

THE LEGACY OF DIMITRIE GUSTI FOR THE POST-WAR SOCIOLOGY

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The author evaluates the influence of the scientific personality of Dimitrie Gusti on the Romanian sociology and society, in four main aspects. One direction refers to the constitution of sociology as a science in Romania, with international prestige and a broad national involvement. The second direction refers to the creation of sociology as a science of the nation, with the mission of creating self-knowledge in the Romanian society and to further social modernization. This led to a dominantly descriptive and empirical orientation of sociology, based though on a high level theoretical conception. This orientation contributed to the development of the Romanian sociology in the heavily ideological communist period. The third direction of influence refers to the involvement of sociology in social reform, which persisted after 1945. The forth direction refers to the creation of a strong sociological school, which managed to survive the instauration of the communist regime and to create a school modeled on the antebellum achievements.

The outstanding men of science influence the subsequent scientific and social-cultural evolution in various ways. Some influence through the papers they wrote, their life being quickly forgotten after their death, except for the texts remaining after them. Other influence more through their activity of establishing institutions of culture. The influence of other men of science is a combination of the previous two. I think the latter is the case with Dimitrie Gusti. He contributed to the revival of sociology after the war both by his papers and by the late effects of the institutions, culture and sociologic movement that he established.

I would synthesise the legacy of Dimitrie Gusti in four directions.

The first legacy: the revival of sociology in Romania and its endowment with an outstanding scientific, cultural and social prestige, possibly unique worldwide. It is no matter of coincidence that Dimitrie Gusti was elected President of the Romanian Academy. The Bucharest school of sociology established by Dimitrie Gusti was one of the most articulate national sociologies worldwide, among the top 5 countries in Europe, acknowledged as such as shown by the fact that he was commissioned the responsibility of organising the 1939 World Congress of Sociology. The Bucharest school of sociology became a ***national movement*** in Romania. Sociology came forward from, simply, the academic perimeter and encompassed wide segments of population not just among the Romanian intellectuality. The peasants, particularly, were receptive to the sociological action of promoting the village.

The second legacy. Dimitrie Gusti started a direction of development for sociology that proved to be widely accepted even today; beyond the general-universal theoretical and methodological frame, sociology is a national science. Dimitrie Gusti defined sociology as “science of the nation”. Besides the objective of developing the understanding society in general, the vocation of sociology is mainly to be a science of the collective within which it develops. The mission of sociology is to describe systematically the society and its state, thus supporting the plans for national social development. The descriptive function of sociology is much more difficult than that of other curricula whose object are the individual systems, and not the universal classes, such as geography, for instance. Society is a much more complex reality that changes rapidly. Living in concrete social contexts, the collectives are vitally interested in a detailed description of their states and in identifying the directions of change. The sociology promoted by the Gustian school of sociology, although having a top theoretical component, focused on the empiric survey of the Romanian reality. Such an empirical orientation is not a methodological error, labelled with the infamous title of “empirism”, it is rather the answer to a vital requirement of the Romanian society: to know itself. This orientation materialised in the objective of the monographic survey: the object of sociology is the analysis of the “social units”, that have to become the actors of the social change. Dimitrie Gusti dreamed of developing a social map of Romania by producing monographs for all the Romanian villages. It is incorrect to discuss, from the positions of the post-war history, the feasibility and justification of such a large project. In general terms, the option was fully justified by the context of the Romanian society of the first half of the 20th century, a predominant agricultural society struggling to achieve a rapid modernization. Dimitrie Gusti suggested that modernization must not be done by the tough way of the rural capitalism and impoverishment of the peasants that could not be absorbed by industrialization and urbanization, but rather by “promoting the village”, by its gradual modernization both by assimilating the modern agricultural techniques and by the modernization of the social and cultural life, in parallel with the development of industry and towns. The communist party swept brutally this program of development of the Romanian village by its own resources, replacing it with a forced program of cooperativization complemented by the industrialization and urbanization that were to absorb rapidly the surplus of peasants. It was only natural, within this context, that the program of monographic surveys had no more reason. A very important thing remained, however, from this program: beyond the fact that the idea of monograph entered a cone of shadow, the fundamental idea that the central mission of sociology is the empirical survey of society remained. The mission of the Romanian sociology is to become a national movement towards the understanding of the realities of our society.

