

Pavel Machonin, eminent Czech sociologist, has died

Pavel Machonin (6 June 1927–14 July 2008), one of the most outstanding Czech sociologists, was among the first scholars to actively contribute to the revival of Czech sociology in the mid-1960s. His person and work are closely tied to the auspicious start of sociology in the period preceding the 1968 Prague Spring and should be remembered.

The post-war story of sociology is gloomy. Having flourished in the interwar period, it was destroyed by the communist regime, and by 1950 the last students of sociology graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy of Charles University. Labelled a hostile 'bourgeois pseudo-science', the pursuit of sociology was violently banned from research. Instead, Marxist historical materialism was introduced and taught as the only 'true sociology'. After fifteen long years the doors re-opened to sociology when the Institute of Sociology was established at the Czechoslovak Academy of Science and the *Sociological Review* (*Sociologický časopis*) began to be published in 1965.

Paradoxically, it was not on the premises of this institute but at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism for Higher Education – an institution affiliated with Charles University and charged with the task of training teachers in the official ideology – that the most important piece of research in renascent Czech sociology was launched. Pavel Machonin, the director of the institute (though officially appointed as such only in 1968), established a team of researchers, most of them young newcomers, and set them quite a different task: to prepare an empirical social stratification survey and on its basis put together a picture of contemporary Czech society that reflected reality instead of reproducing ideological clichés.

New and motivated researchers were found and recruited, money was procured from the state budget, the Czechoslovak Statistical Office was persuaded to apply a long questionnaire survey to a large sample of respondents, and the only computer in the country capable of handling the job (at the Ministry of Planning) was secured for use – all this was the work of Pavel Machonin himself. Deeply committed to the task, he invested his managerial and organisational talents into overcoming all the obstacles to it that existed under the pre-1968 communist regime. But much more was done – under Machonin's leadership the core research team constructed a theory and methodology of multidimensional social status as



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a comprehensive tool for the observation and explanation of the social structure in its multi-dimensionality and dynamics.

The survey fieldwork took place in the autumn of 1967 and was carried out along with a smaller survey on attitudes. In reality, however, there was much more to the project than just collecting and describing the data of one survey, even despite its great size. It involved an in-depth comparison of Bohemia-Moravia (now the Czech Republic) with Slovakia and for this purpose a team of outstanding Slovak colleagues was also engaged. Similarly, it also involved a historical dimension, and for this a group of historians was put together. This was a big project, planned to run for a couple of years and thus to establish an important branch of Czech sociology. Unfortunately, it was only partially able to achieve its objectives, as the work was soon interrupted by the 'friendly help' of five countries' armies in August 1968 and the regime change that followed.

Work on the main book that would result from this research nonetheless continued, and the results were published in 1969 in Czech and Slovak by a recently established publishing house in Bratislava Epona in – shut down soon after, mainly because of this 'crime'. That book was *Czechoslovak Society. A Sociological Analysis of Social Stratification*, and the crime derived from the fact that it became something of a symbol of the 'Prague Spring in sociology', and therefore, a subversive piece of reading banned from libraries. The institute – which in 1968 had been renamed the Institute of Socio-Political Sciences – was dissolved, and Pavel Machonin was expelled from the Czechoslovak Communist Party, his name was placed on the list of 'the enemies of socialism', and he was banned from the academic sphere.

The book was supposed to be translated into English and published in the United States, but Pavel Machonin rejected the publication offer, in apprehension (later justified) of the persecution the social scientists involved in the task would be subjected to. He published only a summary article in the *American Journal of Sociology* (1970), and a long book review by Czech emigre sociologists Zdeněk Strmiska and Blanka Vaváková was published in *Revue française de sociologie* (1972). In 1990, Pavel Machonin described the book's gripping fate in an article published in *Sociologický časopis*, and more recently, on the occasion of his 70th birthday, he discussed it again in *Sociologický časopis* (1997).

