

Book Review. Székedi Levente's *Limitele supraviețuirii: Sociologia maghiară din Transilvania după 1945*

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Abstract

The recent publication of the volume *Limitele supraviețuirii. Sociologia maghiară din Transilvania după 1945* [The Limits of Survival: Hungarian Sociology in Transylvania After 1945], signed by Székedi Levente, is a notable contribution to the study of the Transylvanian Hungarian sociology, the author's playground being, for the time being, little frequented by other researchers. The analysis of the post-1945 period, made "on the grassroots," from the perspective of survival, focusing on sociologists such as József Venczel or Lajos Jordáky, as well as other intellectuals, makes the reader part of a stage of adaptation and transformation of the Transylvanian Hungarian sociology in the context of an austere regime. After 1948, when sociology was eliminated as a science, we are the spectators of a long process of sociologists' resistance and disguise of sociological research, under the umbrella of institutions other than sociological ones. The "escape directions" covered areas such as: political economy, folklore, history, social history, linguistics. The reappearance of *Korunk* magazine in 1957 led "cautiously" to the rehabilitation of sociology in the Hungarian culture in Romania. The author of the volume emphasizes the importance of the magazine's editor-in-chief, Professor Ernő Gáll, in this whole process of re-establishing sociology and the Gusti School, analyzing the first articles, true professions of faith that stage the new action plans and research. The volume *Limitele supraviețuirii. Sociologia maghiară din Transilvania după 1945* is about the Hungarian sociology of Transylvania in the complicated historical chapters of the period after August 23rd, 1944, for two decades, while at the same time frankly addressing the situation of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. In this sense, it is worth mentioning the multidisciplinary and dynamic character of the work, necessary for any effort of political, historical, and sociological understanding of that era.

Keywords: The Gusti School, survival, escape directions, Hungarian sociology, Ernő Gáll

In the volume *Limitele supraviețuirii. Sociologia maghiară din Transilvania după 1945* published at the publishing house of the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, in Cluj-Napoca in 2021, Székedi Levente proposes a novel approach to the history of the Hungarian sociology in Romania, a constituent part of the Romanian sociology, in the period after the end of the World War II. From the very beginning, the author informs us that he intended to prove “the existence of the Hungarian sociology or the Hungarian sociological thinking in Romania as a kind of subset of the Romanian sociology, attributing a certain coherence and continuity to a semi-institutionalized presence” (p. 19). In literature, there are “relatively few references to the Hungarian authors in Romania or to their texts published in Hungarian” (p. 17), a fact that gives the author the opportunity to cover this shortcoming, his book offering us very useful data and information about the evolution of the Hungarian sociology after 1945.

The research hypotheses are clearly defined, emphasizing that the scope of the Hungarian sociology in Romania is similar to the scope of the Romanian sociology and the role played by the cohabiting nationalities. Also, a special research direction is represented by the village, which is a current research topic and represents the umbrella for putting forth the ideas of the Gusti School, through publishing the texts in the Hungarian language. The volume was built on the basis of articles and essays from the *Világosság* Daily Newspaper, the *Utunk* Magazine, the *Korunk* Magazine, the *Művelődési Útmutató* Magazine, the *Lupta de clasă* Magazine, the *Probleme economice* Journal, the *Valóság* Magazine, analyzed from two points of view: as social documents containing reports on certain scientific research and events, and as constitutive elements of the rehabilitation speech of the Hungarian sociology in Romania.

From the chapter “Sociologia maghiară din România după cel de-al Doilea Război Mondial—Tranziția spre comunism (1945–1947)” [The Hungarian Sociology in Romania after World War II—The Transition to Communism (1945–1947)] we note the important moments of the Hungarian sociology after the end of World War II. The establishment of a new Hungarian University, which bore the name of János Bolyai since 1946, the activity of the two research institutes—the Transylvanian Museum Society and the Transylvanian Scientific Institute, permanently disbanded at the beginning of 1950—the practice of social sciences by the specialists working within the “Bolyai” University or affiliated to the Transylvanian Scientific Institute and, last but not least, the Romanian–Hungarian scientific collaboration as a leitmotif of that time, represent some points that the author pursues in this part of his book. It is emphasized the role that the *Utunk* magazine from Cluj had in this “grace period,” which launched a special column for the promotion of rapprochement between peoples,

