

## **Hynek Jeřábek: Paul Felix Lazarsfeld's Research Methodology. Biography. Methods. Famous Projects.**

Charles University in Prague, The Karolinum Press, Prague 2006, 136 pages.

Well-known expert on modern sociological method and the work of P. F. Lazarsfeld – Hynek Jeřábek – has published his latest monograph devoted to Lazarsfeld. The monograph is connected to Jeřábek's other work from previous years and was published in English which gives it the possibility to address a broader expert public.

The author of the introduction, Elisabeth Noelle, a specialist in Lazarsfeld's work, highlights the importance of the monograph which makes Lazarsfeld's research methodology accessible, mainly his pioneering work, such as his research on unemployment. Jeřábek has dedicated himself to the systematic collection and analysis of Lazarsfeld's materials, projects, and notes which attest to Lazarsfeld's personality, life, working style, and, most importantly, his research procedures. It is no accident that Jeřábek dedicates his book to Paul Neurath, thanks to whom the Lazarsfeld's legacy has been preserved and who has established Lazarsfeld's archive in Vienna.

The monograph is divided into three thematically different parts: the first is biographic and chronologically divides the periods of his research career; the second one deals with his methodological innovations; and the third, which is relatively the most comprehensive, represents his most important team research projects. In his conclusion, Jeřábek reviews Lazarsfeld's contribution to the elaboration of sociological research methodology. The valuable and voluminous bibliography of Lazarsfeld as well as the work of his contemporaries and then-contemporary commentators is very enriching.

Precision and consistency in the compiling of Lazarsfeld's bibliography, and the emphasis on his many organisational activities during his work in Vienna and mainly in the USA are characteristic of the first chapter. Jeřábek focused primarily on the professionalism of research in social sciences under the auspices of BASR – The Bureau of Applied Social Research, founded in 1944. In this bureau, P. F. Lazarsfeld together with R. K. Merton undertook several research projects in the field of interpersonal communication. These research projects together with public opinion surveys contributed to a better understanding of social change at that time. Jeřábek praises Lazarsfeld's contribution to the transformation of BASR into educational institution for sociological researchers in the 1950s. From the viewpoint of the history of social research, the author points out the remarkable fact that already in the 1930s, Lazarsfeld developed an overview of the history of sociography as an attachment to his famous study "Marienthal" which he later elaborated in "Notes on the History of Quantification in Sociology: Trends, Sources and Problems" and in other articles and studies that he published in the 1960s. As Jeřábek notes, the core of Lazarsfeld's and his teams' work in the 1960s and 1970s was an applied sociology and its use in various spheres of social praxis. Also in that time, Lazarsfeld studied the development of sociological research and reflected on its new trends which he summarised in another book. It is significant that Jeřábek mentions some critics of Lazarsfeld's methodology. He focuses on three different examples: T. Adorno, who labelled Lazarsfeld's research as "administrative"; Ch. W. Mills, who made Lazarsfeld the main figure of his "abstract empiricism" critique; and finally T. N. Clark, who, many years after Lazarsfeld's death, developed the "Columbia Sociology Machine" critique. In the latter case, as Jeřábek explains, Clark chiefly criticised Lazarsfeld's work-style which, according to Clark, suppressed researchers' individuality. However, this critique, as Jeřábek mentions, contained some personal elements. From all the reaction to this type of critique, Jeřábek considers Merton's and Lazarsfeld's workshop members' replies as the most important. This discussion resulted in the recognition that Lazarsfeld's work-style was team-oriented and thus its results was not possible to ascribe to individual researchers but to the collective as a whole. Therefore, as Jeřábek remarks, it is impossible to separate Lazarsfeld from his research school, from his four research institutes, his workshops, or his colleagues. In the end of this chapter, Jeřábek offers an overview of awards and prizes that Lazarsfeld received throughout his professional career. The reference to Lazarsfeld's bibliography (supposedly the most complete one) by Paul Neurath – the owner of many of Lazarsfeld's manuscripts – is also very informative.

From a methodological perspective, the second chapter, "Paul Lazarsfeld as methodological innovator," is the most significant in a heuristic sense. In nine thematic scopes, Jeřábek explains the chief methodological innovations that make the 1930s sharply different from the era after World War II. He highlights the creation of specific procedures used in interview and in data-gathering (panel analysis, for instance), and new research tools applied in observation methods, in measurement (measuring), and in setting new procedures in data-analysis (e.g. in analysis of latent structures). The author concisely reveals the basis of these procedures, referring to specific research in which these innovations were applied. Specifically, in a reader-friendly manner, he explains every method and research principle from the perspective of practical application. This form of explication gives the text value not only from expert and popular viewpoints, but also didactically. At the same time, Jeřábek highlights the continuous infiltration of these methodological innovations into the methodology of sociological research between the 1930s and 1970s. Lazarsfeld used these principles and methodological tools in his research workshops and at the same time, he made them available to his students and colleagues. The components of this methodological book are in Lazarsfeld's articles, research monographs, reports, and textbooks. Jeřábek considers "The Language of Social Research" to be the most important. The author gives Lazarsfeld credit for a fundamental change in the essence of empirical research and sociological methodology. These innovations presented the core of Lazarsfeld's surveys on market, unemployment and mass media, and later surveys on the research of opinion leaders and interpersonal communication, and finally, surveys on academic freedom in the 1950s and methodological generalisations in the 1960s.

