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Why Sociology Has a Marginal Position in Civic Education in Bulgaria Nationally Specific and/or Universal Trends

"A mood of crisis has pervaded the field of sociology over the past decade. It might be and indeed often has been argued that crisis is endemic to a field that has always lacked both a clearly bounded subject matter and a dominant theoretical and methodological focus. The present crisis, however, is institutional rather than intellectual, even if it is granted that a perennial state of intellectual crisis increases sociology's vulnerability to internal division and external threat."

(Dennis Wrong 1993, 183)

Abstract

The authors claim that, to an extent, the marginalization is a by-product of relationship among sociology, citizenship education and school education in general. This relationship is pretty complex and problematic because each of the three constituents undergoes a phase of fundamental crisis of axiological and institutional character. The developments in American sociology that exemplifies the state of affairs in the field are taken as point of departure while the Bulgarian case is used just as a magnifying glass to see clearer the triple crises which bring us to the roots of the civilizational transformation experienced today.

The moral of the story is that sociology has been marginalized in last decades because its public and academic status won by the previous generation can not be taken for granted. It does not correspond to the pressing demands of the changing world for a different type of sociology. Thus sociology falls easy prey to the academic competitors who follow aggressive strategy and policy of public expansion even in civil education. The particular situation in other countries may be different but these are common general rules of construing sociology.

At the end the paper offers some guidelines for transformation of the pattern in which contemporary sociology should be practiced in order to raise its public and civic relevance through refocusing it on sophisticated mediation of public policy and actions of citizens and through new forms of cultural communication.

Keywords

crisis in sociology; crisis in school education; American sociology; Bulgarian sociology; fights over civic education

Contents

1. Description of the task and work

Theoretically speaking, it seems normal for sociology to have a tangible presence in civic education (CE) as it seems normal CE to figure prominently in the school curriculum. Starting from such a premise it would be really surprising that in a comparatively democratic society, as the Bulgarian one is, CE has been officialized but is intangible. And the sociological input in it is void. How come? Is this a local misfortune or just a local manifestation of a larger societal process?

When we speak about the role of sociology in CE in school, we are inclined to consider each one of the three components, 'sociology', 'civic education', and 'the school', as taken for granted. It is as if we have before us a school that is successfully attaining its other educational objectives, so that we may safely entrust it with our hopes for effective CE as well, whereby to consolidate the potential of civil society in the country in question. We view sociology as capable of promoting CE, being a social science that, in itself, is a well functioning cognitive and educational tool. It seems equally natural that CE already exists, and the only task is to further perfect it. But as early as the 1960s Peter Berger, in his book *Invitation to Sociology*, instructed us in the first rule of sociology: things are not as they seem. And this holds true for each of the three above-mentioned components of the problem we want to understand – contemporary sociology, school and CE . The Bulgarian case will be used only as magnifying glass to see the problem clearer. Of course,

there could be no direct correspondence between any particular national case and the global trends of development. Yet without this dual point of reference the national situation may seem over eccentric or dismal on the one hand and, on the other – the notion of variability of the relationship among school, sociological and CE developments may seem too abstract and unreasonably problematic. Equipped by such a double vision the researcher could be spared both illusions and gross theoretical generalizations.

2. Sociology – general and country specific problems[1]

2.1. The general trend of crisis in sociology

Contemporary sociology undergoes a phase of profound crisis. If one goes back to the pages of "Footnotes"[2] from the early 1990s he will find abundant evidence of a sharpened crisis consciousness among sociologists of different ranks. The same would be the impression from the pages of American Sociologist, Social Forces, and Sociological Forum of the same period.[3] A brief enumeration of some telling titles of influential books would suffice:

- Turner and Turner had depicted sociology as *The Impossible Science* (Turner, Turner 1990).
- P. Berger issued his *Disinvitation to sociology* (Berger 1992).
- Horowitz composed his *Decomposition of Sociology* (Horowitz 1994).
- St. Cole solicited the debate on *What is Wrong with Sociology* in Sociological Forum, later to appear in a much extended volume under the same title (Cole 2001).
- Despite of the fact that Charles Lemert eagerly published *Sociology after the Crisis* as early as 1995 (Lemert 1995; 1996) in 1999 Lopreato and Crippen issued their vision of *Crisis in Sociology* (Lopreato, Crippen 1999).

The crisis concerns are to be found in the representative and influential collections edited by H. Gans (Gans 1990), Halliday and Janowitz (Halliday, Janowitz 1992)[4], and Erikson (Erikson 1997).

Sociology in all those cases meant American sociology, of course, but important counterparts are to be found in Europe (Bryant, Becker 1990; Nedelmann, Sztompka 1993; Boudon 1981), too. A decade later, the very same crisis is, obviously, not over yet (Berger 2002) – and here we have a topic to think about. If we trust the testimony of A. Abbott, there are no more sociology sections in the big bookstores in USA and the editors of some major publishing houses most confidentially advise their authors to refrain from having the term "sociology" in the titles of new books.[5] It would be fair to say that the sociology crisis consists in:

- the lack of any conceptual core in addition to the "hollow frontier" (Homans) that engenders the inability for cumulative growth;
- the lack of disciplinary distinctiveness and gradual osmosis with neighboring research fields;
- the lack of public appeal and hindered reproduction.

