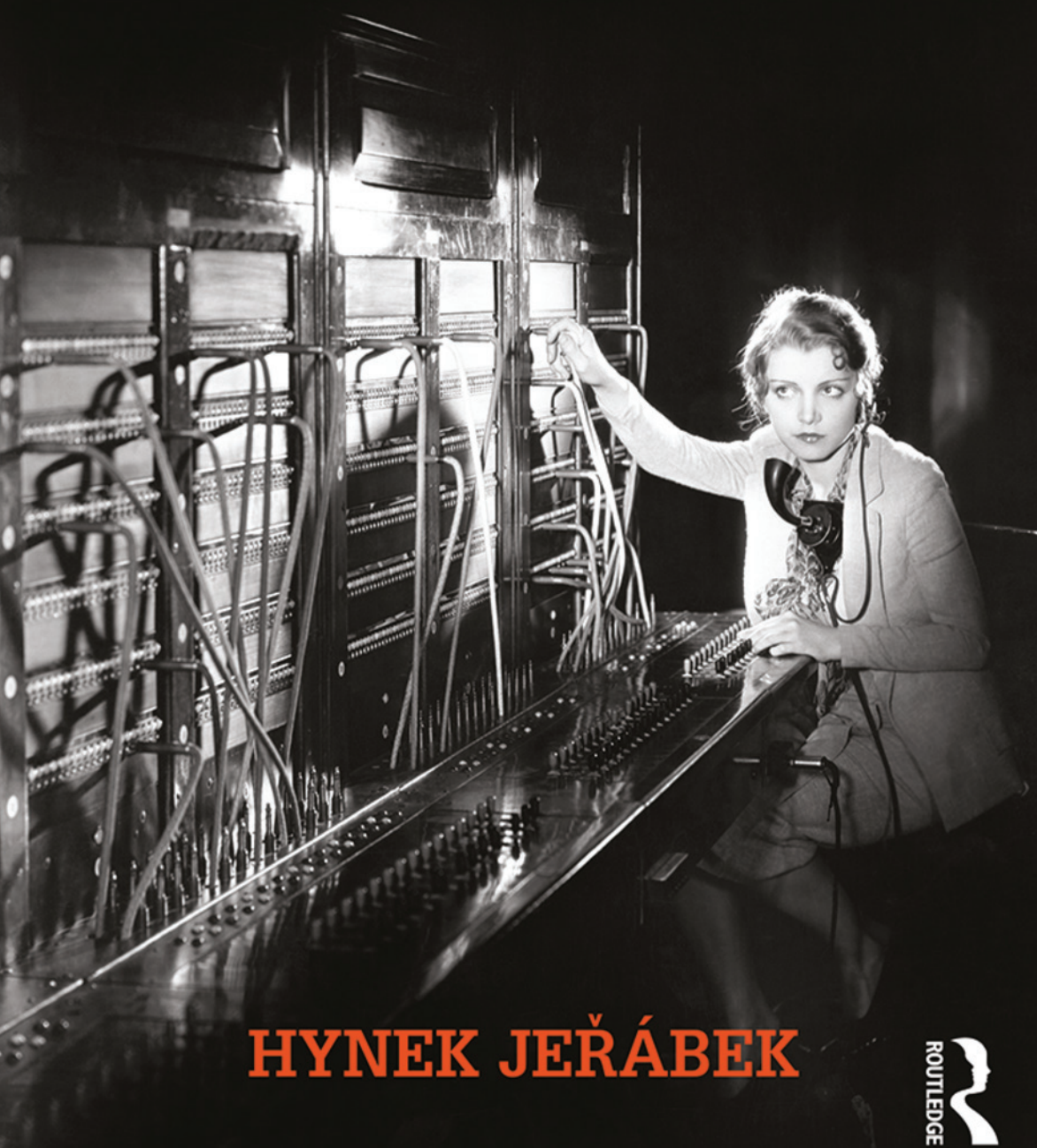


PAUL LAZARSFELD AND THE ORIGINS OF COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH



