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‘No Brains, No Initiative, No Collaboration’ – The Austrian Case

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abstract: Established formally in 1950, the Austrian Society of Sociology did not really exist during its first decade, though at the end of the 1950s one man entered the International Sociological Association under the guise of the Austrian Society of Sociology. In the middle of the 1960s, when the government began a reform of the university system, sociology was established as a full programme and the Society was resuscitated. At the end of the 1960s, the worldwide student movement spilled over into Austria, and self-proclaimed revolutionaries came to power. From the mid-1970s the Society became a more or less normal association: it published a journal and a newsletter, and organized annual conferences and sections for academic discussion. The time-lag between the intellectual beginnings of sociology and the establishment of the Society is remarkable. The Society does not function as a professional organization. Its influence on the university curriculum and the recruitment policies of departments has been weak, the participation of its members is poor, and its international standing is negligible. All in all, the history of the Society seems to confirm what the ex-Austrian Paul F. Lazarsfeld wrote in 1959 about the Austrian situation: ‘no brains, no initiative, no collaboration’.

keywords: Austrian Society of Sociology ✦ history of Austrian sociology ✦ organizational weakness

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The Founding of the Austrian Society of Sociology and its Short First Period

In July 1950 a group of about a dozen met at the University of Vienna to attend the inaugural meeting of the newly established Austrian Society of Sociology (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Soziologie, ÖGS). Five years after the end of the Second World War and thus the defeat of the Nazi system, and five years before Austria gained its independence from the Allied Occupation Forces, sociology was not on the agenda of Austria's university system or public discourse. However, 'Austrian-ness' was highly valued, and the emphasis on the specific Austrian way of behaving, writing, speaking and doing things was popular and got the backing of official sources. Austrian politicians created a new language to be spoken at Austria's elementary schools called *Unterrichtssprache*, an Austrian version of German. Austrian historians discovered the Austrian Nation, and ordinary people now pronounced their own vernacular differently from the time before the *Anschluss*, the annexation by the Third Reich in 1938 – strange behaviour, at least for former Austrians. Marie Jahoda, for example, noted after her first return to her home town 14 years after she had had to leave the country against her will, 'that one class distinction of which I had always been aware before I left Austria in 1937, had disappeared: middle class and working class people alike seemed to have intensified the Viennese dialect, so that their voices are now hardly distinguishable' (Jahoda, 1995: 11) But it made a difference vis-a-vis the Germans.

In 1950 Austria's university system was more or less re-established. Most of the university posts vacant immediately after the end of the war had been filled up with people dismissed in 1938, who had survived the Nazi period in so-called inner emigration. The few true émigrés who wanted to return to their country of origin recognized that postwar Austria was still anti-Semitic, and the postwar university system was still against left-wingers. Sociology, flourishing in the period between the two wars in Austria, though primarily outside the formal university system, existed only on its margins after the Second World War. Only one professorship at the University of Vienna was dedicated to this field, while two or three more professors held an interest in sociology additionally to their main duties, primarily in the field of economics.

Consequently, the founding group of the Austrian Society of Sociology consisted of scholars from different fields. The first elected president, August Maria Knoll (1900–63), reached a full professorship in 1950. Prior to that he had been an associate professor since 1945, after re-entering the university seven years after his dismissal by the Nazis. Knoll, a social philosopher, received his appointment as university lecturer (*Habilitation*)

in 1934, and taught at the University of Vienna till the *Anschluss*. At the time of the establishment of the Society in 1950 he surrounded himself with younger or lower ranking people only loosely connected to the field of sociology. Even more remarkable than the composition of the founding group in terms of members' sociological interests was its composition in terms of party affiliation. As a well-known pattern of Austria's postwar political culture, all institutions, organizations and activities had to be bipartisan. So, in addition to the Catholic Conservatives around Knoll, two representatives of the Social Democrats acted as members of the executive board; among them was Hertha Firnberg, trained as a social historian and at that time an official of the Austrian Chamber of Workers, who later (in the 1970s) became the first Federal Minister for Science.[1]