All these tendencies are real and their ensemble threatens the very prospect of the existence of sociology. It is easily recognizable that the second and the third factors – the dispersal of sociology and the loss of public attention – basically derive from a common root, that is, the inability of sociology to resemble the pattern of development typical for the so called "true/hard science." And since it is justifiably assumed that sociology would never be a "normal science" (Boudon 1988), it seems quite logical that sociology is as if on the verge of disappearing. Should we all join Vera Sparschuh in her self-esteem as "belonging to a dying species" (Sparschuh 2006)? Of course, not for having our background in the former DDR, but for the sheer fact of being sociologists...

2.2. Explanatory pattern

We will not tackle all those interpretations that are circular in character – for example, a statement that sociology cannot develop because it cannot attract talented young people any more because it is seen as unattractive just on the ground that there are no more brilliant new works; or – sociology doesn't

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1 An earlier version of this part of the article has been made public by G. Dimitrov in his *The Crisis of Sociology at the End of the 20th Century and Perspectives for the 21st Century. A Plea for a Mediating Sociology*. Public lecture at "Sozialwissenschaften neu denken. Sozialwissenschaften Fur das 21. Jahrhendert. Denkwerkstatte der Fakultat Fur Sozialwissenschaften an der Universitat Wien, Juni, 2005, Wien.

2 *Footnotes* is the official monthly periodical of the American Sociological Association.

3 Beyond any doubt, the American sociology has the most (if not the best) developed national sociological tradition in the world and that is why it is important for us to focus on it.

4 "It is time for a fresh look at the sociological enterprise. Although sociology appears to be comfortably ensconced in academic life, enjoying robust professional associations and an attentive public, the discipline faces troubling develop-

ments. Various essays in this book propose that the quality of sociology's graduate student recruits has dropped radically since the late 60's, that sociology lags well behind history, anthropology, and economics in its appeal to outstanding future scholars, and that the intellectual integrity of sociology is threaten by external financial and managerial pressures. Subspecialists in the discipline have become vulnerable to raids or even annexation by adjacent disciplines. Contributors also assert that the organization of sociology within university faces powerful centrifugal and sometimes disintegrative forces. They suggest that the substantive core of the discipline may have dissolved. The public voice has grown dimmer; its prestige in governmental circles has sunk. Whether these developments constitute a crisis is a matter of definition. At the very least, they warrant careful examination." (Halliday 1992, 3).

5 Personal conversation with A. Abbott in 2003.

grow steadily because there is no sufficient funding and the latter has shrunk because sociology could not demonstrate substantial progress. A number of authors note the interconnection between different factors: the lack of a conceptual core leads to a lack of identity, which results in waste of research resources and impossibility of the emergence of a professional community and, therefore, impossibility of coherent socialization, which in turn leads to mutual discrediting and lower quality of work and, consequently, lower public investments and loss of public interest, because of which the quality of the new generations of sociologists is inferior and that only aggravates the crisis of sociological development, at the conceptual and methodological level including (Turner, Turner 1990; Baker, Rau 1990; Erikson 1997; Cole 2001). Thus the theoretical and methodological problems prove to be interconnected with the institutional, human and subject-related ones in a dialectic unity of contradictions and problems, which simply have no solution.

All this is unquestionably true. This bleak picture is so systematic and depressing that it seems to leave little room for any other question about the plight of sociology. The big problem here is that such explanations suffer from a common shortcoming – namely, the assumption that sociology is "self-evident"; that it is a sort of a-historical ideal from which current sociological practices (only) have deviated and to which "true sociology" must return.

If we are allowed to paraphrase a famous title, we shall note that sociology isn't an "impossible science" in itself; it *has become impossible today* because of the hundred-year-long history of its being professed as a promise. In order to understand the essence of the prolonged crisis we should turn to P. Berger's methodological imperative that we should look at sociology in a broader social perspective[6].

2.3. Science as culture and the crisis of scientific culture. Tri-unity of Sociology and Its Understanding in a Broader Cultural Context

Through the perspective of the contemporary science studies and sociology of science it is clearly seen that science as such (and sociology in particular) is a specific cultural sub-system, which is a component of the large societal cultural system (Wolff 1946; Odum 1951; Friedrichs 1970; Coser 1978; Szacki 1982; Wrong 1990; Bershady 1991; Abbott 1999) and, hence, the structural parameters of the contemporary social life would not let sociology be the one it used to be in the past. The contemporary sociology crisis is much more profound and prolonged because it is much more fundamental. It concerns the very constitutive sources of the sociological endeavours and not only its theoretical form of being or public image.

In several versions of his statement N. Smelser (Smelser 1992, 1997) asserts that sociology is tri-fold by its very nature – it is simultaneously and intrinsically a science, an art and part of the humanities[7]. Yet, the thus understood inevitable tri-unity of sociology [so to say, "by nature"] can be sustained without problems only in an undeveloped form – in the popular sermonizing sociology of Auguste Comte, Lester Word, Albion Small or Franklin Giddings, Robert Park or Robert Lind, or even Charles Wright-Mills (Small 1916, 1924; Ward 1920/1883; Becker 1971; Matthews 1977; Ross 1991). In sum, what seems "true sociology" has been in fact the "innocent sociology" from the age of the Great promise. The growing sophistication of sociology as a result of the acquisition of professional experience inevitably means concentration on each of the three components, which exposes their categorical incommensurability and incompatibility. The problem is not only that at present the three poles of the sociological essence cannot be upheld simultaneously because of their specific detailed articulation as modern specialized practices. The problem is that in their own development each one of the three goes through its own contemporary crisis:

The crisis of science is easiest to recognize. Here we don't have in mind only the traditional unsolvable conflict between positivistic and constructivistic methods of cognition, each one of whose warring camps has broken up into numerous value- and methodologically-biased factions (Abbott 2001). We have in mind the more general context of public de-legitimation of science as a promising sphere of public activity. The MTV generations, educated by Internet based sources at that, cannot venerate formal reason, without which the entire architectonics of scientific activity crumbles to pieces. Contemporary science has lost public visibility and attractiveness – at least that kind of public mesmerization it had enjoyed 50 years ago during the Cold War age and the Conquest of Open Space.