HYNEK JEŘÁBEK

ROUTLEDGE

Paul Lazarsfeld and the Origins of Communications Research

The manuscript discusses the early days of communication research, explicitly the first works of Paul Lazarsfeld radio and media research in Vienna, Newark, NJ, Princeton and New York during the years between the early 1930s and the end of the 1940s. Lazarsfeld's Viennese radio research, especially the world's first extensive audience research – RAVAG study (1931) – is entirely new information for English speaking scholars. The book shows the details of Lazarsfeld's methodological reasoning in his projects in the field of communication. The book also presents the research institutes that Lazarsfeld founded in Vienna in 1931, from Newark Center in New Jersey (1935) to Princeton Office of Radio Research in 1937 and up to the foundation of Lazarsfeld's famous BASR at Columbia University in New York in the 1940s. The monograph shows how important Lazarsfeld's first studies were for the future development of communications research and for methodological progress in the following decades.

Hynek Jeřábek is Professor of Sociology at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic.

‘Hynek Jeřábek reviews and celebrates Paul Lazarsfeld’s pioneering role in the establishment of empirical social science, particularly in the field of communication. The book dwells on the ingenuity displayed in Lazarsfeld’s earliest work, theoretical and methodological, and on the organisational settings that he created. And, lest we forget, the book reminds us of the intellectual vibrancy of Lazarsfeld’s Vienna.’

**Professor (Emeritus) Elihu Katz, Annenberg School for Communication,
University of Pennsylvania, and Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
Former close collaborator and coauthor of Paul Lazarsfeld.**

‘This book is essential reading for anyone interested in the origins of communication research. For English speaking scholars unfamiliar with Lazarsfeld’s Viennese communication research, Jeřábek’s account of Lazarsfeld’s radio research will prove fascinating as well as instructive to his later work in America. This is a “must read book” on the history of the field.’

Professor David E. Morrison, University of Leeds.

‘Paul F. Lazarsfeld belongs to the small group of scientists who are most frequently quoted in international social science journals. What is today called organised social research owes much to his having pioneered the establishing and institutionalization of this type of research in the form of the Columbia University Bureau of Applied Social research and its predecessors. His contributions to the social sciences were of diverse styles and in diverse substantive domains (from mass communication to voting behaviour and from unemployment to the impact of McCarthyism on American academic life), but, quite evidently, his most influential work in the social sciences has been of methodological nature as many scholars have confirmed. Hynek Jeřábek is a scholar well informed about all these topics and he is a devoted Lazarsfeld-researcher. His book opens useful and worthwhile insights on the early days of Paul F. Lazarsfeld’s communication research, including the famous RAVAG-study of 1931 in Vienna, on the founding and development of the diverse research institutes, and on the progress of methodology of social research inspired by Paul F. Lazarsfeld. The text is particularly suited to introduce the interested reader to life and work of Paul F. Lazarsfeld.’

Professor Anton Amann, University of Vienna.

‘This volume remembers the multiple scientific merits of Paul Lazarsfeld, particularly in the field of research methodology. It will be appreciated by students of political science and sociology, as well as by historians of political and social research, and its methods.’

**Dr Michal Illner, The Institute of Sociology,
Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.**

‘Hynek Jeřábek is a known expert in the field of Lazarsfeld’s, respectively lazarsfeldian methodology, where he has already published a number of monographs and scientific studies. In this book, he clearly demonstrates the methodological innovations and institutional context of the communication research, which was founded, and in 1930s and 1940s successfully developed just by P.F. Lazarsfeld. Jeřábek’s book is particularly interesting. First of all, he clearly demonstrates the basic principles and methods of communication research, but also he tries to integrate the perspective on methodological dimension of communication research with its historical dimension. In this sense, it is quite rare approach in the sociological literature, but both beneficial and inspiring one. The book can be recommended to all those interested in communication research.’

Professor Juraj Schenk, Comenius University.