The newly established Society started ambitiously. In August 1950, Knoll wrote to Erik Rinde, executive secretary of the International Sociological Association, to apply for membership for the Austrian branch, and he nominated a representative for the ISA conference to be held at Zurich in September 1950. In fact at least one Austrian did attend the Zurich meeting, and one might suspect that this was the main reason for establishing contact with the ISA, because at this time one needed a permit from the occupation forces to travel abroad. Nothing else happened afterwards. Letters from the ISA secretary regularly remained unanswered. After the initial posturing to represent more than 200 sociologists, the Austrian Society for Sociology went into hibernation for the next 10 years.[2] The main reason for this may have been the fragile institutional base of sociology in Austrian universities, and the sketchiness in the professional interest of its members. One could speculate on another factor. The re-establishment of the German Sociological Association, and its recognition by the ISA, forced patriotic Austrians to establish their own links to the international community. To accord with the official policy of disconnecting relations with Germany could have played a role. From its beginning before the Second World War, Austrians had taken part in the German Sociological Society, had joined and had acted as speakers at its biennial conference. Only a few Austrians did this after the Second World War, because Austrian patriotism required them to refrain from any kind of cooperation with Germany.[3]

Whatever the reasons may have been, during the 1950s neither in the universities nor outside did any ÖGS activity take place. When the former Austrian Paul F. Lazarsfeld came to Vienna, as an envoy of the Ford Foundation, for the first time since his emigration, he mentioned in his 'Report on Austria' 'three facts . . . in order to appreciate the general difficulties of the Austrian university situation: the anti-intellectual effect of recent Austrian history; the special nature of contemporary Austrian politics; [and] the relation of the Catholic church to the social sciences' (Lazarsfeld,

1959a). He explained the first point by the strength of the waves of emigration or elimination of intellectual talents from 1918 to 1950. He stressed too the crucial role of the permanent bipartisan coalition in the federal government: 'A considerable number of major issues are rarely discussed in public in order not to endanger the coalition. Politics consists, in great part, in negotiations regarding the distribution of jobs.' As exposition of the third point, Lazarsfeld accused the Catholic Church and its political allies in the conservative People's Party of being 'suspicious' towards 'empirical social sciences'. He also blamed the 'ruling bureaucracy' in the Social Democrats of lacking a 'very genuine understanding of what empirical social research could do for their cause'. In 1959, Lazarsfeld was again touring Central Europe to find young candidates for Ford Foundation fellowships. From Vienna he wrote in a more personal letter to the Ford Foundation officer Shepard Stone: 'As to the Austrian situation at large, I find it as depressing as before. No brains, no initiative, no collaboration. Someone should make a study to find out how a country can be intellectually so dead, and at the same time have such wonderful musical festivals. . . . A paranoid element of mutual distrust is characteristic of today's personal relations among the Austrians' (Lazarsfeld, 1959b).

The sad appearance of Austria's intellectual life during the 1950s stood in sharp contrast to the richness of its social scientific contributions before 1938. The only similarity between the early years and the first two decades after the end of the Second World War was that neither then nor later had the different cohorts of sociologists been able to establish sociology institutionally. However, in the first three decades of the 20th century Austrians produced remarkable contributions to sociological discourse.

Predecessors

Sociology as an intellectual endeavour reached its first peak between the turn of the century and the First World War, due, no doubt, to the intellectual stimulation of Ludwig Gumplowicz's work (Fleck, 1994). This was manifested most clearly in the creation of Sociological Societies in Vienna (1907) and Graz (1908). In 1909, sociology took on an institutional form in the German-speaking world for the first time with the founding of the German Sociology Society, which encompassed scholars from all German-speaking parts of Central Europe. The equivalent organizations in Austria were, however, not as strong as their German counterpart, in that the members had fewer ties with the academic world; the same could be said in comparison with the Hungarian part of the old Empire.[4] The lack of roots in the universities hindered the establishment of sociology in the form of professorships and university studies, which was the initial intention.

The most important representatives of the founding generation were the philosopher Wilhelm Jerusalem (1854–1923), Rudolf Eisler (1873–1926), Max Adler (1873–1937), the later state chancellor and federal president Karl Renner (1870–1950), and the independent scholar (*Privatgelehrter*) Rudolf Goldscheid (1870–1931) (who always tends to be forgotten); other members with a more stable base in the universities were Eugen Ehrlich (1862–1922), who was a professor of Roman law at Czernowitz, Hans Kelsen (1881–1973), who was a professor of public law at the university of Vienna, and the medievalist Ludo Moritz Hartmann (1865–1924). As one can see from these disciplinary identities, no one from the 'founding fathers' was committed exclusively to the new field, which may be the main reason for their institutional failure.