The crisis of the meaning and purpose of human life is vividly illustrated by the poverty of philosophy in the second half of the 20th century. We have in mind the exposed tension between the meaning of human life and the reflexivity of 'formal rationality' (Weber) that contributes a lot to the desecularization of our world (Berger et al. 1999).

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6 "In diagnosing the condition of sociology, one should not view it in isolation. Its symptoms tend to be those affecting the intellectual life in general." (Berger 2001, 203).

7 "I will maintain that over the past century the major debates and dilemmas in our field – right up to the present – can be understood in terms of sociology's proximity to *three* intellectual outlooks that simultaneously constitute part of its environment and parts of itself. These may be referred to as the *scientific* orientation, the *humanistic* orientation, and the *artistic* orientation" (Smelser 1997, 18).

The crisis of public communication is also a fundamental problem of the contemporary life-world – and by that we don't mean the typically modern problem of alienation. Let's also leave aside for the moment the crisis of aesthetic communication itself, which is reproduced expressively by the so-called "conceptual art." The crisis of public communication, which concerns dramatically the possibility of existence of sociology today, derives from entirely different constituents and deserves special consideration. The sociological miscommunication (Cole 2001; Erikson 1997; Halliday, Janowitz 1992; Clemens, Powell, McIlwaine, Okamoto 1995; Sica 1992) – between sociological texts and their addressees – has at least three key dimensions:

Departmentalization of Sociology

First and foremost, sociology today cannot have mass public appeal because it itself has broken up into "thousands of sociologies" (Abbott 2001; 1999). Even if we ignore for the moment the lethal effect of the mutual disdain between sociologists that is obvious in all their writings, the very history of the substantive and paradigmal differentiation of sociologies makes addressing the audience from the positions of "sociology as a discipline" simply absurd – unjustifiable as an intent and ridiculous as performance. In sociology there is perhaps truly everything except discipline[8].

More to that sociology after 1980s has been heavily preoccupied with various minorities' issues – ethnical and cultural minorities; gender minorities (lesbians and queers); political and religious minorities. No matter what their intellectual quality may be such sociologies could not claim general public recognition. This brings us to the next important factor.

Departmentalization of the Addressee

Unfortunately for sociology, monstrous Balkanization is typical not only of its own camp but also of its public. In the mid-1960s, when sociology reached its zenith, the postwar societies were considerably more homogeneous in structural and cultural terms (Gans 1990a). In "the third wave" (Toffler) societies the homogeneous environment disappears – their stratification becomes increasingly complex and at the same time – polarized, whereas cultural diversity precludes a common plane of value commitments and, respec-

tively, – the very possibility for sending messages addressed to a mass audience (Gitlin 1990).

Cynicism as a Cultural Norm and "Value" Perspective of Sociological Practice

The situation becomes even more complex if we consider that the present age is characterized not simply by value pluralism but by radical devaluation of human values, beyond any substantive definition of each and every one of them. Even if we don't agree with everything said by J. Goldfarb (Goldfarb 1991), there is hardly room for doubt that cynicism is a widely representative cultural norm in the contemporary world, far beyond the boundaries of American society. The problem is precisely in that the shared moral commitment of author and reader is the basis on which authentic sociological communication has been possible at all (Ross 1991; Bershady 1991). Cynicism as a public cultural norm destroys the very discursive field in which sociology can exist as such.

Apart from that, we must also recall that today's sociology students become cynics by virtue of the very turf which they get their education on. If one considers the numerous sociological studies of concrete academic settings (Martindale 1976; Abbott 1999, 2001), one will easily understand the role of the institutional practices of education in sociology precisely as the source of this professional cynicism. On the one hand, the mutual disavowals between the greatest sociologists (Levine 1985) leave little room for hopes to students that sociology could become dialogical if not integrated (Levine 1995). On the other hand, witnessing the notorious nasty clashes between figures like Parsons and Sorokin, Parsons and McIver at Harvard or Riesman and Hauser at Chicago (which just exemplify the universality of the feuds in sociology) future sociologists get used not to the multitude of paradigms but to the lack of shared values of any sort in their field.

In sum, the most serious challenge to the possibility for sociological communication today comes from the overlap between the heterogeneous internal fragmentations of both the communicators and their target audience, on one side, and from the absence of a shared value environment of communication, on the other. In its turn, all this occurs when the path passed by sociology has led to impossibility to sustain the fundamental constituents of sociology: art, science, humanities.

A science that is undergoing such a fundamental crisis cannot be taught conveniently and in school. Moreover, despite Weber's imperative of value neutrality, every piece of sociology not only belongs to one of the competing paradigms but is unavoidably tied to premises from which contrary political implications should follow.

