



Book Review

***Zoltán Rostás: Strada Latina 8. Monografiști și echipieri
gustieni la Fundația Culturală Regală „Principele Carol”***

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Zoltán Rostás's book, titled *8 Latin Str. Gustian Monographers and Team Members at the Royal Cultural Foundation "Prince Charles"* is a mandatory reading for the social science researcher who wants to adequately understand the phenomenon of the Gustian School of Sociology, and an exciting and vivid one for the reader generally interested in Romanian interwar society.

The Gustian School of Sociology is a fascinating phenomenon, especially when it is approached via the "alternative" instruments of oral history, as Zoltán Rostás shows in his books. Beyond the chronological institutional history, whereby we can follow how a project of monographic research and social reform, inspired by professor Gusti's ideas, takes shape, grows and eventually ends, and beyond the organizational approach of the School, whereby we grasp the group's functioning and its relationships with the state and various other institutions, the oral history perspective provides the essential advantage of perceiving the experience of the phenomenon through the testimony of its own members.

The preoccupation that constituted the basis of this research project that encompassed almost two decades was the following: Do we really know everything about the Sociological Monographic School led by Dimitrie Gusti? Gusti's partial recuperation during a period of relative ideological relaxation of the communist regime, and a series of works on the subject, as well as the "homage" approach of the topic, which actually eradicates all its vivid aspects and places it in

the dull insectarium of mythologies and historical ornament setting, gave the impression that nothing new could be written about the Sociological Monographic School.

However, this impression is nothing but false, as the books of interviews with the School's everyday "heroes", published by Rostás, clearly and undeniably show. These conversations started in 1984 – thus, to some extent, "clandestinely", i.e. not meant for academic publishing – with the survivors of a historical period of great ideological and social changes and challenges. The interviews with the great sociologist H. H. Stahl (Rostás, 2000), with the monographers involved in the first period of field research (Rostás, 2003) or with the Gustian School disciples (Rostás, 2006) brought to light life histories that enrich, nuance and open multiple perspectives on the phenomenon itself, as well as on the interwar Romanian society (both rural and urban), on the academic life of the time, etc.

The volume 8 *Latin Street* tackles the period when Gusti's School reached the highest institutionalization degree. If, during the first period, the Gustian sociological monograph was a pioneering endeavor and the stress was especially on sociological research, gradually the emphasis started to be more on "cultural work" or on social "missionarism," in which the voluntary student teams actively intervened in the social life of interwar villages.

More than a "cultural activism" undertaken at random, Gusti's and his collaborators' activities tended to become public service, when the Gustian project turned into a "Social Service" stipulated by law, right before the outbreak of World War II. Briefly, this is the stage when, some of the old members of the Gustian School and new collaborators – now working for the Royal Cultural Foundation "Prince Charles" –, attempted a form of soft social engineering aimed at compensating for the serious social problems confronting Romanian villages. This "experiment", carried out in King's Charles II interwar Romania, was also meant to constitute a means to compete with the Legionary Movement in its quest to attract the youth eager to be valued and involved by the state in the work of "inner edification of Greater Romania."

The volume comprises interviews with key-people who were part of the institutional infrastructure of the Social Service cultural teams, as well as ordinary people, students for whom, at the time, it was mandatory to accomplish this service in one of Professor Dimitrie Gusti's student teams.

References

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