Paul Lazarsfeld and the Origins of Communications Research

Hynek Jeřábek

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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	vii
<i>List of tables</i>	viii
<i>Foreword to the English edition 2017</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	xi
1 The context of Lazarsfeld's communication studies	1
1.1 <i>Paul Lazarsfeld's life story</i>	1
1.2 <i>The social context of Lazarsfeld's life and work in Vienna</i>	6
1.3 <i>Communication research in the context of Lazarsfeld's work</i>	13
1.4 <i>Lazarsfeld's contribution to communication research in the context of the theory and study of mass communication</i>	17
<i>Notes</i>	23
2 Lazarsfeld's first 'communication studies'	25
2.1 <i>The early stages of cooperation with Austrian radio – psychological experiments</i>	25
2.2 <i>Research on Radio-Wien listeners – Lazarsfeld's RAVAG study</i>	28
2.3 <i>Magazines in American cities – a secondary analysis of aggregated data</i>	31
<i>Notes</i>	36
3 The Princeton years of radio research	39
3.1 <i>The search for a project director</i>	39
3.2 <i>The first research reports</i>	40
3.3 <i>Radio and the printed page</i>	44
3.3.1 <i>Analysing and building radio audiences</i>	46
3.3.2 <i>The reciprocal effects of radio and the press</i>	49
3.4 <i>The research moves to Columbia University</i>	53
<i>Notes</i>	54

4	The radio research yearbooks during World War 2	56
4.1	<i>Radio broadcasting for specific groups of listeners</i>	57
4.2	<i>An analysis of musical programmes on the radio and the collaboration between Paul Lazarsfeld and Theodor Adorno</i>	60
4.3	<i>Radio broadcasting in wartime in the democratic society of the United States</i>	66
4.4	<i>Research on radio audiences in Great Britain</i>	69
4.5	<i>German radio propaganda – research on totalitarian communication</i>	70
4.6	<i>A content analysis of daytime radio serials and a social analysis of their audiences</i>	74
4.7	<i>Research uses of the ‘program analyzer’ and measuring its reliability and validity</i>	76
	<i>Notes</i>	80
5	Two major studies by Paul Lazarsfeld’s colleagues	81
5.1	<i>The Invasion from Mars – a study of the panic caused by a radio broadcast</i>	82
5.2	<i>Mass persuasion – the war bond drive</i>	91
	<i>Notes</i>	98
6	Representative studies of radio listeners	101
6.1	<i>Listener populations and overlapping audiences</i>	102
6.2	<i>Criticism of advertising and measuring criticism</i>	106
	<i>Note</i>	112
7	The birth of communication research	113
7.1	<i>Who doesn’t listen to daytime serials? What advice for radio stations?</i>	114
7.2	<i>What does it mean for readers to ‘miss their newspapers’?</i>	118
7.3	<i>Types of personal influence and models of influence in local communities: R. K. Merton’s study of influence as an example of a new type of communication research</i>	122
	<i>Notes</i>	128
8	Lazarsfeld’s communication research: Its credo and its contribution to sociology	130
	<i>Summary</i>	135
	<i>References</i>	137
	<i>Index</i>	144

Figures

2.1	Reading score by geographical regions in the United States	32
2.2	Cultural and reading scores by geographical regions in the United States	36
3.1	Visual reproduction of the results of the evaluation of the programme using the 'program analyzer' developed by P. Lazarsfeld and F. Stanton	43
3.2	General listening and serious listening on different 'cultural levels' (schematic)	48
6.1	The degree of criticalness of individual statements on advertising	112

Tables

2.1	The number and percentage of responses indicating ‘the person is used to giving orders’ out of the total number of responses given by listeners (the number of listeners who evaluated each individual person differs)	28
2.2	Number and percentage of Viennese women who wished to hear more, the same amount or less opera programming on the radio	30
2.3	Interest in classical and light music by listeners’ social category – men – RAVAG study	30
2.4	A comparison of the percentage of African Americans in the population and the reading rank of the city in relation to the magazine <i>True Confessions</i>	34
6.1	Percentage of listeners who enjoy listening to discussion programmes on public issues by age, sex and educational background	104
6.2	Overlapping listening: music programmes (correlation coefficients)	106