Furthermore there cannot be a value-neutral view on citizenship, because it is practically impossible to achieve a perfect balance between rights, duties, and

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8 "No one person or group can now claim to speak for the entire discipline. Fragmentation of the discipline has gone too far for that. Sociology now consists of a great variety in subject matters, political stance, theories, methods, and aspirations."(Becker, Rau 1990, 200). "There appear to be much less consensus in sociology than elsewhere in the social sciences about which theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches are best, about which scholars are most important in the field."(Lipset 2001, 262). A. Stinchcombe thinks of contemporary sociology as a "Disintegrated Discipline" (Stinchcombe 2001).

responsibilities, between critical thinking and partnership interaction: each concrete situation requires setting a priority on one of these attitudes, and this inevitable choice will always remain politically questionable in every particular social situation.[9] We must not forget that the golden age of sociology in the 1960s was part of the hopes for an 'welfare society' in Europe and the 'Great society' in the US, a society in which sociology was expected to be the reference point and instrument in the pursuit of scientifically grounded state policies. At the start of the 21st century such hopes would be a sign of political infantilism rather than of scientific achievement.

2.4. National particularities

Knowing the state of art in the field brings us some comfort when we discuss a particular case. Within this general crisis of contemporary sociology, Bulgarian sociology has its own particular causes of professional discomfort. The plight of sociology in Bulgaria is a topic that has been discussed with escalating concerns in recent years by native sociologists of different generations (Nikolov 1992; Koev 1992; Boyadjieva 2009; Dimitrov 1995, 1995a, 2002; Koleva 2005; Slavova 2009; Danchev 2008). The tendencies are disturbing, indeed.

To give just one example, in his report in 2008[10], the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University pointed out a trend: in the last 4 years the eight specialties in the Faculty have undergone a loss of about 40 per cent in the number of candidates applying (the candidates that indicate the respective specialty as their first choice or indicate that specialty as desired by them at all). Most drastic of all is the decreased interest in sociology: about 60 per cent fewer candidates indicate sociology as their first choice and 55 per cent fewer chose it in a lower rank of desired specialties.

Year/ Specialty	Candidates	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Change 2004-2008%
Philosophical Faculty	Total	10782	10900	11200	9020	6281	-41.75
	First place	3468	3716	3755	2640	2052	-40.85
Philosophy	Total	8472	8177	7967	5431	3865	-54.38
	First place	402	328	307	219	373	-7.21
Psychology	Total	6318	6357	6242	4851	3481	-46.23
	First place	849	838	833	759	591	-30.39
Sociology	Total	7640	7673	7857	5240	3397	-55.56
	First place	215	213	216	140	85	-60.47
Political science	Total	6666	6998	6633	4875	3508	-43.00
	First place	429	587	484	332	244	-43.12
Public administration	Total	7720	7682	8095	5585	3802	-50.75
	First place	1308	1420	1645	992	594	-54.59
Culture studies	Total	7005	7272	7020	5226	3347	-52.22
	First place	92	131	114	106	61	-33.70
Library-information Studies	Total	5407	5440	5195	3545	2004	-68.49
	First place	45	32	32	16	30	-33.33
European studies	Total	1504	1224	1188	867	1005	-33.18
	First place	129	167	124	76	84	-34.88

9 Cf, for instance, the sharp criticism by Stefan Theil in Foreign Policy regarding the anticapitalist bias in the way social science is taught in the French and German schools (Theil 2008).

10 http://www.phls.uni-sofia.bg/downloads/OTCHET08.pdf visited on 22.06.2009.

This concrete example is significant, because the education in sociology in Sofia University is considered the best that Bulgarian universities have to offer. So the question asked by S. Cole in 2001 – What's Wrong with Sociology? – is important far beyond the framework of US sociology at the end of the 20th century. Our local sociological community holds a marginal place in public attention, and the reasons for this are very significant. The present-day status of sociology is the direct result of its past, both its more distant past in the years of communism, and of the trends in the last two decades.

Although sociology in Bulgaria acquired the position of a separate discipline in the 1960s, which this science did not have in USSR (Koleva 2005; Michaïlov 2003).Yet it was not a genuine social science in Bulgaria, unlike in Poland (Boyadjieva 2009; Koleva 2002). Bulgarian communist sociology was mostly connected to the personal position of key figures in the Party apparatus, rather than to academic position based on personal research achievements. Science, art and humanities were practically indiscernible in the highly ideological discourse of the official sociology. Under these conditions academic sociology had some liberty for development, because of the greenhouse conditions provided for it by the Party functionaries, but it had no public visibility, and no relevance, other than for the Party. Nevertheless during the 1970s and 80s sociology in Bulgaria enjoyed a measure of prestige inasmuch as statesmen styled themselves sociologists. P. Boyadjieva aptly named it "the Party-blessed public prestige of sociology"[11].

The change after 1989 abruptly transformed the positioning of sociologists in public life, but not the nature of sociological research. For instance, during the years of communism, as a form of paradigm alternative to the party usage of sociology, the sociology of everyday life was developed in academic circles, and it succeeded in being ideologically neutral (Nikolov 1992; Koev 1992). But in the course of the very intense historical changes that ensued after 1989, the most capable among Bulgarian sociologists continued to occupy themselves with problems of the everyday experiences; and this was all too convenient for the 'criminal transition' to a 'controlled economy'. Academic sociology proved to be exotic in its thematic

and methodological orientation, and not committed to diagnosing and explicating current life (Dimitrov 1995). In the last 20 years no sociological study has attracted wide and lasting public attention. Thus Bulgarian sociology lost its battle for intellectual prestige(Boyadjieva 2009; Danchev 2008).

