
SOCIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY BUILDING THE ROMANIAN CULTURAL NATION GUSTI'S SOCIOLOGICAL SCHOOL

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Abstract

Concerned with the state of the peasantry, sociologist Dimitrie Gusti, founder of the Sociological School of Bucharest, planned to study and modernize the Romanian society. The project of the sociology of the nation was implemented partially through the institutions that Gusti introduced in Romania after being inspired by the Occident, especially by Germany, Austria and Denmark. Through the Cultural Community Centre and then through the Social Service that was mandatory for all the university graduates, Gusti aimed to apply a *Militans Sociology* to raise the Romanian nation. King Karl II shared Gusti's doctrine of modernizing the Romanian villages through the work performed in the villages. According to Gusti's system, the King and the Church had an essential role in the cultural work in the villages. Financed by the King, in the '30s Gusti has coordinated the four areas of cultural work in the villages on the axes of health culture, work culture, soul culture and mind culture. Sociologists and theologians played the part of the elite that had to work in the villages to 'upraise' the Romanian cultural nation.

Keywords: cultural nation, science of the nation, cultural work, social intervention

1. Introduction

After the Great Union in 1918, the Romanian ethnics represented the majority of the peasants in the new provinces. Romania was 80% rural. The Romanian peasant was the common denominator of all the united provinces [1]. The peasant became the symbol of the Romanian nation at the beginning of the 20th century. Romanians have easily adopted a peasant definition of their nation and Orthodoxy became one of the fundamental elements of the Romanian nation for the nationalist-orthodox intellectuals led by Nichifor Crainic and Nae Ionescu.

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In the year when the universal male vote was introduced, the traditional Romanian society used late 19th century technical means for its agriculture and industry and the rural population was characterized by its socio-economic homogeneity [2].

After 1918, the public education was based on a centralizing policy, which led to an open conflict between the national state and the representatives of the ethnic communities. The most striking expression of the ethnic exclusivity consisted in the anti-Semitism during the '20s. The next decade brought many acts of violence against the Jews and some of the university students were involved in it, especially in Cluj, Iași or Chișinău.

Professor A.C. Cuza's League of National Christian Defence (LNCD) emerged in 1923 as a reaction to the fact that the new Constitution acknowledged the rights of the Jews obtained after they became Romanian citizens. The group was born in a university centre, at the University of Iași, where numerous Jewish students were learning. The LNCD doctrine was based on anti-Semitism and the orthodox Christianity constituted the main element of Cuza's argumentation.

The Legion of Archangel Michael was founded in 1927 by a group of young LNCD dissidents. The 28 years old lawyer Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu was leading the Legion and he believed that LNCD policy regarding the Jews was too moderate, despite old A.C. Cuza's anti-Semitism [3].

As opposed to these reactions, Dimitrie Gusti's School provided the young intellectuals with a different manner to relate to the challenges that occurred after the birth of the national Romanian state. Because the average Romanian student was coming from a family of peasants and had no background on the student life, Gusti invented in 1927 'The University Office' in Bucharest, the place where students could get information about the University, faculty and get career directions [4].

While the students of the '20s became more and more drawn to the national-legionary ideology and to Captain Codreanu's justice promises, Dimitrie Gusti redirected the diligent young people towards social research. To confront the uncertain future and the social transformations that could have unpredictable consequences, the sociologist Gusti suggested the youth with rural origins to understand the reality of the world that the students' elite came from. In the '30s, Gusti's Sociological School and the monographists that stood by him at the Royal Foundation constituted a genuine counter-movement for the Legionary Movement.

Gusti's project to modernize the rural areas implied more than just the research of the Romanian villages. His utopian intention was to achieve a 'Sociology/Science of the Nation', a complete project that was meant to include the research (Monography) of all the Romanian villages and cities: 15.201 villages and 172 cities, according to the 1930 Census. Gusti intended to study all the Romanian villages with the goal to supply the King and the local authorities with the obtained data, so that, together with them, the community members could fix the shortcomings of the researched rural communities.

The Militans Sociology or the Science of the Nation (Monography) initially consisted in a series of monographic studies conducted in a few villages with the student teams enrolled in the Sociology Seminar in the '20s. The first monographic campaign that took place in the Goicea Mare village in 1925 was considered the birth moment of the Monographic School [5].

