

Reviews

MACHÁČEK, Ladislav: An Introduction to Youth Sociology

Trnava: UCM 2011. 1st Edition. 181 pp.

The reviewed work is the third author's work in succession, reflecting problems of political and civic participation of the youth in the context of post-socialistic development of the Slovak society. The first publication with a title *Chapters from Youth Sociology* (2002) systematized the theoretical-methodological view of the youth and, at the same time, was based upon the knowledge and findings of some scientific and research projects carried out in the Sociological Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. The second from the series of publications – *An Introduction into Political Sociology of Youth* (2008) – constituted a more exacting study text designated first of all for the study disciplines of sociology, political science, pedagogy and society science, whose task it was to introduce readers in the problems of sociological understanding, perception and description of civic life of young people after 1989. The aim of the third submitted publication was to refer to the selected characteristics of the generation continuity and problem aspects of youth integration in the society in the period of its transformation. In connection with the above-mentioned book series, it is necessary to appreciate the author's effort to fill the empty space in the social-scientific literature about the current youth, and also the thoroughness with which he combines both theoretical and up to now obtained empirical knowledge from this sphere.

In the publication structure, it is possible to identify five thematic scopes represented by its individual chapters. The first one summarizes in detail the development and transformation of sociology in the Czechoslovak context in the post-war period, during normalization, and after 1993. The second chapter is devoted to the sociological research of youth in Slovakia – it deals with its division in periods, and both methodological evaluation and practical penetration in the youth politics. In the third chapter, conditions and processes characterizing the transition of young people from childhood to adulthood with a subsequent description of the phenomenon of citizenship and participation of the youth in the sense of civic society necessities, dealt with in the fourth chapter, are analysed with the use of the modernization theory. The final, fifth chapter evaluates the formation of the state youth politics in Slovakia in the period of 1992 – 2010, and through the sociological viewpoint indicates its distinctiveness, principles and individual levels.

At the beginning of the first chapter, the author – paraphrasing the legacy of ISA president I. Wallerstein about interdisciplinarity – underlines the importance of connection and mutual enrichment mainly in history and

sociology. As a follow-up (both with referring to the importance of measure of personal involvement in the sense of roles of „players“ and „outsiders“), three aspects characterizing distinctiveness of development of sociology in Czechoslovakia in 1959 – 1969 are outlined: absence of experts specialized in history of domestic sociological thinking; prevalence of papers of „players“ of the above-mentioned period in the interpretation of the period development of sociology at present; a marginal position of Bratislava and Slovakia (also) in the development of the Czechoslovak sociology. In the next sub-chapter, methodological orientation, activities of both individual personalities and the so called representatives, and institutionalization of sociology in Slovakia by 1969, as well as the measure of co-operation with both Czech and foreign sociologists are described in detail. The author's notes and commentaries resulting from his personal experience and elucidating the situation are congenial. A large space is devoted to the development of sociology in the period of 1970 – 1989, and a reader can obtain through it a picture of negative aspects of transformation of this science leading to the total performance stagnation and intellectual decline. With a time interval, some positive aspects are identified, for instance establishment of some sociological theories and sociotechnical functions of sociology, space for employment of young graduates of sociological studies, or sporadically introduced innovations of methodology and methods of sociological research are identified.

The process of differentiation of the Slovak sociological community that was caused mainly by the generation grouping striving for both a certain spiritual revival and consistent and critical evaluation of the normalization transformation of sociology is described in the sub-chapter with the title *Pluralisation of Sociology: Anti-totalitarian Orientation (1985 – 1989)*. The author underlines the importance of democratization processes characterizing both the preparation and the course of the II. Congress of Slovak sociologists in the end of September 1989 that confirmed „November 17, 1989 in a seven weeks' time and the velvetiness of the revolutionary system change in the Czechoslovak society“ (p. 19). Subsequently, in the parts describing various groups of sociologists in the role of „players“ of the social change, forming the new shape of the Czech and Slovak co-operation, and the institutional structure of the sociological science in Slovakia, the relation of sociology and society after 1993 is interpreted.

In its first part, the second chapter informs in detail both of the historical-social-political factors dealing with the development of sociological research of the youth in Slovakia, and of public, special and political discussions the research has been methodologically profiled and in which its present institutional roofing has resulted. The author points to the relation of both the youth and education sociology with the then young generation of scientists

(1960s), to the paradoxes of the impact of the normalization process on the sociological research of the youth (sanctions of young scientists on the one hand, and support and formation of specialized working places on the other), and also to the specification of the sociological approach in the interdisciplinary context. In connection with the above-mentioned, the personal and scientific approaches of the author in the initial „direction“ of youth sociology in the sphere of youth research is noticeable. The final sub-chapter clearly summarizes the formation of the European youth politics, the use of knowledge of the sociological youth research after 1989, and the working places where empirical youth research in Slovakia is being carried out. It also offers a summary of journals and electronic sources representing and making available information from youth research.