H. Jeřábek enumerates the following key innovations:

1. *Reason Analysis* - a method of decision-making research. This method is considered to be Lazarsfeld's first original contribution to the elaboration of tools for the research of relations between causes and effects – between the reasons and motivations which lead a person to a specific action, decision or deed. As the author himself states, it is an individualised case study of causes and reasons.
2. *Programme Analyser* – a plan of programme evaluation. For the first time, this was used as a tool to record the reactions of an audience to parts of a programme in a radio broadcast. It played an important role in the research “The American Soldier.”
3. *Focused Interview*. By this method Lazarsfeld inspired R. K. Merton to create a second part of the research procedure for a communication study. The rules for the application of this method were tested by several of Lazarsfeld's colleagues. Merton himself was later inspired to discover links between the focus interview and focus group.
4. *Panel Analysis*. This is a method with many comparative advantages, about which Jeřábek refers in detail. At the same time, the author gives an example of its application. The importance and benefits of this tool were proved especially in research based on the repeated observation of identical samples of individuals in different time-periods, e.g. in uncovering the shift in political preferences over time. However, H. Jeřábek points out the fact that the panel method does not exhaust all of the possible applications of studying repeated dynamic changes on the same samples. (p. 43) Therefore, he emphasises the need to use a control group in order to reveal “shifts” through repeated interviewing of the sample in comparison to the control group. Jeřábek divides the procedure into several steps which uncover the circumstances under which the changes happen.
5. *Survey-analysis* and the principles of *Elaboration-model* are considered by Jeřábek to be Lazarsfeld's masterpiece. This research methodology focuses on the determination of causal relations on the basis of survey-analysis. H. Jeřábek emphasises the different possibilities and conditions in comparison to the natural sciences or experimental psychology. He illustrates the procedure, non-experimental in its character, on the model of vote-counting in public-opinion surveys. The interpretation of statistical relations as a distinctive research procedure is crucial. The Elaboration-formula itself represents a specific approach, through which it is possible to indicate and understand not only the basic and fundamental, but also randomly uncovered relations between observed phenomena. There are four variants of this model – replication, explanation, interpretation, and specification. The author clarifies their meanings and strengths. The application of these methods enables the researcher to reveal false correlations, or random linkages that have to be differentiated from the real, causal factors.
6. Jeřábek devotes considerable space to a multidimensional analysis of data – so-called *Latent Structure Analysis (LSA)*. The author finds it interesting that P. F. Lazarsfeld outlined the principles of LSA method long before computers began to be used in sociology. Lazarsfeld developed this method especially for numerical data (both nominal and cardinal indicators). In the USA, the method was used, for instance, for determining the level of ethnocentrism. Jeřábek reconstructs the LSA method in 9 steps, through which he demonstrates the essence of every procedure, illustrated by examples from Lazarsfeld's research. He also compares LSA with other methods of multidimensional analysis and points out initial problems with its application that were later eliminated by the usage of computers and by the creation of a practical design for the LSA model.
7. *Mathematical sociology* is generally considered to be a sub-discipline co-established by P. F. Lazarsfeld in the 1950s. Jeřábek refers to several important works from this area. He puts the biggest emphasis on the fact that Lazarsfeld presented the first model for a mathematical estimation of quantitative multidimensional data gained from a panel analysis.

In the final parts of the chapter, Jeřábek highlights the contribution of Lazarsfeld's books, “The Language of Social Research,” “Méthodes de la sociologie,” in which he developed an analytical paradigm, and “The Academic Mind,” where he applied so-called contextual analysis. The author also mentions all of the methodological “details” which can be traced to Lazarsfeld's work and which represent smaller innovations. (See p. 63)

The biggest part of Jeřábek's monograph is devoted to research projects known by the informed public, mainly research from 1930s and 1940s, which the author has already examined in his previous studies. (See J. Schenk a kol.: *Návraty k myšlienkovému dedičstvu. Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, Bratislava, 2003*).

He describes the research RAVAG, considered to be the first broadly-framed research project in Central Europe, and the multi-paradigmatic research of the community of unemployed *Marienthal*, providing an idea both of the research procedure and the characteristic of the community itself (deprivation, time-management, or flexibility loss). In *The Princeton Radio Project* and its continuation at Columbia University, one of Lazarsfeld's “specialities” dominates again: the methodology of communication research together with the application of programme analysis and the focus interview. Finally, H. Jeřábek deals with the panel research of voting preferences formation in *The People's Choice: How the Voter makes up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. The author selectively outlines the main contribution of this work in 10 points and characterises its methodological innovations. He deals in a very informative manner with the results, which indicate social differences between voters and their influence on voting preferences. He also addresses election campaigns, election attendance, social determinants conditioning the voter's decision, the mechanism of the change on voting preferences, the role of interpersonal communication in an election campaign, and the specific role of opinion-leaders and the hypothesis of two-level communication flow. Finally, the author focuses on Lazarsfeld's other significant contributions towards the development of sociological research methodology.

This monograph represents a landmark in Jeřábek's long effort in the sphere of Lazarsfeld's research and, more broadly, in the area of the history of empirical sociology and sociological research methodology. It provides an integrated view on an outstanding researcher, pedagogue, and organiser of many sociological research projects in the

20th century. From a contemporary perspective, it represents a challenge to study more deeply the message of authors from the past, because from the perspective of time, it is possible to more successfully avoid the distorted mirrors of then-contemporaries and rivals.

This comprehensive and inspiring work of Hynek Jeřábek can be recommended to the informed public – to researchers, students, sociologists, and other perceptive readers who are interested in how sociology studies and interprets socially important problems.

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