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Editor's Introduction: Placing Contemporary Czech Sociology in a Historical Context*

"…it is the problem of the writer in the social sphere, if anywhere, not to offer the reader final answers, but rather to move him to thought and—to action" (Masaryk 1970: 231). These are the concluding words of what is probably the first sociological book written by a Czech scholar—Tomáš G. Masaryk's *Suicide and the Meaning of Civilization* (1881). Not only are they a fitting summary of Masaryk's view of the role of the sociologist in society, but they also offer the most succinct explanation of why throughout the 20th century sociology in the Czech lands has always at best been in a precarious position. To be guided by the insights offered by sociological analysis is to be permanently at risk of becoming entangled in conflicts with the political power, and there is hardly any need to remind Polish readers that the realities of power in Central Europe were sometimes extremely harsh.

In his book, Tomáš G. Masaryk attributes the growing incidence of suicide in modern industrializing societies to the spread of "half-education," a concept he used to signify one-sided intellectual training of the mind unaccompanied by the parallel cultivation of a commitment to the shared moral values that could make the sufferings and anguishes of modern life bearable to individuals qua members of a society. With his emphasis on the axiological dimension and the practice-oriented function of sociology, but, above all, with his intense engagement in the politics of his country, for many years Masaryk appeared to be out of step with the triumphant advance of the Weberian doctrine of value-free social science research. Since at the same time, Masaryk frequently expressed his belief that sociology is a system of objective knowledge about society unaffected by subjective concerns, there seemed to exist an obvious contradiction in his thinking, which could have led casual readers of his work to suspect that it was lacking logical consistency and therefore was not worth a deeper study. In fact, Masaryk's work as a sociologist and analyst of social ideas was for decades overshadowed by his extremely successful political career. Something

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like a rediscovery of Masaryk the sociologist occurred in the West in the early 1970's, when his study of the causes of suicide in modern societies was published in English translation, with an introduction by no less a figure than Anthony Giddens (1970). Masaryk's conviction that convergent value orientations are necessary for what he would call "a healthy society," and what social scientists today commonly refer to as "social cohesion," never really became outdated, even if the social contexts it was applied to then and now are dramatically different. But many pages in Masaryk's sociological and political writings can be also seen as early examples of what has of late been identified as "public sociology" (Burawoy 2005). And his analyses of particular social and political problems, frequently followed by proposals for a programmatic solution based on more or less explicitly formulated value orientations, are not far off from the "sociological syllogism" or "sociological ethics" that Piotr Sztompka (2007: 257–59) recently demonstrated to be an integral part of the sociologist's work.

In conformity with his credo, Masaryk very early in his career turned from purely theoretical preoccupations (if he ever had them) to more practical concerns with the political emancipation and social improvement of the Czechs, an area where he was to have phenomenal success, eventually becoming the thrice-elected President of the interwar First Czechoslovak Republic. Significantly, his close collaborator and successor in office Edvard Beneš had also pursued a promising academic career in sociology before turning full time to practical politics. From 1912 Beneš lectured in sociology as a private docent at the Czech-language Charles University in Prague and wrote on such topics as political partisanship or the history of socialism. Yet, however praiseworthy the efforts to unite theory and practice may have been, the fact is that, as major talents abandoned university chairs for political offices, Czech sociology of the early to mid-20th century never produced a personality of the stature of a Florian Znaniecki.

Despite this, the development of Czech sociology after 1918 was rapid and highly productive. The first department of sociology was founded in 1921 at the newly established Masaryk University in Brno, where the most prominent personality and the chair of the department—until it was shut down first by the Nazis in 1939–1945 and then by the Communists in 1949—was Inocenc Arnošt Bláha, a former Catholic seminarian expelled for his reformist convictions, who studied for some time under Émile Durkheim and retained a lifetime interest in issues of social ethics and morality.[1] At the University in Prague, sociology first developed as an autonomous circle within the department of philosophy. The undisputed head of what is sometimes called the "Prague school" of interwar Czech sociology (in contrast to the "Brno school," led by Bláha) was Josef Král, who for many years also held the chair in sociology at Charles University's Faculty of Arts. Král and his associates were partisans of a sociology inclined towards analyzing concrete social problems using quantitative research methods and resulting in practical policy knowledge. While the avowed empirical orientation of the group's members was often not reflected in their work, the Prague sociological circle produced a number of interesting empirical studies, in particular