What greatly contributed to this intellectual defeat was the new situation of differentiation and competition between the expertise holders in the social sciences. In the previous decades, in the framework of Marxist ideological monopoly, the social sciences were extremely underdeveloped and sociology was a common home for all those interested in politics, culture, anthropology, public administration, social work, etc. After the start of the transition, each of these traditional disciplines became differentiated, and, understandably, the most innovative representatives among the general 'tribe' of sociologists joined the separating ranks of the disciplines. Academic sociologists proved the most inert scholars of all, and in the context of abrupt politicization of public life, it was political scientists, rather than sociologists, who moved into the priority focus of public attention.

It is highly indicative that the separation of scholarly communities into distinct fields took place following a strictly defined logic. Most threatened in the new situation were, naturally enough, the most ideologically charged specialties: philosophy, which trained 'ideological workers', and early school pedagogy, which trained leaders for the communist children and youth organizations, the 'pioneers' and 'komsomol'. Well aware of the menace to their professional groups, these two communities sought new forms of professional fulfillment. Pedagogues practically monopolized university education in social work. Philosophers joined on a mass scale in invading the field of general secondary education; at present in Bulgarian schools 7 philosophical disciplines are taught (5 of which are mandatory – *Ethics, Logic, Law*[12], *Philosophy* and *World and Personality*). A very telling fact is that philosophers undertook a strategy for sustained presence in school life, in a way that engaged the efforts of some key figures, who busily introduced 'philosophy for children', organizing 'national philosophy Olympiads', and entering the field of... civic education. This was the guild's strategy and policy for survival through adaptation to the new conditions.

But sociology, carried along inertly by the prestige and comfort it had enjoyed as a discipline in previous decades, made no attempts whatsoever at an organized and institutionally supported expansion towards social policies or to a presence in schools. To a considerable degree this attitude of inertia among the guild of sociologists was supported by the expectation that

11 "The close links of leading sociologists with government authorities virtually acted as a political umbrella over sociology, ensuring to a great extent the authorities' favor and creating peculiar ‚hothouse' conditions for its development. This ‚political umbrella' had decisive significance for the institutionalization of sociology" [...] The political umbrella over sociology also created an artificially privileged status for the sociologist – his/her position was publicly visible, party promoted, and prestigious, and thus attractive to many people. The artificiality of this mass attraction to the profession of the sociologist became immediately visible upon the collapse of communist party rule." (Boyadjieva 2009, 3-4).

12 It is worth mentioning that the textbook is written by a philosopher.

the pluralization of public life would entail a sharp rise in the demand for sociological diagnosis and expertise. It is true that within the space of a decade a dozen or so local marketing firms of sociologists were created, but due to the pseudo market conditions, most of them were directly engaged with party politics and in most cases functioned as PR agencies rather than as analytic centers. Hence there is a permanent tendency for sociology in Bulgaria to be associated by society at large with polls and rankings of public attitudes toward public figures and institutions, a research activity which generally meets with public mistrust (Dimitrov 1995; Boyadjieva 2009).

Besides we have to mind another crucial fact. Not coincidentally, sociology is defined as a form of self-reflection of modern societies. It can exist as a science only in societies that have attained a considerable degree of formal rationalization of public life, but where public institutions function in a transparent manner and reliable statistics are available for almost all public sectors, so that the connections between quantitatively expressed social processes can be studied. In reverse, the crime and party osmosis of the Bulgarian transition (Tchalakov et al : 2008) signifies that the basic social processes are occurring in the grey and black economy in the form of non-public practices, for which information is not and cannot be collected by sociological means – at the very least because the very technique of empirical surveys rests on the assumption of trust between respondent and interviewer, while in Bulgarian society there is a fundamental attitude of mistrust towards strangers, and a disposition to refuse anonymous interaction (Dimitrov 2009). In such a quasi-modern society, classical sociology simply cannot be adequate in its methods to the actual research tasks. There is no way that such sociology can be socially relevant and socially prestigious. More important, however, the lack of civil society has proven a key precondition for the marginality of Bulgarian sociology. This lack is a double handicap for sociology: on the one hand it represents a structural deficiency in the object of study; on the other hand there is a flaw in the addressee of sociological information (Dimitrov 2002; Boyadjieva 2009). Sociology can be civically important only under conditions of an authentically functioning "critical publicity", as Habermas calls it. Having said this, we are prepared to understand the hardship of CE in Bulgaria.

3. Civic education: universal and national characteristics

CE is equally ambiguous a subject, both viewed internationally and locally.

3.1. Universal scale: social demand and problematic results

It may be said that as a general rule, CE throughout the world develops as a result of a deliberate policy for its dissemination and encouragement. It is considered a key instrument for stabilization of democracy in countries that have chosen this form of government as their path of national development. But the general rule does not exclude countries like Great Britain, the cradle of modern democracy, in which CE is looked upon as a tool for resolving the acute problem of the integration of young people into the traditions and practice of representative democratic government (Edirisingha, Holford 2000). Studies have shown that the results of dissemination of CE vary greatly according to specific national traditions regarding democratic culture (Holford, Edirisingha 2000). But, as Sir B. Crick points out, even in the best of cases, for instance the United Kingdom, success is attained more in the implementation of new practices than in educational results (Crick 2007).

These general reference points should be had in mind when we turn our attention to a case in which there is a double lack – of social demand and of democratic cultural traditions.

3.2. Specific particularities in one particular post-communist society

This is a rather specific issue, the solution to which cannot be found on the basis of the personal experience of any single insider. That is why, before proposing our own interpretation, we looked for the viewpoints of key experts in the field of CE. The preparatory phase of our work included three components: interviews with experts[13]; focus groups[14]; desk research on previous studies[15].