named “We live together,” and for the promotion of the idea of establishing a Romanian–Hungarian research institute with the help of the Ministry of Minority Nationalities, led by a former member of the Gusti School, Gheorghe Vlădescu-Răcoasa; and for the organization of the “Apáczai Csere János” Academy, which organized conferences on ideological themes (cohabitation of the peoples of Transylvania, the relationship between the proletariat and the intellectuals, Lenin’s teachings). The Academy “also organized some conferences with less ideological themes, such as the tasks of public education or the legacy of the humanist scholar János Apáczai Csere” (p. 38).

Regarding the redefinition of the role of sociology, Székedi Levente mentioned authors who advocated the introduction of sociology in school curriculum, one of them being Lajos Jordáky, who founded the Institute of Social Sciences of the “Bolyai” University and coordinated the two series of the University’s social sciences journal, and who, in an article from the fall of 1946, “presents himself as an ardent promoter for the teaching of social sciences” (p. 39). In this part of the book, some sociological surveys are listed, whereby the Hungarian researchers focused on the urban environment (mini questionnaire from the State Gymnasium for Girls in Cluj, with questions that had political overtones or sociological research carried out among graduate students, the questionnaire being filled in by 1229 students from the final years, with subjects selected from 48 secondary schools, with teaching in Hungarian language).

Obviously, all social research during the transition to communism was directed at the proletariat, the new ruling class. Many sociological texts published between 1945 and 1947 processed the data gathered in previous years, an example being the monographic research in Unguraş, coordinated by József Venczel, whose data were partially processed. Sociologist József Venczel was arrested in early 1947 and,

even though he was released after a few months—he never returned to the chair. His chair was also abolished in the autumn of 1947, just as it had happened in the case of the other promoter of sociology at the “Bolyai” University, Lajos Jordáky. (p. 48)

A rather difficult period for researchers and teachers followed, who had to find survival options both personally and professionally.

The author doesn’t focus on all members of the Gusti School, this is not a desideratum of the present volume. However, it should be emphasized that everywhere the situation of the sociologist was increasingly problematic. The author’s exposition must be understood in the broader context of repressive administrative measures, arrests, suspension of some publications, and abolition of sociology departments. It should be mentioned

that an important part of Gusti's collaborators suffered. Dimitrie Gusti had his pension withdrawn and was banished from his home. After 1948, the fate of the Gusti School worsened even more. Mircea Vulcănescu, Victor Rădulescu-Pogoneanu, Anton Golopenția, Traian Herseni, Ernest Bernea, Octavian Neamțu, Harry Brauner, Lena Constante, George Reteganu were detained. The first three of them died in detention. The others served sentences of different duration, and most were rehabilitated only in the 60s.

At all university levels and specializations, Marxist–Leninist disciplines are introduced, as well as the Russian language that “helps to assimilate ‘the cultural and ideological aid’ coming from the Soviet Union” (p. 53), the scientific journals must conform to ideological guidelines, such as the case of *Utunk* magazine, which was indicated to fight combatively and persistently against cosmopolitanism, separatism, nationalism (p. 54). Either we wanted or not, we witnessed a historical process of disintegration of a discipline; in order to prove that the sociological vision and thinking resisted despite the massive purges, Székedi turns to the analysis of some Hungarian scientific publications in Romania from 1948–1955 and finds that the sociology escaped in so-called “escape” directions (branches), on areas such as: political economy (economic monographs, regional development research, substantiation of industrialization decisions, cooperativization process), folkloristics (campaigns for selection of folk art, research for documentation of folk art and music, selection of songs and melodies), history (history in terms of coexistence of peoples, workers’ movements, history of communism, peasant struggle, peasant revolts and wars, revolutions and other liberation struggles, life of revolutionaries, of leaders of the nation, life of “progressive” personalities, economic history (especially for documenting the class struggle in capitalism), social history (customs from Szekler villages, etc.), linguistics (dialectology, intercultural influences in spoken language) (p. 61).

