



## **Sociologie Românească**

ISSN: 2668-1455 (print), ISSN: 1220-5389 (electronic)

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***THE MISSION OF ROMANIAN SOCIOLOGY DURING THE COMMUNIST  
PERIOD. FROM SOCIOLOGISTS' MEMOIRS.***  
**ROMANIAN ACADEMY PUBLISHING HOUSE, BUCHAREST, 2025.**  
**CĂTĂLIN ZAMFIR, ELENA ZAMFIR (EDS.)**

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Sociologie Românească, 2026, vol. 24, Issue 1, pp. 216-221

<https://doi.org/10.33788/sr.24.1.15>

Published by:  
Expert Projects Publishing House



On behalf of:  
Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy  
and  
Romanian Sociology Association

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**Abstract**

This review discusses Cătălin and Elena Zamfir's edited volume on the mission of Romanian sociology under communism, arguing that its main strength lies in converting autobiographical testimony into sociological evidence by anchoring memoirs in verifiable publications, projects, and institutional records. The review summarizes the book's two-part architecture, an analytical framing chapter followed by thirteen professional memoirs, and highlights recurring themes: cycles of institutional opening and closure, methodological vigilance toward indicators, professional ethics under ideocratic pressure, and the persistence of empirically grounded inquiry. The volume is read as both a landmark archive for disciplinary memory and a timely resource for contemporary debates on expertise, politicization, and the governance of knowledge.

Keywords: Romanian sociology; communist period; professional memory; memoir as evidence; sociology of knowledge; methodology; quality of life.

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## Résumé

Cette recension examine le volume dirigé par Cătălin et Elena Zamfir sur la mission de la sociologie roumaine sous le communisme, en soutenant que sa principale force réside dans la transformation du témoignage autobiographique en preuve sociologique par l'ancrage des mémoires dans des publications, des projets et des archives institutionnelles vérifiables. La recension résume l'architecture en deux parties de l'ouvrage, composée d'un chapitre de cadrage analytique suivi de treize mémoires professionnels, et met en évidence des thèmes récurrents: les cycles d'ouverture et de fermeture institutionnelles, la vigilance méthodologique à l'égard des indicateurs, l'éthique professionnelle sous pression idéocratique, et la persistance d'une recherche empiriquement fondée. Le volume est lu à la fois comme une archive de référence pour la mémoire disciplinaire et comme une ressource opportune pour les débats contemporains sur l'expertise, la politisation et la gouvernance des savoirs.

Mots-clés: sociologie roumaine; période communiste; mémoire professionnelle; mémoire comme preuve; sociologie de la connaissance; méthodologie; qualité de vie.

## Presentation of the volume

Co-edited by Cătălin and Elena Zamfir, the book reconstructs the professional memory of Romanian sociology under communist rule with sober rigor and, at times, quiet warmth. It does not indulge the easy temptation of memoirs as self-defense. Again and again, testimony is tied to traces that can be checked: publications, projects, and institutional records. An explicit ethical injunction runs through the pages, stated early and kept in view, that “the present must assume responsibility for how it treats its own past.” For me, this blend of documentary discipline and narrative openness is precisely what gives the volume its weight, both as institutional history and as a case study in how sociological knowledge can persist under ideological pressure.

The volume is built in two complementary parts. Part I, “Sociological Thought during the Communist Period”, coauthored by the two editors, provides the framing narrative. Part II, “From Sociologists’ Memoirs. Professional Experiences”, brings together thirteen sociologists, listed alphabetically: Dorel Abraham, Dan Banciu, Ilie Bădescu, Septimiu Chelcea, Mihai Milca, Sorin Mitulescu, Vasile Morar, Dumitru Otovescu, Constantin Schifirneț, Gina Stoiciu, Maria Voinea, and the two editors themselves. Together, the two parts trace the complex path of Romanian sociological research within a socioeconomic and moral context shaped

by communist ideology. In what follows, I outline the architecture and then offer a more concentrated appraisal of the book's sociological contribution.

