Contemporary Sociology in Austria

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GRÜNDERZEIT—COGNITIVE FOUNDATIONS

Sociology in Austria\(^1\) can look back on a very long tradition, which was, however, not without discontinuities and deep-reaching lines of fault. If we disregard historical reports and other literary descriptions of social conditions, as well as contributions to Polizeywissenschaft, which can be seen as the basis for an understanding of the Josephinian and Vormärz administration, the first important representative of a sociology that did not as yet call itself such must be Lorenz von Stein (1815–1890), who was a professor of political economy at the University of Vienna for 30 years. He directed his interest in social sciences toward the so-called social question, (i.e., toward the emergence of a new social class in the aftermath of industrial development). His emphasis on labor as the driving force behind social integration and conflict between social classes make Stein the pioneer of the non-Marxist analysis of society in the German-speaking world. He did not, however, attempt to establish sociology as a new scientific discipline; his argument with sociopolitical issues and the social movement took place within the context of political science and economy which, according to Stein, are based on an idealistic philosophy. This makes Stein one of the founders of Kathedersozialismus (i.e., the paternalistic conception of the new social problem of the working class and the labor movement).

The first person in Austria to speak out in favor of the creation of sociology as a discipline, who endeavored to found such a faculty, was the Polish-born Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838–1909), who was a professor of public law at the University of Graz from 1876 onwards. Gumplowicz...
viewed sociology *naturalistically* as an exact science whose obligation it was to discover the laws of society. He also viewed it as *holistic*, since society was composed of different social groups, and as *conflictual*, since these social groupings, or aggregates, were at odds with each other. There was an extraordinarily lively response to Gumplowicz’s theory, even during his lifetime. Not only did he have students and followers in various countries and his works translated into all major languages, but the international scientific community also acknowledged him and his theory.

While it is possible to approve of Gumplowicz’s theory insofar as it could have been the basis for a university discipline, the conditions under which he was working clearly demonstrate why this never came about. First, there is Gumplowicz’s multiple marginality: he was a Pole by birth, working at a German-speaking university, which was also a provincial university, and hence had little prestige within Austria; he was a Jew and agnostic in a German nationalistic, anti-Semitic, and Catholic environment; he was a “sociologist” among law professors, and finally he led a secluded life, doing little to rally students and followers around him.

It is also worth considering Jerzy Szacki’s comment: “Gumplowicz was too radical for the conservatives and too conservative for the radicals.” Another reason for his theory’s not being overall positively received, especially later on, was the fact that he used the term “race” at the core of his argument. He viewed “race” in the cultural, anthropological context of “ethnic,” rather than as a biological term; however, this does not prevent those reading and interpreting his theory, even today, from classifying Gumplowicz alongside racist social Darwinists. Among Gumplowicz’s followers were the Austrian scholar and Field Marshall Lieutenant Gustav Ratzenhofer (1842–1904), Franz Oppenheimer in Germany, the Italian Franco Savorgnan, and the American Lester Ward.

**FIRST ATTEMPTS AT INSTITUTIONALIZATION**

Sociology reached its first peak between the turn of the century and World War I, due, no doubt, to the intellectual impetus stimulated by Gumplowicz’s work. This was manifested most clearly by the creation of *Sociological Societies in Vienna* (1907) and Graz (1908). In 1909 sociology for the first time took on an institutional form in the German-speaking world with the founding of the German Sociology Society, even before the advent of the German Empire. The equivalent Austrian institution was, however, not as strong as its German counterpart in that the applicants had fewer ties with the academic world. It was therefore not possible to establish a sociology faculty in the form of university chairs and courses of studies, which had been the initial intention.

