

**Habilitation procedure
of Dr. Slavomíra Ferenčuhová**
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A review of a book
Sociologie města. 20. a 21 století (Praha-Brno: muni Press / Slon 2013)
authored by Dr. Slavomíra Ferenčuhová

Dr. Slavomíra Ferenčuhová is an active researcher specialising in urban sociology, both from a theoretical and empirical perspective. Virtually all of her undertakings and accomplishments are in the field of urban studies. She has a decent citation result (as of today in Google Scholar – 89, 76 since 2012). Her scientific activities are multifarious. Since 2012 she took part in six research projects and was a Principal Investigator in one of them (“Sociology of the city in 20th century”, 2012-2013); she has delivered many papers at both international and national conferences; organised four conferences; and was invited to give lectures at home and abroad. Most importantly, Dr. Ferenčuhová authored several articles in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes, both in English and Czech. She also published two books, namely *MENO, MESTO, VEC; Urbánne plánovanie v sociológii mesta a pripad (post) socialistického Brna* (Brno: Masarykova Univerzita 2011), and *Sociologie města* (2013) which is the subject of my more detailed review below.

This book is a result of the above-mentioned research project on the “Sociology of the city in 20th century”, which was funded by a research grant. The focus is on the history of urban studies in sociology and related fields such as cultural anthropology, philosophy, history, demography, and social geography. The notion of “field” has its special meaning here, since Slavomíra Ferenčuhová makes an effort to go beyond strict sociological studies and expand the scope of her research to more widely understood urban studies by applying Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “social field”. There are many implicit hints in the text about what is the specificity of urban sociology and urban studies. I would like to see more evident assertions in this sociological perspective that cities are understood as multiple relations between population and territory, physical and material environment and the location of social life, i.e. specific places created for and by interactions between social actors; that in cities, social relations are extremely intensified, the division of labour is highly complex, and people are more active and mobile than in non-urban contexts; that it is not just the density and architecture that decides about “the city”, but, as Georg Simmel argued long ago, special qualities that urban life demands, and which at the same time, produces certain skills, abilities and attitudes of its dwellers.

Dr. Ferenčuhová starts with the very beginnings of “urban studies”, from the 19th century, i.e., the writings of Charles Booth and Friedrich Engels. None of them was an “urban sociologist” in the sense that we understand it today. These two thinkers were not trained in sociology and their agenda was political, not academic. However, both of them raised several urgent social issues inherent to industrialised city life, especially those related to the living standards of the urban working class and proletariat. Booth and Engels were sincerely appalled by urban poverty, respectively in London and Manchester. In the next century, several scholars to an extent explored similar topics and theories, even methodologies. Somewhat different is the status of three German classics in sociology discussed by Ferenčuhová – Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Simmel and Max Weber. Although their contribution to urban sociology was rather marginal in relation to their general *œuvre*, their intellectual impact on the discussed sub-

discipline – as we can read in a special chapter devoted to them – was very significant. All these great scholars were interested in modernisation, and the city is one of the most important features of a modern, industrial landscape. As the author emphasises, these major pillars of academic sociology inspire experts until today.

A large part of the book is devoted to the Chicago School in Urban Sociology. This is a comprehensive overview of the achievements of this tradition. The story starts with Robert E. Park's famous article "The city: suggestions for the investigation of human behavior in the urban environment", published in 1915. From here we are led through the intricacies of Park's thought, but even in more detail, one can read about the innovative works and ideas of Louise Wirth. Ernest W. Burgess, William Zorbaugh, William I. Thomas and Charles H. Cooley are also mentioned. The conception of human ecology, and urbanism as a lifestyle is introduced and criticised. Anybody interested in a concise but fine-drawn history of the Chicago School and its impact on urban studies can reach to this part of Slavomíra Ferenčuhová's book. Of special importance is a chapter in which the school is discussed in highly critical retrospective. Many arguments of postwar scholars, such as Sjoberg and Firey, and more modern, such as Ganse and Castells, are accurately presented.

