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Péter Miskolczi, Gábor Király

TEACHING SOCIETY? LOOKING FOR NEW WAYS TO TEACH SOCIOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY HUNGARY

ABSTRACT

Sociology's possible roles of producing knowledge and shaping society can suggest several different approaches to teaching. In our article, we conduct a macro-level review of sociology's role in society. We touch upon the issue of value-free sociology (stressing scientific neutrality) and then refer to Burawoy's programme of public sociology (advocating involvement in civil society) and its criticism. We connect this with the Hungarian experience which shows that while sociology was historically involved, to various extents, in shaping society by either legitimating or challenging the status quo, nowadays this function seems to be superfluous for the architects of political power. In such a social context, even the goals of improving students' reflexivity and critical thinking might be seen as a political act.

KEYWORDS: sociology's social role, knowledge production, shaping society, CEE sociology, Hungarian democracy, critical thinking, reflexivity, teaching sociology

Učeča se družba? Iskanje novih načinov poučevanja sociologije v sodobni Madžarski

IZVLEČEK

Iz izhodiščne možnosti sociologije, da proizvaja vednost in oblikuje družbo lahko izhaja vrsta različnih pristopov k poučevanju. V našem prispevku smo opravili pregled vloge sociologije v družbi na makroravni. Dotaknili se bomo vprašanja objektivne sociologije (poudarjanje znanstvene nevtralnosti) ter referirali na Burrawoyev program javne sociologije (ki zagovarja sodelovanje v civilni družbi) in njegovo kritiko. To povežemo z madžarsko izkušnjo, ki pokaže, da se je v zgodovini sociologija do določene mere angažirala v ustvarjanju družbe ali pa tako, da je status quo zagovarjala ali ga izpodbijala, da pa je danes takšno početje arhitektom družbene moči odveč. V takšnem kontekstu so celo cilji razvijati refleksivnost in kritično mišljenje pri študentih lahko videti kot politično dejanje.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: družbena vloga sociologije, proizvodnja vednosti, oblikovanje družbe, madžarska demokracija, kritično mišljenje, refleksivnost, učeča se družba

1 Introduction

The aim of this article is to investigate the roles that sociology can play in society, with special attention to the Hungarian – and to a certain extent, Central-Eastern European (CEE) – experience, and then draw conclusions with regard to *teaching sociology*. In doing so, we also make a connection to the main theme of the November 2015 Conference of the Slovenian Sociological Association, „Sociology between producing knowledge and shaping society"[1]. The choice of the topic is partly based on personal motivations (reflection on our professional roles and identities) and partly on external pressures (pressing questions concerning the role of sociology and the state of Hungarian democracy). We believe that these problems have not been discussed previously in this particular constellation.

The first section of the paper investigates the role of sociology in society on a macro level. Is *studying society* sociology's sole function, or can it possibly have the authority to *drive social change* in a particular direction? What are the possible roles sociology can take up in its relationship with society? In discussing these questions, we visit the debate on value-free sociology, then move on to the programme of public sociology and its critique. By adding the Hungarian (CEE) experience, we highlight that sociology (just as every science) cannot pretend to be completely independent from external social conditions, which also suggests that it has to commit itself to society to a certain extent.

In the second part, we turn our focus to the activity of *teaching sociology* (Halasz and Kaufman 2008; Finkelstein 2009; Rickles et al. 2013). Based on the findings of the first part, we delineate a number of possible directions for teaching (introductory) sociology courses, and discuss the challenges that they face. We present some of the decisions that we have made in our struggles to capture, motivate and develop our student audience while being responsible scholars as well.

2 The role of sociology in society

What is the purpose of sociology? Is there a single, unitary 'sociological ethos'? What is its relation to 'society' at large? All important questions, the answers to which have strong implications concerning the identity and role of the individual sociologist and their everyday activity.

2.1 Can sociology be value-free?

The debate on the possibility of *value-free sociology* concerns the problem of 'moral statements'. Since sociology studies social life, it is inevitable that value judgements and moral issues will fall under its scope. However, it is not at all obvious whether sociology itself can present evaluative, judgemental statements as its (scientific) *findings*. If sociology

1. This article is based on the paper presented at the 'Annual Meeting of the Slovenian Sociological Association 2015 – Sociology between Producing Knowledge and Shaping Society' that was held from 6th to 7th November 2015 in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

can be value-free (or, as some assert, it can be *only* that), then it has no grounds whatsoever to prescribe a direction for shaping society.

Philip Gorski (2013) is a defendant of the value-involved position. He argues from the standpoint of *ethical naturalism*, which states that since human beings will flourish under certain conditions and falter under others, it is *possible to tell what is 'good' for humans from what is 'bad' for them* (Gorski 2013: 543). Moreover, facts and values are not easily separated even philosophically. On the one hand, facts are often *value laden*, being established with the help of 'good' theories or 'the best possible' methods, which inherently carry a value judgement. Conversely, values are also *fact laden*, because they have an 'experiential basis', and we adjust our values on the basis of facts we encounter. Therefore, science is fit to investigate values as well as facts. „The object of these investigations is [to deliver] *discoverable truths about the good life and the good society*" (Gorski 2013: 543, our emphasis). Even so, he does not think sociology can 'legislate' values or become a „Ministry of Ethical Information" (Gorski 2013: 553).

