

**The International Symposium on
Advanced Lazarsfeldian Methodology
in Prague: 19–20 September 2008**

On the 19–20 September 2008 an international symposium titled ‘Advanced Lazarsfeldian Methodology’ was convened at the Institute of Sociological Studies of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University (FSV UK). Hynek Jeřábek and Petr Soukup, both of FSV UK, organised the symposium in collaboration with the Masaryk Czech Sociological Association (MČSS). The symposium was dedicated to the theoretic, historical, and methodological development of advanced statistical methods from the perspective of their origins in the methodological innovations of Paul Felix Lazarsfeld. Considerable space was also reserved for presenting analyses of specific social phenomena and issues that were conducted using the very methods initiated by P. F. Lazarsfeld and his team. The symposium opened with the official launch of a book of the same, published by Charles University Press (Hynek Jeřábek and Petr Soukup (eds.), *Advanced Lazarsfeldian Methodology*: Prague 2008: Karolinum). The majority of the book’s co-authors (lecturers and senior lecturers at the Institute of Sociological Studies, FSV UK) were active participants and presented papers at the symposium, creating a welcome forum for an expert discussion with the authors themselves on the themes covered in the book. Because the symposium was an international and had participants from abroad it was conducted entirely in English.

Hynek Jeřábek’s introductory contribution to the symposium was dedicated to an overview of the methodological innovations of P. F. Lazarsfeld. Subsequent contributions made greater or lesser reference to this explication, making use of one of the many Lazarsfeldian methods mentioned in the introduction. The presentations thus underlined Hynek Jeřábek’s main claims, namely, that Lazarsfeldian methodology

is still alive, that Lazarsfeld’s principles of scientific work are applicable even today, and that the methods and techniques currently used are the logical extension of the methods he developed (e.g. cluster analysis, multiple regression, path analysis, structural modelling, logistic regression, hierarchical modelling, and latent class analysis).

The first section was given over to presentations by the authors of individual chapters in the book *Advanced Lazarsfeldian Methodology*. In her contribution, ‘From Latent Structure Analysis to Latent Class Analysis’, Julia Hauberer acquainted symposium participants with the concept of latent structure analysis and the (more advanced) concept of latent classes. These methods are designed for the analysis of categorical data and are therefore very useful instruments for the analysis and typology of disconnected sociological transformations. In ‘SNA as an Application of Contextual Analysis’, Michal Osuský focused on the issue of the systemic and the ‘relationship’ nature of society and the social network analysis method as an application of contextual analysis. In a presentation titled ‘From Contextual Analysis to Multilevel Modelling’, Petr Soukup spoke on the importance of factoring context into sociological analysis and on the dangers of distortion that arise from overlooking it. In ‘Panel Research from P. F. L. to the Online Era’, Eva Veisová dealt with the issue of collecting data on a panel of respondents and the opportunities and risks associated with online questioning. The last contribution in the symposium section devoted to the book’s authors, ‘Evaluation Research since Lazarsfeld’, was presented by Jiří Remr, who focused on the implicit and explicit evaluative aspects in the work of P. F. Lazarsfeld.

The section ‘Methodological Progress since the Age of P. Lazarsfeld’ was opened by Petr Blahuš from the Department of Basic Kinanthropology and Humanities at the

Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Charles University. In his contribution titled 'On the Conceptual and Mathematical Unity of Latent Variable Models', he explained the principle of local independence, which constitutes the conceptual background of latent variable models, and demonstrated a universal mathematical model of latent classes that includes all latent variable models, such as linear and non-linear factor analysis and structural and IRT models. David Morrison, from the Institute of Communication Studies at the University of Leeds, presented a paper titled 'Paul F. Lazarsfeld: His Fascination with Methods and His Methodological Thinking', in which he drew especially on his own conversations with P. F. Lazarsfeld and his collaborators. He spoke of both Lazarsfeld's fascination with mathematics and quantitative methods and his enthusiasm for qualitative methods, which is often wrongly overlooked. The last contribution in the section, 'Theory-oriented Evaluation: A Comparison of Different Approaches', was presented by F. Biolcati-Rinaldi from the University of Milan, who gave a theoretical and historical description of methodological progress in evaluation research.

The second day of the symposium was dedicated to the application of advanced methodology to real sociological issues. Cristiano Vezzoni of the University of Milan described his analysis of contextual influences on individual voting behaviour

in the Italian elections of 2006; Petr Fučík, from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Masaryk University, presented his research into marital homogamy and heterogamy in the Czech Republic using data from the Czech Statistical Office; Natalie Simonová, from the Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (SOÚ AV ČR), and Petr Soukup, from FSV UK, presented their analysis of educational inequalities affecting the transition between secondary and tertiary education; and Jiří Šafr and Julia Hauberer from SOÚ AV ČR and FSV UK, respectively, presented their research on subjective professional social distances, i.e. subjective class boundaries in the Czech Republic.

Thanks to its emphasis on the methodological aspects of sociological research, the symposium was a unique event in the Czech Republic and its organisers deserve great thanks. The symposium offered a beneficial opportunity both to examine the development of advanced data analysis methods over the past fifty years and to find inspiration in the methods employed by colleagues in (not only) the Czech sociological community. It also offered participants a chance to assess the current methodological apparatus of Czech sociology. Based on the above, we trust that this symposium was not the last of its kind, and that it will be continued in the future.

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