Pavel Machonin resumed his work in the field of social stratification research in 1990, initially at the renewed Institute of Socio-Political Sciences of Charles University. In 1992 he joined the social stratification research team at the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (re-established in 1990), headed by Petr Matějů. In 1994 he established a research team of his own, working mainly with Milan Tuček and a number of young scholars. In the early 1990s he was involved in designing the first large social structure and mobility surveys, namely 'Class and the Social Structure' (1991) and the comparative survey 'Social Stratification in East-Central Europe and the Circulation of Elites' (1993), coordinated by Donald Treiman and Ivan Szelenyi (UCLA).

These data and the data from many other surveys were studied by Machonin, Tuček and a number of young collaborators and interpreted in several articles and synthesising studies published in Czech. Pavel Machonin remained very active until a late age, elaborating on the theories of social structure in transition and of modernisation from various angles (listed below are just his publications in English). His last book, *Czech Experience and Sociological Reflection*, published in Czech in 2005, was discussed by Johann P. Arnason in *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review* 4 (2007), together with other texts commemorating Machonin's 80th birthday. Most recently he participated in a project of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs titled 'Mechanisms of Social Cohesion, Stratification and the Role of the Welfare State'.

In 1991, Pavel Machonin was named Honorary President of the ISA Research Committee for Social Stratification and Mobility in recognition of his pioneering work in the field in state-socialist societies. He also received a number of academic awards in the Czech Republic, and he cooperated with the Czech Social Democratic Party (in its Social Committee) and the related Masaryk Workers Academy. At the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic he was head of the Department of Social Structure Studies and he also served as Chair of the Scientific Council for many years. Pavel Machonin, an assiduous researcher and a prolific author, has left behind a vast body of work, always worth studying and furthering. He will remain in our memories.

Jiří Večerník

The book *Czechoslovak Society* and related publications:

- Machonin, P. (ed.) 1969. *Československá společnost. Sociologická analýza sociální stratifikace.* (Czechoslovak Society. A Sociological Analysis of Social Stratification) Bratislava: EPOCHA.
- Machonin, P. 1970. 'Social Stratification in Contemporary Czechoslovakia.' *American Journal of Sociology* 75: 725–741.
- Strmiska, Z. and Vaváková, B. 1972. 'La stratification sociale de la société socialiste.' *Revue française de sociologie* 13: 240–254.
- Alan, J. and P. Machonin, et al. 1990. 'Československá společnost po dvaceti letech.' (Czechoslovak Society Twenty Years On) *Sociologický časopis* 26: 129–145.
- Machonin, P. 1997. 'Výzkum vertikální sociální diferenciací a mobility 1967 dnešními očima.' (Research on Social Differentiation and Mobility in 1967 through Today's Eyes) *Sociologický časopis* 33: 481–486.

Books in English:

- Krejčí, J. and P. Machonin 1996. *Czechoslovakia 1918–1992. A Laboratory for Social Change.* London: Macmillan.
- Machonin, P. 1997. *Social Transformation and Modernization. On Building Theory of Societal Changes in the Post-Communist European Countries.* Prague: SLON.
- Adamski, W. W., J. Bunčák, P. Machonin, and D. Martin (eds.). 1999. *System Change and Modernization. East – West in Comparative Perspective.* Warsaw: IFiS Publishers.

- Machonin, P., L. Mlčoch and M. Sojka. 2000. *Economic and Social Changes in Czech Society after 1989*. Prague: Karolinum.
- Adamski, W., P. Machonin and W. Zapf (eds.). 2003. *Structural Change and Modernization in Post-Socialist Societies*. Hamburg: Reinhold Krämer Verlag.
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- Machonin, P. 1992. 'Political and Economic Transition or Social Transformation?' *Sisyphus – Social Studies* VIII/2: 125–133.
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- Machonin, P. and M. Tuček. 1994. 'A Historical Comparison of Social Structures in the Czech Republic in 1984 and 1993.' *Czech Sociological Review* 2: 149–172.
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- Machonin, P. 1997. 'Social Structure of Communist Societies "Après la lutte".' In M. Baethge, W. Adamski and B. Greskovits, *Social Structure in the Making. Sisyphus – Social Studies* X.
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- Machonin, P. and L. Gatnar. 1999. 'The Prospects of a Compromise Political Model in the Czech Republic after the 1998 Election.' *Polish Sociological Review* 4 (128): 485–502.
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