



REVIEW: VERA SZABARI, ED. (DISZ) KONTINUITÁSOK. A MAGYAR SZOCIOLÓGIA 1960 ÉS 2010 KÖZÖTT

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Abstract: (Disz)kontinuitas. A magyar szociológia 1960 és 2010 között [(Dis)continuities. Hungarian Sociology between 1960 and 2010], edited by Vera Szabari, proves that, at least in Central and Eastern Europe, it is both meaningless and impossible to study the history of sociology in isolation, without the political and historical context. The main argument in favor of this claim is the first article, written by the editor, which breaks down Hungarian (by which is meant Hungarian in Hungary) sociology into its phases, and these phases are all linked to the political and historical changes that have shaped the history of Hungary in the 20th century. Keywords: history of sociology, Hungary, the communist period.

Citation suggestion: Telegdy, Balázs. „REVIEW: Vera Szabari, ed. (Disz)kontinuitások. A Magyar Szociológia 1960 és 2010 között”. *Transilvania*, no. 1-2 (2022): 141-142.
<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2022.01-02.20>.



(Disz)kontinuitas. A magyar szociológia 1960 és 2010 között [(Dis)continuities. Hungarian Sociology between 1960 and 2010], edited by Vera Szabari, proves that, at least in Central and Eastern Europe, it is both meaningless and impossible to study the history of sociology in isolation, without the political and historical context. The main argument in favor of this claim is the first article, written by the editor, which breaks down Hungarian (by which is meant Hungarian in Hungary) sociology into its phases, and these phases are all linked to the political and historical changes that have shaped the history of Hungary in the 20th century. This kind of political and economic ‘vulnerability’ of sociology is not new to those interested in the history of sociology, because when reading the book edited by Szabari, the reader from Transylvania, for example, will inevitably feel compelled to draw parallels with the history of Romanian sociology, for instance, which is characterized by the same vulnerabilities.

Already in the introduction, the narrative of discontinuity appears, which allows us to grasp the decisive moments in the history of sociology in both Hungary and Romania. It seems that discontinuity characterizes the institutional development of sociology, since the broad political context of the 50-year period analyzed did not allow the institutional framework of the pre-World War II period to continue. At the individual level, the narrative of discontinuity is much more nuanced, because,

as some chapters of the book show, the careers of some practitioners were interrupted by confrontation with politics, while others sometimes paused and then resumed over time – either in Hungary or abroad – and there were also those who continued their research uninterrupted for many decades.

This is also confirmed by the fact that the editors consciously followed the triple conceptual framework of heritage, appropriation (imitation was thus modified by the editors) and discovery, elaborated by Kovács (2002).

After an initial introduction to the history of science and institutions, the editor presents some of the authors’ central areas of research that have been decisive for Hungarian sociology during the fifty-year period under analysis. The condensed historical presentation of each topic provides an eloquent portrait of Hungarian sociology, as these chapters cover both the conceptualization of the phenomena under study and the development of conceptual frameworks and their changes over time, as well as methodological developments

The first chapter, written by the editor of the volume, briefly reviews the institutional changes that have accompanied sociology in Hungary from its beginnings to the present day. Szabari sets out to outline the main periods of Hungarian sociology (1900–2010). Reading this article from another country with a partly similar, partly radically different historical background, one can see the fault lines that have

had a similar impact in both countries, as well as those that represent unique patches of color. Suffice it to say, for example, that although sociology as a science emerged in both countries (Hungary and Romania), it was through the democratizing and liberalizing economies of these countries that it emerged as a tool to help these processes, after the First World War, whereas in Hungary sociology was associated with left-wing political ideology and therefore took a back seat in the interwar period. On the other hand, in Romania, it was precisely after the First World War when sociology, which Dimitrie Gusti called the science of the nation, took off, and thus acquired a right-wing overtone. On the contrary, while in Hungary, after the rewriting of the Stalinist principles, an opening up took place that allowed the study of sociology, with the availability of specialists, institutions, and resources, in Romania the opening of the 1960s lasted only for a very short period, after which, in the period marked by the name of Ceaușescu, sociology and sociologists were marginalized again, until 1990 (Larionescu 2007).

In the following, I will briefly describe the chapters of the volume, which will give the reader an insight into the main research themes prevailing in Hungarian sociology during the period of analysis of the volume. Judit Gárdos, “The research of the prejudices”: As prejudice research has accompanied Hungarian sociology and social psychology throughout the years, the author presents in the article the normative character of the results, in addition to the main research fields. Judit Gárdos and Bence Ságvári, “The promise and reality of value research. Research on values”: In this case, too, the authors, in addition to presenting the concrete research results, also discuss the politicized and ideologized nature of the presentation of the results. Róza Vajda, “On the political dimensions of academic representations of Roma”: The author draws attention to the politicized nature of Gypsy/Roma research, as the concept is in itself a political construct. According to the author, Roma research always draws attention to some kind of anomaly, making it particularly suitable for systemic critique. Vera Szabari, “The new ways of modernization. Theories of social structure, research of social strata and mobility”: In addition to the specific research results, the author also points out that it was this research topic which,

in addition to legitimizing sociology, aimed at a critical analysis of the state socialist system and at extending the Marxist social and conceptual framework. Tímea Tibori, “From dream to reality. Lifestyle – theory and practice”: In many cases, lifestyle studies have provided a basis for comparing socialist and capitalist societies, but at the same time Hungarian sociology has introduced significant innovations in this field in terms of research methodology, even in the international arena. Erzsébet Takács, “The possibilities of the sociology of the family in the 1970–1980 period”: Since the sociology of the family is a distinctive and special sociology, the author of this chapter traces the infiltration of typically Western sociological paradigms into Hungarian sociology quite precisely. András Vígvári, “The conceptual history of informality in the Hungarian social sciences”: This chapter is an excellent example of how the socialist nomenclature was also interested in research that investigated social phenomena over which it had no or only indirect control. As a result, the analysis of “second economy” became an important field of research in Hungarian sociology. Ibolya Czibere, “Poverty Studies in Hungary”: This chapter also provides an excellent illustration of how sociology in the socialist period was able to research a phenomenon that was absent from the official discourse of the time. Luca Kristóf and Vera Szabari, “Who are the elites? The possibilities and boundaries of elite research”: The chapter explores the concept in the title from the perspectives of the history of science, politics and research methodology.

These themes, ultimately, are the conceptual history and methodological analysis of the research areas that define the period 1960–2010 in Hungarian sociology. These areas are lifestyles, values, prejudice, stratification, informality, family, elites, poverty and Roma people. Last but not least, the book edited by Vera Szabari would be a good example for other authors or editors from Eastern and Central Europe to come up with a similar work, because in this area of Europe it is important to know the past and thus the tradition of the profession, not that without this knowledge one cannot do sociology, even at the academic level, but I think that it is this knowledge of the history of sociology that distinguishes the technical professional from the real sociologist.

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