among the population and improved society's readiness and capacity for compromises.

The stability of the regime owing to its consolidation played an important role in the fact that sociology could be reorganized in Hungary even if the period of *détente* was not without troubles since the traumas of the 1950s had wounded many people who were to reorganize sociology. In this changed political climate, the habitual way of thinking in sociology did not change completely. It is well known that sociologists who wanted to relaunch the discipline, such as András Hegedüs, Sándor Szalai,¹³ or Kálmán Kulcsár, had to depart from the principles of historical materialism in justifying the legitimacy of an independent sociological discipline. They argued that historical materialism was not the same as sociology and that independent Marxist sociology should be created. Hegedüs, for example, made the claim that sciences – including historical materialism – become differentiated through their development, as new lines of study are formed, and therefore Marxist sociology had to be viewed as one of the new lines of study within the general discipline of historical materialism. Hegedüs used the strategy of stressing the close relationship between sociology and historical materialism, while Kálmán Kulcsár or Sándor Szalai pointed out the professional and scientific value of a sociology free of ideology (Hegedüs 1961, Kulcsár 1961, Szalai 1961, Szántó 1960). These legitimating procedures, on the one hand, made a connection to the arguments used in the Soviet Union (see in the footnote: Fedoseev 1959), and, on the other hand, they were groundbreaking since according to the dogmatic Marxist position, there was no need for an independent sociology alongside historical materialism. After 1963, Hungarian sociologists paid very little attention to discussing the relationship between historical materialism and Marxist sociology. Instead, they concentrated on empirical research projects and Western sociology.¹⁴

13 Sándor Szalai was rehabilitated in the fall of 1956 after the political cleansings, and he could work for a short period between 1956 and 1957 as a university teacher. Later on, he was dismissed from his job and became a senior research worker at the University Library in 1960 and then a university teacher at the University for Chemical Industry in Veszprém at the end of 1962. Despite his efforts to play a central role in the (re-)institutionalization of sociology, Szalai was not given a leading position. However, it is indicative of his talent as an organizer that it was under his leadership that Hungary took part in the first international time balance research project in the early 1960s (Szalai 1972).

14 While theoretical discussion continued to be about the relationship between historical materialism and sociology, and the formation of an independent sociology was still at stake, there already existed a group of scholars at the Central Institute for Statistics (CIS) who, thanks to their professional knowledge and flexible worldview, later played a crucial role in conducting sociological surveys as well as preparing the economic reforms of 1968. Within the CIS, a Department of Economic and Demographic Statistics was already operating in the 1960s, and their work became the point of departure for studies on social mobility and demography after the Department of Social Statistics was founded in 1962. The Institute also provided an opportunity for social scientists who had earlier been removed from their positions for political reasons to work again. An old student of Szalai Institute, László Cseh-Szombathy, was employed there, and he researched the social problems of alcoholism, aging, and deviance. In 1961, András Hegedüs was appointed Head of

The “golden age” of sociology – as it was often mentioned by the sociologists contributing to it – can primarily be linked to the establishment of the Sociological Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for a variety of reasons.¹⁵ First, because the Research Group became the symbol of sociology in Hungary due to its institutional independence; second, because it undertook the responsibility of educating people, a task assumed by the politically engaged intelligentsia at the beginning of the twentieth century; third, because it practised a critical approach in sociology. What did critical sociology mean in Hungary at the time? Criticism had a peculiar meaning in Hungary in the 1960s: it did not mean the criticism of the existing political order (it did not strive to offer social or political alternatives, contrary to the practice of social thinkers at the beginning of the century and to Western critical sociology) but the criticism of social reality, i.e. showing that things in society do not always happen in the ideologically projected way. The representatives of the critical line, such as Hegedüs, Zsuzsa Ferge, Ágnes Losonczi, and others, tried to point out the differences between reality and ideology. Moreover, they believed that society could be corrected, modernized, and the disparities reduced, with the help of sociology.¹⁶

In 1963, the Sociology Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) started its activity under the direction of András Hegedüs. The staff came from various social backgrounds. Those playing a role in the development of Hungarian sociology can be divided into two groups: on the one hand, the already mentioned Marxists (or Marxist revisionists), among them: Mária Márkus, Ágnes Heller, Ágnes Losonczi, Antal Gyenes, and Miklós Szántó and, on the other hand, people coming from the non-Marxist intelligentsia such as László Cseh-Szombathy, Iván Szelényi, Iván Varga, and Rudolf Andorka.

