

**Schenk Juraj et al: Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, Reflections on Legacy of Ideas (Collection of Academic Papers Commemorating His 100th Birthday Anniversary)**

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This book is a remembrance of a distinguished author, famed for his methodology of sociological research, as well as several relevant theoretical concepts which have become an integral part of modern sociology. His 100<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary provided a suitable occasion to remember his life's work, which was why the Chair of Sociology at the Philosophical Faculty of the Comenius University in Bratislava, together with Slovak Sociological Association at the Slovak Academy of Sciences decided to organise a workshop. All papers presented have been published and thus Lazarsfeld's legacy has become more accessible to wider professional public. Authors of the respective papers provide the readers with most significant elements of Lazarsfeld's work.

In the introduction, Juraj Schenk evaluates Lazarsfeld's contribution to the discipline of sociology. He suggests three main points, which initiated the workshop on Lazarsfeld: his methodological line in sociological thinking, which he calls methodologisation of sociology; the paradigmatic dimension of his concept which dominated and provoked many controversial reactions; and last but not least the contacts of our sociology with Lazarsfeld's concept. Schenk emphasises that we are remembering a classical persona of sociological research who introduced a vision of scientific sociology.

The collection consists of six papers. After the introduction Juraj Schenk in his contribution *About the Main Principles of Lazarsfeld's Concept of Methodology* presents these principles and Lazarsfeld's three main approaches with regard to methodology: methodology as a step towards future philosophy of social sciences; methodology as disciplined thinking; and lastly methodology as an analysis and development of specific methods.

Author classifies Lazarsfeld as one of the representatives of American sociology (S. Stouffer, A. Barton, M. Rosenberg, K. R. Merton), who developed methodological positivism and tried to bridge the gap between abstract theory and pure empirical science. He considers Lazarsfeld's methodologisation of sociology as a necessary prerequisite of scientific research. This "scientification" of sociology was meant to serve as an attempt to devise a philosophy of social sciences on the basis of sociology. The unification of social sciences required the construction of a language of social sciences with particular emphasis on method of text explanation (from the particular to the general), as well as the issue of term operationalisation as a key cognitive operation. Author of the paper mentions further development of Lazarsfeld's approach. He points out that A. Hirner's concept of identification of social facts differs from Lazarsfeld's concept of identification of terms chiefly in two areas: operationalisation concentrates on terms, whereas identification is concerned with social fact itself (ontological problem). Also, identification in a wider sense denotes a system of cognitive operations which encompasses internal as well as external identification (the complexity problem).

In following parts J. Schenk analyses Lazarsfeld's understanding of sociology defined as disciplined thinking which cannot be replaced by imagination. He reminds us that Lazarsfeld pays attention even to the issues of sociological theory and its constitution. He goes back to inductive construction of knowledge. The codification of successful and effective approaches needs to be systemised, organised according to the logic of scientific research in social sciences. The author presents his own attitude towards attempts at codification and systematisation of sociological knowledge and claims such strategy seems more suitable for the area of methodology where it has already found many followers thanks to its cumulativeness and usefulness. Lazarsfeld's work is seen by Schenk as that of great merit as foundations facilitated the evolution of sociological research.

*Lazarsfeld's Key Surveys from 1930a and 1940s* are introduced in the second paper by Hynek Jeřábek. In his work Jeřábek concentrates on analyses of Lazarsfeld's work and has written many articles about him. His aim was to present Lazarsfeld's methodological innovations, new hypotheses and core observations. He names four of Lazarsfeld's many surveys: *RAVAG* (1931) – a media survey of Vienna radio listeners, *Marienthal* – multiparadigmatical survey of the unemployed (1933, published 1971), *Princeton Radio Project* (1937) – radio survey and the breakthrough survey *People's Choice* (1940) – survey on the process of evolution of voting preferences during presidential elections.

These four surveys represent Lazarsfeld's modern research of social phenomena. The author points to the use of many reciprocally supplementing research methods, techniques and procedures, which have created conditions necessary to see the substance of a phenomenon. His mathematically-statistical understanding enables a synthetic approach. The result was a sophisticated methodology of research. Of great merit to voters' behaviour research was the method of panel observation, as described by the author. He sets Lazarsfeld and his surveys into the light of good utilisation of methodological mechanisms and theoretically unprecedented findings. He has contributed to the institutionalisation of empirical sociological research as a component of academic sociology and his research strategy *Survey Analysis* is considered the foundation of cumulative construction of sociology.

