European University Institute

Department of Political and Social Sciences

The Reform Generation. 1960s' Czechoslovak Sociology in a Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

The thesis deals with the 1960s' sociology in Czechoslovakia, rapidly launched around 1964–1965, and rapidly finished, as a discourse, with the end of the reform era in 1969/1970. The approach is that of disciplinary history, with discipline defined as a set of practices revolving around disciplinary discourse and around institutional settings for teaching, research, and professional organization. Emphasis is put on studying practices, as opposed to the idealist interpretations of science, and on comparative approach, as opposed to the idiographic one. Chapter 2 maps suppression of sociological institutions in post-WWII Soviet Europe, explaining it as a conflict of habituses between the standing 'bourgeois' sociologists and the Stalinists arriving to power. Chapter 3 studies debates on historical materialism and sociology in the Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia as a practice that belonged to the process of establishing the discipline of sociology, and was a good indicator of its progress. Chapter 4 examines the possible continuity with the previous sociological tradition in Czechoslovakia, stating a pronounced discontinuity instead; Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia serve as background cases. Chapter 5 maps the sociologists' attitudes to a neglected research topic (ethnicity), a promoted topic (social structure), and their interaction with the Communist Party headquarters. In result, it describes sociology as a project closely related to the reform Party wing and favoring technocratic experts – like the sociologists themselves. Chapter 6 compares the postwar institutionalization of Czechoslovak sociology with twenty-three other European countries. It identifies three typical obstacles to the process, and proposes six institutionalization types in Europe. The thesis concludes by reviewing the 1960s' Czechoslovak sociology as a project of a particular age cohort, which had entered the political and academic life in the first postwar years, and dominated the discourse until the 1968 Soviet and allied invasion.

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Michael Voříšek studied history and sociology at the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University at Prague, where he graduated in 2000. From 2003, he has been a PhD researcher at EUI. His research interests include comparative history, methodology of historiography, and history of sociology. Voříšek worked, among other things, as a teacher, editor, freelance translator, and freelance researcher. He is currently a market analyst in telecommunications.