The chapter entitled “From ‘Marxist sociology’ to ‘concrete sociological research’ (1955–1964)” describes the attempts to reconstruct sociology starting from the events in the Soviet Union, where an “engineering sociology” is proposed (p. 83) and the participation in the World Congress of Sociology in Amsterdam is prepared. In Poland, J. Chalasinsk publishes studies condemning dogmatism, and in Hungary, discussion of a possible re-institutionalization of sociology took places in 1956, postponed because of the Hungarian Revolution. In the case of Romania, the author points out the appearance of the *Korunk* magazine in Cluj in 1957, which held a key role in the rehabilitation of Hungarian sociology in our country. In that context, it’s worth noting the ways in which *Korunk* succeeded in this aspect: the editors were consistent in publishing the writings of Romanian personalities—important Romanian sociologists, such as Henri Stahl, Traian Herseni, Ion Aluăș—

and there were presentations of social problems including the theme of the Romanian village and the presentation of the results of Dimitrie Gusti's monographic sociology.

The magazine played an important role in the rehabilitation of the Romanian sociology and in the import of theoretical concepts and methodological solutions from "bourgeois sociology" and it was one of the first publications in Romania to advocate for the (critical) re-valorization of the Gusti School's heritage. (Ernő Gáll in 1957, as qtd by Székedi, p. 87)

The year 1955 brings positive changes for the academic community of Cluj: in the process of pre-institutionalization of sociology, we point out the organization of public events and lectures, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of universities, as well as the release of a group of intellectuals and academics purged in 1949–1952: university professors Lajos Jordáky, János Demeter and Edgár Balogh and Lajos Csörgör, former rector of the Institute of Medicine and Pharmacy of Târgu-Mureș (p. 96).

In the chapter on the relaunch of the *Korunk* magazine, Székedi Levente reviews several articles, among which the following are worth mentioning: "Társadalmi valóság és társadalomkutatás" [Social reality and social research], by Ernő Gáll and the editorial of Edgár Balogh, a programmatic essay "including the function of reconnecting the magazine to the tradition created by Gábor Gaál, the last editor-in-chief of the magazine in the interwar period" (p. 127). Given the scale of the description of the Gusti School activity, the author notes that "the text is an important milestone in the rehabilitation process of the Romanian sociological tradition" (p. 131). In the same note, of rehabilitation of the Romanian interwar sociology, the author of the volume speaks about "saving the Gusti School heritage ... in an extensive critical volume on the history of Romanian sociology, a book published in Hungarian and Romanian languages" (p. 133).

The way which the members of the Gusti School survived, their projects and actions after the end of the World War II, are not in this case an innovation in itself, this being characteristic of other volumes such as *Condamnare, marginalizare și supraviețuire în regimul comunist. Școala gustiană după 23 august 1944* [Condemnation, marginalization and survival in the communist regime. Gustian school after August 23, 1944], a book published in 2021 under the coordination of Zoltán Rostás. In fact, in this volume, Székedi Levente also signs an important article about how the so-called "escapes of sociology" were carried out, what methods were used, bringing arguments regarding the sociological research in *Utunk* or in other Hungarian-language publications—real survival strategies of a forbidden discipline.

On the other hand, the analysis of the Hungarian sociology in Romania in the first post-war decades, carried out at the grassroots, based on the discursive analysis of the texts published in the Hungarian-language periodicals and in other sources of social history (archives, memoirs, oral history interviews), as a place for the development of survival strategies, represents a notable intention that Székedi Levente takes advantage of from the perspective of the Hungarian sociology identity in Romania as an integral part of the "Romanian scientific world." *Limitele supraviețuirii. Sociologia maghiară din Transilvania după 1945* is a book through which we understand once more the indissoluble connection between the Hungarian sociology in the country and the Romanian sociology, materialized in joint plans and actions, in collaborations that got stucked due to political constraints.

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