After Gusti was appointed President of the Royal Cultural Foundation 'Prince Karl' in 1934, the monographic researches were extended to a few hundreds of villages with the help of the royal teams of the Foundation. Gusti's intention was to cover all the Romanian villages on a national level using the tools of the Science of the Nation: that is why he edited and introduced the Social Service Law in 1938. The law was suddenly suspended in 1939; hence Gusti could not fulfil his project that turned out to be utopian.

Gusti understood the nation in a similar way with his contemporaries. The concepts that set the basis of the nation theory in Central and Eastern Europe originated in the suppositions of philosopher Herder [6]: ethnicity, blood were basic criteria in defining the cultural nation. Religion and the national language – the administrative means that facilitated mass communication – became essential criteria for identifying the citizen.

This article shows the unachievable project of the founder of the Sociological School of Bucharest (to study and modernize all the Romanian villages) and the part that Gusti assigned to the Cultural Community Centre and to the local community in building and upraising the cultural nation. The sociologists in the multidisciplinary teams were supposed to go to the villages and stimulate local initiatives with the purpose of community development. The priest and the teacher were the main facilitators of the social intervention for upraising the community and the Romanian nation.

2. Research method

I have used the method of representative biography to study the role that theologians and sociologists had to perform in Gusti's project for building and modernizing the Romanian cultural nation [7].

This qualitative research method follows the history of an individual's life, depicting the social contexts and the experiences he/she shared with other individuals who have had similar social evolutions.

I have analyzed the newspapers of the royal teams published by the Royal Cultural Foundation (*Curierul Echipelor Studentesti, Fundația Culturală Regală 'Principele Carol'*) and by the Social Service (*Curierul Serviciului Social*), as well as the journals, memoirs and correspondence of the Sociological School members. I have also studied the King Karl II speeches and journals in the '30s to better understand the importance that the King gave to Gusti project of modernizing the villages.

3. The Cultural Community Centre and the Royal Cultural Foundation 'Prince Karl'

After Gusti ended his term at the Ministry of Education, Cults and Arts (1932-1933), King Karl II offered him the leadership of the Royal Cultural Foundation 'Prince Karl' in 1934, as President, general manager. At the Foundation, the focus was rather on cultural action in the villages than on monographic research, which had significant consequences upon the ideology of the School of Bucharest [8].

The local centre of cultural activity was the Cultural Community Centre, an institution inspired by the Austrians. It had a council assembled of the village elite. The second rank institution in the system was the Peasants School. The Popular Universities or Peasant Schools were inspired by the Danish and were intensely promoted by Gusti in the '20s [9].

At the Royal Foundation, he hired monographists interested in the 'cultural work' for the upraising of the Romanian villages. The royal teams were now preoccupied rather with the cultural intervention and action, than with social research and their main concern was to cover the four areas of cultural work: the health, work, soul and mind culture.

In May 1934, King Karl II underlined the importance of local work within the Cultural Community Centres in one of his public speeches: "The opera of the Foundation is a thorough one, based on working in the core of things. By strengthening the Cultural Village Centres – meaning by strengthening some organizations that have, let's say, moral guardianship upon the village – we want to reach the upraising of the individual and the community" [10].

In another mobilizing speech on June 30th 1934, Karl II gave a boost to the youngsters of the cultural teams at the Foundation, who were going to the countryside: „Firstly, I wish to thank you for how you answered to my call. I hope you are all convinced of the work that you will have to perform. Indeed, it is a work of sacrifice, but you have to be certain it is a deeply productive work, useful to the country. You will not go there to work only for show-off, but you will go to those lost countryside areas to perform a permanent work, a thorough work, a work that has to leave deep traces in each village. My wish is that after the teams' departure, the village will be as much as possible transformed. Transformed in its exterior aspect and in its private life." [10, p. 121]

Each royal team was formed by students joined by a medic, a veterinarian, an agronomist, a graduate of the National Sports Academy, a zoo-technician, an economist, an ethnographer, a folklore specialist, a psychologist and a theologian. They conducted their work through the Cultural Community Centers. A theologian was included in each royal team with the purpose to nurture the soul culture. Mostly, he was the village priest.