Foreword to the English edition 2017

It was more than two decades ago that I was sitting in the marvellous library and archives of the University of Konstanz writing this study on the early stages of communication research and the role of Paul Lazarsfeld in the birth of that field. My habilitation thesis came out in 1997, though only in Czech [Jeřábek 1997], but because of my deep interest in the work of Paul Lazarsfeld I was invited by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, the founder of the Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research, to speak at one of this great institution's evening seminars. This indirectly led to my more than fifteen-year involvement in the World Association of Public Opinion Research (WAPOR).

I have since presented dozens of papers at international conferences and written numerous articles in Czech, English and German manifesting my enduring interest in Lazarsfeld's methodology, an interest that ultimately culminated in a trio of monographs published in English [Jeřábek 2006; Jeřábek, Soukup, eds., 2008; Haas, Jeřábek, Petersen 2012].

It is hard for a slim book like this on such a narrow subject to find a large enough readership in Czech. This kind of work would fare much better in an international forum, where it can be discussed by international scholars that share this interest. Unfortunately, it was impossible for this to happen before now, as it was only in 2013 that I finally acquired the conditions to have the book translated, thanks to the support of the Czech Science Foundation (grant no. P404/11/0949), and was given the opportunity to publish it, thanks to Routledge and SLON publishers.

Today I am still spurred on by the words of Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and Thomas Petersen, and especially by the encouragement I received from Irving Louis Horowitz at Transaction Publishers, who, when he saw the 'summary' and read the table of contents of this little book in 1997, wrote to Robert K. Merton: "What a strange world! East European scholars thirsting for the sort of solid, empirical research pioneered during the finest hours of American (and European) thought; while our own new generation is searching out the most subjective and irrational forms of European thought to emulate! Go figure. ... Be assured if we see the manuscript in decent English, we will review it with care."

If I were beginning work on the book today, I would perhaps write it slightly differently and would refer to the several more recent commentaries that have since emerged on the work of Lazarsfeld and Merton; I might go further and discuss yet

other studies by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues and successors. However, I have written about them elsewhere, and so have other scholars. Even if this belated translation were to be of value to just a dozen experts around the world whose research interests are focused on the early stages of communication research, the development of methodology and the work of Paul Lazarsfeld, I am certain that this study in English will prove more useful for their work than the Czech version published twenty years ago.

In Hořovice, 12 April 2017

Hynek Jeřábek

Introduction

The pages of this book are dedicated to the memory of Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, researcher, sociologist and methodologist, whose 115th birthday, which he did not live to see, we commemorated in 2016. This book offers a look inside the workshop of one of the most prominent representatives of European and American empirical sociology. It is now forty years since the death of this researcher and teacher, the founder of four research institutes and an author who contributed to sociological knowledge in many branches of sociology and their research methods. He co-created, introduced into research practice and himself used and popularised analytic research paradigms that dominated sociology for a full half century. At the same time, however, he was an exemplary champion of the interaction and tolerance of multiple different methods, promoting the complementary and mixed use of different methods. He influenced the development of empirical social research from the 1930s to the 1970s.

This book is devoted to the life of Paul Lazarsfeld, his body of research and above all his studies in the field of research on radio audiences and the effect of other media on mass communication. The book presents a brief biography of Lazarsfeld and examines in greater depth Lazarsfeld's fate and his work in the 1930s and 1940s in Austria and the United States. It offers a look inside his sociological workshops, describing the method of work that Lazarsfeld used in those years and his contribution to the history of empirical social research, namely, to the history of research on mass media.