The orientation of sociology towards the empirical investigation of reality had a massive, two-fold influence on the reconstruction of the Romanian sociology during the hard communist period. First, this empiric orientation provided the re-emerging sociology the opportunity of largely avoiding to be stifled by the officials of the Marxist-Leninist ideology. From the beginning of its revival, the Romanian sociology of the 60s-70s focused on the survey of the actual processes of industrialization and urbanization, on the process of integration of the peasants – forcefully released from a collectivised agriculture – in industry and in the urban environment, on the different disruptive social processes such delinquency. The Romanian school of that period had different topics of study than most of the communist countries. They were enslaved by topics derived from the communist program: homogenisation of the society, promotion of the socialist conscience, cooperativization of the agriculture, development of the socialist way of life promotion of the atheist conscience. This topics, promoted in the beginning by some ideologists, was rapidly replaced by the topics taken from the inter-war tradition. Second, the theoretical obsession that has dominated sociology in the communist countries – clearing the role of sociology within the Marxist-Leninist ideological frame, its relation with the Marxist philosophy, with the scientific socialism, with its basic concepts – was replaced by the empirical orientation of the research. The focus on the exploration of the Romanian reality enabled the new sociology the avoid the obsession of being engaged in dissecting the theoretical-ideological topics of an abstract communist program.

Taking advantage of the ideological option of the Romanian communism – distancing from the internationalism dominated by the Soviets and the national orientation – the Romanian sociology was granted a privileged status. It was allowed to develop a positive attitude towards the tradition of the pre-war Romanian sociology. The papers of Dimitrie Gusti were published. The “valorisation” (the main formulation during that period) of the contribution of the Bucharest school was accepted and even stimulated. But the “valorisation” of the Romanian sociology became a means towards the universal sociology and an additional distancing from Marxism-Leninism. A new question became valid: if the pre-war Romanian sociology is valuable, why shouldn't the pre-war western sociology, an essential source for the Romanian sociology, and the post-war one, be also valuable? In terms of opening towards the universal sociology, Romania was among the top communist countries: at the beginning at the same level with the Polish one, than maintaining, but loosing field in favour of the Magyar sociology after the Romanian sociology was marginalized in 1977. Although under very difficult conditions, the Romanian sociology remained on the third position within the communist system, particularly as topics and opening towards the western sociology.

The school of Dimitrie Gusti was not merely an academic circle, but an inter-academic movement. Due to its prestige, the sociological manner of thought and research diffused towards other social disciplines too. The effort of developing a multi-disciplinary synthesis in the social research generated an enthusiasm hardly to be conceived nowadays. This program remained, however, just a striving, it never turned out into an applied, durable plan. Not just in Romania, but worldwide too, sociology developed separately from other social disciplines, with mutual influences and borrows. It probably was a global logic of science evolution.

Third, Dimitrie Gusti formulated a vocation of our sociology: its commitment to the *reform of the Romanian society*. The key element of his program was the commitment to the social change rather than the descriptive and explanative function. We may ask ourselves whether the commitment of the Bucharest School to the Reform runs against the communist program of change, thus blocking its influence. I think the correct answer is: partially. The communist program focused on a global approach of introducing a pattern of organization "from top to bottom", promoted with political means. The program of the Romanian sociology, taken from the School of Bucharest, was characterised by a "bottom to top" approach, with cultural means of persuasion and spreading of the patterns of modernity developed in the West, of promoting rationality and of focusing on the needs of the people. The reform program, which crystallized quickly, took advantage of the crisis of the communist program and of the period of openness and liberalization of the 60s. Sociology was tolerated and, for a period, even promoted. The evolution towards a personal bureaucratic dictatorship, which started during the early 70s, needed no more modernization, rationalization, therefore sociology. The exclusion of sociology in 1977 was the final act of the process of liberalization.

Finally, Dimitrie Gusti contributed to the revival of sociology by establishing a strong school of sociology. He died in 1955, feeling disappointed, it seems, with the way history took and pessimistic towards the faith of the Romanian sociology. Most of the members of his school survived, however. Some of them spent long years of imprisonment but resumed their activity after being released. Others survived in other institutions going on with their professional activity without stating they are sociologists, but continuing to practice sociology under other denominations accepted ideologically. I might say that the School of Bucharest survived underground continuing its activity in a quite illegal way. They formed survey teams and conducted programs of empirical research according to the pre-war traditional patterns, establishing a new school. They aroused the interest of the young for the Romanian and Western sociology although they were not sociologists.

I think that the current Romanian sociology owes Dimitrie Gusti much more than we might be tempted to think at a superficial reflection.