How it all began

The story is brief but rich in lessons. The first attempts at introducing CE began in the early 1990s and are still continuing, but without significant results. For this

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13 In-depth interviews were conducted with the former deputy ministers of school education (M. A., R. V., Y. N., who were respectively part of left-wing, right-wing, and centrist governments); with key experts who had elaborated state requirements and syllabuses for civic education (. A. A., G. K.); M. Gr., head of the team of authors who produced the only textbook, so far, on the mandatory school subject *World and Person*, which comes closest to civic education in high schools; I. K., author of the methodological handbook for teachers of "World and Person"; I. T., dean of the Faculty of Pedagogy in Sofia University; chief experts on civic education at the Ministry of Education and Science (K. K., Y. N.), D.K., head of an influential NGO that report on CE on behalf of MES.

14 Three focus group discussions were conducted with teachers (in the capital Sofia, in a large city, and in a small city), as well as three focus groups with parents (in the capital Sofia, in a large city, and in a small city)

15 All publications on Bulgarian sociology by sociologists were studied (Boyadjieva 2009; Danchev 2008, 2005; Deyanova 2001; Dimitrov 2002, 1995, 1995a; Genov 2001; Koev 1992; Koleva 2005, 2002; Discussion 2004; Michailov 2003; Mitev 1995; Nickolov 1992; Slavova 2009, 2006).

reason, despite the requirement in the Law of general education that every high school student must pass a maturity exam in CE, this provision of the law has not been applied in years. There is no way there can be an exam testing the results of a process that never took place. How did things come to such a situation?

After the changes in 1989, entirely under pressure from external institutions such as the UN, the Council of Europe, the World Bank, the European Union, and particularly through the financial tools of the Open Society Foundation, the Bulgarian government and the Ministry of Education recognized the need for introducing CE in school. We stress the role of the Open Society Foundation, because its money paid for the state educational requirement, programmes, and methodic handbooks accepted by the Ministry of Education and Science. It was precisely the cadres of this NGO that gradually became officials in the Ministry, and the advances in CE are mostly due to them, an education that even now is basically realized through activities of the non-governmental sector[16].

The fight for CE in school[17] that broke out at the turn of the century, was very peculiar as described by some of the main participants in it[18]. On the one hand the confrontation ran along the debate as to whether CE should be a separate school subject or diffused in the contents of many subjects, connected with inter-subject links related to values, contents, and educational methods. The second idea triumphed, but at the cost of remaining unfulfilled. The major cause for this was that the introduction of a separate subject would entail decreasing the number of classes in other school subjects: this eventuality united experts in literature, history, geography (and of the publishing houses behind them) against the idea of a separate subject and in support of 'inter-subject links'. Apart from that, educationalists (students of pedagogy) that would have an important share in teaching the new subject rejected this innovation from the start. They had grasped that the subject was of an interdisciplinary kind, not just pedagogical, and hence the training of future teachers of this subject would not be their work alone[19].

A common front was thus formed between teachers in Bulgarian, geography, history, against the philosophers; as for other participants (sociologists) in the debate behind the closed doors of the Ministry of Education and Science – there were none. Sociologists were acknowledged not as stake-holders and expertise-holders on issues of CE but as hostile guild

contestants. Philosophers have had their small compensation – the introduction of the subject called "*World and Person*" in the 12th grade within the range of philosophical disciplines[20].

On the other hand, a battle is waged within the ranks of philosophers themselves. On one side of the line is the chairman of the work group, a former professor in dialectical materialism, who at the very start of the 1990s, drifted toward "philosophy for children". He was the one who insisted on CE as a separate subject that should run through all the years of education, but also on the pragmatic orientation of the contents of this discipline, which should build skills in project activity and other civic competencies. He lost the battle to the other side, which held that project culture is an instrumental skill that acquires importance only in a democratic environment, and this environment should be introduced in the form of a narrative about it, for the actual social environment gives no perceptual example of democratic participation[21].

This is how a compromise was reached that practically excluded the possibility for authentic CE to be realized in Bulgarian schools. On the one hand the explanation about democratic values, mechanisms, and practices appears only in the last class of high school, and until that time pupils have practiced precisely the lack of democratic culture. On the other hand, even then CE is reduced to just talking about citizenship, rather than providing orientation and tools for acting in a civic environment.

General trends behind the local misfortunes
The social logic in the story is even more instructive.

In a society where citizenship is missing, political parties cannot function as representatives of interests. The very existence of parties in such a society is directly dependent on clientelism and connections with the shadow economy, and even with organized crime. No such party would acknowledge the values and mechanisms of democratic citizenship as its cause, for authentic citizens would act as opponents

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16 Interviews with K.K., D. K., R. V. and group discussions with teachers.

17 The concept of CE as a battlefield has been theoretically elaborated recently in more details by Dimitrov and Boyadjieva in an article in *Citizenship Studies* (Dimitrov, Boyadjieva 2009).

18 Interviews with A. A, G. K, R. V., U. N., Iv. K.

19 Interview with I. T.

20 "Many times after 1990 philosophy would become part of, and then move away from, civic education – it would encompass it, then cross through it, then do something quite different. It depended on the directives of the respective minister. Ultimately, things never came to a clear consensus variant. I've taken part in many meetings and in several text variants, but with no definite result. Against this background and in the midst of these changes, we (philosophers) introduced 3 subjects related to civic education: Ethics and Law in the 1990s, and World and Person in 2001."[…]" When I meet teachers I first explain my understanding of *World and Personality*: I recall the Russian proverb 'let's sit before departing'. In the 12 grade a person is at the beginning of one's life journey and this subject is a form of recollection of one's thoughts before departing". (interview with Iv. K.)