Yet the members of the founding generation had something in common. The philosophical affinities between the early Austrian sociologists and Ernst Mach (1838–1916), an outstanding natural scientist, philosopher and theorist of science, are striking, even though some showed a tendency towards neo-Kantianism in their thinking. The evolutionist strand of thought subsequent to Darwin and Spencer, and the then very popular Ernst Haeckel and Wilhelm Ostwald, was regarded as extremely relevant for social science, even though none of the men mentioned above shared the Darwinians' crude conviction in the survival of the economically fittest. Sociopolitically, the early Austrian sociologists belonged to the reformist wing of the enlightened Viennese bourgeoisie, and some were (or later became) party supporters or sympathizers of the social democratic labour movement.

Among the intellectual accomplishments of this founding generation are contributions to the sociology of knowledge, sociology of law, Marxist sociology and state and financial sociology. A striking feature, and even a peculiarity of the development of sociology in Austria, is the early appearance of such specialization in sociological research, which might have been another reason for their lack of institutional success. Their contributions won acclaim in the neighbouring disciplines, but did not constitute sociology as a distinct endeavour. In spite of the publication of some of the earliest textbooks on sociology by Eisler and Jerusalem, this generation failed to produce large, systematic, informative works as their contemporaries did in Europe and the USA. This early specialization can be viewed in relation to the high rate of development in neighbouring disciplines: economics, philosophy and psychology at the turn of the century were pivotal in the eyes of the lay public, and therefore aroused the interest of historians of ideas. The early cognitive differentiation inside the fragile community of sociologists can be seen as the main reason why none of these Austrian sociologists were able to establish sociology as a university discipline.

During Austria's First Republic (1918–38) sociological research flourished in different parts of the field. To mention only the most outstanding contributions, there was Alfred Schütz, *Sinnhafter Aufbau der sozialen Welt*, Felix Kaufmann, *Methodenlehre der Sozialwissenschaften*, Otto Neurath's attempt to create a neo-positivistic version of sociology, Edgar Zilsel's contribution to a social history of science and *Die Arbeitslosen von Marienthal* by Lazarsfeld and his collaborators. One has to keep in mind that all these publications were written by scholars based outside the official university system. Inside the university the social sciences were stagnating. Nothing similar to a profession of sociologist existed at all. The sociological societies in Vienna and Graz (which never merged into a national association) behaved like debating clubs, but not as foci of a profession.

All these and many more social scientists had to leave Austria during the 1930s to survive (Fleck, 1996). Practically none of them returned to Austria after the defeat of the Nazis. The devastation of the field of intellectual and academic discourse caused by the two dictatorships was prolonged in postwar Austria due to its own decisions. Only a few exceptions could be reported from the 1960s.

An Initiative from the Provinces and a Private Enterprise at the End of the 1950s

In 1959, Johann Mokre (1901–81) from the University of Graz, where he held a triple professorship in statistics, philosophy of law and sociology, applied to the ISA for the status of collective member for the regional branch of the Austrian Society of Sociology. He stressed in his letter to the then executive secretary, Tom Bottomore, that the Styrian provincial branch had existed since 1951 as an independent body. Bottomore approved this application, but advised Mokre to join the ISA as a university department. Later Mokre sent a report on current research done by his institute. According to the materials in the ISA archive in Amsterdam, Mokre and his institute held their membership for at least a couple of years. From the perspective of a sociology of knowledge it is interesting to add that during the Nazi period Mokre lived in the US, where he held minor posts in rural colleges. It seems that there he learned at least the basics of professional behaviour: to join the organizations of the profession, to attend their conferences and to subscribe to their journals. Till his death he held membership of the American Sociological Association, and had subscribed to American sociological journals. Besides that, Mokre and his tiny institute, with no students majoring in sociology, did not make any difference.