[1] Bláha is the author of an early sketch of the history of Czech sociology that was published in English in *Social Forces* (Bláha 1930). As is characteristic for Bláha, who was an adoring pupil of Masaryk's, Masaryk and Beneš receive more attention than anyone else.

a unique analysis of the suburbanization of the Prague region (Ullrich 1938). But even such remarkable achievements could not change the fact that on the eve of the Second World War Czech sociology was far from being fully institutionalized. Younger, aspiring sociologists were unable to attain full academic recognition and secure a sustainable position in academia, so they instead had to make ends meet as private docents employed in inferior clerical occupations. This perhaps helps explain why some of them later fully embraced official Marxist ideology and under all circumstances remained loyal to the Communist Party. A good example is the career of Karel Galla, in the 1930's a *Privatdozent* with an interest in rural sociology and politically close to the then powerful right-wing Agrarian party (banned in 1945): in the 1940's he turned to official Marxism which he continued to support in the years of Stalinism and post-Stalinism as well as during the liberalization of 1960's. For his loyalty, he was appointed after the Soviet invasion in 1968 to the highly politicized position of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts in Prague.

After the Second World War the fast march of history did not grant Czech sociology enough time to reconstitute itself. Immediately after the communist takeover in 1948 the discipline was labeled a "bourgeois pseudoscience" and was virtually destroyed. Communism wrought heavy damage on Czech sociology, and the recovery process is long term. Unlike Polish sociology, in the Czech lands the discipline did not have its 1956 or 1980. It did of course have its 1968, the ebullient climax to the social fermentation of previous years, but, simultaneously, a point of relapse into a neo-stalinist system of a more sinister kind than what was found at the time in most other Soviet satellites. The revitalization of Czech sociology began in the mid-1960's, when the first Institute of Sociology was founded under the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and the Czech sociological association was created in response to growing demand from an interested public. But again the time was too short. A major empirical study of the stratification system of Czechoslovak society, conducted under the direction of Pavel Machonin, was completed just in time to escape major interference from the Party's ideological apparatus. Yet, even though the resulting book (Machonin et al. 1969) was published in the then more liberal Slovak capital of Bratislava in 1969, it was immediately banned and removed from all libraries and bookstores. Machonin himself, who played a major role in the reconstitution of Czechoslovak sociology and was an active member of the reform wing of the Communist Party, was purged like hundreds of thousands of other reform-minded Czechoslovak communists, and with a ban imposed on him by the regime, had to work on a poultry farm. The fate of many Czech sociologists was like that of some of the well-known characters in Milan Kundera's novels, with some opting for the exile, while those who stayed, or returned, were expelled from the sociological profession or struggled to survive in marginal and inferior positions. Yet other Czech social scientists, among them Radovan Richta, the author of a concept of the scientific-technical revolution that was very influential in the 1960's, had to make numerous concessions to the regime in order to be able to preserve their position in what was then "normalized" Czech sociology.

The 1960's were also the period when Czech sociology, to the extent unknown to date, began to look to Poland for inspiration. Within a few years a number of

books by Zygmunt Bauman, Adam Schaff, Jan Szczepański, Antonina Kłoskowska and Jerzy J. Wiatr had been translated into Czech or Slovak and became standard reading for two generations of sociology students at Czech universities. Personal contacts were established and leading Polish sociologists frequently spoke at major Czech conferences. But this Czech-Polish synergy was brought to a rapid end after the invasion of 1968.