In response, proponents of the *value-free position* assert that philosophically, facts and values are totally distinct worlds with no logical connection. The only foundation that a value-free social science needs is the mere ability to construct *value-free statements*, and that is perfectly possible. Confronting the idea of facts being 'value-laden', they agree that *within* the practice of social science, 'good' theories and methods are selected in an evaluative way. However, this value judgement is *internal* to science, which in no way compromises the *output*, which can be presented in a value-free way. What they reject are *external* value judgements, whereby social science evaluates the world it studies, or gives advice on how the world 'ought' to be (Black 2013: 767–768; Campbell 2014: 446–447). They also refer to Max Weber, who in an essay on the topic repeatedly calls „all matters of evaluation scientifically undemonstrable" (Weber 1949: 6). For them, such a value-involved social science is simply *not science*. Thus, what is the ethos they suggest for sociology and the sociologist? Campbell allows that scientific findings can be put to use in order to achieve an end, and that rigorous scientists, *outside their scientific roles*, can engage in honest and well-separated value-involved activities (echoing Weber 1949: 5). However, this dual role of the scientist might 'confuse audiences' and, therefore, it is best to stick to one's „true vocation" instead of playing the „high priest of humanity" (Campbell 2014: 449–451).

This debate pertains strongly to sociology's role between *producing knowledge* and *shaping society*. The latter role seems incompatible with value-free social science, at least in the eyes of those who defend it. We will revisit the problem below and see if some ground for consensus between the positions might exist or not.

2.2 Public sociology

In his 2004 American Sociological Association (ASA) Presidential Address, Michael Burawoy delivered a grandiose call *For Public Sociology* (Burawoy 2005a). His address and subsequent articles on the matter (Burawoy 2005b; 2007; 2009) *offer a very clear and ambitious programme for sociology*, in both the roles of producing knowledge and

shaping society. In Burawoy's narrative, sociology 'responds' to waves of *market and state encroachment* upon *civil society*.[2] By civil society, he means „organizations, associations and movements that are neither part of the state nor part of the economy" (Burawoy 2009: 196). Without civil society, sociology *as a whole* cannot exist and will disappear, as it did in Nazi and Communist regimes (Burawoy 2005a: 24; 2009: 196).

Burawoy outlines four types of sociology (a *'division of labour'*), inseparable from each other even in their antagonisms. The first is *professional sociology*, which defines its research programmes according to its own considerations, and executes them with the utmost methodological rigour and exactness (Burawoy 2005a: 10). It produces *instrumental ('factual') knowledge* for an *academic (professional) audience*. Burawoy repeatedly stresses the prime importance of professional sociology (Burawoy 2005a: 10; 2005b: 424; 2007: 139–140), because this is the branch that provides *legitimacy* and *expertise* for the others. Without it, all sociology could be discredited as unscientific.

Next, *policy sociology* is „in the service of a goal defined by a client" (Burawoy 2005a: 9), *instrumental* knowledge aimed at an *extra-academic (lay) audience*. The client can be the state and private organisations alike; a general risk here is that the privately defined goal can divert the scientific process (Burawoy 2005a: 17). Then, *pubic sociology* „brings sociology into a conversation with publics" (Burawoy 2005a: 7), providing *reflexive ('evaluative') knowledge* to *extra-academic audiences*. Finally, *critical sociology* provides *reflexive knowledge* to *academic audiences*, and acts as some sort of 'conscience' of the discipline. His critical sociology is not the *internal value-judgement* of an otherwise value--free sociology: it questions the very foundations of established paradigms as its duty, serving scientific progress (Burawoy 2005a: 10).

The programme of public sociology is, therefore, *engaging sociology and society in a dialogue*. Burawoy also refers to Habermas's (1984) notion of „communicative action" in his discussion[3]. He assures us that „public sociology has no intrinsic normative valence, other than the commitment to dialogue" (Burawoy 2005a: 8). He sees this activity as a *must* in the present time of market and state colonisation. By defending civil society, sociology defends „the interests of humanity" (Burawoy 2005a: 24). For him, this is seemingly self-evident since he believes that most sociologists were driven to the profession by a „passion for a better world" (Burawoy 2005a: 5).

2. We are currently witnessing an „offensive against civil society", and the academy is subjected „to political surveillance" (Burawoy 2007: 144–145) while being financially insecure as well (Burawoy 2005a: 7). This experience is not unique to the West; in post-Socialist European countries, the free reign of the market damages civil society and the practice of sociology (Burawoy 2009: 191).
3. Habermas's theories could also offer a strong foundation for a discussion on the role(s) of sociology. His model of ***deliberative democracy*** (Habermas 1996) outlines an arrangement in which the ***power centre*** is influenced by a ***periphery*** during the political decision-making process. Since the centre cannot manufacture ***legitimacy*** for and by itself, it is provided through ***public discourse***: the opinion- and will-formation of citizens. (Public) sociology looks very much compatible with this model, playing a part in public discourse.