The most important representatives of this founding generation are the philosopher Wilhelm Jerusalem (1854–1929), 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). Loosely affiliated to this learned society were Eugen Ehrlich (1862–1922), a professor of Roman law at Czernowitz; Hans Kelsen (1881–1973), a professor of public law at the University of Vienna; and the medievalist Ludo Moritz Hartmann (1865–1924). The following points are useful indicators to any intellectual common ground between the representatives of this founding generation: there were philosophical similarities between the early Austrian sociologists and Ernst Mach (1838–1916), an outstanding natural scientist, philosopher, and theorist of science, even though some showed a tendency toward neo-Kantianism in their thinking. The evolutionist train of thought originating from Darwin and Spencer, and the then very popular Ernst Haeckel and Wilhelm Ostwald, is regarded as extremely relevant for the social sciences, even though none of the above-mentioned representatives shared the Darwinians’ conviction of the survival of the economically fittest. Sociopolitically, the early Austrian sociologists belonged to the reformist wing of the enlightened bourgeoisie, and some were (or later were) party supporters or sympathizers of the social democratic labor movement.

Among the lasting intellectual accomplishments of the members of this founding generation, although little attention was paid to them, are the contributions to 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. However, this generation failed to produce large, systematic, informative works as their contemporaries did in Europe and the United States. The early specialization can be viewed in correlation with the high rate of development in neighboring disciplines: economy, philosophy, and psychology at the turn of the century have for a long time aroused the interest of histories of ideas. The early cognitive differentiation is one of the reasons why none of the above-mentioned Austrian sociologists were able to establish sociology as a university discipline.

We must also mention the authors of the first sociological overviews and textbooks, as well as the editors and translators responsible for making the works of Durkheim, Tardé, and William James, among others, accessible to a broad public shortly after their original publication.

**CLOSED UNIVERSITY AND UNATTACHED CREATIVITY**

Attempts to institutionalize the teaching and research of sociology, that is, the establishment of an academic sociology, were not crowned with success. The outbreak of World War I, the ensuing fall of the Habsburg
Monarchy, and the difficulties encountered in the reconstruction of the democratic republic after the so-called Austrian Revolution17 created conditions in the 1920s and 1930s which were even more unfavorable to the institutionalization of sociology than before:

1. The chronic lack of university funding and the stronger emerging anti-Semitism, primarily among the ranks of the more educated classes, who faced the threat of impoverishment and social degradation, restricted the possible development of new disciplines, among them sociology.

2. The number of potential professional sociologists was diminished in the postwar period by two mobility processes: on the one hand, some scholars who had published scientific articles before 1914 assumed political posts (Otto Bauer, Michael Hainisch, Rudolf Hilferding, Karl Renner, and, temporarily, Joseph Schumpeter), without, as was requisite during the Habsburg Monarchy for those holding professor ministerial posts, having university positions, to which they could have returned after their political careers. On the other hand, outstanding social scientists emigrated or did not return to Austria (Carl Grünberg, Hans Kelsen, Emil Lederer, Jacob Moreno, Karl Pribram, and Joseph Schumpeter).

3. The few university positions available were taken up by right-wing intellectuals, of whom Othmar Spann (1878-1950) immediately became the leader. In the tradition of the German romantic movement (Adam Müller, 1779–1829) and of Albert Schille's organicism (1831–1903), his ensuing thinking can justifiably be described as “anti-sociology.” Through Spann's skillful personnel policy, competing sociologists were kept away from or ousted from the universities. This applied equally to the “old”-liberal theorists, who, in the tradition of the Austrian School of Economics (Carl Menger), were also dealing with sociological issues,18 such as Ludwig Mises (1881–1973), a bourgeois Republican who was denied access to the most prestigious university of the time in Vienna, as was Schumpeter (1883–1950), or those who were squeezed out (Kelsen); and to left-wingers, who were denied the possibility of receiving their postdoctoral lecturing qualification, with the exception of Max Adler.19 The academic sociology of the First Republic was the domain of semifascist social theorists.