21 Interview with G. K., a historian who is known to be the author of the concept of *World and Personality*.

of party clientelism and of corruption under party patronage (and these phenomena are basic problems of Bulgaria and Rumania according to the periodic monitoring reports of the European Commission).

Due to the lack of political ownership over CE, and under powerful external pressure, the Ministry of Education and Science understandably does not obstruct foreign intervention through the educational projects of the Council of Europe, the PHARE programmes, UN projects, or the direct intervention of the Open Society Foundation, but neither does it invest resources in the implementation of CE as a national priority in school education.

Thus CE finds itself a battlefield of corporative interests: its contents and form of realization are determined by the absence of sociologist and educationalists, and by the active confrontation between philosophers (who are aware of their guild interest to expand within high school education) and teachers of literature, history, and geography and the respective publishing houses producing textbooks. And it is rendered as field of action to NGOs, maintaining foreign donor programs mainly.[22] State educational standards and syllabuses for CE are a result of the compromise between two opposing cliques, each protecting its private group interests. But no one is in charge of implementing them.

On the one hand CE is dissolved within 'inter-subject links', which ultimately fail to materialize, because the programmes in literature, history, and geography contain no civic contents. On the other hand the perspective of geographers and historians proves prevalent in the way civic syllabus emphases are placed: for instance, a central thematic interest is "the connection between nature and man", and, respectively, the category of labour, but society itself, citizenship, civic interests, are lacking. Yet, knowledge about the state and its institutions is vastly presented there before students learn anything about society. (Dimitrov 2008).

In still another aspect, the means of teaching turns out to be subordinated to traditional practices for these subjects, which, in Bulgaria, all go under the heading of "narrative subjects". The task foreseen in the regulations for the subject World and Personality to be only an "integrative subject ... that will build bridges among the already acquired civil knowledge in other subjects" is institutionally and culturally doomed to failure. No bridges could be built without banks.

That is why empirical facts confront us with yet another paradox: due to the coterie-based way in which work is done in the Ministry of Education, the writing of a textbook on "World and Person" proved to

be finally assigned, on the basis of personal ties of friendship, to a team of sociologists. In a spirit of emancipated thinking and pluralism of paradigms, the authors attempted to produce a 'non-standard textbook'[23], that would provide no more than a general guideline for the independent work of teachers.[24] This textbook ultimately won no support among the teachers that had to work with it: it was hard for them, because the book contained no lessons to be learned by heart. And that is what a textbook is expected to supply in the view of the local teachers in literature, history, geography, and even philosophy. For such is the socialization paradigm of school education in general, inherited from the previous decades. In brief, instead of being a school for the civic culture of the new generations, CE in Bulgaria finds itself engulfed and reformatted by the standards of the local social environment, for which civic participation is 'pure theory'.

Moreover, such a textbook would require active, creative individual work from every teacher.[25] But just at this point, the crisis of Bulgarian schools is growing to a culmination point, manifested in the 3-month long national teachers' strike in 2007. In other words, the kind of teacher that would be competent to teach CE is not the usual teacher now remaining in Bulgarian schools. But this is far from being a purely Bulgarian problem.

4. School education at the beginning of the 21st century: universal and national characteristics

4.1. General crisis of school education

The school in its classical form, which implements "universal and mandatory education", is an educational institution of modern societies that is undergoing a crisis everywhere in the world. All contemporary societies are conducting practically constant educational reforms in order to adapt the educational system to the fundamental changes that have taken place in the mind and personal development of modern humankind, changes brought about by open access to electronic information sources, the changes in the status of science in contemporary society, and above all the changes in society itself, in which school cannot have a monopoly on knowledge when learning is

22 Interviews with G. K., R. V., U. N., D. K.

23 Interview with M. Gr., head of the authors' team.

24 But there are no supplementing teaching materials through which the teacher could develop their own understanding of CE. Thus the alternative textbook that has these turns out to be used as 'teacher's manual'.

25 Whilst the majority of teachers are discontented with the textbook because it cannot be learned by heart, others reject it because it remains at the level of a *discussion* between different viewpoints, and never reaches the point of forming competencies (teachers' statement from the group discussions). The second complaint is justified since it is evident in M. Gr.'s interview that her educational ideal is "a real live discussion".

a life-long process. Bulgaria is the country with the largest decrease in the level of educational results as registered by the PISA survey. But immediately before it, though with a significantly better result, is a country like Sweden. The problems of Swedish school education are certainly not due to a social crisis of the national society itself. The point is that, today, sociologists would be the last to view the school institution as a natural unproblematic environment providing a natural ground for CE. As we have indicated elsewhere (Danchev, Dimitrov, Tacheva 2008; Dimitrov, Boyadjieva 2009), the situation is exactly the opposite: it is precisely the resource of CE, focused on the formation of skills for life and civic competencies for young persons, which can be the tool for overcoming the contemporary school crisis.

4.2. Crisis of the school in a country in transition

In Bulgarian conditions however, the situation is additionally complicated, as in most post-communist countries, by the wider crisis of the transition (Danchev, Dimitrov, Tacheva 2008; Vulchev 2004). We know that communist society may be compared to a universal panopticum, in the framework of which the strict disciplinary functions of the school have unquestionable legitimacy. What is more, in such a society education leads to privileged biographical trajectories in the intensely bureaucratic, state-controlled public life. In such a system teachers are prestige-bearers, being live embodiments of knowledge, which has a high value status.

