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Victor Karády · Péter Tibor Nagy

# Sociology in Hungary

A Social, Political and Institutional History

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Sociology Transformed

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## PREFACE

“Sociology! This was the word synthesizing our endeavors: our belief in the triumphant power of the natural sciences, social research grounded in them and generating a new politics for the happiness of the people” (Litván and Szűcs 1973, vol. 1, 5). Thus Oszkár Jászi, the leader and organizing agent of the ‘first historical workshop of Hungarian sociology’ reflected on the foundation of its journal *Twentieth Century* (*Huszadik század*) in 1900. The famous Society for Social Science (*Társadalomtudományi Társaság*) though initially a mere learned society combined with a circle of social reformers—not unlike the German *Verein für Sozialpolitik*, founded decades earlier in 1873—gave rise to a left radical political current of thought by 1906 and an active party—the Bourgeois Radical Party—by 1914. This turned into the most substantial grouping of intellectuals involved in the October Revolution of 1918 that put an end to the dual Habsburg monarchy. In spite of its strong ideological affiliations with radical movements of social reform and political transformation, the Society for Social Science was a major and authentically local scholarly venture, focused on in-depth study of contemporary Hungarian society.

It was clear that while the Society located itself historically in the international re-foundation movement of the sociological discipline, far from the theorizing French founding fathers in the nineteenth (August Comte, Tocqueville) or even the eighteenth century (Montesquieu) (Aron 1965), it was engaged in empirical research focused on contemporary realities. As such it was hardly a late arrival. The first German

book to include ‘sociology’ in its title—by the Austrian academic Ludwig Gumplowicz—dates, it seems, only from 1883 (Fleck 2016, 15). The German Sociological Association was founded in 1909 by Max Weber, following its Austrian counterpart. Durkheim’s *Année Sociologique* started to be published in 1898. This was a period (1896–1905) when some 40% of studies in the authoritative Parisian organ of French intellectual life, the *Revue Philosophique*, already covered sociological topics, with 48% covering psychological ones (Heilbron 2015, 62).

There was clearly a demand for the kind of social expertise proposed by the founding fathers of the new discipline in the advanced part of the continent. But how could it be realized in Hungary? The temporal parallelism with the West requires explanation. What were the conditions under which an equivalent to the most modern contemporary Western scholarly ventures appeared, developed and achieved—as we shall see—considerable public impact in a country known for its relative under-development in both economic and social terms, given the widespread survival of social relations inherited from feudalism? Where did those clusters of educated people emerge from in their hundreds or even thousands, eager to participate in critical discussions about the state of their society, ready to get involved in painstakingly detailed research to explore it and share the worries and concerns it raised? To understand all this, we must go back to the very foundation of the Hungarian nation state in the nineteenth century in order to summarize the basics of the birth of an ideologically and professionally creative intelligentsia, endowed—much as in France or Germany—with the intellectual tools as well as the autonomy indispensable for the construction of a sociological discipline with local/national roots and preoccupations.

Budapest, Hungary

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