This monograph also explores the research activities of Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues on: radio audiences; newspaper, book and magazine readers; film-goers; and participants in interpersonal communication. It focuses on the period between 1931 and 1949. The work relates to the history of sociological research, but it is not historical work. It documents in detail research studies by Lazarsfeld and his immediate colleagues on these subjects published during this period. However, primary attention is devoted to his research workshop, above all its research methods, examples of their imaginative use, methods of data presentation, interesting interpretations and innovative findings made by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues.

This publication came about as a result of a number of fortunate circumstances. It was prepared between 1992 and 1996, during study residences that allowed me to do research in the Social Sciences Archives and in the library at the University

of Konstanz and at Cornell University in Ithaca in the United States, and thanks to short trips during which I was able to work in the Paul Lazarsfeld Archive at the Institute of Sociology at Vienna University and the Lazarsfeld archive at Columbia University in New York in the United States.

The more familiar I became with the results of Lazarsfeld's life-long activities, the more apparent it became to me that his method of work, the vitality with which he influenced others around him, his scientific and personal contacts, made it impossible for me to fully understand Lazarsfeld without also understanding the context of the work of his colleagues. His plans were so far-reaching in their vision that it was impossible for him to fulfil them on his own. His findings tended not to be definitive and were open to further verification and perfection. The research projects he headed, the deep natural laws behind them, emerged one from the other and drew their strength from the collective methodological approach that Lazarsfeld cultivated as an integral part of all his research activities. Just as his ideas gave rise to numerous books and inspired all sorts of research projects, so too his work absorbed the findings and thoughts of those who worked around him. He did not present their ideas as his own. He never hesitated to cite the role and contribution of his colleagues. He shared, accumulated, critically tested and followed up on their ideas and discoveries. His work environment was the workshop. The work and the results of the work of his colleagues in that environment shine with a fascination with knowledge, admiration for the discovery of something new and respect for new facts before they become a part of established knowledge. Lazarsfeld's achievements also include the development of whole new fields of research and scientific schools: mathematical sociology, the study of voter behaviour, latent structure analysis, empirical analysis of action, research on the social consequences and accompanying phenomena of unemployment. Communication research is one such field of research that Lazarsfeld helped to create. This book highlights Lazarsfeld's contribution to the scientific school of communication studies when it was first emerging.

I would like to thank the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst, the University of Konstanz and the head of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University for providing me with the opportunity to take up the study residence during which much of the work on this book was done in the autumn of 1995 in Konstanz. I would also like to thank the following individuals for their assistance and advice: Professor Horst Baier, Professor Kurt Lüscher, Professor Ilja Šrubař, Doctor Hubert Knoblauch, Doctor Wolfgang Lauterbach, Mathias Maucher and Till Kleinhans and, last but not least, Mrs Heide Fehriger, who always had a friendly word for me. Special thanks are also due to Professor Erhard R. Wiehn and his wife Mirjam Wiehn, who helped me to feel at home in Konstanz with the warm, human and personal welcome they extended to me there.

My great thanks are also due to Professor Paul Neurath, director of the Paul Lazarsfeld Archive in Vienna, for the care that he has devoted to preserving the legacy of Paul Lazarsfeld and to building his archive at the University of Vienna. I would like to thank him personally, as well as Professor Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann from the Institute for Public Opinion Research in Allensbach, for the many details

that they provided me with that helped me to fill in the mosaic of Lazarsfeld's life and work. I would also like to thank the Open Society Fund Foundation, namely the HESP programme, for giving me the opportunity to study Lazarsfeld's archive materials in Vienna during my preparation of the course Sociological Workshops.

I thank the reviewers of this work, Professor Miloslav Petrusek and Doctor Michal Illner, for their critical comments, which helped me to make the content of this work more accessible to a wider circle of readers. Their ideas were crucial to my setting this study within the context of Lazarsfeld's life and work and examining them in relation to the concepts and theories of mass communication, in contrast to which Lazarsfeld's own work was able to emerge and evolve. My thanks also go to Robin Cassling for her responsible translation from Czech to English and to two anonymous reviewers in the service of Routledge and SLON publishers. Thanks to them, I repaired some details and added section 1.2 concerning the social context of Paul Lazarsfeld's Vienna life and work.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their help, support and understanding.