In the era of "normalization" (1969–1989), Czech social sciences enjoyed the dubious privilege of being subject to close surveillance from the ideological committee of the Communist Party, which remained very vigilant until the late 1980's. Domestic assessments of this period (Musil 2004) register certain advancements in some specific areas—the sociology of ("socialist") lifestyle, quantitative methodology in the official sociology, the sociology of work, interpretative sociology in the semiofficial or unofficial varieties of the discipline, and urban sociology, which found refuge in the neighboring field of urban and regional planning—but overall stagnation prevailed. The Communist Party hermetically sealed Czech academia from the outside and thus severed Czech sociology from vital links to sources of innovation in Western sociology and severely limited contacts with sociologists in other countries of the Eastern bloc. The only Czech translation of a Western author published between 1970 and 1989 was of Parsons' *Societies* in 1971 (a late product of the liberal 1960's that somehow escaped the alert eye of censorship), while most of the translations of Eastern authors were of little value, with a few exceptions, such as Stefan Nowak's *Methodology of Sociological Research* (in 1975).

Czechoslovakia was certainly far from the model of the kind of self-governing republic that Piotr Gliński (2006) aptly analyzes in his study of this concept, which took shape in the intellectual milieu of the first *Solidarność*, and Czech sociology was cut off from any opportunity to exert an influence on wider society. Prominent individuals in the most significant opposition group, Charter 77, were philosophers, writers, actors and theologians, rather than sociologists. Yet, there existed small intellectual groups, hidden, for sure, in the lower echelons of various official academic and social organizations, in which professional sociologists were able to use their specific type of knowledge to analyze the social and political situation of a disintegrating communist country. Throughout the normalization period, and with growing intensity in the second half of the 1980's, various semiofficial circles emerged and conducted analytic and prognostic studies of the most serious problems of the communist economy and society (Machonin 2004), and it is worth noting that some of the sociologists and economists involved in these activities became very influential members of the post-1989 political and economic elites. During the last years of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, the Party's grip over society slightly loosened, and this opened the door for some new and unprecedented phenomena to occur, such as the emergence of the samizdat sociological journal *Sociologický obzor* (edited by Miloslav Petrusek and Josef Alan). Efforts to cultivate contacts with colleagues within at least the communist bloc (most notably Poland and Russia) began to be tolerated again and the hitherto banned sociologists as well as those social scientists of the younger generation who were not willing to compromise their academic integrity by pretending

full loyalty to the official ideology could find more favorable circumstances for their work and in some cases even a position—marginal, for sure—in the official sociological institutions.

National sociologies resemble Tolstoy's marriages: happy ones are in some important respects all more or less the same, but those that are unhappy are each unhappy in their own way. Given that the period since 1989 has by most standards been a happier one, it suffices to say that the restored Czech sociology is becoming increasingly like other mid-sized Western and Central European sociological communities (for an assessment of its developments, see Petrusek 2004). It has resumed the journey repeatedly interrupted in the past, in 1938, 1948 and 1968, while eagerly integrating influences primarily from the West. There is no doubt that among the former communist countries Poland is still the one whose sociology is most attentively followed. However, this is above all true of the Czech reception of the international "celebrities" among Polish authors, such as Bronisław Malinowski, Florian Znaniecki, Zygmunt Bauman and Piotr Sztompka, who are a visible presence in Czech social science teaching and research. Does this state of affairs imply that in order to travel the short distance from Poland to the Czech Republic Polish authors have to take a long detour through the West? The answer seems to be different for different generations. Among sociologists born in the 1930's or the 1940's and trained in sociology during the 1960's there are quite a few examples of those who take an extraordinary interest in the development of Polish sociology, in particular two professors at Charles University in Prague, Jan Sedláček and Miloslav Petrusek, who, from the 1960's to the present day, have translated, prepared for publication and reviewed for different journals an impressive number of works by Polish authors. On the other hand, the students and fresh graduates who grew up in today's era of advanced globalization are, quite naturally, much more cosmopolitan in their tastes, which stretch across various regions of the world. Yet, because of the influence of their teachers, the increasing participation of Polish and Czech scholars in the international exchange of ideas and the many personal and cultural connections that exist between the two countries, it seems very unlikely that the awareness of what is happening in Polish sociology in the Czech social science community would ever fall below the level critical to maintaining a reciprocal flow of influences. This thematic issue is intended to contribute to a fruitful exchange between Polish and Czech sociology, mainly in the opposite direction, bringing several examples of recent work by Czech sociologists to the attention of Polish as well as all other interested readers.