In chapter *Lazarsfeld's Approach in the Context of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Sociology* Eva Laiferová historically presents Lazarsfeld's work and its assessment as seen through the eyes of other sociologists, historians, critics. Laiferová also points out Lazarsfeld's struggle together with his associates to improve the accuracy of science, sophistication of research methods, precision of scientific language, facilitation of operationalisation and verification of research data. She goes back to thoughts on his methodological positivism and efforts to negotiate the separation of theory and empiricism, to systematisation and generalisation of empirical data, to special philosophy of social sciences. Laiferová describes Lazarsfeld's standard methodological approaches in modern

sociology: the topic setting, clarification of terms, choice and explanation of research techniques and their interdependence, systematisation of empirical data, formalisation of reasoning.

Further on, the author comments on Lazarsfeld from the viewpoint of respected sociologists such as Jahoda – Zeisel (Marienthal survey), Szacki, Merton, Petrussek, Mills, Bauman, Osipov, Efirov (Ferrarotti), Giddens, Charvát, Hirner, Schenk, Jeřábek. She mentions many distinguished sociologists' opinions of Lazarsfeld's theoretical and methodological work which proves that he has significantly influenced the history of world sociology.

Ján Sopóci concentrated on Lazarsfeld's most famous theoretical concept *Two-Step Flow of Communication and Opinion Leaders – Hypotheses 60 Years Later*. He draws on the study *The People's Choice*. He summarises several essential findings – results of Lazarsfeld's empirical surveys. Sopóci emphasises that the two-step flow of communication hypothesis : “information coming from mass media at first get to so called opinion leaders, who then spread these information among people with whom they are in contact and over whom they have influence” was formulated on the basis of three findings: the influence of particular people on the decisions taken by citizens during an election campaign, a rather more intensive exercise of personal influence of certain people and the fact that opinion leaders are much better informed via media. The hypothesis presumed that individuals are more influenced by personal contacts than by the media, thus arousing doubts about the correctness of the mass society concept and leading to its later revision.

According to author, Lazarsfeld's ideas led to surveys which had to be carried out on social groups with real social relationships and links (E. Katz, R. K. Merton). The results of these surveys confirmed and were later added to Lazarsfeld's original findings. They enabled us to find out more about the characteristics of opinion leaders and they confirmed the importance of interpersonal communication. Sopóci states that this theory has become an integral part of American sociological theory of mass communication, the theory of public and public opinion. It has been expanded to a theory of a communication flow with several steps. Although in European sociology this theory was adopted with some reservations, its influence is undeniable. Author speaks about its undisputed theoretically-methodological legacy.

Silvia Capíková in her paper *Criticising Mills's Critique of Paul F. Lazarsfeld* presents arguments in favour of Lazarsfeld's approach. In her introduction she explains the historical context of American sociology as well as Lazarsfeld's relationship with leading sociologists. In particular Mills criticised Lazarsfeld – he published his critique in his work *Sociological Imagination*. Capíková warns that this could be a biased criticism rather than an unprejudiced, objective reflection on his work. Mills' criticism of abstract empiricism in American sociology provoked questions about its definition and cast doubts on the issue whether Lazarsfeld should count towards its representatives. Author provides Mills' definition of abstract empiricism and points out several shortcomings it encompasses. For illustration, she points out that Mills neglected the principle of methodological adequacy, methodological innovation and the level of generalisation applied by Lazarsfeld in his research.

In the discussion Capíková argues that Mills could not differentiate between: scientific and positivistic orientation in sociology, practical way of carrying out empirical surveys and empiricism as satisfaction with simple interpretation and resignation to create higher levels of sociological theory. On the grounds of Mills's argumentation the author expresses doubts about his personal impartiality and puts forward facts which could have contributed to his critical approach. She sees the main differences between both sociologists' approaches to research in different paradigms, Lazarsfeld's scientific and positivistic orientation on one hand and Mills' paradigm of conflict and critical orientation.

In conclusion, Andrej Vallo in his paper *Lazarsfeld's Concept of Analytical, Structural and Global Characteristics* reviews the concept of the characteristics of examined objects. He points out the role of methodologists and the importance of research methods, their use and consequences, quoting Lazarsfeld: „sociology studies man in society, methodology studies sociology at work“. He speaks about Lazarsfeld's specification of understanding of variables in sociological research, which can be of use for practical researchers. He describes and names examples of classification of characteristics of examined objects which can be divided into individual (absolute, relative, comparative, contextual, concerning relationships) and collective characteristics (analytical, structural, global). The chapter ends with a reflection on the relationship between individual and collective characteristics where the latter is defined with respect to individuals. Author concludes that it is necessary to give priority to information about individuals as this data can be further aggregated, which will enable the analysis of advanced units.

The collection represents a mosaic of various viewpoints on Lazarsfeld's work. Respective authors accentuated his methodological ambiguity as well as his efforts to generalise individual findings which went down in history of sociology. The collection summarises interesting points of Lazarsfeld's work which could be of interest for readers. And although sociological research has come a long way since his time, researchers can find inspiration in his work – this publication tries to point out its potential sources.

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