2.3 Critique of public sociology

Burawoy's vision of public sociology was not met with unqualified enthusiasm. Even those sharing his passion for a 'better society' do not wholly agree with him. Brint's (2005) overall assessment is that Burawoy's vision of public sociology is leftist and liberal. Brint reminds us that whatever passions govern the sociologist, they must always put *scientific truth first*, even if it contradicts their personal convictions (Brint 2005: 48–50). Similarly, Scheiring (2006) brings his experience as an 'activist' into his commentary. He, too, emphasises the *prime importance of sticking to scientific standards*, even in the most 'public' of activities, because prejudicial blindness or methodological weakness (bad enough in themselves) will ultimately 'hurt the cause' as well (Scheiring 2006).

Brint finds it unlikely that public sociology would really want to engage *all kinds* of civil publics (such as book-reading or gardening clubs); many of these do not need reflexive sociological knowledge. He suspects that Burawoy is concentrating on community groups that challenge the power structure (Brint 2005: 51–52). He accepts Burawoy's fourfold division of sociological labour, however, he draws attention to the risks that the *competition* of these four arms pose. He would like to see professional sociology as the unquestioned structural and moral centre of the discipline (Brint 2005: 57–58). Lengyel's (2006) remarks bear some similarity to this argument: he does not agree to have the four branches *institutionalised separately*. For him, it should be *the same sociologist* who carries out strictly scientific research, informs the pubic, teaches and gives advice, and is attentive to the grievances of civil society (Lengyel 2006: 108).

Deflem (2013), writing in the American context, labels public sociology „heavily politicised", and its stance toxically *ideological*. Sociologists have fallen for „a radicalized sociology, under the seemingly benign heading of public sociology, simply because *they do not have the intellectual skills necessary to think critically about their own activities*" (Deflem 2013: 161–162, our emphasis). Marketisation also played some part in this deterioration, namely in the sphere of higher education. In short, the problem is that universities now need a high number of students to survive financially. While other (mostly natural) sciences are able to maintain their standards, sociology, being intellectually weak already, seems to succumb to these pressures, and accepts students of mediocre ability, helping them obtain a degree. For Deflem, this amounts to a „total lack of morality" and his remedy is to „make sociology unpopular" and relaunch it on much stricter scientific standards (Deflem 2013: 162–165).

Overall, the debate suggests that Burawoy and his public sociology is equally committed to both activities of *producing knowledge* and *shaping society*, where the latter must be firmly founded on the former. However, he also sees the existence of a *civil society* as a *precondition* for the existence of the whole of sociology. Some of the criticism is concerned with stressing the importance of the *scientific* approach even more. Some of it questions Burawoy's fondness for civil society. Finally, some of it sees the whole project of public sociology as radicalised and partisan, finding the roots of sociology's troubles not mainly in state or market domination (i.e. wider social conditions), but rather in its own intellectual weakness.

2.4 The role of sociology: The Central-Eastern European historical experience

In the review so far, we have investigated the role of sociology 'in general' – and while some of the views were highly abstract, some of them were obviously situated in a certain time and place. Naturally, we are most familiar with the contemporary Hungarian situation concerning the role and challenges of sociology, and our analysis is centred on our country. Nevertheless, we would like to present a 'regional' post-socialist account of this topic. We believe that the Central-Eastern European experience will add an important new aspect to the discussion by drawing attention to the importance that *wider social conditions* bear not only to the (contentious) *society-shaping*, but also to the *knowledge-producing activities* of sociology. The views of CEE authors also help us to map out the similarities and differences between Western (European and American) and Central-Eastern European discourse on the roles of the discipline.

Sociology's history as an *institutionalised discipline* does not span a full century in Central-Eastern Europe. However, almost every country has an early 20th-century tradition, in which social scientific thinking was linked to questions of social modernisation: whether to conduct it in an 'imported Western' way or on the basis of national cultural resources. In Hungary, early sociology had strong links to journalism as well – informing the public on a range of issues, e.g. living conditions of the peasantry (Némedi 2009: 152–154). Sociology was established as a science following the 'Khruschev thaw', in the early to late 1960s, throughout the socialist bloc. Sociology's relationship with the Socialist state power was ambivalent. It was a *servant* of official propaganda, strictly Marxist in its foundation, and 'careful' in its choice of research topics. However, this did not fully quench the development of a methodologically rigorous, positivist social *science* – one which, by uncovering 'unfavourable truths' about social reality, also provoked the anger of the authorities (Boyadijeva 2009: 163–165; Mucha and Keen 2009: 130–133; Némedi 157-154 :2009; Zdravomyslova 2009: 142–143).

Zaslavskaia (1997), in her discussion of Russian sociology, names three functions of the field: the first one is *scientific-cognitive*, i.e. knowledge production, which already had its beginnings in socialist times. The possibility for the next two functions was opened up by the transition to a democratic society (with a market economy). The *political function* means the provision of feedback for government and assistance in „the effective management of social development". The *civil function* is the 'creation of a civil society' and 'social enlightenment' – strong words which imply activism; however, Zaslavskaia sees it fulfilled through the *provision of reliable knowledge to the public sphere* (Zaslavskaia 1997: 34, 37), arguably not going even so far as Burawoy does with his *dialogic* public sociology.