Part I offers the theoretical and historical scaffold. The editors follow continuities after 1953 and show how dialectical and historical materialism, alongside "scientific socialism", structured the field of ideas until 1989. What holds the narrative together is a structural tension that never disappears: a party that claims a monopoly on the "science of society" cannot easily tolerate the autonomy of an empirical science of the social. The discipline therefore oscillates between rejection, conditional acceptance, including selective appropriations of Western sociology, and renewed marginalization. The process of institutional rebuilding is tracked with care: recognition in 1959, the National Committee of Sociology, affiliation with the International Sociological Association, and the rebuilding of editorial mechanisms for a specialized journal. The panorama of journals, series, and collections then works like a seismograph, registering the opening between 1966 and 1971 and the gradual closing that followed.

The editorial method is stated plainly, almost austerely. The editors insist that they should present facts, things visible to all, above all publications. To temper the subjectivism of memory, they also include brief histories of the sociologists who worked in that period. The point is simple but consequential: the memoir is treated as evidence that remains open to public verification. This allows earlier traditions to be reactivated without nostalgia, interwar monographies, team-based fieldwork, and attention to local situations. It also clarifies how practices that survived in modest form could later become publicly oriented programs and social policy support structures after 1989.

Part II gives that framework its human and institutional texture. The chapters bring mentors, laboratories, editorial boards, and applied research sites back into view, the places where sociology remained possible and methodologically accountable. Voices differ in tone and emphasis, as one would expect. Nevertheless, the memoirs share a concern with criteria, with how knowledge was produced, validated, and made publishable, and they translate structural constraints into concrete professional practices. Together, they produce a collective portrait of disciplinary persistence under constraints. Small methodological decisions about indicators, fieldwork organization, or publication strategies often carry disproportionate weights.

In Dorel Abraham's chapter, urban sociology is built on empirical diagnosis, with Bucharest functioning as a workshop for observation and applied inquiry. Through collaboration, including with the Institute for the Design of Standardized Buildings, he develops operational indicators that range from housing density and access to services to mobility costs and daily flows. Analysis becomes a bridge between diagnosis and decision-making. What matters here is not a picturesque city portrait but a discipline of measurement that captures urban quality of life and shows how sociological expertise can inform policy credibly.

Dan Banciu offers a lucid chronicle of cycles of institutional rebirth and renewed marginalization. Editorial boards, collections, and textbooks appear as everyday laboratories where the profession's public visibility is negotiated. Series open. Departments close. The specializations are rearranged. The evaluative criterion is implicit but convincing: the publishing infrastructure is proof of professional existence. When it is hit, training and research cool. In practice, it has become a measure of disciplinary health.

Ilie Bădescu foregrounds culture and the Romanian village as analytic matrices in dialog with anthropology and the history of ideas. By focusing on moral economies, architectures of value, and tradition, he argues that rural symbolic resources can be mobilized coherently in modernization debates. The argument avoids both romanticism and dismissal, which is no small achievement in this terrain.

Septimiu Chelcea shows how sociometry made it possible to see beyond the ideological protocol. He pairs vivid empirical contrasts with a steady vigilance toward triumphalist statistics. A classic example is the sharp difference between team dynamics underground and those among agricultural workers, which is used to show how methods can reveal what official language tries to conceal. The memoir's lasting contribution lies in a simple insistence: indicators must be questioned first for how they were produced and what they render visible and only then for what they are made to mean. His methodological work on questionnaires, experiments, and sociometry, which trained generations, gives this insistence practical force.

Mihai Milca articulates a sociologist's creed under ideocratic pressure. Conceptual rigor, explicit criteria of validation, and a clear separation between empirical diagnosis and normative rhetoric form its core. He warns against the snares of scientism while pressing for operational criteria, internal coherence, fit between indicators and their object, replicability, and responsibility in interpretation. The chapter's clarity and its pedagogical insistence on methods make it useful beyond its historical setting. It reads, at times, like a compact guide to the social status of expertise.

Sorin Mitulescu captures the profession's practical ethos in the 1970s and 1980s: prudence in public exposure, tenacity in training, and improvisation governed by standards. He writes memorably about changing student cohorts and consolidating analytical rigor, with the formation verified through work on real data rather than ritual formulas. His later trajectory, including editorial leadership and a subsequent memoir volume, confirms this ethic of measure and didactic craft. After 1989, it reappeared in curricular renewal and thematic editorial projects.