The Cultural Community Centre was meant to serve as an example for the villagers, as it should have gathered all the hard-working, householder peasants and enabled them to lead by the decision of the majority of the villagers, based on the criteria of work, diligence, book know-how or their skilful use of the

plough. The Cultural Community Centres were supposed to stimulate the villagers to build clinics, libraries, churches, public baths, roads and bridges: “The Cultural Community Centre has to assimilate the student team’s work methods and to continue its endeavours. [...] The first obligation you all have is to identify those people in the village who, according to the Foundation standards, have to join the Cultural Centre. They can only be the truly hard-working ones who believe in the best interests of their village. It is ideal that the village intellectuals, the priest and the teachers are not missing from the Cultural Centre. [...] Also, consider all of the village leaders who stood out by being industrious, regardless of their political or personal divergences.” [11]

Social intervention at the countryside through the royal student teams with the purpose to collaborate with the village elite, with the priest and the teacher in order to stimulate the local initiatives and energies is very similar to the communitarian vision on community development. Dimitrie Gusti’s belief was that the nation modernization could be achieved by developing the rural communities with the involvement and stimulation of the local community.

Although Gusti did not use concepts like communitarianism, ‘good society’ or community development, the project of the Sociology School is similar to the communitarian doctrine. For communitarians like Etzioni, [12] “a good society is founded on morals, community, social responsibility, and consensus upon a set of values. It is an attempt to reconcile tradition with modernity, the moral values – as the basis of the social organism – with protecting the individual autonomy, brought by modernization.”

The members of the royal teams considered their purpose was not to transform, but to provide counselling to the peasants, and the institution of the Cultural Community Centre was the place where the local leaders received advice. The Orthodox local parish priest and the village school teacher were the most important actors of cultural work and the royal teams were instructed to collaborate well with the church and school: “Guided by natural leaders of cultural life, the priest and the teacher, the Cultural Community Centre gathered all the praiseworthy, enlightened and diligent householders. The villagers’ majority decided to entrust them the rural community leadership taking into consideration the appreciation of their work, integrity, carefulness, and whether they knew how to read and write, or how to use the plough.” [13]

The major role that the orthodox clergy had to play in upraising the nation and in the national build that Dimitrie Gusti imagined is also underlined in his guidelines for applying the cultural action program. Gusti recommends the royal teams to share their work at the Cultural Community Centre with the representatives of the Orthodox Church and of the local schools (particularly with the history teachers): “We recommend that you prepare a calendar of the social meetings, with days, hours, topics and a unitary program. During religious and national holidays, the respective event shall be recalled through readings and songs. [...] The priest assigned to the Cultural Community Center can use the social meetings to go through his entire religious program during a year; similarly, the teacher handling the pre-military instruction in the village will

spend a few evenings educating the young recruits to be patriots by giving them the string of lectures concerning the great historic battles, according to *The Past of our People* program. [...] A memorial calendar will be compiled for each town or village, presenting national historic events (religious, local) that have to be evoked on holidays.” [D. Gusti, *Îndrumări pentru aplicarea programului de activitate culturală*, Fundația Culturală Regală ‘Principele Carol’, Bucharest, 1-11]

The mission of the Cultural Community Centre was not just to strengthen the collaboration of the young diligent students with the local leaders (priests, teachers, noteworthy peasants), but also to provide a new meaning for their work in the local community. The doctrine of the Royal Cultural Foundation ‘Prince Karl’ aimed to build the Romanian cultural nation through Church, School and Administration, directly assisted and advised by the teams serving the Monarchy: „Because the true transformation of the village life will be the outcome of the fight between the villages in which the Cultural Community Centers infuse the peasants with faith in their power to achieve things through good organization and a new understanding of the purpose of school, church and cultural institutions. [...] The constructive and transformational reality of the Cultural Community Centre – as means of organizing the new village life – is built in the peasants’ souls on their will to set up a new life.” [13, p. 6-7]

Different student teams brought their contribution in the villages to develop the health, work, mind, and soul culture. The teams dedicated to the soul culture built churches, took care of cemeteries, distributed religious icons, and married the concubines. The clergy and the institution of Church were called to cultural action because, according to the recent collective memory and to the conscience of the people back then, the churches and monasteries stood for the moral institutions that strived to enlighten the people and supported the unification of the Romanians in 1918.