In post-transition years, CEE sociologies faced a number of challenges. These seem to recur almost invariably in every country. First of all, the discipline had to renew itself, shaking off (then re-evaluating) its Marxist philosophy, updating its theoretical and methodological standards. A successful renewal led to the pluralisation and fragmentation of the discipline at the same time (Zaslavskaia 1997: 38; Zdravomyslova 2009: 140). Second, the market economy opened up new possibilities for putting sociological knowledge to

practical use. The new fields of market research, media analysis and opinion polling were often presented as 'sociology' in the media, creating a false impression and undermining the social status of the discipline, because these marketised activities were often seen as inaccurate, arbitrary or outright partisan (Boyadijeva 2009: 167). Third, sociology had to reevaluate its relationship to politics. While sociologists found it a 'natural' role for them to participate in the democratic transition with the provision of scientific knowledge, they had to accept that they were ill-prepared for it. The fact that sociology failed to foresee the collapse of socialism weakened its status as a *proper science* (one capable of making predictions). Moreover, the production of sociological knowledge could not keep up with the pace of the rapid social transformation, and was often unable to provide information, either for policy use, or for the purpose of keeping the public informed, undermining sociology's status further (Boyadijeva 2009: 170–171; Némedi 160 :2009).

Another possible role of sociology, described in connection with the post-socialist transition (but also applicable to its social role in general), is to provide a *vocabulary of public reasoning* which helps to understand social reality not only to professionals, but to the members of society as well. In Hungary, sociology exercised such functions in the past (Kuczi and Becskeházi 1992; Szabari 2010). As Kuczi argues, sociology became the *lingua franca* of public reasoning with many 'lay' sociologists entering the debate (Kuczi 1991). Using Kuczi's own words, sociology „became the language of transmission for various groups of intellectuals; physicians, teachers, engineers, public educators, editors, etc. who used the terminology of sociology in public discourse" (Kuczi 1996). To this we might add that, while supplying vocabulary in itself can be a value-free exercise, in public discourse, uses and abuses of this vocabulary will deepen the public's confusion: is it sociology, the language of which we use, that is inherently value-involved?

Observing the experience of the post-socialist transition, CEE authors draw similar conclusions to each other (Boyadijeva 2009; Mucha and Keen 2009; Zdravomyslova 2009). First, they contend that the relationship to politics is highly problematic, and that direct (personal) involvement in politics, or propagandistic misuse of scientific sociology is unacceptable (although in Russia, a certain group of sociologists want to re-establish the discipline on national-religious grounds, see Zdravomyslova 2009: 144). Nevertheless, many also hold the view that providing knowledge for policy use – in order to improve social conditions – is an acceptable and desirable role, or a natural part of sociological practice which goes without comment (Boyadijeva 2009: 172). As for Zaslavskaia's *civil function*, CEE sociology looks cautious in its activism: the need for a strong civil society is spelled out (Boyadijeva 2009: 172), but sociology's main role is seen in *informing* it, even by those who emphasise that the discipline has to „engage with a civic position" (Zdravomyslova 2009: 147).

2.5 The Hungarian experience: recent developments

The works cited above suggest a number of roles for sociology in post-socialist countries. Besides being a science, established and professionally reproduced within the university, the roles of the 'expert on social reality', 'policy advisor', 'educator of the people' and 'partner of civil society' are all possibilities. Practically all of them require, to some degree, the functioning of a democratic country where these activities are possible.

Looking at the actual political landscape of present-day Hungary, we can see that there are concerns about democracy in terms of hollowing out (declining involvement in politics) and backsliding effects (returning to semi-authoritarian practices) (Greskovits 2015). Critical voices are strong not only in relation to Hungary (Kornai 2015), but to Poland as well (Albrecht 2016). Notably (although for different reasons), concerns about *weakened democracy* were also part of Burawoy's analysis (2005: 4–5), to which his public sociology was a response.

It seems that political leaders in Hungary (and Poland) step away from dialogic mechanisms of public opinion- and will-formation to create politically effective constellations and acquire more political control. Some have argued that the shift toward a 'leader democracy' (Körösényi 2005) can be attributed to the crises of 'party democracy' and the celebrity culture of the mass media (Pakulski and Körösényi 2013). Thus, it is a common phenomenon in the political sphere, not just in Hungary but in many countries.

However, the Hungarian case on „national consultation on immigration and terrorism" paints a rather grim picture in relation to both the potentials of deliberative democracy and the roles of sociologists in it. According to the official reasoning, 'national consultations' – questionnaires sent to all Hungarian citizens – were instigated so that the government seeks the opinion of Hungarian citizens on important policy issues. Yet, in many ways those who designed these consultations did not even attempt to meet any kind of scientific and professional criteria. This is particularly true for the last national consultation „on immigration and terrorism". According to experts in migration[4], questions were formulated in a biased way (Bocskor, manuscript), additionally, the ordering of questions was misleading, connecting immigration and terrorism, and since the prime minister asked citizens to fill and send back the questionnaires, the resulting sample was skewed politically. Moreover, a billboard campaign had already commenced when the data gathering phase was still under way. These facts together show that the aim of the national consultation was not to seek but instead shape citizens' opinion.