With Vasile Morar, professional ethics is connected to organisational analysis. Workplace accidents, he argues, call for institutional responsibility, training, safety culture, procedures, and information flows, not individual blame. Reporting

becomes an instrument of learning and prevention. In this context, ethical audit appears to be a necessary practice for healthy workplaces.

Dumitru Otovescu reconstructed the discipline's academic geography: departments, laboratories, and institutes. He treats them as infrastructures of continuity that help preserve standards. By tracking training trajectories and mechanisms of legitimation, he shows how regional communities reproduced competence under pressure. Professions endure through rules of transmission as much as through ideas.

Constantin Schifirneț offers an institution-centered sociology of youth through the documentary history of the Center for Research on Youth Problems. The case is instructive in showing how controlled openness, applied recommendations, and regulated international relations, including UNESCO, could still operate inside a restrictive regime.

Gina Stoiciu presents transnational sensitivity. She foregrounds itineraries, networks, and access to bibliographies and conferences as safeguards of research standards. Here, "openness" is not a political slogan. It is a professional criterion, a form of methodological verification across contexts.

Maria Voinea returns to the seminar room and to the figure of the professor as a mentor. With a warm exactitude, she argues for didactic continuity: targeted bibliographies, case-based exercises, and academic rituals that teach its rhythm. These are quiet conditions, but decisive ones, for credibility and clarity.

In his own pages, Cătălin Zamfir gives an insider account of a profession forced to operate within narrow windows of opportunity. He recalled tactical compromises made to keep ideas circulating, including books accepted at risk and published only after vulnerable fragments were removed. The rupture of 1971 and the ensuing years of renewed closure are described soberly as an institutional diagram rather than a lament. At the same time, the memoir makes visible a body of work whose influence extends beyond the communist period: theoretical and empirical programs grounded in modern sociology, a theory of social uncertainty, and foundational work on quality of life and lifestyle, together with consequential social policy programs for development agendas. This chapter clarifies the theoretical and empirical axis of Romanian sociological research from the early 1960s to 1989.

Elena Zamfir adds an ethical and epistemological lens that strengthens the coherence of the volume. Her voice is restrained, oriented toward definitions rather than slogans, and toward research rather than ritual language. She draws on functional structuralism, cultural anthropology, and social psychology, anchoring professionalization in a modern methodological toolkit. The emphasis on human development and quality of life, with both objective and subjective indicators such as life satisfaction and happiness, becomes a way to connect everyday experience to public policy without the use of technicist exaltation or vague generalities.

What emerges is a double fidelity, to method and to the human, which is difficult to sustain under conditions of ideological capture.

### **Critical observations**

The contemporary relevance of this archive is not merely commemorative. Current sociological practice faces renewed pressures through datafication, the digitization of inquiry, algorithmic mediation of selection, and the fragmentation of the public sphere. In other words, older problems return to new guises. Epistemic vigilance toward indicators remains central: we need to ask, first, how data were collected and which phenomena become visible and, second, what numbers are made to mean. The volume's persistent theme, the civic decency of method under pressure, speaks directly to today's debates on expertise, politicization, and the governance of knowledge.

In a climate where recent history has called for lucidity, the mission of Romanian sociology during the Communist period offered both instruments and a tone for traversing the discipline's path under communism. My verdict is straightforward: this is a landmark volume in which explanation tests testimony, and professional memory is placed under the sign of public responsibility. Among the doctrines that claimed a monopoly on the "science of society" and a community that defended its autonomy through methods, institutions, and writing, what emerged was not a spectacular victory. It is a dignified persistence. The ordinary work that keeps sociology possible.

From an evaluative standpoint, the book's main achievement lies in how it converts memorial material into sociological evidence. Plural voices are held together by shared documentary rules, a moderate tone, and consistent attention to criteria of validity, whereas the editors' framing gives Part II a coherent interpretive horizon. There is, inevitably, some unevenness of density across contributions. A future edition might add more cross-references, a synoptic chronology, or a compact map of key institutions and projects. These are opportunities rather than substantive weaknesses, and they do not unsettle the book's balance between synthesis and testimony, which is, overall, exemplary.