

# Political Power and the Sociological School of Bucharest

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Sociology was purged from the public space and social sciences in 1948, when it disappeared from the Romanian University as a discipline. After 1949, the Stalinist ideologists blamed the Sociological School of Bucharest and its creator, Dimitrie Gusti, that they ignored the rural conflicts and the class struggle of the peasants. The Stalinists claimed that Gusti studied the class conflict from a bourgeois perspective.

In the early 1960s, the political power and the communist ideology reevaluated 'the great scientific patrimony of the Romanian people' and of the fundamental Romanian personalities. Subsequently, in 1965 Dimitrie Gusti was recognized the (back then) merit to have tried to draw Romania closer to the Soviet Union in a time (1932-1933) when he was a state minister in the National Rural Party.

New meanings were attributed to the Sociological School of Bucharest during the 1980s, when the researchers emphasized the 'specific nature of the Romanian sociological concepts'. On the one hand, the Sociological School of Bucharest was accused to have rejected the Marxist-Leninist revolution, but on the other hand it was praised for its 'nationalist tools of sociological analysis'. The ideologists recognized Gusti's merit that as a sociologist and state minister he configured a public education system and resuscitated people's interest for the rural world and for the 'Romanian national culture'.

After the 1989 Romanian Revolution, the sociologists stigmatized the censorship from the '60s and '80s. It was the beginning of a new era, when Dimitrie Gusti was considered a 'great cultural personality' and the previous approaches were denied. The sociologists who wrote about Dimitrie Gusti after 1990 claimed that Gusti ought to be treated as a 'great sociologist, founder of the Sociological School, creator of a sociology system recognized by the worldwide scientific community'.

The hereby study recommends that Dimitrie Gusti ought to be reviewed from an angle which excludes the political judgments. The hypothesis is that each political context determines different theoretical interpretations of one issue, which leads to different types of sociological investigations.

We question the possibility to approach Gusti's political and sociological system within the Max Weber's paradigm that one can research without making political evaluations.

Our study regards the Sociological School of Bucharest and the University as part of the civil society. At the same time, we examine the Sociology Seminar, a laboratory in which experts and clerks were trained to serve the 1918 state. For Gusti, politics means having specialists and technical experts that are educated in the Sociological School of Bucharest: in the Sociology Seminar, the Science and Social Reform Association and the Romanian Social Institute.

In 1910, Gusti was Head of the Sociology, Ethics and Politics Department at the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy, University of Iasi. In his 'Introduction to the Course of History of Greek Philosophy, Ethics and Sociology', he pointed out that:

'Our entire work will be concentrated in a Sociological Seminar, connected to the likewise scientific research institutions from abroad. A sociology seminar as the one I attended during my studies in Germany, where the professor and the students are discussing both issues regarding the special sciences and subjects of high social impact. Let us hope that the future seminars and associations shall fundamentally change the awfully superficial manner in which the Romanian social problems are regarded. It is time that the study of sociological matters is transferred from the Ministries and Parliament Committees to the Universities' (Gusti, *Opere*, 1946, pages 38-47).

This was the first reform scheme for the state and nation. This is the point of view from which we are to explore the relationship and the influence that Gustist intellectuals exercised upon the monarchical regime and vice-versa.

Returning from the PhD he graduated in Germany, Gusti's political ambition was concentrated in the work entitled 'Science of the Nation', a method of using sociology with the purpose to develop the Romanian village and the life status of the peasants. Gusti thought that the Romanian society could have been improved by the means of what he called *social personalities*: specialists, technocrats dealing with social matters.

Empirical research resulted in data that would serve the politicians and political power in implementing the public policies. The point was that the politician should not resort to improvised information anymore; instead he should use scientific solutions. Only by the know-how of the technocrats could the reform be applied. Sociological knowledge was meant to sustain political action.

Gusti invented the public debate structures, undertaken from the Western civil society. In 1918 he established the Association for Study and Social Reform in Romania, in Iasi city, a debate club who reunited intellectuals and experts interested in the institutional development of Romania. This Association set the bases of the Romanian Social Institute, where a series of conferences about the Romanian socio-political status were organized during the 1920s.

Gusti had the skill to attract at these conferences the future elite politicians and bureaucrats, such as Mihail Manoilescu, who became Foreign Affairs Minister. The participants at the Romanian Social Institute conferences were able to deal with social issues and to improve such issues by reforms.

The Sociological School of Bucharest begins its activity in 1925, when a group of seminarists lead by Gusti goes to Goicea Mare, a village in Dolj county.

Due to the fact that in the 1930s Gusti benefited of the financial support of the king Carol the Second, the king became the Honorary President of the Romanian Social Institute.

In 1932-1933, Gusti was named Education, Cults and Arts Minister in the National Peasants Party Government. In 1934 he became the general manager of the Royal Cultural Foundation 'Prince Carol'; it was the year when the students' research teams from the Royal Cultural Foundation merged with the students' teams from the Sociological School of Bucharest.

In the 1920s Gusti was making propaganda for rural research, while in the 1930s he was making propaganda for Carol, praising the monarchy. Whereas Gusti used monarchy and the political elite for financing his social research, Carol and the supporters of the monarchy used Gusti's students' teams for their propaganda and for annihilating their opponents. The royal students' teams led by Gusti served the interests of the monarchy and were in direct competition with the extremist Legionary movement.

By the Social Service Law from 1938, promulgated by king Carol, all students were obliged to work in the villages in order that the peasants' life status improves. No student could have obtained his degree unless he had completed 6 months of voluntary work in the rural area, helping the villagers.

The village work started in the 1920s during the Sociological Seminar extended through the teams of the Royal Cultural Foundation 'Prince Carol' and became compulsory for all students by the means of the Social Service Law. By implementing village work, Gusti not only wanted to mobilize the peasants, but also wished to make the students support the monarchy and reject the extremist Legionary movement.

The Social Service constituted a temporary success, because the extremist Legionaries had infiltrated the students' teams and contaminated Gusti's cultural-political action.

After Romania entered World War II and the Social Service was abolished, Gusti did not have ministerial positions anymore.

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