András Hegedüs had a very singular life. At the age of 33, he became Head of the Council of Ministers and fulfilled this function between April 1955 and October 1956. After he signed a request asking the Soviet Union to send troops to suppress the 1956 uprising, he escaped to the Soviet Union. There he worked as a senior research worker for the Philosophy Institute at the Soviet Academy for Sciences. He could return to Hungary only in September 1958 on the condition that he would not undertake a political career. In his memoirs, he wrote that after his return he wanted to conduct scientific work (Hegedüs 1988). In 1960, he began

the Institute, and then, after his release from prison, István Bibó took over, and from 1962 Rudolf Andorka was leading the Institute, whose research about population, demography and later about social mobility made it possible for Hungarian sociology to engage in international scientific life. In 1963, the first research project on social stratification started in this institute under the guidance of György Péter; the organizers were Zsuzsa Ferge, Éva Láng, and István Kemény.

15 The Sociology Research Group, at first part of the Institute of Philosophy within the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) (established according to the Soviet model), was created in 1963.

16 In the second half of the 1960s, a similar way of thinking can be detected in the sociology of Czechoslovakia, where Marxist revisionists, who believed that the stagnating society could be modernized through sociology, played a crucial part in sociological studies (Musil 1998).

working for the Economic Institute of the HAS, and in 1961 – working under the direction of Erik Molnár – he was already the secretary of the Sociological Committee of the HAS,¹⁷ also named the Vice-President of the Central Institute for Statistics. András Hegedüs had a strong political background, which made it possible for him to “dare” to take part in the reorganization of sociology.¹⁸ Besides engaging “reliable cadres”, another control mechanism was also in place: the obligatory approval of the research budget by the government.

The first monumental empirical research carried out by the Sociology Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) was the so-called survey in the Gyöngyös region, consisting of the study of three settlements near the city of Gyöngyös. An indicator of the general enthusiasm with which it was carried out – but also of the want of a thorough professional basis – was the fact that the twenty-two researchers worked on twenty-two different topics, and the proposed goal of their research was – vaguely – put as “the deepest possible exploration of the social relations in the three villages” (Szántó 1998: 178).

As early as at the beginning of the 1960s, traditional research topics appeared in Hungarian sociology, for example, sociologies of the city, village, and work, or the study of lifestyles and surveys of the situation of certain social groups (for example, the intelligentsia and the working class) were also made. The fact that from the beginning of the 1960s Hungary, together with other socialist block countries, regularly took part in international conferences for sociology organized by the UNESCO helped in the modern approach to various topics.

It is clearly visible in the early projects (for example, in the Gyöngyös region study), as well as in the later ones, that the analysis of social structure and of mobility were the two most important research themes of this period. Social structure and mobility were important ideas at the time because (both intra- and intergenerational) upward mobility considerably grew compared to the interwar period. This kind of mobility was supported by the socialist ideology, and, at the same time, the problem allowed the critically-minded scholars and sociologists who were sensitive to civil issues (and interested in so-called civil sociology rather than in Marxist theories) to form a new idea of “reality”.

The most important book of this period on the social structure was the work of Zsuzsa Ferge (1969), which made use of the results of research on

17 At the beginning of 1961, there was already a decision to form the Sociological Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and to establish a sociological department at the Institute of Philosophy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, coordinated by Miklós Szántó (AL V. 221-1, Record of the formation of the Sociological Committee).

18 Similar processes took place in other state-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE): in Czechoslovakia, Pavel Machonin and in Poland, Włodzimierz J. Wesolowski were chosen by the political authorities as the most reliable scientific leaders to establish the sociology discipline. (Their lives took similar courses to that of Hegedüs after the political repression of sociology).

social stratification conducted at the Central Institute for Statistics (CIS). Ferge established the study of society according to its division into different types of work groups.¹⁹ This approach allowed the sociological examination of the structure of society because instead of the determining role of the means of production, it studied the role of people's place in the division of labour: the size of income, the quality of housing, and the level of education. In her book, Ferge sets out the concepts of equality and inequality. In her opinion, people have to strive not for equality and levelling (even though the goal of the socialist revolution was the creation of complete social equality) but rather for the undoing of rigid structures created by the various dimensions (i.e. legal, material, and cultural) of inequality. In her viewpoint, "real social equality implies a complex system of social differences, in which most differences are not socially determined" (Ferge 1969: 30). In her book, besides justifying the study of inequalities, Ferge also threw light on the fact that the abolishment of private property did not automatically entail a more equal social structure because it left other inequalities (for example, cultural ones) intact. Like Pierre Bourdieu, Zsuzsa Ferge later analysed cultural inequalities by looking at the system of education.