At this time a young Viennese sociologist, Leopold Rosenmayr (1925–),

a disciple of Knoll and a former Rockefeller Fellow, adopted the orphaned Austrian membership to establish himself as an Austrian sociologist with international ties. Shortly after he received his appointment as lecturer (*Habilitation*) in social philosophy at the University of Vienna in 1955 (to which in 1959 he added an appointment for sociology), he got in touch with the ISA. In the correspondence with Bottomore the idea emerged to convert the corporate membership of the inactive ÖGS, which never paid its fees, to a personal one for Rosenmayr himself. At the Stresa World Congress in 1959 Rosenmayr applied for a renewed collective membership, because 'the basis of the Austrian Sociological Society has been broadened considerably during the last two years', so there 'is no danger that the neglect [of paying the fees] will reoccur'. During the next decade Rosenmayr represented Austria at the ISA and the World Congresses, and established himself as the one and only internationally known Austrian sociologist.[5]

Both episodes strengthen the impression of a highly fragmented intellectual and professional life. The old split between the dominating role of Vienna as the then too large surviving centre of the old Empire, and the tiny provincial universities whose professors lacked access to the power brokers in the metropolis, prevented the establishment of a nationwide pressure group of sociologists. The fear of the Catholic Conservatives with regard to the new social sciences – they thought of them as subversive forces aimed to destroy the faith and the value system erected on it – led to a policy of suppressing these un-Austrian developments. Resistance to any change in the university curriculum postponed the creation of the new fields of social research. The decision-making power was in the hands of a tiny group of politicians and bureaucrats, who did not feel any need to modernize the old-fashioned university system. Support from visiting professors for the creation of new strands of research fell on deaf ears.

The Establishment of Sociology in the 1960s

In 1960, Rosenmayr took over the scattered ÖGS when he was elected acting president. After the death of Knoll in 1963, Rosenmayr followed him as president, a post in which he remained up to 1968. During these years Austria, and the Austrian universities, experienced profound changes. Politically, the system of bipartisan government became weaker, and the reforms of the universities and their programmes started, not least thanks to the influence of the OECD.

The founding of the Institute for Advanced Studies (Institut für Höhere Studien, IHS) in Vienna in 1963, which was financed initially by the Ford Foundation and energetically pushed forward by Lazarsfeld, led to a reconstruction of sociology in Austria. This sociological boom also saw

Table 1 *Development of the Sociology Faculty at Austria's Universities*

	1950	1970	1996
Full Professor	1	13	18
Associate (*Dozent*)	1	0	23
Assistant (incl. part-time)	1	27	52
Total faculty	3	40	93
Enrolment of students in sociology	> 5	255	2656
Graduations in sociology	+/–0	21	64

the founding of commercial opinion research institutes, most of which still sympathized with political parties, as well as the founding of the first specialized social science journal, *Die Meinung* (Opinion).[6] It was primarily committed to the field of public opinion research, and Lazarsfeld was also involved in its founding. It was only in 1966 that the universities followed suit, when the brain drain abroad and the shortage of academically trained personnel became obvious. In the course of a major renewal of different university fields sociology was established as a course of studies (see Table 1). During these years the Austrian Society of Sociology expanded its activities. For the first time it published an *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für Soziologie* (Austrian Yearbook of Sociology), with a bibliography of recent publications and articles debating the curriculum. An attempt to establish sociology as a course in the high school curriculum failed, due to the opposition of the much stronger historians who defended high school courses in education of citizens (*Staatsbürgerkunde*) as their domain.

Since then a sociological education has been available in Austria both at universities and on an independent graduate level outside the universities. The split between a weak university-based study and a two-year long postgraduate study at the Institute for Advanced Studies demonstrates again the reluctance of the dominant disciplines inside the universities. Law professors, philosophers and historians opposed sociology, sometimes intermingling it with socialism, at least in their rhetoric. The split between the conservative university faculty and the more liberal staff at the IHS mirrored the political balance between the two big parties. Education and science stood under the influence of the Conservatives, while the Social Democrats finally started to grow their own academically trained experts. The clear division between these two sectors is also reflected in the research efforts and publications. The extra-university research's stronger ties with the political world corresponded to a greater extra-scientific research significance (even if only temporarily). With a few exceptions, this contract research was scientifically insignificant. On the

other hand, university research was earmarked by its tendency towards complacency and few of its results can be considered to have withstood the test of time.

