

inclusiveness. Lastly, each case was based on three interviews lasting approximately 40 minutes. More frequent or prolonged interactions might have yielded deeper insights into the adolescents' psychosocial dynamics and recovery trajectories.

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Book Review:
Contemporary Sociology: Fields of Study and Representative Concepts. Edited by Dumitru Otovescu and Cristina Otovescu.
Craiova: Editura Beladi, 2025. 2 vols., 1200 pages.

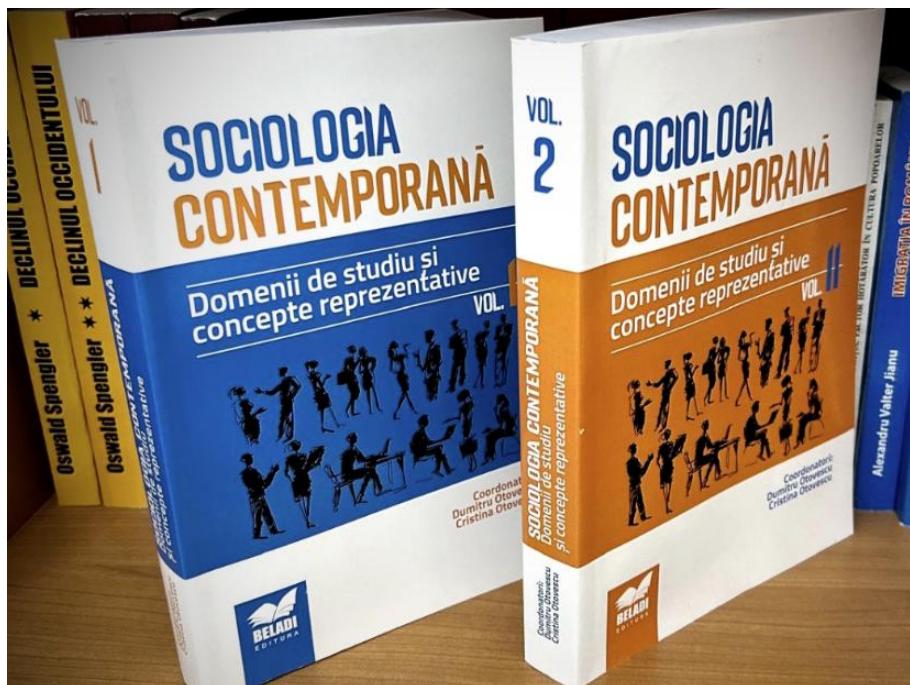
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Under the coordination of a Craiova-based academic tandem, Dumitru Otovescu and Cristina Otovescu, a substantial diptych has recently been published in the *Contemporary Sociology* series (Otovescu & Otovescu, 2025). Its stated aim is to offer a “systematic” radiography of contemporary society by defining its fields of study and providing readers with a representative conceptual toolkit. An examination of the synoptic thematic framework reveals three major problematic sections: the first two address national society—namely, basic social units and the principal social phenomena, activities, or processes—while the third focuses on a broad spectrum of contemporary phenomena of regional or continental scope, ultimately engaging with the very destiny of the human condition within the turbulent landscape of contemporaneity. Through the contributions of 27 authors—Romanian and international—comprising university faculty and prestigious scientific researchers, and by employing an orientative thematic framework that ensures structural unity, the volumes also seek to “configure a micro-dictionary of domain-specific terms” for each field addressed, an undertaking of unquestionable utility.

It is self-evident that the publication of these two volumes, equipped with a luxuriant bibliography, fulfills sociology’s enduring mission: to study contemporary society, explain its structure and dynamics, and—often with corrective intent—focus on its dysfunctions. This is not to suggest, however, that sociology is a miraculous science, as it was sometimes believed to be in Romania during the years of the discipline’s institutional revival.

