

**Tomáš Katrňák: Odsouzení k manuální práci. Vzdělanostní reprodukce v dělnické rodině (Condemned to Manual Labour. Educational Reproduction in Working-Class Family)**

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Not long ago, the Slovak public was dominated by heated debates, demonstrations and disputes between political parties regarding the payment of tuitions for university studies. Tuitions represent only one part of the school reform (and the reform of the education system). As is usual in Slovakia, the discussion over this reform chiefly centred on its economic aspect. What was certainly missing was a deeper debate on the broader social consequences of the school reform.

This book by the Czech sociologist Tomáš Katrňák can serve as a source of inspiration for that discussion. It fulfils this role even though its primary subject is neither university education, nor the school system, (and) nor even school reform. The central theme of the book is that school and education play a crucial role in the educational reproduction of society. At the same time, they represent a place where social and economic inequalities are reproduced. As the author states: „School is the place where social and economic inequalities transform into educational inequalities and where social background changes into individual merits and individual inequalities.“ (p. 24) The subject of the book is „the ways, by which a workers' family can influence the educational reproduction of its members from one generation to another“. (p. 11) The frame of reference towards the workers' family is the family of university-educated people. Thus, the topics, which usually belong to the sociology of family, education, youth, mobility and social inequalities interlace in this book.

The author presents his conclusions from the beginning. According to him, it is family background that affects educational reproduction to a decisive extent. Comparing the case of workers and university-educated people, family background forms a different approach towards school. Although the author does not underestimate the role of economic inequalities in educational reproduction, he agrees more with those authors who emphasize the crucial role of cultural inequalities. The family background of workers and university-educated people is different due to different life strategies. In order to draw a conclusion, the author used both qualitative and quantitative methods. Although the biggest part of the book is based on qualitative methods (pp. 57-190), the rest of the work is concerned with more than methodology. The text also contains both empirical and theoretical chapters.

In the first chapter, using qualitative methods, the author shows that even in the 1990s, the time of social transformation of Czech society, educational

reproduction based on social background remained relatively unchanged. Referring to other studies, he proves that even the educational reproduction in socialism was not significantly different from the present, nor from western countries at that time. Thus, educational reproduction represents a constant that remains more or less unchanged in spite of substantial social changes. Other explanations are provided in the second chapter through a brief overview of the theories of social reproduction and of research on educational reproduction. Katrňák does not openly declare, which of the theories he prefers. Judging from the text and frequency of certain terms, it is clear that the author prefers the theory of Pierre Bourdieu, which is applied to the analysis and interpretation of empirical data. In the third chapter, which has a more empirical character, the author uses quantitative methods to show that workers have low economic and cultural capital. He tries to explain how this affects their educational reproduction. The author refuses the idea that the deficit of the economic capital directly influences children's capacity at school. Other than a reference to the findings of other researchers (pp. 65-68) in other countries, he does not provide an argument, which would support this interpretation. Instead, the lack of economic capital in these cases indicates a specific life style and specific beliefs of the parents and children, which determine their attitude towards school and education. The motive for such a decision reveals a „right-left continuum“ (p. 35) that the author uses in classifying the theories of social reproduction, though from the perspective of further analysis, this is pointless. The author makes a reference to this continuum only once (p. 153) and in an entirely different context. The author seems to be giving a warning that choosing a certain theory entails a political-ideological label. Contrary to the prevailing effort of scientists to create an impression of value neutrality, it seems that the author has a need to manifest his standpoint. This is a pity since the author has proved his capacity for original and profound analysis regardless of this continuum.

Chapters 4 through 8, which comprise the biggest part of the book, are about qualitative research. The author gives detailed information on the subject, object and aim of the research as well as the method he used. He describes the basic principles of qualitative research, which are based on the presumption that social actors are the experts on their own lives. This part of book is based on twelve unstructured interviews with workers whose parents were workers as well. These interviews were compared with the findings from five interviews with university-educated people from university-educated families. This comparison is important because it is the core of qualitative research. As the author claims, comparison enables one to identify the conceptual frame in which the research is conducted. It clarifies differences and similarities in the data and helps to distinguish patterns from exceptions and sporadic phenomena.