Another important topic of critical sociology was the problem of alienation. Alienation refers to processes by which material, intellectual, and social products gain an uncontrollable power over people, as it was not a matter of dispute that alienation existed in Hungary in the 1960s. The discussion revolved around the question of whether alienation was merely a legacy of the past, which would disappear at the end of a short transition period, or whether it was the result of various production processes related to the production of goods (carried out in a socialist economy), perhaps leading to the development of a new form of alienation (for example, due to planned economy or bureaucracy). According to the research of András Hegedüs and Mária Márkus concerning the effects of economic reforms, property relations, and the division of labour, alienation is not only characteristic of capitalist societies, but it is an exciting phenomenon in the socialist system as well (Hegedüs–Márkus 1965). Political reprisals were launched against Hegedüs for his critical works – partly because of his participation in the discussion about alienation and partly because of his reform views. Consequently, in 1966, Hegedüs was removed as editor of the prominent social science journal of the time, *Valóság* [Reality], and was forced to resign as Head of the Sociology Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) in 1968.

19 Departing from the division of labour theory, Zsuzsa Ferge created seven groups based on the type of work, according to property, power, knowledge, systematicity of participation in the division of labour, the agricultural character, or the physical or intellectual character of the work, and the subject of work.

Repression and Institutionalization of Hungarian Sociology (1973–1989)

Although in 1969 a new economic mechanism was introduced (not in its original form but with many compromises), the Hungarian participation in the suppression of the revolution in Czechoslovakia convinced even the most optimistic reformers that they could not count on considerable changes in the Soviet sphere. A gradual shift to the left marked the era and also influenced the situation of sociology. After 1968, a two-way process started. On the one hand, on a personal level, there was an intensification of reprisals against the representatives of the critical line of thinking. On the other hand, the pace of institutionalization accelerated, with individuals willing to compromise with the state power.

On a personal level, those against sending troops to Czechoslovakia (the ones who signed a protest in the town of Korčula, Yugoslavia, i.e. members of the Budapest School and students of György Lukács, except for Hegedüs) were “punished” only later, in 1973 (after György Lukács’s death). András Hegedüs, János Kis, and Mihály Vajda – who were party members – were expelled from the Party, while Ágnes Heller, Mária Márkus, György Márkus, and György Bence lost their jobs. Another indication of the conservative turn was the fact that Iván Szelényi and György Konrád were arrested because of their jointly authored book *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*. The book’s theoretical basis was Marxism, yet it provided a critical assessment of the traditional Marxist concept of “class”. In 1974, both authors were offered the possibility to leave the country.²⁰

At the same time, at the institutional level, progress was impressive during this period. In 1966, under the leadership of Sándor Lakatos, the Social Sciences Institute of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (MSZMP) was founded in order to counterbalance the monopoly of the Sociological Research Group of the HAS. The main task of the Institute was to provide theoretical justification for the Party’s ideology. Nonetheless, quite surprisingly, the Institute also provided a place for discussions and presentations, even though its director was a dogmatic hardliner.²¹ In 1968, the Sociology Research Group

20 The thesis of the book was that within the state-socialist system the members of the intelligentsia, which included bureaucrats, technocrats, and humanist intellectuals, organized themselves into a class and used their knowledge to promote their class interests in the process of the redistribution of power and goods (Konrád–Szelényi 1989). It is interesting to note that, just as Zsuzsa Ferge, the authors underscored the increasing importance of cultural capital in state socialism through an analysis of inequality in society, yet, while Ferge threw away the Marxist concept of class by introducing that of work types, Konrád and Szelényi created the new, revisionist concept of the class of intellectuals.

21 As an example of the development of Hungarian sociology, a series of courses organized by the Institute can be mentioned, in which Zsuzsa Ferge, Kálmán Kulcsár, Iván Szelényi, Ferenc Pataki, and Tibor Huszár gave lectures on classical works of sociology by E. Durkheim, Max Weber, R. K. Merton, W. Mills, and György Lukács, which, given the exceptional situation of the Institute, became accessible to a limited audience in Hungary, too.

of the HAS became an independent research institute as Sociology Research Institute of the HAS, headed by Kálmán Kulcsár. By 1972, the Institute had grown to have 28 researchers supported by 17 administrative and technical assistants. On 1 January 1969, the Mass Communication Research Centre was established at the Hungarian Radio and Television under the leadership of Tamás Szecskő. The responsibilities of the Centre included research on the measurement of audience reception of radio and television programmes and the recording of various public opinion polls. In 1970, the Department of Social Statistics was founded in the Central Institute for Statistics (KSH), under the direction of István Huszár with the task to provide information in general about social processes by collecting data in specific fields. The problems studied in the Department included social mobility, social stratification, housing conditions, lifestyle, poverty, the situation of the Gypsies, and deviance (such as alcoholism and suicide).²²

In 1971, the first academic department of sociology was established at the Faculty of Humanities of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE).²³ The first head of the department was Tibor Huszár, who had studied at the Lenin Institute in Moscow before becoming a lecturer at the Department of Philosophy of ELTE. In 1969, Huszár was commissioned to found the Department of Sociology. His personal influence determined the development of the Department and later of the whole Institute of Sociology. Because of his connections in the Central Committee, Huszár succeeded in maintaining a delicate balance between restrictions and opportunities, between what was forbidden and what was allowed or tolerated. The department's tasks included not only pedagogical ones (such as the publication of handbooks and educational auxiliary materials or the development of a curriculum) but also research: first as part of a research project on the intelligentsia, and then, in 1973, two nation-wide surveys were carried out on the social situation of lawyers and doctors.