It is worth recalling the enthusiastic years of sociology’s institutional rebirth, when the first cohort began its studies in 1966 with the establishment of the Sociology Section within the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Bucharest. This was a pioneering mission with wide social resonance—perhaps too hasty, perhaps even “reckless,” as Professor Rostas once remarked—coinciding with the years of national renewal (de-Sovietization and the cultivation of a national ethos) that legitimated the new political leadership through the appointment of the young Nicolae Ceaușescu at the head of the Romanian Communist Party in March 1965. Once denounced as an “imperialist science,” sociology was rehabilitated (alongside cybernetics and genetics), and the merits of Miron Constantinescu—himself a high-ranking political figure who was later rehabilitated—are undeniable, even if some voices, rejecting the “mythology of rehabilitation,” have contested his role. What must not be forgotten is that sociology was reinstated by a political decision. Miron Constantinescu was an intellectual, an authentic (Marxist) sociologist, and a devoted activist. Feared, proud, and vain, with a tragic destiny, Constantinescu (1917–1974) was punished for “factionalism” in 1957 and for other iconoclastic gestures during

the Khrushchev era. His death in 1974, while serving as Minister of Education, foreshadowed the difficult years that followed—even though sociology could no longer be abolished, as it had been in 1948. Its sinuous path, its “non-linear development,” the reflexes of obedience to the ideological imperatives of the moment (especially after the 1971 Theses), but also the “Romanian tactic of circumventing official directives,” as Professor I. Drăgan observed, ensured its survival even after the fateful year of 1977. Yet one difficult question, at the level of state and party authorities, could no longer be avoided—one famously recalled by Professor H.H. Stahl: what use are sociologists?



Clearly, this question should have been asked much earlier, before dozens of graduates of the revived generation were dispersed throughout the country, euphorically proclaiming the need for sociology. Their professional integration, beyond the discipline's symbolic “aura,” proved—in most cases—highly problematic, as the relevant authorities were neither sensitized to nor familiar with the profession, with the exception of the academic environment. Sociology was, in essence, a “fluid” profession, ill-defined, at best tolerated, and not included in the official occupational nomenclature. Neither responsible sociological practice nor scientific support—situated in a blend of Gustian and Marxist traditions—could mitigate these dysfunctions in the professional lives of sociologists. Paradoxically, this occurred within a discipline that, as the “science of society,” of social realities and facts, had precisely the mission of correcting societal dysfunctions. To this we must add a lack of professional solidarity: sociologists were far from forming a cohesive professional group, visible within the socio-cultural field. Ideally, as Professor I. Drăgan noted, their role might have resembled that of writers, acting as a “diffuse symbolic counter-

power" (Mitulescu, 2021: 286). Instead, through disqualification, re-professionalization, and reconversion, many former graduates abandoned the discipline; only those employed in research enjoyed a relatively better fate. Even then, their studies—when conducted—often proved inconvenient due to their "critical charge" and thus unwelcome to the administrative bureaucracy. Equally difficult to explain remains their lack of involvement in the historic upheaval of December 1989—a turning point that nonetheless led to the revival of sociology as a profession, finally recognized and liberalized (Otovescu & Otovescu, 2025).

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Beyond a shared set of principles—widely accepted and ensuring the institutionalization and standardization of the discipline—the existence of divergences, heterogeneous traditions, and specific, thematized problems makes the establishment of a common paradigm unlikely. First of all, because sociology, as it presents itself today, remains in a pre-paradigmatic phase, as C. Zamfir once reminded us. Furthermore, one should not forget that its applied character and social utility inevitably lead to localized solutions, shaped by contexts that do not lend themselves to euphoric, globalizing treatments. Nor can we hope that sociological interpretations have fully emancipated themselves from ideological passions or pressures.

Since sociology does not aspire to be an ethical doctrine, but rather seeks to understand what *is*; since sociological ideas themselves become social products and must therefore be assessed from a dual perspective—scientific relevance and social relevance alike; and since the desire to reform society encourages thematic proliferation—along both descriptive-explanatory lines and those of social innovation—the plurality of complementary approaches becomes understandable. These approaches are, inevitably, anchored in specific societies; they do not offer universally valid solutions delivered by an omnipotent, magician-like sociologist. As explanatory strategies, the structures of sociological thinking tend to coalesce in a systemic yet competitive manner, without the capacity to propose a single paradigm and, regrettably, often without communicating with one another.