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Ever since its second revival in the 1960's, Czech sociology has been evolving to become a highly differentiated and pluralist research field. However, there are two particular areas where development shows a certain degree of continuity throughout the period stretching from 1960's through two decades of normalization to present, with all the limitations and deformations caused by the dictatorship of the Communist party. One such field is social stratification research, which stood at the center

of the efforts by Machonin's team to acquire a more objective grasp of the state of Czechoslovak society during the period leading up to Prague Spring than that produced by Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. The outcome was a major study of the stratification system in state-socialist Czechoslovakia (Machonin et al. 1969), which was intended to provide the necessary sociological expertise for the broad political reform which was under preparation just as Soviet tanks were about to enter the country and which consequently was never able to materialize. Machonin's team discovered wide-ranging inconsistencies in the social status that were produced by the deforming pressures inherent to the communist system. They showed that significant discrepancies existed between levels of education, occupational status and income and documented a very uneven pattern of access to political power. At the same time, they discovered that the correlation between education and work complexity was rising and interpreted this trend as a sign of a pro-meritocratic shift in the Czechoslovak stratification system. The study also identified segments of the population that were affected more than other social groups by persistent status inconsistencies and consequently had greater motivation to support the reform process (Krejčí, Machonin 1996: 170–84). With the onset of "normalization," the study by Machonin et al. was declared *liber prohibitus*, but the continuing interest of the ruling Party in mapping the evolution of stratification patterns in Czechoslovak society resulted in two larger stratification surveys being conducted, one in 1978 and one in 1984, under close ideological surveillance, and with no outcome comparable to the 1960's project. Thus, it was left to the independent stratification research that was made possible again after 1989 to document the deep changes in the stratification structure that had taken place in the last two decades of communism and especially in the post-communist period. The body of recent Czech social stratification research is vast, and interested readers can find most of the major results of that research published in English in the *Czech Sociological Review* and other international journals. At the forefront of researchers' attention in recent years has been the evolution of elites, with evidence showing, among other things, that the old-new economic elites of the early-to-mid 1990's were mostly replaced in the process of a generational turnover by a new elite, whose significant economic successes are the basis of their strong support for the pro-EU policies of the Czech government (Machonin, Tuček, Nekola 2006). Much attention has also been devoted to the transformation of the Czech education system after 1989 and to mapping the trends in the reproduction of social inequalities within educational institutions. Petr Matějů and collaborators have repeatedly shown that the Czech education system continues to function as a powerful mechanism in the reproduction of social inequalities, and criticized both the elitist bias of the system of secondary education and the persistence of obstacles that limit access to the institutions of tertiary education (e.g. Matějů et al. 2007).

The other significant stream of contemporary research with clearly discernible antecedents in the pre-1989 period is urban and regional sociology. The work of Jiří Musil, which spans a full five decades, provides a remarkable example of non-ideological social science practiced under very adverse circumstances. Very often it was in urban or regional sociology that Czech sociologists were able to find a relatively

safe haven during the normalization period, as the ideological surveillance there was somehow less strict (Musil 2004: 591–93), and, at the same time, this specialization gave them an opportunity to work on problems directly related to social policy. In recent years, urban and regional sociology has produced valuable empirical studies on the variegated development of Czech cities and regions, the practical policy relevance of which is often very high; for example, Illner, Kostelecký, and Patočková (2007) proposed a detailed system of indicators that can be used in the assessment of the performance of regional governments.

Another strand of sociological research that is very deeply rooted in the history of Czech social sciences is sociological theory. Yet, although theory has been evolving for a much longer time period than social stratification and urban sociology, it was precisely social theorizing that the communist period interfered with most seriously. With the exception of the late 1960's, the ideological surveillance of theoretical research was ruthlessly vigilant, and alternative theoretical studies only managed to appear in *samizdat* towards the very end of the communist regime (Petrusek 1986). The resumption of unhindered development in Czech sociological theory after 1989 brought about significant results in the form of book-length studies on the history of classical sociology (Keller 2004) or on conflicting sociological conceptualizations of contemporary society (Petrusek 2006—see the review by Jarosław Kilias in this volume). An example of substantial and still growing bulk of theoretical work developed by Czech authors of various generations and very different axiological standpoints is provided by the research on modernization that appears remarkably successful in straddling the divisions between domestic and international sociology and between theoretical and empirical approaches (see e.g. Arnason 2007).