Apart from the fact that it was particularly bad social science, as a political strategy it was quite effective and the national consultation proved to be a shrewd political tool. As official language dominated public reasoning and the media in general (Bernáth and Messing 2015; Bocskor, manuscript), everyday discussions are also structured according to the official vocabulary.

4. In an open letter sent to the prime minister, a group of social scientists requested the halting of the 'national consultation' because the questionnaire „lacks all ***professional*** and ***moral*** considerations" (Artemisszió blog 2015, our emphasis).

Further, it is also worth mentioning that in the national consultation and the follow-up campaign, we can witness elements of the *magical narrative worldview* – similarly to the archaic, 'fairy tale' type narrative structure of the official discourse in 1950s Hungary (Kuczi and Becskeházi 1992: 28–29). As an analogy to the linear chronology of events in tales (Kuczi and Becskeházi 1992: 91), at first there is 'order and peaceful life' (our way of European life based on Christianity and national uniformity), which is then disturbed by an external evil (mostly Muslim migrants), which calls for an extraordinary hero (Hungarian government protecting Hungarian people) who fights the disturbance and restores balance to the universe (see also: Propp 1999). While the political effectiveness of this strategy cannot be questioned, there are several lessons to be learnt from the case.

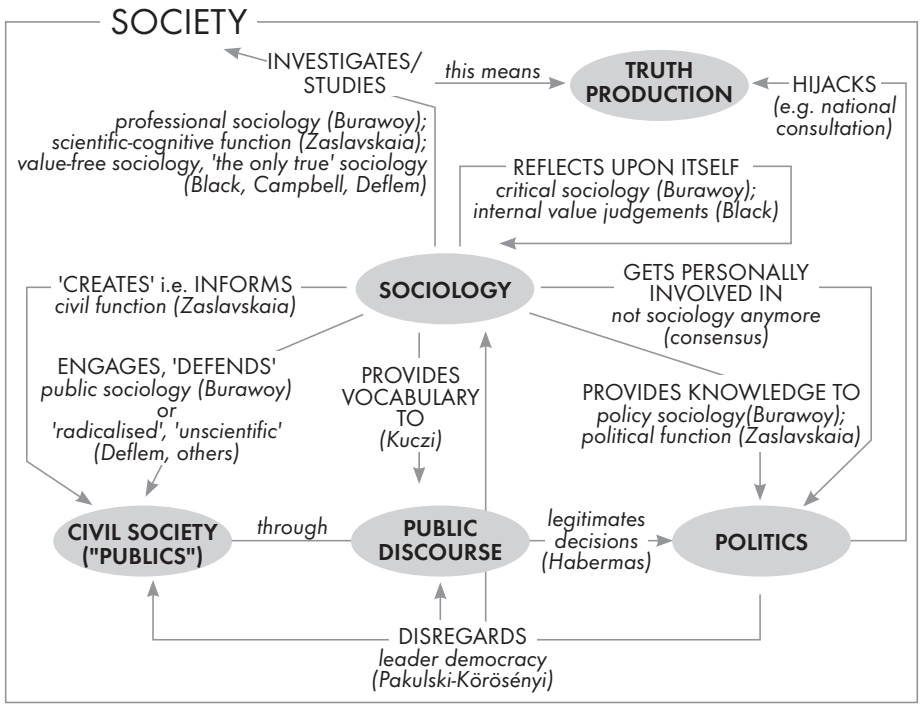
Firstly, it seems that in a relatively new democracy, the social opinion- and will-formation mechanisms of the citizenry can be 'hijacked' by political actors strengthening their fears and anxieties, thereby producing mass loyalty and legitimacy for specific policies. This questions the potential of civil society and public discourse shaping policies and decisions in the present. Thus, the likelihood of sociology – through engaging with civil society – being able to shape public policy (directly or even indirectly) is dwindling. Secondly, the case also demonstrates that political actors are becoming very aware of the role of interpretative frames (Goffman 1974) and the vocabulary they use (Lakoff 2014). Moreover, they also know that they must dominate the scene with their discourse in order to strategically ensure that citizens use the same vocabulary and frames for thinking and reasoning as the official discourse. This also limits the sociologist's role as the one who elaborates and develops the vocabulary for public reasoning. Thirdly, the national consultation also tells us how politics can utilise knowledge production mechanisms for their own benefits. While the consultation was neither a real consultation based on dialogue nor a proper opinion poll, its results still aimed to present reality – even if it is the reality political actors want the public to see. Scientific criteria of knowledge production such as neutrality and objectivity are cynically ignored, while the whole set-up was camouflaged as a quasi-scientific research process piggy-back riding on the prestige of scientific procedures.