Sociology, the periodical of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, was first published in 1972 (from 1991 onwards, it has been published by the Hungarian Association of Sociology under the title *Sociology Review*), and the teaching of sociology began step by step at some universities in the country.

The Hungarian Association of Sociology²⁴ was founded relatively late, only in 1978, and its first president was Sándor Szalai. With this, sociology achieved a

22 In 1975, István Huszár was "sent" from the CIS over to the National Planning Institute, and the Department was closed in September 1978, while some of the subordinated departments were reassigned to different departments of the Institute and to the Institute for Research of Population Sciences.

23 The Department started at first with 10-15 undergraduates, and their number grew steadily. In 1983, the Department was transformed into an independent institute in which sociology, social history, social psychology, and methodology formed separate departments. After 1987, the Institute offered programmes also in social politics and social work.

24 The number of participants was limited to 99 persons for, according to a police rule, people had to ask for special permission to gather in the case of meetings of 100 persons and over.

full institutional force, and all the necessary elements of the infrastructure were in place for the study of sociology. Naturally, until the end of the 1980s, the Party maintained its control in personal matters (number of employees, confirmation of hirings, etc.), and, since independent research grants were almost totally missing, research relied financially on organizations belonging to the state and the Party.

In the 1970s, a new generation appeared in Hungarian sociology, which further promoted the professionalization of the discipline. Although it cannot yet be considered a “professional generation”, its members entered the field through a deliberate choice of career. Their task was not to create anymore but to ensure the operation of the new discipline. Professionalization, which began in the 1970s, entailed the import of theoretical and methodological results of work done in the West, rather than the development of an independent and specifically “Hungarian” sociology. Thus, as already noted above, Bourdieu’s ideas dominated in Zsuzsa Ferge’s research, the critical theories of the Frankfurt school appeared in Zolt Papp’s works, and theories of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber were very popular in sociological analyses throughout the 1970s. In order to render classic sociological works more accessible to the Hungarian public, Gondolat Publishing House published a series called *Sociological Library through the 1970s and 1980s*, including works by Herbert Marcuse, Max Weber, George Simmel, Ferdinand Tönnies, Robert Merton, and Herbert Mead in Hungarian translations.

The increasingly professional character of sociological literature in the 1980s – the use of specific terminology and systems of measurement – made sociological works difficult to understand and largely inaccessible to the broader public. Sociology, which hitherto provided a language for discussion about society and made the exchange of social experiences possible (Kuczi 1991), now became increasingly closed, staying within the confines of its own professional vocabulary. Alongside this process, difficult methodical (statistical and mathematical) procedures gained considerable impetus in sociology, the results of which were meaningful only for a handful of professionals. Although empirical research had been present from the very beginning in Hungarian sociology, in accordance with international tendencies, sociologists were doing research in this period in ever-more systematic ways and in increasingly smaller fields, dealing with specific problems instead of the overall social issues. Thus, research areas that were hardly separable in the 1960s became separate fields of sociology by the 1980s with their own methodology, technical literature, and dedicated research groups.

Changes in the discipline during the 1970s, its professionalization, and broader political changes led to a decline in the public role of sociology. The classical themes of sociology, such as social inequality and the analysis of social structures, were less apt to provide answers to the challenges of the 1980s compared to economics and political science.

Conclusions

The history of sociology in Hungary between 1948 and 1989 cannot be described as a history of one immanent or internal development, following the principles of the discipline, even though what we have seen unfold in this chronological sketch is the image of a gradually institutionalized and professionalized discipline.

The institutionalization of sociology highlights the growing importance of scientific and professional knowledge and expertise during the consolidation of the Kádár regime in the 1960s and the fact that in many cases the representatives of the system of the party-state and science supported each other's goals in both latent and manifest ways. Processes of consolidation contributed to the development of autonomy in the various professional and scientific fields and allowed for the demarcation of boundaries where professional competences became an increasingly important resource. New possibilities were opened up by the various contradictions between knowledge and power, obedience and professional ethics. It could be said that the communist leadership in Hungary chose the path of “domesticating” sociology rather than the eradication of sociology (Mink 2017: 23).

Despite the various difficulties, a considerable development took place in the field of sociology in the 1960s: the discipline justified its existence, achieved the recognition of its professional competence, and legitimized the theory of a social system divided on the basis of the division of labour, a new reality whose ground was no longer ideological. The professionalization of Hungarian sociology and its integration into the world of international scientific research could not have occurred without the work done in this period.

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