The two decades of transition destroyed these preconditions of school life. Firstly, the disciplinary apparatus was delegitimized. Secondly, knowledge ceased to represent a guaranteed path to biographical advancement. Thirdly, teachers lost the tools with which they could hold disciplinary sway, and at the same time lost their social prestige.

Despite all this, and despite certain changes in the contents, education remains unchanged in its principle: it is oriented to knowledge, not to personal development; it implies passive learning, not personal participation; it is based on instruction coming from teacher to pupil, not on partnership between teacher and pupil and between the pupils themselves.

The unchanged nature of school life, amidst the changing situation at large, led to a profound crisis in everyday school practices. School can no longer hold either the attention or the trust of pupils. The dropout rate and school violence are also growing intensely, while educational results for all subjects are decreasing with each year.

On top of all this, state investments in education were drastically decreased, and the teacher's profession became one of the worst paid. It lost its value prestige and its social prestige. The teachers remain-

ing in schools are those who have not been able to find any other work, and such people are hardly the fittest to assume the responsibilities of teaching, much less the exceptional challenges of CE.

In brief, such teachers, in such a school, cannot and will not teach CE proper. For, if it were authentic, CE would be in contradiction with the entire spirit of school life and with all practices daily recurring in other subjects. And then, as often happens, even the most ambitious and devoted teacher is perfectly helpless when confronted with the pupil's question, "Why is it that what you teach me has nothing to do with my life, with what is going on around us?"[26]. A CE subject would not give an answer to this question, even if the syllabus were prepared by sociologists, even if the textbook were perfect in its sociological content, and the teaching process were led by sociologically competent teachers.

In a country without civil society, CE is not a separate educational problem but an issue of policy and fundamental educational reform. In this case external political pressure proves decisive – that is why pressure should be uncompromising, systematic, and thorough-going in order not to repeat the failure of the donors' programs. Membership in the EU implies it. In such a society sociology's task could not be primarily to change the spirit and the contents of CE. Before that or in parallel with it sociology must promote and facilitate the modernization (reform) of school life. Sociology should mediate the cooperation among stakeholders in this reform in order to make it sustainable and effective.

5. Conclusions

The basic moral of this story is quite clear. *Sociology has been marginalized in the last decades because of the inertia of its public and academic standing, both intellectual and institutional. It takes for granted the status won by the previous generation and does not respond to the pressing demands of the changing world for a different type of sociology. Thus it falls easy prey to the competitors who follow an aggressive strategy and policy of public expansion.* The particular situation in other countries may be different but these are the general settings and rules of our play. There is nothing specifically Bulgarian in them.

Obviously, there are two most probable scenarios for the future development of sociology.

First, if we do nothing but simply follow the inertia of the sociological tradition, the sociologists will continue to be engaged in topic-oriented research longing for the utopia of a powerful sociological theory. (Till this very day it is "taken for granted" that "advancement of sociology" is almost synonymous to

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26 This is a standard opinion among teachers, registered in all focus group discussions.

"theoretical development"[27].) This would mean only further marginalization of sociology, an increase in its critical stance and leftist political affiliation compensating its public irrelevance.

Second, contemporary sociology can begin a fundamental re-orientation. This must include a switch from "topic research" to "problem research". In sociology, we are still victims of the legacy of the Enlightenment – we presume that if our research is duly sophisticated and methodologically correct and our research findings are right, then the public will absorb our sociological truths automatically and enthusiastically. This does not happen at all and it is the urgent task of the sociologists to tackle the miscommunication. The task consists of two basic components and they both concern fundamental restructuring of education in sociology:

First, instead of being tailored after the pattern of "theoretical prominence" education in sociology must provide at least an access to social policy research. This is, broadly speaking, the very large field from needs assessment, through monitoring and evaluation, to impact assessment, mediation of public interaction and so forth. This kind of research is done at present mainly by laymen and it is of very poor quality and, subsequently, of very low effectiveness. It is exactly the sociological competence that can substantially raise the public benefit from policy research and active citizenship. More to that, public policies are going to encompass more and more spheres of social life in the future. The entire arsenal of the sociological knowledge acquired in the 20th century must be put in work in mediating public policies and civil action. We certainly understand that if one minds the addressees of sociological information in advance, this will change substantially the way social problems are seen, articulated and treated.

Second, in the past the intensive dialogue between sociologists and their audience has been possible on the grounds of shared values and mental patterns. These premises for productive communication are not valid any more. Nowadays, it is the job of the sociologist to make their findings communicable to the public. Students of sociology must learn the art of persuasive presentation that will culminate in common public action. The 20th century sociology successfully accomplished the task of interdisciplinary integration intermingling with anthropology, history, economy, cultural, and political studies. Today the task is to further the interdisciplinary synthesis in the field of professionalized humanities and even visual arts. Thus,

sociologists will become better equipped to counteract indifference or misunderstanding by the public.

From now on sociology, as a fulfilled promise, cannot be professed – it has to be publicly practiced. Only then it will contribute to the needed contemporary civility and, hence, to the CE needed today. Actually there is nothing country specific in this task-frame no matter how specific the particular sociological decisions may be.

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27 The highly representative collection *Sociology in Europe* (1993) is an ample proof of the traditional equaling between sociology and theory – the optimism about sociology's future derives from the expectation for new theories. See in Nedelmann and Sztompka (Nedelmann, Sztompka. 1993a).

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