The most painful lesson of the national consultation is that social scientists are not even required to assist in producing the knowledge that political actors want to see, but are totally bypassed in presenting the 'true voice' of the people. Of course, it can be argued that this was a one-off situation, but still one may ask whether social science in general and sociologists in particular still stand a chance, not even of *shaping social reality*, but to operate as a *truth-producing enterprise*, if political actors can produce their own 'knowledge' about the world and communicate the alleged results on billboards. After all, what could be the role of the sociologist in such a situation? Even the most value-free and purely scientific observations (namely, pointing out the appalling methodological errors amounting to manipulation) will propel them into the centre of political turmoil – in the words of C. W. Mills, „in a world of widely communicated nonsense, any statement of fact is of political and moral significance" (Mills 1959: 178). Another possibility is to remain silent, perhaps because the government's national consultation never aimed to be published in peer-reviewed journals, and it could, theoretically, therefore fall outside the confines of scientific discourse.

2.6 Synthesis of theory and CEE experience

So far, we have conducted a macro-level review *in search of sociology's role between producing knowledge and shaping society*. We have summarised the findings in Figure 1, which we explain below.

Figure 1: The possible roles of sociology in society, coupled with the CEE experience.



First of all, we would like to highlight that *sociology* and *society* are never two distinct entities, since the former exists and operates within the latter, even if it often has to take the standpoint of the perfectly disinterested observer. Therefore, sociology, just as the other circles in the figure, is one of the 'spheres' within society. We identified a number of other spheres, and the arrows describe the relationships between them, with references to the authors cited above. It is notable that a number of connections were identified by several authors, even though they may have used different terms to explicate them.

The diagram aims to spell out that not all of the relationships are legitimate in everyone's eyes, because some of them venture beyond *knowledge production* and aim at *shaping society*. However, we would also like to highlight the possibility of a consensus between the views presented above. The *knowledge producing* function was not questioned by anyone, thus it looks to be a good starting point. Personal involvement in politics is basically also forbidden by all. However, the figure also shows that connections to politics will exist through other avenues, e.g. by providing vocabulary for public discourse, and sociological knowledge being adopted for policy use (which could actually happen

without sociology explicitly 'providing' such information; after all, scientific results, once published, are free to be used by all). We also showed the possibility of politics hijacking the pivotal *truth-producing* activities of sociology.

The project of 'defending civil society' is contentious, and, as the figure shows, unacceptable for some. However, proponents of a value-free sociology, who find this connection suspicious and radical, did not discuss the type of so*cial organisation* which allows scientific activity. The Hungarian experience especially strongly reminds us that even the most 'disinterested' science needs a wider social environment where freedom of scientific thinking, knowledge production and dissemination are possible, and truth production is not monopolised by the market or the state (politics). When this basic freedom is at stake, all of the sciences might have to subscribe to a 'minimal social programme' of its defence.

3 Teaching sociology in Hungary

We now turn to the sphere of the university, where sociologists engage in their *research* and *teaching* activities. This seems to be the sphere which is not going away, whether we uphold value-free science or not, agree with public sociology, participate in the public discourse, or are ignored by the political centre, the classroom audience is just as ever present as the pressure to publish.

While many of the founders and headlining figures of sociology were also active as teachers, the practice of teaching currently does not seem to be at the forefront of scientific discussion within the field. This absence has been pointed out in various contexts (Davies 2010; Harley and Natalier 2013: 392). On the other hand, *Teaching Sociology* is a quality journal in its own right, dedicated to this very topic. Most of its articles focus on methodological innovations in teaching and on ways to improve students' cognitive (and in its service, sometimes emotional) involvement in learning the subject[5]. Many of these methods aim to help students establish the connections between 'real life' and sociology's body of theoretical and abstract knowledge. While showing great dedication (perhaps a value commitment in itself) to the cause of good teaching, very few of *Teaching Sociology*'s articles reveal explicit value involvement in their titles[6].

Whether familiarising students with issues of social justice (Petray and Halbert 2013), domestic violence (Latshaw 2015), class inequality (Norris 2013) and other themes through simulation games and other methods crosses the line between facts and values, scientific and unscientific, is a fascinating question. However, the goal of the present article is not the evaluation of others but to find an acceptable *modus operandi* for sociology teaching with regard to the particular macro-level considerations outlined above, including the contemporary Hungarian situation.

5. Similar articles can be found from the CEE region as well, e.g. Malikova (2003) and Toshchenko (2012).
6. We realise that this is an impressionistic statement, but researching the topic more rigorously would have required a study on its own.

3.1 The situation of sociology in Hungarian higher education

As we have mentioned earlier, sociology was established as an academic discipline after the second world war in Hungary, more precisely in the 1960s (Némedi 2009: 155). Currently, 9 universities offer sociology as a BA programme (Hungarian Educational Office 2012), in the capital Budapest and 4 other major cities. In the last five years the number of first-year students enrolled in these programmes has risen from 300 to over 500, while roughly 100 people started sociology MA studies each year (Felvi n.d.[7]). Sociology teaching takes place within Humanities faculties in several universities, while some have Social Science faculties. Furthermore, thousands of students of humanities, economic and social sciences (but also engineers and medical students) will study sociology at an introductory level, either as mandatory or elective classes.