Moreover, although the sociologist should be a "natural ally," capable of offering qualified, broadly applicable advice useful to decision-makers, the profession appears to have resigned itself. The social itself has "disappeared as an object of social construction" during the turbulent years of post-communist transition (Zamfir, 2009: 144). Yet the discipline—with its trail of dissatisfactions, illusions, and projects, oscillating between enthusiasm and disappointment—remains part of collective consciousness, constituting a scientified expression of society, despite the prevailing "lack of interest" and, implicitly, a "lack of expertise."

In any case, sociology aspires to move from the accumulation of information (through sociographic studies) toward genuine understanding, seeking an integrative, reflexive perspective capable of producing "adequate definitions of reality." This interrogative reading—often in tension with common sense (that tacit knowledge or implicit sociology)—belongs to a "disciplined eye," broadening the horizon of understanding and aspiring to function as a project of rationalization, nurtured by a "clarifying" discipline (Bauman, 2008: 235), one that is inevitably on

the offensive within the conditions of a media-saturated society (itself a new sociological concept).

Unfortunately, so-called sociological studies often lapse into mere sociography, ignoring macro-level themes, lacking the capacity to formulate valid propositions, and failing to attain the much-desired dual relevance: epistemological and social. Sociology, as a “social operator,” as an applied social science—simultaneously discipline, institution, and profession—reveals a largely untapped potential for expertise. It is paradoxical that in an era of societal reform, sociology itself—“liberated” after the December 1989 upheaval and awakening immense hopes—has been slow to make a major contribution to social construction. Admittedly, it is rarely solicited, even though the problems confronting society would seem to demand sociology’s assistance. Revitalized and reconnected both to focused empirical studies and to major societal issues, the discipline has every chance of becoming a “credible science,” adjusting in real time to the new frames of reference imposed by globalization, in which we are inevitably involved.

Paradoxically, after the 1990s, in other regions we have witnessed a decline of the discipline. James T. English, sounding the alarm, observed that cultural studies, gender studies, postcolonial studies, and similar fields have taken over and assimilated the sociological perspective, leaving sociology itself to play the modest role of a “partner.”

Those who have examined the social history of Romanian sociology have highlighted its close dependence on shifting social contexts, themselves subject to the dirigiste “political meteorology.” Long ignored, relegated to “illegality,” diverted apologetically, or nourished by illusions, sociology follows the logic of the broader societal context, such that sociological production is inevitably “deeply contextual.” Inevitably anchored in Romanian realities, even when decontextualizing attempts are made, these efforts often leave the impression of an “empty universalism,” as has been observed. The issue remains controversial. Amid rapid global changes that alter national specificity and erode sovereignty, and with the emergence of transnational sociologies, some sociologists believe that the denationalization of sociology will occur “with certainty” (Vlăsceanu, 2011: 60). Other voices—most notably Ilie Bădescu—argue firmly that sociology “will either be national, or it will not exist at all.”

Ultimately, the equation—destined to be cyclically revisited—concerns the relationship between power (decision-making bodies) and reality (unvarnished). Sociology, navigating the meanders of “Romanian communism,” between glaciations and semi-liberalizations, caught in the trap of reformist caprice and encomiastic reverence, endured the supremacy and hypocrisy of ideology. Today, lacking a macro-level project and subject to self-colonization, it faces—through insidious political correctness—the assault of re-ideologization. What are sociologists doing, we ask ourselves? They should, as Alain Touraine once warned, “get up early.”

It is therefore thanks to the sustained efforts of Professor Dumitru Otovescu—ever-enthusiastic and indefatigable—through whom the Faculty of Sociology emerged in Craiova, and with the support of his collaborators, that we may note with genuine satisfaction the appearance of a work that is impossible to ignore for those wishing to deepen the thematic and problematic field of sociology (Otovescu & Otovescu, 2025).

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Book Review: