

Linek, Lukáš: Betrayal of the Dream? The Structure and Dynamics of Attitudes toward the Political Regime and its Institutions and their Consequences.

Prague, SLON, 2010, 259 pages.

A recent book from the SLON publisher house will please (not just at home in Czech Republic, but also in Slovakia) all those that follow political attitudes of the public, inquiry about the causes of these gusts and in search for an answer reach for research data with pleasure. Monograph written by a sociologist *Lukáš Linek* could serve as a model, example of „good practice“ or as manual how to develop a solid sociological analysis. Author is systematic and logically advances from difficult theoretical concepts to empirical indicators; he compares the researched phenomena in time and across social groups, dynamics, and structure.

Linek concentrates in his work on a basic research question – what had happened to the Czech society in 1997 and 1998 that led to a decrease in election turnout by 16 percentage points in 2002 and simultaneously to the fact, that KSČM (Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia) received 200 thousand votes more? This basic question is a stepping-stone to an empirically founded analysis aimed at a decade of political development in Czech Republic. Period under research falls into the span from 1996 to 2006. Simultaneously, the year 1996 is „precedes“ the big bang, when in 2006 elections to the senate took place without any direct legacy regarding the opposition treaty.

The book defines and analyses four main dimensions of attitudes of the public toward political regime: legitimacy of the regime, institutional and individual alienation, and political dissatisfaction. It is divided into two sections and ten chapters. In the first chapter, author deals with attitude towards the regime, its institutions and players, their quality and sources. In the second chapter, he describes their consequences on behaviour, namely the electoral behaviour. In the introduction, author clarifies the cause of a turning point in the development of Czech society between 1997 and 1998, when the dream ended of being a „top“ transformer. He identifies three sources leading to the increase in negative evaluation of politics: 1. economic difficulties that had caused the flaw in the myth about smooth transformation and the infallibility of ODS (Civic Democratic Party); 2. scandals related to the financing of political parties and foul privatization (at the end of 1997) and 3. the signing of the so-called „opposition agreement“ between ODS and ČSSD (The Czech Social Democratic Party). Individual affairs had soon subsided, but the consequences were felt for quite a long time.

In the following chapters author devotes himself in detail to the conceptualization of the mentioned four dimensions related to the attitudes toward political regime, he provides the readers with their indicators and outlines consequences (scheme on page 29). Besides, he deals with each dimension separately. To be more precise, he operationalizes them, provides empirical evidence, and puts them back together in the second part of the book, in which results are presented, too. Regarding legitimacy of the regime, he points out the fact that even traditional democracies had experienced a decline in trust during the 70's. The rise in distrust leads to increase in voter shifts, decline in electoral loyalty, decline in thematic voting, increase in repeated

nonparticipation in the elections, thus all phenomena that can be source of unstableness in the political scene. He distinguishes between a normative legitimacy of the regime, that is the consent to the rules of the game (figuratively expressed in a well-known sentence „democracy as the only game in town“) and an instrumental legitimacy, which stands for the assessment of regime's functioning, assessment of its performance. Similarly, we can talk about a normative and social legitimacy. (p. 41-42) Closely related to the latter is David Easton's concept, which distinguishes between a diffuse and a specific support of the political regime and three levels of political objects – political community, regime and authority. Lukáš Linek analyses the mentioned political attitudes also from the angle of their distribution in social groups in a way similar to what we already know from Slovak society, the strongest predictors being the age, education, income, and status, while on the attitudinal level the evaluation of changes is mostly influenced by the evaluation of the communist regime.

The following chapters (No. 4 and 5) analyse institutional and individual alienation from politics. The concept of alienation in politics is closely linked to political efficiency. Author goes back to the Michigan school of voting behaviour. According to its model, an individual feels that political action is or could be of key influence on political processes, and so it makes sense to act, for example by voting. Besides, it distinguishes between inner and outer efficiency, the absence of the former leading to institutional alienation, and absence of the latter individual one. In the chapter on political dissatisfaction, Linek returns to the slump in political satisfaction in Czech society – 1997 witnessed the decrease from one-half to 10 percent! (p. 115)

Second part of the monograph is devoted to consequences of political attitudes and illegitimacy, which manifest themselves mostly in voter turnout. In Czech and similarly in Slovak society and most probably also in other new democracies political dissatisfaction usually does not result in a change of the voted party, but to disregarding the elections, which as a pattern differs from established democracies, in which dissatisfaction leads to voter choosing a different party. (p. 154) Extensive space was given to the issue of party identification, which is “a frame citizens use to selectively perceive and interpret events”. (p. 163) Identification with a party is saturated by social identity, rational and cognitive sources. Even though its slow formation and relative stability have often been highlighted, fast (even accelerated) political development may give rise to “accelerated” identification. Linek shows that “psychological adherence to the party significantly influences the voting itself and its consistency with declared orientation to the party”. (p. 175)

In conclusion, author seeks answer to his rhetorical question – has Czech society experienced a “betrayal of the dream about democracy”? Who betrayed and who was betrayed? We do not learn anything new in this section. At the beginning, new regimes were given high confidence; they embodied an ideal, the denial of preceding rejected regime. What happened afterwards can be considered a “classic conflict of ideal and reality”. Retrospectively, it is clear that idealistic expectations could not even have been lived up to and so people lost their ideals. However, political processes led to sobering. (p. 211) Getting even at the end, author blames politicians and calls the affairs between 1997 and 2000 the “betrayal of the dream” (p. 211), this time without question mark. Reading the analysis and diagnosis of Czech society, it cannot be compared with Slovakia. “Slovak curve” is obviously different even without systemic

comparison. To put it simply, it was more “a wavy line” depending on which crew was in power rather than a slump in virtually all social groups.

Significant strength of the book lies in that author has quality data sets at his disposal. To be more specific, he makes use of three respectable and relevant sources – set of ISSP surveys, three post-election surveys by CSES (1996, 2002 and 2006) and surveys carried out by CVVM (Public Opinion Research Centre) of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Thanks to this, author can afford such “luxury” as to compare empirical consequences of various operationalizations (data by CVVM and CSES) and then draw consequences for theory and further research. Research oriented readers will certainly appreciate appendix with information on analysed data sets including precise wording of key questions and constructions of individual indicators.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat that monograph fulfils the criteria for a quality sociological literature. It is a happy medium between an essayistic, empirically unfounded “story” and an exercise in multivariate statistical methods divorced from reality, which sometimes cannot see social reality with tangible political context for numbers. Linek has it all in just the right amounts. He can only be reproached for a little exaggerated didactic manner; each chapter begins with an account of what it is going to be about and ends with what it was about so including the essence some essays were repeated three times. However, this is marginal. After reading “The Betrayal of the Dream?”, we hope that author has already started working on next decade of political development in Czech society.

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