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ECONOMIC ACTORS AND THE LOCAL SOCIETY. A ABOUT MAGDOLNA LEVELEKI'S WRITINGS IN ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY

A bomlás virágai. Gazdaságszociológiai írások (1988-1998)
[The flowers of disintegration. Writings in economic sociology].
(Veszprémi Egyetemi Kiadó, Veszprém 1999: 108)

Anyone concerned with economic sociology in Hungary today is in an attractive, and at the same time, difficult position. The position is attractive because, applying the way of thinking of sociology in exploring the social conditions apart from the market environment, he or she can pose ever newer problems and question. And it is hard because he or she faces the challenge of finding the path between universal explanations and historicism under rapidly changing social and economic conditions, having to join the micro and macro levels, elaborating a high degree of incidentalness as well (Granovetter 1994).

Magdolna Leveleki's writings confirm that she is aware of this challenge and possesses the required perceptivity to the problems.

The title already shows that the crop of ten years is presented in the book - offering an insight into the events of a far from ordinary decade. It is not static shots side by side, but dynamic analyses. The author seems to be intrigued by the changes and the responses given by the economic actors to the changes, especially by those who had to face serious challenges. Thus, as will be seen, the writings are connected in a process, not only in space.

Another major feature, and value, of the studies is regionality, that is, the investigation of actors embedded in the local society and economy. The later the study, the more emphatic the role of the local environment and the more sharply defined the various dimensions of the local environment.

This has special significance because she dissects and refines the process called growing regional differentiation in post-socialist Hungary. The well-known rift is the east-west axis the relative position along which well defines the growing differences in economic performance, income, unemployment and other indicators of the level of development (Cséfalvay 1993). All this can be interpreted as the outcome of complex processes. Following the collapse of the redistributive mechanisms and the structural crisis, the advantage of the western regions is increasing, caused in part by the proximity of the European markets and other, e.g. infrastructural, institutional and cultural advantages rooted in part in the stage of economic development. The advance of foreign companies is determined by the geographical position apart from the training level of employees.

Narrowing the focus, however - and that's where Magdolna Leveleki's stories begin - the processes of different 'western' regions and the behavioral patterns of different actors of one and the same region, can be learnt. In her close-ups, even a single economic actor's different roles can be recognised. The interrelation between a large company and small-scale enterprises, and the large company as employer expose various sections. Magdolna Leveleki

has stopped a large gap by outlining the tableau of a local society - Székesfehérvár and its vicinity.

In two of her studies written in the late '80s - analysing the launching of the careers of chemical engineers in different generations and the difficulties of the profession of technical engineers as against expectations, the socialist state-owned large company still looms large as the environment of the studied economic actors. (*The permanence of the structure and the structure of permanence; Employment or underemployment.*)

The two writings dated 1991 are concerned with the emergence of the private sector.

Using the concepts of acting strategy, habitus and capital as defined by Bourdieu, she creates a theoretical frame in her *Awakening of capitals. Conception for a research into entrepreneurship* to study questions such as: Where do successful entrepreneurs grow, or, which social strata can go into entrepreneurship as a real alternative? What composition of capitals makes the success of an enterprise probable? What individual and collective prerequisites are needed to become an entrepreneur? On the soil of what past investment can the entrepreneurial habitus be produced or reproduced? What social learning processes take place when the size of the entrepreneurial stratum is growing?

Entrepreneurial lifepaths in Hungary in the '80s: Traditional and modern entrepreneurs seeks answers to the question what elements of a personal lifepath predestine the individual to become an entrepreneur, and what correlations are possible between the lifepath and the entrepreneurial mentality and behaviour.

The studies written after 1993 - taking up some two-thirds of the volume - are closely connected to the Székesfehérvár region, giving diverse sections of local society and economy.

Perhaps the best-known work of the author, *The Flowers of Disintegration*, is about the organisation of the small-scale economic associations born parallel with the decay of the large state-owned electronic industrial complex in Fehérvár. How are relations reshuffled and certain roles exchanged between large company and small enterprises, what forms of competition and co-operation evolve in the market?

In the '80s, Videoton (the large enterprise) gladly contacted small private subcontractors because the performance was obtained cheaper (not for wages) while the subcontractors got extra income. At the turn of the '80s and '90s, not only subcontracting disappeared with the disintegration of Videoton, but the status of employees also became shaky. That was when the 'flowers of disintegration' began to sprout, meaning the small electronic ventures with their supplies (aerials, intercoms, amplifiers, etc.); they were still connected to the large enterprise using its semi-finished products and certain services.

Returning six years later, in 1997, to the scene, the author examined (*Market relations of small enterprises in a changed economic environment*) how the small firms of 1991 were going on, what forms, in which areas, remained viable. How did their connections in the markets of acquisition and sale change? Did any co-operation remain between the small and large enterprises, and if yes, what was it like?

What competition was there on the labour market, how did small-scale enterprises try to retain their labour resources in a deflating environment?

The transformation of Videoton substantially changed the position of small ventures earlier partly dependent on it. With the appearance of foreign capital, Videoton itself became the subcontractor of multinationals, and as a result, it ceased to be the source of acquisitions for small firms. This went parallel with the tightening competition and saturation of the sales markets.

After the fundamental reorganisation of circumstances, will the earlier studied small ventures be found 'alive'? If yes, how have their activities been modified? The answer can be got from Magdolna Leveleki.

Another section of the large enterprises can be found in the study entitled. *The Paradise of wage labour. What do employers offer in Fejér county?* which is concerned with reviving local large industry seen from the angle of employment. The author differentiates and describes the labour policies of firms settled at various dates in terms of what they offer to the employees and what social groups find employment in the offered jobs.

Apart from small entrepreneurs and large enterprises, groups of other economic actors are also investigated. The study addressing itself to the unemployed (*From liberation to compulsion. Changes in being unemployed*) describes various types of workers dismissed in Fehérvár with the strategies connected to these types.

Rural Romas in the sphere of attraction of an industrial town (co-author: József Albert) defines the structuring of the Roma society living in the agglomeration of Székesfehérvár, embarking on the extent to which the economic and social changes of the '90s, the collapse of large industry in Fehérvár, the expansion of the private sector, and the revival of large industry in the city affected various strata and groups of the Roma society. What techniques of subsistence and survival do they devise in the state of unemployment?

The scholar does not forget about the local institution most deeply influencing the local economy: the local governments (*Role variants of local governments in the early nineties* - co-author: József Albert).

Reading the studies of Magdolna Leveleki one feels that she is an excellent practitioner of the method of interviews and case studies. This genre needs a researcher with empathy who does not wish to impose theories on reality, who does not squeeze her interviewees into the boundaries of prefabricated questions, who can weigh the received information and can see beyond the incidental features of the answers. That is how the outcome will be natural and self-evident - as it is in Magdolna Leveleki's economic sociological writings.

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