Despite these unfavorable political and institutional circumstances, sociology developed during this period to an intellectual peak unmatched in Austria since.26 The studies of Alfred Schütz (1899–1959)21 and Felix Kaufmann (1895–1949)22 emerged from Ludwig Mises' private seminar. These two, especially Schütz, after emigrating to the United States, greatly influenced phenomenological sociology and ethnomethodology. However, in the course of the transatlantic process of approval, it was forgotten that the ideological basis of Schütz's radical thinking was rooted in the liberalism of the end of the nineteenth century, and that his theory was supposed to be the sociophilosophical backing for Mises' anti-statist program.23 Several social scientific authors belonged to the neopositivist Vienna circle: after the circle organizer, Otto Neurath (1882–1945), there was Ed-
Spann, Johann Mokre (1901–1981), a member of the Catholic wing in Graz after returning from emigration in the States, and Johannes Messner (1891–1984), who worked at the Catholic theology department of the University of Vienna, were the only sociologists in Austria, assuming one adopts an extremely broad definition of the term sociology. Messner endeavored to establish a social theory based on natural law, Mokre hardly distinguished himself as a prolific writer, but Knoll emerged in later years as a knowledgeable critic of ideology, especially of Catholic natural law and ecclesiastical history. The early attempt at carrying out a sociological analysis of the Nazi concentration camps through Benedikt Kautsky (1894–1960), on the other hand, remained an episode, because its author did not hold a university position and was prevented from carrying out scientific work by his participation in the trade union program for adult education.

It was only the founding of the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) in Vienna in 1963, financed by the Ford Foundation and energetically pushed forward by Oscar Morgenstern and Lazarsfeld, that led to a reconstruction of sociology in Austria. This period also saw the founding of commercial opinion research institutes, most of which sympathized with political parties, as well as the founding of the first social science specialist journal: Die Meinung was primarily committed to the field of public opinion research and Lazarsfeld also had a hand in its founding. It was only in 1966 that the universities followed suit, after a recommendation by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), with the establishment of sociology as a course of studies.

Since then it can be said that a sociological education is available in Austria on a university and extra-university level. The clear division between these two sectors is also reflected by research efforts and publications. The extra-university research's stronger ties with the political world correspond to a greater extra-scientific research significance (even if only temporarily). Apart from a few exceptions, the majority of this research is pure contract research and rather insignificant. On the other hand, university research is earmarked by its tendency toward complicity, and its results can seldom be regarded as important after a certain amount of time.

The cohort effect can also partly explain the development of sociology in Austria over the past two decades. The creation of university chairs, almost all of which were filled at the same time, preceded the introduction of sociology as a course of studies (in Vienna and Linz in 1966 and in Salzburg and Graz in 1984). More than half of the full professors still lecturing today 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 its mark on Austria. The results of this anomaly are the publication of numerous, rather unprofessional research reports by the younger generation and the retreat to the ivory tower of artistic complacency on the part of the spurned professors. (The above-average number of textbooks produced by Austrian sociology professors is not necessarily an indication of their pedagogical ethos.)

The IHS was temporarily an exception in this respect: the usual practice in the first half of the 1970s—employing excellent foreign researchers as guest lecturers and employing them as project supervisors—collapsed in a few noteworthy empirical studies. This development came to an end with the waning of the Austrian social democratic enthusiasm for reform toward the end of the 1970s, and especially after the recent worldwide economic crisis: the transformation of the IHS from a multidisciplinary basic research institute into an institute for economic prognoses and applied research—in connection with this Anatol Rapoport was fired as director in 1984 under undignified circumstances—also put an end to this innovation.

The high degree of specialization is of particular importance, since the small number of researchers into particular topics prevented an exchange of ideas. Even the founding of the Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie did little to change the undeveloped desire for discussion.

In relation to this, it must be said that there are hardly any sociologists who deal with questions of sociological theory on a general level; the predestined (through their position) university sociologists hardly distinguish themselves with relevant publications. Together with the lack of continuous research in the field of sociology is the purely rhetorical reference to the modern authors and theories: in the late 1960s it was the theory emanating from the Frankfurt School, which was followed in the early 1970s by structuralist French-originating neo-Marxism, after which theoretical references multiplied: the spectrum stretches from Luhmann through Habermas to Bourdieu.

There is more continuity, while still maintaining an internationally respectable level, in the field of methodology. Since 1972 Kurt Holm has been lecturing at the University of Linz; he and his collaborators have published numerous works concerning the techniques and methods of quantitative social research. Authors of methodological works were also to be found elsewhere.