Such a comparison leads the author to state that workers have a free relation to school while university educated people's relation is more cohesive. He claims that we can understand these two types as two different life strategies – material in case of workers and status-oriented in case of university-educated people. The material strategy represents an orientation to work and money and the status orientation to education and social symbols bound with prestige. Since educational reproduction also contains structural differences, due to differences in economic and cultural capital, the author tries to determine whether those differences dictate different behaviour or if behaviour is independent of structural differences. Is a man passive or active in relation to structural differences? Are the different relations and different strategies of workers and university-educated people towards school and education the result of structural differences between them or are they, on the contrary, a reaction to those differences?“ (p. 154) At this point, the author diverges from Bourdieu and joins his critics. Bourdieu supposes that differences in behaviour are the consequences of structural differences, which are determined by differences in economic and cultural capital. Referring to other critics, the author notes that if this was the case, we would have to admit that each social class does not have its own culture. While it is culture itself, or more precisely habitus (i.e. a similar style of thinking, perception of the world, and practices), through which the author, like Bourdieu, defines the classes. (p. 81) This contradiction is not a subject of his reservations. Instead, he is concerned that classes, if not defined by their own culture, represent an „empty space“ similar to Marx's classes, defined only by an unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital. „Man's behaviour would then arise only from his or her social status. Although specific values, attitudes, opinions, life style, and culture in a broader sense would exist, they would not be as strong as the social inequalities by which they were formed.“ (p. 155) In contradiction to this quote, the author claims that each social strata or group has a certain leeway for an active response to structural inequalities. „In this notion, humans are active beings who can perceive and react to their surroundings according to their social status and their perceived chances and opportunities to succeed.“ (p. 156)

This conclusion is based on findings from a qualitative analysis, which the author gained from a comparison of unstructured interviews with members of two social groups. A question arises. Would the author draw the same conclusion if he compared those workers whose fathers were workers as well with those respondents whose fathers were workers but they themselves had accomplished an advance in their educational mobility? Similarly, in the case of the university-educated people, he could compare those who attained the educational level of their fathers with those who did not reach this level and thus represent a downward mobility. Then he could compare the narratives of workers and

university-educated respondents. This is a procedure, which is encouraged by the data used by the author. (p. 28)

Comparing the group of workers and university-educated people concerning the structure of their educational mobility, we see that in the case of workers, there is a bigger share of those who had an upward educational mobility. In case of university-educated people, the share of those who reproduced the educational mobility is almost the same as of those who educationally descended. Only about 40% of university educated people come from a family in which the father had a university education.

In connection with using qualitative data it is necessary to say that the reader does not have a possibility to look at the respondents' narratives as they were recorded. In the text the narratives are already sorted according to topics – categories created by the author on the basis of similarities in the respondents' narratives. Therefore, besides trusting that the author does not present his presumptions as the findings of his qualitative analysis, the reader has no other way to verify the author's interpretation. The fact that the author's findings correspond with the conclusions of other authors (e.g. Lareau) can be a sign that the processes of educational reproduction are universally valid regardless of country and time period but can also be the unintentional penetration of the author's values into his analysis. Something else will puzzle the reader. In his effort to provide exhaustive information on the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research, the author increases this doubt even further. He says: „The most vulnerable part of qualitative analysis is, of course, the researcher himself. It depends only on him how he deals with the interview transcripts, in which way he presents them, and what kind of meta-story, sense, and answer to basic questions he gets.“ (s. 82) The reader's doubts are reinforced when he (or she) reads the note about „grounded theory“ which was fundamental for the author's qualitative analysis. „Some of the principles of grounded theory I have modified, to some I have resigned and, on the contrary, some principles that are not included in grounded theory I have added.“ (p. 81) Which theory did the author use? We could keep our comments about a doubtful reader regarding the applied qualitative analysis to ourselves if the results of the qualitative analysis were not used to prove the basic conclusions of the book. This weakens the plausibility of author's findings.

Katrňák's book can be inspirational in connection to efforts to launch the payment of tuitions for university education in Slovakia, since it could be a stimulus for serious research before and after that change. Although, in the spirit of author's claims, we could expect that tuitions for university education would not significantly change educational reproduction. A comparison of the data might contribute to theoretic knowledge about social reproduction of society.

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