The cohort effect can also partly explain the development of sociology in Austria over the next three decades. The creation of professorships, most of which were filled at the same time, preceded the creation of sociology as a full programme (in Vienna and Linz in 1966, and in Salzburg and Graz in 1984). More than half of the full professors lecturing till the end of the 1980s were appointed in the 1960s. None of these professors were able to establish a good, stable rapport with their students, partly due to the politically turbulent years of the student movement and uprisings in West Europe, which also left their mark on Austria. The results of this anomaly have been the publication of numerous, rather unprofessional research reports and politically driven pamphlets by the younger generation, and the retreat to the ivory tower of artistic complacency on the part of the professors spurned by their students.

The IHS was temporarily an exception to this pattern. In the first half of the 1970s it engaged excellent foreign researchers as guest lecturers and employed them as project supervisors, which resulted in several noteworthy empirical studies. This practice came to an end with the waning of the Austrian social democratic enthusiasm for reform towards the end of the 1970s, and especially after the economic recession in the early 1980s. The IHS was transformed from a multidisciplinary scientific research institute into an institute for economic prognoses and narrowly defined applied research. In connection with this, Anatol Rapoport was fired as director in 1984 under undignified circumstances.[7] He did not get any support from the social scientists or their professional organizations, so one could take this case as an indicator for the interference of politics with the academic world.

The ÖGS mirrored these developments (see Tables 2 and 3). The successor of Rosenmayr as president, Erich Bodzenta (a well-established full professor first at the University of Linz and later at Vienna) was seen more or less correctly as a representative of the establishment, and in 1972 a rebellion took place when, under the patronage of a professor from a provincial university, Kurt Freisitzer from the University of Graz, Young Turks captured the executive council. This was in part possible because the ÖGS was open to nearly everyone who showed an interest in sociology. At no time did the Society ask for a minimum level of formal competence or proved recognition, or restrict itself to higher ranking status groups. As a foreseeable, though unintended, side effect, the vast majority of the full professors withdrew their membership, formally or by negligence. Afterwards they used their personal connections to politicians and bureaucrats to reach their own goals. They decided on recruitment at every

Table 2 *University Ranks of All Presidents of the Austrian Society of Sociology, 1950 to 2001*

Rank at the time of election	1950–68	1968–85	1985–2001
Full Professor (*Ordentlicher Professor*)	Knoll (1950–63) Rosenmayr (1960–8)	Bodzenta (1968–72) Freisitzer (1972–7) Kellermann (1979–81)	Haller (1985–9) Traxler (1993–7)
Second rank professor (*Ausserordentlicher Professor*)			Richter (1989–93)
Associate Professor (*Dozent*)		Steinert (1977–9) *Köckeis-Stangl* (1981–3) *Wagner* (1983–5)	Gunz (1997–)

Names of the two female presidents are in italics.
Rosenmayr was acting president from 1960 to 1965.

Table 3 *Development of Membership of the Austrian Society of Sociology (Approximations)*

Ranks	1950	1960	1969	1982
Professors (including non-sociologists)		8	17	46
Associate (*Dozent*)		3	3	14
Others with a degree		13	57	187
Students		6	22	76
Total	< 30	30	99	323

level exclusively, and every full professor assembled around themselves a tiny group of vassals. They failed to train students, or to encourage young sociologists to enhance their work, and they retained their few connections to the international sociological community privately. During the 1970s and 1980s, the ÖGS was in the hands of middle-ranking sociologists, apart from the fact that two full professors acted as its presidents. Interestingly enough, it was only at this time that women were able to capture the presidency (see Table 2).