There is no room to mention all the works in the subfields of sociology here. After referring to research institutes, I will restrict myself to a few examples, which will presumably still be worthy of discussion in a few years' time. The sociology of the life-cycle goes back a very long way, to which Leopold Rosenmayr, the doyen of academic sociology, was committed from the very beginning. During his forty-year career Rosenmayr carried out research into succeeding life-cycles. He has most recently been examining the process of age.
an extensive literature study on the use of autobiographical documents in different human and social sciences by Sigrid Paul, from which thoughts about biographical methods in sociology originate.\textsuperscript{44}

Another field, which has been studied for years, is that of deviant behavior. Research into this is being carried out at the Institute for Legal and Criminal Sociology, which was founded in connection with the reform of criminal law, and at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research into Drug Abuse, both of which are located in Vienna.\textsuperscript{45} Works based on the observation of marginal groups were published by Roland Girtler,\textsuperscript{46} and a theoretically more critical study is Peter Strasser’s discussion of the history and tradition of criminology.\textsuperscript{47}

Following the emerging unemployment of the 1980s, attempts at research into this were relatively quickly established; these were primarily initiated and financed by the Federal Ministry for Social Affairs. As well as empirical studies,\textsuperscript{48} there are attempts at interdisciplinary research\textsuperscript{49} and international cooperation.\textsuperscript{50}

Extensive reports on the situation of the family and of women in Austria appear regularly, which are also organized and financed by the state.\textsuperscript{51} The last group especially can be viewed in relation with emerging feminist women studies.\textsuperscript{52}

There is no doubt that there is a lack of research in Austria carried out in many fields abroad and that research results presented by Austrian sociologists only seldom receive international recognition. On the other hand, after many years, sociology, which was primarily in the hands of independent scholars during the interwar period, such as Schütz, Kaufmann, Neurath, Zügel, and Lazarsfeld, has become professionalized and will therefore be in a better position to weather the coming storms. Or so one hopes.

NOTES

1. For the period before 1918 I am limiting myself to the development of sociology in the German-speaking part of the Habsburg Empire. Second, only those who are working or who have worked in Austria are mentioned.


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5. For more details see Christian Fleck, Rund um „Marienhal“ (Vienna: Gesellschaftskritik, 1990).


7. See Max Adler, Kausalität und Teleologie im Streite um die Wissenschaft (Vienna: Volksbuchhandlung, 1904), and Rudolf Eisler, Kant-Lexikon (Berlin: Mittler, 1930).


13. Attempts at such “grand systems” were made by insignificant authors; those worthy of mention are Albert Schäffle, Bau und Leben des sozialen Körpers (Tübingen: Laupp, 1875–1878); Gustav Ratzenhofer, Soziologie (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1907); and Ratzenhofer, Die Soziologische Erkenntnis: Sociological Knowledge: The Positive Philosophy of Social Life (Salem: Ayer, 1973).