Naturally, one can point to other important currents in contemporary Czech sociology that build on domestic traditions of some significance, such as sociology of the family or political sociology. Yet, rather than aiming to provide a precise picture of each and every one of them and tracing their historical roots back in time, the contributions presented in this volume were selected in order to demonstrate some interesting post-1989 innovations in Czech sociology and some of its future directions. The papers illustrate the point that, besides the areas in which Czech sociology has been traditionally strong, innovative work is now produced in a broad variety of domains of sociological and interdisciplinary social science research.

Gender studies have been among the most dynamic new disciplines to develop in post-communist Europe after 1989, both because of a large domestic demand and significant external funding. As the axiological structure of European societies in the past forty years undergoes far-reaching transformations, one sphere in which the impact of those changes has been particularly strong is that of the family and partner relations. However, the inertia of traditional gender roles in the family shows that, while values are certainly shifting, not all role patterns are prone to very rapid change. To illustrate this point, Hana Maříková's qualitative study investigates how the decision of Czech fathers to participate in caring for their small children affects their and their partners' identities, and whether or not this decision really represents a step towards greater gender equality, not only in the family, but also in wider society.

The developments that have taken place in the post-communist world provided an extraordinary area of research for economic sociology. It was not just that private property was restored as a fully legitimate social institution and whole economic systems were transformed from the command economy model into free markets. Far-reaching shifts also occurred in patterns of consumption and in the corresponding sphere of consumption-related values and norms. Jiří Večerník analyses the causes and agents of the growth of consumerist expectations in the Czech Republic, documents their evolution with empirical evidence and compares consumption patterns across Central Europe and other EU countries.

Jan Drahoukoupil's contribution, anchored in the young and fresh research stream of "new political economics," is providing a very different, complementary take on the socioeconomic processes under way in the former communist states of Central Europe. Comparing the development of the state capacity in the four Visegrád countries during the transformation period, Drahokoupil sheds light on some factors that explain why each country has taken its own particular path of transition to arrive at very similar outcomes, and in doing so he points to the central role of a specific segment of elites, which he terms the "comprador service sector." This group was the most skilful at mediating between domestic governments and international actors and contributed decisively to the fact that all four V4 states unreservedly embraced neoliberal policies in the late 1990's.

Civil society ranks right next to economy as a social sphere that underwent spectacular transformations after the collapse of communism. Even if the differences between Poland and Czechoslovakia in the extent to which civil society was mobilized in the last decade of the communist regime were huge, the post-1989 developments of their civil societies and non-profit sectors display many parallels. The focus of Radim Marada's article is the tensions and contradictions affecting the identity of the representatives of Czech NGOs who have found themselves under growing pressure to professionalize. Marada demonstrates that the contradictory concepts from which Czech civic activists choose to construct their identities correspond with the codes of un/civility that Jeffrey Alexander pinned down as the defining elements of a discourse characteristic of American civil society.

If there is a branch of sociology that has taken a surprisingly long time to take off in the Czech Republic then it is that of sociological inquiries into the country's own communist past. One exception to this rule is furnished by Jiří Kabele, who, drawing mainly on Czech historical data, shows that communist political systems invented the method of the "hierarchical balancing" of powers to maintain the appearance of socialist legality while at the same time doing away with the fundamental liberal-democratic principle of the division of powers. Introducing the rules of so-called democratic centralism and creating a sophisticated internal structure that copied in detail that of the state and society, communist parties were for a long time able to maintain the loyalty of citizens at the level necessary to preserve their domination.

The snapshot of contemporary Czech sociology that the following pages provide is of necessity a very incomplete one. The editor's wish is that it helps validate the claim that, in the year of the 40th anniversary of the 1968 events that so violently crushed

this field of study, Czech sociology is back in the mainstream of global sociological efforts to better understand and improve our societies.

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