4. The Social Service

On February 11th 1938, the King abrogated the liberal Constitution of 1923, and on February 20th he proclaimed a new Constitution based on the royal authority. The Law of mandatory Social Service was introduced on October 18th 1938 [14]. From that moment, the Foundation teams started to collaborate within the Cultural Community Centre with the members of the institutions created by King Karl II authoritarian regime: The Country Guard (*Straja Țării*), The Pre-military Preparation, and The Work for Collective Use – organisms with a much more important role than the one played by the Social Service among King Karl’s institutions. Dimitrie Gusti was assigned President of the Social Service, a position from which political-wise he was answering directly to the King.

By the introduction of the Social Service Law, the cultural work in a Romania placed under royal dictatorship became mandatory for all the university graduates, who had to work for at least 3 months in the villages to get

their degree. After 1938, the royal student teams were organized through the Social Service, meaning through a real ministry, with clerks and pay-rolls.

Between 1938-1939, through the Social Service Law, Dimitrie Gusti try to extend at a national level the work performed starting with 1934 by the Royal Foundation teams in the Cultural Community Centres built in over 2600 Romanian villages (according to the School members' estimations) during the 5 years of activity under his leadership (1934-1938). The project of total research and 'nation uplifting' was introduced in the mandatory Social Service.

The Social Service Law considered that the Cultural Community Centre was its executive organism. By law, the role of the Community Centre was to lead the village life by determining the locals to work together for the collective interest, and by coordinating the activities conducted in the village by the authorities and by private initiatives.

Each Community Centre treated a specific local or regional issue; therefore each had to apply its own cultural policy, which was original due to the various nature of the matters that each village confronted with.

The four areas of cultural work in Gusti's system (health, work, mind, and soul culture) were explicitly encompassed in the Social Service Law. The Cultural Community Centre was supposed to coordinate the village activities by developing: "the health culture, by preventing and fighting diseases and by teaching people how to do sports; the work culture, by showing people how to be more productive; the mind and soul culture, through national education regarding all the life aspects. The Community Centre building shall accommodate three departments: sanitary (clinic, pharmacy, bath, maternal area), economic (supplies, bakery, and butcher's shop), cultural (festivity room, conference room, a radio, a library with reading room, a museum, a room for peasants' crafts, like weaving and others as such)." [14]

Article 11 of the Social Service Law stipulated that the village work in the Community Centres was mandatory for the rural communities' intellectuals: "The priests, teachers, administrative clerks (notary, mayor and prefect) and any other professionals employed by the State, region, county or town are compelled to integrate their work for the collective use within the Cultural Community Centre. Those who circumvent this obligation shall suffer disciplinary sanctions".

However, the military style imposed to the royal teams after 1938, the financial benefits and the disciplinary sanctions enforced by the Social Service Law could not outrun the influence of the green shirt legionary uniform: it attracted many young intellectuals, as well as we many peasants. On October 13th 1939, the mandatory Social Service was suspended by the King and its budget was redirected for equipping the army, which had just been mobilized to engage in World War II [9, p. 235].

5. Conclusions

Although his project was far from being fully implemented, the build up and modernization of the Romanian nation were conceived by Dimitrie Gusti in the sense of the material and spiritual upraising of the Romanian villages, and of an ethnic construction of the Romanian nation.

The Cultural Community Centre was the institution that handled first the monographic research project, and then the social and cultural intervention during 1934-1939. It was the institution where Gusti's teams counselled peasants at a local level and coordinated the cultural action. It involved the village intellectuals, the most important peasants, the teachers and the priests: Health, Work, Mind and Soul were the four key-concepts that peasants were instructed about in the over 2600 Community Centres (according to the School member's statements) by Gusti and his co-workers during 1934-1939.

The utopian project of achieving the Monography of all the 15.201 villages was impressive rather due to its intention, than to its results. Other institutions of the King Karl II regime – such as The Country Guard (Straja Tării), The Pre-military Preparation, and The Work for Collective Use – were the organisms that played a much more solid part in the social and cultural transformation during the King Karl II dictatorship.

The theologians and the Orthodox Church were summoned by the Dimitrie Gusti's Sociological School to contribute in the project of building a unitary nation, culturally coherent and homogenous. The answer of the Orthodox clergy was to participate and get involved in the sense of community development.

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