16. Philosophisch-soziologische Bücher (34 vols.); editor: Rudolf Eisler (Leipzig: Kröner, 1907–1915). This is all the more remarkable since the scientific community was then very small and it was taken for granted that everyone spoke French and English. See Fleck, *Rund um ‚Märchenhaft'*.  
18. For example, Friedrich Wieser, *Das Gesetz der Macht* (Vienna: Springer, 1926).  
19. He also remained a nonappointed university lecturer during his lifetime.  
27. Some of the authors were Alexander Gerschenkron, Marie Jahoda, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Käthe Leichter, and Karl Polanyi; see Fleck, *Rund um ‚Märchenhaft'*.  
31. Benedit Kautsky, *Taufel und Verdamnte* (Zürich: Gutenberg, 1946). Later on, through his role as co-editor of Karl Marx’s works, Kautsky paved the way for a Marx renaissance in the German-speaking world.  
33. Since 1953 the Catholic church has had a polling institute.  
35. In relation to this it is worth remembering that also younger academics have emigrated abroad, not always of their own free will. Worthy of mention are Ernst Topitisch (1962 to Heidelberg), Judith Janosca-Bend (1967 to Darmstadt), Henrik Kreutz (1974 to Hannover), Hermann Strasser (1977 to Duisburg), Karin Knorretina (1980 to Bielefeld); it must also be mentioned that many Austrians qualified as university lecturers in the Federal Republic of Germany because they encountered difficulties in Austria.  
36. The project on Austria’s health care system was supervised by Frieder Nascbokl: Frieder Nascbokl et al., eds., *Systemanalyse des Gesundheitwesens in Österreich*. 2nd ed. (Vienna: Montan, 1978); the project on social reporting, social structure, social mobility, and inequality was advised by John Goldthorpe, and Robert W. Dodge, among others: Josef Bueck and Marina Fischer-Kowalski, eds., *Lebensverhältnisse in Österreich* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1980); Max Haller, *Klassenbildung und soziale Schichtung in Österreich* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1982); inspired by Paul F. Lazarsfeld: Karin Knorr, Max Haller, and Hans Georg Zilian, *Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung in Österreich* (Vienna: Jugend und Volk, 1981); other projects, which were only presented as project reports, were advised by Ottis D. Duncan and Wolf-Dieter Narr, among others.  
37. Mainly in the form of institutes organized by the Ludwig Boltzmann Society, which, however, do not have continuous, communicative links with each other; there were Ludwig Boltzmann Institutes for, among others, medical sociology, research on drug abuse, social gerontology, and life-cycle research; the Institute for Criminal Sociology was dropped from the Society after ten years of very successful activity and has since been reestablished as the Institute for Legal and Criminal Sociology. Further research institutes are financed by the Austrian Academy for Science (Institute for Socioeconomic Development Research), UNESCO (European Center for Research into Social Sciences and Documentation), the UN (European Center for Social Welfare), municipalities, parties, trade unions, or boards.  
38. It is worth considering that there are strong ties with West German sociology.  
39. An exception was the number of plaintive reactions by the guild to a publicly
reported criticism of the science minister: Herta Firnberg, “Zur Rolle der Sozialwissenschaften in der österreichischen Wissenschaftspolitik: Das Anwendungsdefizit der Soziologie,” Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie 3, 1 (1978), 4-10, and the replies in this and the following journals.

40. Exceptions are Judith Janoska-Bendl, Methodologische Aspekte des Idealtypus (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1965); Heinz Steinert, Strategien sozialen Handelns (Munich: Juventa, 1972); Johann A. Schüle, Theorie der Institution (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1987); Andreas Balog, Rekonstruktion von Handlungen (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989); Helmut Kuzmits, Der Preis der Zivilisation (Frankfurt: Campus, 1989); Helga Nowotny, Eigentum (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989); examples from neighboring disciplines are Elisabeth List, “Einführung in die Clusteranalyse mit SPSS-X für Historiker und Sozialwissenschaftler,” Historical Social Research 14, 2 (1989), 6-167.


42. Henrik Kreutz, Soziologie der empirischen Sozialforschung (Stuttgart: Enke, 1972); Kreutz is also the senior editor of the journal Angewandte Sozialforschung 1 (1969 ff.). Heinz Steinert not only received recognition through having edited the first reader on interactionism in German (Heinz Steinert, ed., Symbolische Interaktion [Stuttgart: Klett, 1973]), but also published, alongside his works on social deviance, essays on methodological questions: e.g., Heinz Steinert, “Das Interview als soziale Interaktion,” in Heiner Meulemann and Karl-Heinz Reuband, eds., Soziale Realität im Interview (Frankfurt: Campus, 1984), 17-60.


45. The journal Kriminalsoziologische Bibliographie (1974ff.) continuously reports on the studies; compare the two “Festschriften”: 9 (1982), 36/37, and 14 (1987), 56/57. Also from this institute are Arno Pilgram, ... endet mit dem Tode (Vienna: Gesellschaftskritik, 1989); and Gerhard Hanak et al., Argernisse und Lebenskatastrophen (Bielefeld: AJZ, 1989).


47. Peter Strasser, Verbrechermenschen (Frankfurt: Campus, 1984).

48. See Federal Ministry for Employment and Social Affairs, Forschungsber-