Both of the present authors are actively involved in teaching sociology at two of Budapest's universities. We hope to be intellectually fit for both the researcher and teacher roles. Currently, neither of us is involved in social activism, and we would not find the use of „the academic platform" for such activity acceptable. Having also outlined above the dire position in which sociology finds itself in the (increasingly pseudo-) democratic decision- and will-formation process in contemporary Hungary, we came to realise that quite possibly the biggest 'power' we have in *shaping society* is through teaching sociology to some 400-500 undergraduate students every year (this is the number of students who participate in our *introductory* classes[8]). So the question arises: How can we use this power responsibly?

3.2 Teaching scientific sociology

One possible approach is to teach scientific professionalism. This tradition goes back to Weber, who emphasised the importance of specialised training, a strict adherence to facts and exactness even at the cost of seeming 'boring' to the audience, and stated that pedagogical losses result from the introduction of 'the manner of public discussion' into education (Weber 1949: 2–4). Elsewhere, he explicitly warns that all matters political must stay outside the lecture hall (Weber 1946: 145–147). Proponents of value-free sociology would certainly agree with him. Brint emphasises academic 'rigour' because it is essential to doing valid sociological research, and contends that students should find as much excitement in learning these skills as some might do in 'changing society' (Brint 2005: 61–62). Deflem (2013) also strongly argued for the strengthening of professional requirements in sociological curricula.

Presumably, all this could be done in an elegant, value-free way. However, as we have pointed out above, even a keen eye for methodological correctness becomes a political force in situations such as the Hungarian 'national consultation', whereby the government seeks to produce its own knowledge through manipulation. Therefore, a strict professional

7. We obtained these numbers through an online database query. In the references, we include the URL of the database's main page.
8. Presently, only one of us teaches specialised subfields of sociology: namely, history of sociology, sociological theory, and scientific writing. We are not active in teaching methodological courses.

training becomes at once an act of defiance. However, this is not the reason for which we do not make scientific rigour the only priority in our *introductory* courses.

Rather, it is the fact that a strict style of professional training would be at odds with the fields of study and number of our audience. Each year, roughly 300 first-year students participate in our introductory course at the Corvinus University of Budapest, out of whom roughly 70 will take part in the sociology programme (the rest of them study political science, media and communications, and international studies). Out of those 70, not all of them will do a sociology MA, and roughly 5-10 can be expected to begin PhD studies. Then, at Budapest Business School, we have 120-180 students of economics, management, finance and human resources a year, for whom sociology is only an elective subject. Very few of these students will become *social scientists* in a strict sense, and that is why we believe we should introduce them to a different cross-section of the science of sociology – one we elaborate upon in the next section.

3.3 Critical thinking and reflexivity

Reflexivity and *critical thinking*, also strongly linked to abilities of *complex reasoning* and *communication*, are 21st-century skills (indispensable in a knowledge-based economy) that higher education generally aims to improve in students (Arum and Roksa 2011). We believe that sociology teaching can play a big part in improving these skills.

Critical thinking can be defined as the ability „to evaluate, reason and question ideas and information" (Grauerholz et al. 2009, quoted in Rickles et al. 2013). It involves the evaluation of information on the basis of logical and empirical sufficiency, as well as the ability of creative argumentation. It is an exercise in rationality and logic. One of its basic requirements is the ability to apply theoretical concepts to real-world phenomena (Rickles et al. 2013: 272).

Reflexivity is described by Kaufman (2013) as both „a process of being and a process of thinking". It involves being „conscious of the lenses through which we view the world", understanding our 'situationality' and 'positionality'. Being reflexive is to gain awareness of our own categories and processes of thought, which we typically take for granted. Kaufman highlights that these operations are strongly linked to rigorous scientific methodology as well. However, the importance of reflexivity does not lie solely in methodology, but also in a wider realisation of the *constrained and subjective nature of our personal worldviews* (Kaufman 2013: 71).

How can we improve critical thinking and reflexivity in sociology classes? First of all, by demonstrating the *scientific* nature of sociology: its methodological exactness and empirical basis (even if we do not require our students to become methodological experts themselves). Our students should be able to realise the similarities as well as the big differences between scientific and everyday thinking. We also familiarise them with sociology's findings: from classics to contemporary ones. This should help them realise that while 'naturally' we are all 'experts' of the social world we live in, sociology has its own special viewpoint and body of knowledge (and is not 'arbitrary', as some may think). This can perhaps bring the benefit of enhancing sociology's public image a little as well.

Often, we see that sociological findings are in conflict with the preconceived worldview or values of some of our students – we take this conflict as a starting point for *dialogue*, not wanting to inculcate 'the truth' into our students, but to help them develop the abilities of *reflexivity and critical thinking*, both towards their own views and those of science. They can rethink the relationship of their own values to social reality, and they become aware of the processes whereby truth is produced and gains acceptance. Incidentally, this also implies criticality towards power (of any kind), therefore, by developing these 21st-century skills, we again find that we are not producing obedient subjects of the state. Still, this does not seem to go beyond the 'minimal programme' described earlier.

3.4 Dialogic teaching – Value-involved teaching?

We have already touched upon the topic of *dialogue* above. The term was the central idea of Burawoy's programme, and it is applicable to education as well. He calls students sociology's „first and captive public", suggesting that teaching falls under the auspices of public sociology. Indeed, he derides standardised courses and intensive examinations as „disciplinary techniques". According to him, we should engage students in *dialogic teaching*, starting from *their* experience, not taking them for 'empty vessels' to be filled with some authoritative 'truth' (Burawoy 2005a: 5–9).