The retrospective critique of the Chicago School is meant to fill a huge gap in Slavomíra Ferenčuhová's attempt to provide an account of the history of sociological urban studies. The book jumps from the first three decades of the 20th century to the 1970s and 1980s, and later. This part is divided into two major chapters, one devoted to the activities of scholars working in the Weberian tradition, mainly Raymond Pahl, and the second one, which discusses productions of scholars working within a neo-Marxist paradigm, such as Manuel Castells, Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey. This is a succinct recapitulation of their theories and works that captures the major differences between the two traditions in sociology in general, and in urban studies in particular.

The above chapters are followed by chapter 8, probably the most important one in the context of the whole book. First, it is a self-reflexive critique of the possibilities and limits of the sociology of the city understood as a discipline not interested in everything that is going on (and one can observe) in the city, but one focused on the urban aspect of social relations. Unavoidably, we move to more current issues of urban studies that, for instance, enable us to see various types of modern urbanised landscapes, such as cities of (post-)industrial times, colonial cities, conurbations, metropolises, suburbs, capitalist and socialist cities (more about them anon), and global cities – the latter supposedly detached from their territory. Contemporary scientists cope with these intricate issues by inventing new concepts and models. The first axis runs between concepts of cosmopolitanism and community life. It concerns the effect of globalisation on city life and the way in which it mysteriously connects urban centres both nationally and globally. This tension between the cosmopolitan and community dimension propels several scholars to develop new sociological theories of urban life in a geopolitical perspective. The other axis stretches between notions of place (locale) and space (milieu). The first one denotes a more physical, tangible dimension of the city, while the second one implies the way in which urban citizens' social lives are organised, cultural forms develop, and political relations of power and domination are constantly re-established. These and similar problems are discussed in the book in several terms applied in present-day urban studies, for instance "ordinary cities", "cosmopolitan urban theories" or "localised studies".

The latter issue brings us to the last part of the book about sociology of the city in the Czech Republic and Czechoslovakia. It is a properly balanced chapter that shows a trajectory of sociological urban studies in communist Czechoslovakia (Jiří Musil is a towering figure here) and on the socialist city, conducted by both Czech and western scholars. Dr. Ferenčuhová attempts to relate world trends in urban sociology and the intricate trajectories of sociological studies of the city conducted locally. The notion of “socialist city” as a specific category is quite adequate here. Her effort to include sociologists from countries other than Czechoslovakia, behind an increasingly punctured Iron Curtain is praiseworthy, even if it is limited to a small number of scholars, especially from Hungary and Poland. She captures the ways in which local studies were influenced by western theories and how they had been “corrected” in order to grasp the specificity of socialist industrialisation-cum-urbanisation. What the author misses is the fact that it was a one-way-street in which theories were invented in western academic centres and had to be accepted by “socialist scholars” if their voice, however weak, was to be heard internationally. They had to use western language and concepts and present their findings in terms of the differences between the situation “in the West” and in socialist countries. In that sense, they were merely able to emanate reflected light. An account of the situation in post-1989 Czech Republic, even if clipped, indicates that not much has changed in terms of knowledge production and flow since then. Post-socialist scholars in social sciences in general, and in urban studies in particular were catching up with and joining the choir of their western masters unable to propose anything as imaginative as postcolonial scholars. Specific socialist and post-socialist cities are out there, but original post-socialist conceptualisations of them are rather absent. Also, a transformation of urban sociology into urban studies taking place in the Czech Republic, as the author’s thesis goes, imitates a western blueprint. However, this Czech(o)slovak thread is the most original contribution of Dr. Slavomíra Ferenčuhová to the history of urban sociology and sociological theories about the city.

In general, working within established paradigms, she skilfully presents the development of ideas since the 19th century until today as well as critical accounts of thoughts and works of past scholars put forward by several theorists and historians of urban studies. In result, we receive an apt and convincing account of a specific aspect of the history of sociological tradition. It meets the standards of the “habilitation dissertation” and I support Dr. Slavomíra Ferenčuhová’s application for the degree of “*Doctorus Habilitatus*”.



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