The Society did not have the opportunity to act as a professional forum during the 1970s and early 1980s. As an eyewitness I can add some insights. The bipartisan composition of the board of the Society survived the takeover of the Young Turks, but the representative of the Conservatives, a noble old man with old-fashioned manners, had no influence on the content of the resolutions; nonetheless he always paid the bills at the meetings in Viennese coffee houses. The influence of the Society on Austria's research policies and university reforms was negligible. All

major decisions about funding research projects, about the creation of new chairs, about reforms of the curriculum and so on were made elsewhere. This pattern is albeit not distinctive to sociology. The main forces influencing policies were and still are the political parties, the trade unions and front organizations for them and the Catholic Church. Only professions which are established formally as 'chambers' like the lawyers, doctors, architects, and more recently psychotherapists, have a chance to raise their voices officially. All the other semi-professions have to relate each matter of concern to one of the truly influential power brokers, or directly to leading bureaucrats inside the ministries. Access to them was restricted to the higher ranks of the faculties. The two achievements of the Society during these years were the establishment in 1976 of an Austrian journal of sociology, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, and the creation of a biennial congress of sociology.

In the 1980s the great waves of ideologically rooted controversies calmed, and the ÖGS turned slowly into an ordinary, semi-professional association. Some graduates from the IHS entered university positions as associate professors, and brought with them a more up-to-date version of sociology. (Graduates from the IHS were promoted to full professorships outside Austria more often than at home). Due to their – and others' – connections to international networks of specialized research, especially in the fields of deviance, demography, labour market, social mobility and inequality, sociology of medicine and drug abuse, and social studies of science, they helped to establish contacts with the international community, and the standards of their publications were raised to the international average. These collaborations contributed to some remarkable publications, but deepened the fragmentation of the discipline again. Due to the small numbers of people working in the same field in Austria, much more collaborative work took place between Austrian sociologists and colleagues abroad instead of the establishment of an disciplinary exchange between Austrians. In 1988, and again 10 years later, the Austrian Society of Sociology joined the activities of its German and Swiss counterparts. Together they organized collaboratively the separately held biennial conferences as a single one. Both conferences, in Zurich and Freiburg, contributed to the recognition of Austria's sociologists as equals to those of the two other German-speaking countries. At this time, the need to distinguish Austria from Germany had vanished as an urgent task for most of Austria's sociologists.

Nevertheless, the weakness in terms of influence on the decisions of the federal government with regard to the development of sociological departments and allocation of resources, and the lack of any scheme for the future, still remain the shortcomings of the Society. Practically all policy decisions with regard to the development of research facilities and

universities were made without any consultation of the scientists affected by the proposed changes. Cutting jobs – it has seldom happened the other way round in the last two decades – is the prerogative of ministers and their advisers. Only a handful of high-ranking professors were consulted regularly by the federal bureaucracy, and nearly all of these scholars acting as consultants were chosen according to their party affiliations; never ever do they act as delegates of their profession. The recruiting processes of the university departments and promotions inside universities are inscrutable. Most of the specialized research units outside the wall of the traditional institutions for higher education are small; their very existence depends on the goodwill of a few patrons, and their earnings and budgets are insecure and inappropriate. Whoever has a chance to publish articles or books outside Austria does it, and willingness to cooperate with fellow sociologists in Austria is as weak as in earlier years. At the age of 50, the Austrian Society of Sociology is still a place where you can exchange ideas casually, hear the newest gossip and have a nice talk over some drinks, but one would never think of it as a professional organization.

Notes

1. Later on another member of the Executive Committee of the Austrian Society of Sociology, Karl Blecha, became Federal Minister of the Interior.
2. This and all other information concerning the relation between the Austrian Society and the ISA are from the ISA Archive at the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands. See for a short overview: www.iisg.nl/archives/
3. Circumstantial evidence for this assertion comes from the fact that Benedikt Kautsky, a survivor of the concentration camps, who wrote one of the first sociological books on the concentration camps, attended the annual conferences in Germany but did not have any connections to the Austrian Sociological Society. He was viewed as a so-called pan-Germanic Social Democrat, partly due to his family history (his father Karl Kautsky was the famous theoretician of the Second International), partly due to his cooperation with German prisoners in the camps.
4. Before the First World War, the Hungarian Sociological Society was a very active and successful association.
5. Several letters at the ISA archive, boxes 24.2. Austria, 30.1. Collective members: 37.2. Individual membership.
6. Later on it changed its name to *Journal für Sozialforschung*, and split in the 1980s into two independent journals: the *Journal für Sozialforschung* and the *SWS-Rundschau*.
7. See for an eye-witness recollection Rapoport (1993).

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