The other parts of the second chapter explain sociological understanding of the term *youth*, distinctiveness of the process of individualization and social integration of the youth in the present Europe. The author thus offers both sociological and present statistical definitions of the youth, while emphasizing that the sociological view concentrates first of all on the macro-social connections of the transition from childhood to adulthood. In his view, youth sociology has created at present the necessary framework for a complex characteristic of the youth in our transforming society, enabling monitoring of the changes of its social structure, social mobility development, civic participation and political culture development, social situation in specific life periods, socio-pathological phenomena, marginalization problem, etc. In connection with the initiative of creation of collective monographs concerning the European youth, the author critically evaluates their contribution and observes that measurement with classical „mirrors“ does not enable to monitor and comprehend new phenomena. Although these publications bring valuable empirical information and attempts concerning theoretical and methodological reflexions of transition processes, a „solid theory“ misses. Further, the author analyses in individual sub-chapters various studies in the following thematic spheres: deconstruction of youth as a social group, youth as a problem of young women and men, youth life style or a youth scene, youth as a social movement and sub-culture, consumer orientation of the present youth generation, a new generation of youth – seekers of order and hunters of opportunities.

The connection of youth research and youth politics is described by the author in the period prior to the entry of Slovakia in the EU, and after it. He evaluates openly both positive and negative sides of the development and functioning of the state youth politics, activities and initiatives of various subjects, the key analytical documents and their distinctiveness, and the transfer of research results in the social practice is interpreted through concrete examples. The final chapter is irreplaceable by its content and it should become

an „obligatory reading“ for the present researchers (not only sociologists) as it critically indicates the specific features of empirical research of youth in Slovakia (1993 – 2010) which are described by the author as a predominance of exploratory, quantitative and descriptive research. From the point of view of methodological tools, empirically verifiable hypotheses are missing, both validity and reliability are insufficient, a questionnaire technique is dominant, representativity poses a problem, mainly simple statistics is used in elaboration and the rules of generalization are violated, and questionable is also the observance of ethical principles in research.

The content of the third chapter is a theoretical reflexion and interpretation of processes of modernization of the society and individualization of youth through a generation approach on the example of the so-called post-communist youth generation. Both post-modernist and neo-modernist approaches of known authors (Machonin, Keller, Bauman, Beck, Giddens) are compared, and they are followed by characteristics and specifics of modernization of Slovakia. To complete the use of the modernization theory in the explanation of changes in the way of living of youth and the present trends in the sociological theory, the author used the available foreign texts that had been elaborated as an anthology in the Institute of Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in 1995. Interesting are also the other two sub-chapters where the author interprets the results of empirical sociological research aimed at the first generation of Slovak, Czech and Polish post-communist youth, and then comparing the value orientation of the youth prior to 1989, three modernization challenges – those of market economy, civic society, and European integration – are formulated.

The fourth chapter of the reviewed publication is devoted to the civic society and the problems of youth participation, and both theoretical and empirical knowledge from some important research projects carried out at the Institute of Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (R. Roško, J. Stena, M. Čambáliková) are summed up there. Also for a non-professional reader is undoubtedly interesting (and comprehensible) the terminology reflecting the view of youth on the typology of the potential of Slovak citizens through its classification in six categories and their characteristics. An equally important meaning is brought by the final part of this chapter, describing European priorities, spheres and mechanisms of the support of education to active citizenship, their analysis and evaluation in the conditions of Slovakia.

At the first glance, the final chapter of the publication could seem too factographic, and by help of SWOT analysis it summarizes the development of youth politics and work with youth in Slovakia after 1989. However, at the „second glance“, there is a lot of valuable information there that can acquaint a reader with a wider context (connected with the previous chapters), and it is able to evoke the atmosphere of its formation. Despite various problems, the

description of four levels of the state policy concerning the work with youth results (also thanks to the author) in the creation of a law on the work with youth. As mentioned by the author and, at the same time, one of its main „players“, fifteen years of „teaching“ of all partners and seven years of praxis of the state youth policy have been crowned by the relevant law (2008) and by the preparation of the document *The Report on Youth, 2010*. His both theoretical and practical experience is summed up in the typically named chapter *Sociological Distinctiveness, Principles And Levels of Work With Youth*, closing the whole publication, and it can serve to all those working with youth, i.e. they study or work with it within formal or informal education.

The facts presented in this publication enable a reader to obtain a complex view of the problems of youth and its research from the viewpoint of sociology. There are characterized historical connections of the development of youth sociology, its specifics and distinctiveness of youth research, a lot of empirical knowledge and relevant theoretical reflexions, as well as connection with the social-political praxis. Both for a professional reader and the public actively interested in the problems of a young generation, it is an inspiring source of information, and it draws attention to questions aspiring to a deeper study.

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