Burawoy himself recommends *service learning*, a method which involves students in a project that serves a community. Arguably, this goes beyond the boundaries of value-free science. There are also a number of other educational methods that combine learning with *experience* (conducting local case studies, games, simulations), and might or might not be aimed at developing *empathy* in students – something which, according to Latshaw (2015), is „an unspoken goal of many sociology courses" (Latshaw 2015: 277). We believe that *reflexivity* and *critical thinking* are already steps in the direction of empathy – the ability to see a situation from someone else's point of view –, and therefore this latter is not a goal in itself in our courses. Besides, the number of our students does not really permit the use of experiential methods.

However, we believe in dialogue *as a method*. In the age of information technology, the authority of the teacher has greatly diminished and no one can possibly hold a monopoly over knowledge anymore. What is more, the university lecturer basically has to compete with a myriad forms of entertainment that the digital world provides to the young audience (Jeffries and Andrews 2014). In such a situation, we find *dialogic teaching* especially valuable. We strive to make this dialogue more than merely formal, allowing time for debates, and demonstrating the connections between the sociological body of knowledge and the personal experience and views of our students. Finding and articulating these connections on the spot is one of the biggest challenges but also one of the biggest thrills of the teacher's job, and it adds an element of improvisation to each lesson, making every occasion unique.

3.5 The role of course assessment

Obviously, we cannot *make* a person think critically and reflexively if they refuse to do so. Nevertheless, we aim to steer our students gently towards greater levels of dedication to learning sociology. Quoting John W. Moore, Eric Mazur (1997) writes that „for students, the exam is the dog and the course is the tail", meaning that the way a course is *assessed* influences the way students *learn* it. Our assessment system consists of several elements. First, we admit that while we recognise the frustration of Deflem (2013) who writes that earning a college degree has lately become „a matter of justice" and the idea of an earned degree seems to be ridiculed, we do not consider it our duty to „sift" students. Therefore it is possible to get a pass by answering a set of multiple-choice questions, although nobody gets through without having learnt a few basics of methodology and sociological findings. However, in order to get good grades, students also have to write a short *research proposal* on a given topic as part of the exam, testing their scientific thinking. Further, active participation in lessons is rewarded with a small amount of extra points, which can also be earned by way of preparing small-scale *project works* throughout the semester, in which students can try their hands at writing a well-referenced, critically thought-out university paper. At Corvinus University, we also prescribe certain readings which are then tested. According to Arum and Roksa (2011: 204–205), the amount of reading and writing exercises correlate with the improvement of students' skills during college years.
Finally, we are determined to investigate and improve the effectiveness of our teaching practices. In accordance with the concept of the *knowledge-creating school* (Hargreaves 1999), we have decided to develop some research about our activities. With the use of diagrams called mind maps, we collected data from our Corvinus University students in September (before the start of the introductory course) and December 2015 (at the end) (Miskolczi et al. 2016). We are currently undertaking data analysis, which will help us understand, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, how students view sociology prior to studying it, how the course alters their views, how much and what they learn from it.

4 Conclusion

Sociology and its practitioners constantly face a dilemma about their possible roles in *producing knowledge* and *shaping society*. On the one hand, the debate may seem philosophical, concerning the worlds of facts and values. However, the stakes are already high here, because whether sociology can or should be value-free will suggest different approaches to resolve the 'role ambiguity' towards the social world. It is natural for every science to guard its *integrity* and *social standing* by staying methodologically rigorous and strictly neutral (almost 'disinterested'). At the same time, scientific truth production is not a solitary activity, it involves the free exchange, discussion and criticism of findings and ideas. Therefore, we can observe that scientific activity – sociology included – is tied to a way of social organisation which allows this discourse to take place.

Because of its historical trajectory, sociology in Hungary lacks credibility in the eyes of a large part of the population, and is also disliked and neglected by politics. While

sociology used to play a part in public discourse throughout the decades of democratisation, currently the Hungarian government is carrying out large-scale 'truth production' exercises on its own, in the service of the logic of politics and power. Through teaching sociology to a few hundred students every year, we will inevitably come across this problematic situation. By showing the scientific and dialogic nature (which are not opposites) of sociology to our students, we can enhance their *reflexive and critical sensitivity* to issues of knowledge production and the possibility of multiple viewpoints – the earmarks of a 'grown-up' citizen. We do not demand to have a say in shaping society by communicating our personal values to students, but rather we prepare them to act as autonomous agents in a democratic society, towards the full realisation of their personal and collective potential.

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Authors' data

Péter Miskolczi
Assistant professor Budapest Business School; PhD student (Sociology),
Corvinus University of Budapest
Address: Buzogány utca 11-13., 1149 Budapest, Hungary
E-mail: miskolczi.peter@uni-bge.hu

Gábor Király
Senior Research Fellow, Budapest Business School; Associate professor,
Corvinus University of Budapest
Address: Buzogány utca 11-13., 1149 Budapest, Hungary
E-mail: kiraly.gabor@uni-bge.hu