

Autobiographies of Transformation. Lives In Central and Eastern Europe. Edited by Mike F. Keen and Janusz L. Mucha. London and New York: Routledge 2006, pp. 242. ISBN 0-415-37651-3.



The prestigious publishing house Routledge has recently published the last part of a trilogy dealing with the history of sociology in Central-Eastern Europe. In the first part of the series released in 1994, Editors Mike Keen and Janusz Mucha presented the intellectual history of sociology after the World War II, focusing on the period from “1956 thaw” to the fall of the Berlin Wall. In 2003, less than a decade after the publication, comes out another book under the same editorship documenting the transformation period in Central-Eastern Europe on the eve of a new millennium. In the third part we follow the lives of ten representatives of three generations of sociologists, who describe in their autobiographies events of their personal lives as well as those relevant exclusively to their academic work. Due to their purposeful methodological attitude of looking at the systemic transformation from a perspective of personal recollections, the Editors join the long history of biographical method derived from the Chicago School, which became known to Polish sociologists through works by Florian Znaniecki and Józef Chałasiński.

The interesting result of making use of biography is a variety of the authors’ perspectives in depicting changes in the sociological milieu during the transformation. This variety somehow documents directions of research interests of sociology in that part of Europe as well as the generation gap—an “autobiographical memory” so to say. The different languages and ways of perception of reality produce some characteristic perspectives: there is a “feminine”/feminist perspective (Maca Jogan), disciplinary (Władysław Kwaśniewicz, historical (Vera Sparschuh), national (Ladislav Machacek, Karel Turza), personal reflections dating back to academic studies and the first job (Valery Mansurov, Natalia Pohorila) and a professional career perspective (Peter Robert). The cognitive value of these “eyewitness testimonies,” typical to the biographical method, is based on two narration orders which try to describe the uniqueness of the transformation era’s conditions and situations. The first order refers to experiences of the change participants, and the second to their professional role as researchers and “independent” observers of social life.

Having read the whole, it is worth mentioning that until Nikita Khrushchev's breakthrough speech at the XX Congress of CPSU, sociology in Central and Eastern Europe used to be censured and stigmatized as a bourgeois science, which made sociologists adopt various strategies of aligning the autonomy of science with requirements imposed by the political and Party authorities. Reflection on systemic and political meandering of the history of sociology—especially among young students of this branch of science—is a good way of instilling the awareness of complex relations between social sciences and society. Susceptibility to epistemological consequences of the fact that sociology as such, being related to the subjects of its research, constitutes an autonomous subject of social analyses—should be one of elementary attributes of the social researcher. Even though the situation of sociology and sociologists in our part of Europe has undergone radical changes in many dimensions after 1989, more or less covert attempts at political control of research results are an immanent element of this situation.

- Keen Mike F., Mucha Janusz L. (ed.). 1994. *Eastern European in Transformation: The Impact on Sociology*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Keen Mike F., Mucha Janusz L. (ed.). 2003. *Sociology in Central and Eastern Europe: Transformation at the Dawn of a New Millennium*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.
- Keen Mike F., Mucha Janusz L. (ed.). 2006. *Autobiographies of Transformation. Lives in Central and Eastern Europe*. London and New York: Routledge.

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