Hořovice, 21 July 1996 and 12 April 2017

Hynek Jeřábek

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1 The context of Lazarsfeld's communication studies

1.1 Paul Lazarsfeld's life story

Paul Felix Lazarsfeld was born in Vienna on 13 February 1901. He grew up in the city's intellectual circles, influenced by Viennese thinkers and the local socialist movement. He studied mathematics at university, graduating in 1925, and then went on to study psychology under Karl and Charlotta Bühler. In the late 1920s, he and a group of students at the University of Vienna began conducting market research in the field of applied social psychology; he also trained students at the University of Vienna and conducted market research commissioned by businesses and industries in Austria and later abroad. Lazarsfeld obtained some of the funding for his research activities from the Rockefeller Foundation and the funds were managed by the Böhlers. At that time he was also teaching mathematics at a secondary school and working as an assistant to Charlotta Bühler, while also informally supervising the thesis work of students of psychology at the university.¹

Lazarsfeld began to produce his first research studies in the late 1920s, among them *Jugend und Beruf (Youth and Occupations)* [1931 (1975)] and *Statistisches Praktikum für Psychologen und Lehrer (Statistical Praxis for Psychologists and Teachers)* [1929]. In the winter of 1931/1932, he conducted his first large, and successful, statistical analysis of data from a broad survey of listeners to broadcasts of the Radio Communication Company in Vienna (Radio-Verkehrs-Aktiengesellschaft or RAVAG). For this survey he used questionnaires completed by more than 100,000 respondents. Paul Lazarsfeld founded his first research institute Research Centre for Economic Psychology (Wirtschaftspsychologische Forschungsstelle) in 1931. This was one of the first research centres in Europe at that time.²

The Vienna Research Centre for Economic Psychology's most famous study, however, was the one it conducted among the unemployed population in the town of Marienthal in Lower Austria. Titled *Die Arbeitslosen von Marienthal (The Unemployed in Marienthal)*, the study was first published in the summer of 1933 in Leipzig as a joint monograph produced by the research institute's staff under the supervision of Professor Karl Bühler. The study is a prime example of collective work by an enthusiastic team. Paul Lazarsfeld, Marie Jahoda (his first wife) and Hans Zeisel are today known as the authors of this monograph [Jahoda,

2 *The context of Lazarsfeld's comm. studies*

Lazarsfeld and Zeisel 1933 (1974)]. Today we can thank each of them, as well as many other members of the institute's research team, for providing us with one of the nicest examples of mixed-methods research in a single social study.

In 1932 Lazarsfeld appeared in Copenhagen at the International Psychology Congress to speak about this study, but only one year later the effects of political developments in Europe at that time began to have an impact on his academic career. In the autumn of 1933, Lazarsfeld went to the United States, his initial plan being to stay there for one year on a fellowship funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. He extended his stay in 1934. In the summer of 1935, when a totalitarian regime assumed power in Austria and the socialists were outlawed, he applied for an emigration visa in Austria and moved for good to the United States.

Lazarsfeld was very active during his first visit to the United States on a fellowship between 1933 and 1935. He visited more than a dozen academic and commercial institutions and engaged in empirical social research; it was then that he first met Robert Lynd, Rensis Likert, Hadley Cantril and Frank Stanton and first worked with Arthur Kornhauser and David Craig on market research. He resided for a time in Chicago and visited universities, some statistical offices and research groups around the United States. Robert Lynd helped Lazarsfeld during his first years as an immigrant and would do so again later on numerous occasions. Lynd got Lazarsfeld his first job as a statistical analyst, analysing data from 10,000 questionnaires completed by young people in the state of New Jersey on their choice of occupation, a task that no one else wanted to do. Lazarsfeld took on the task and he and Frank Kingdom, the president of the little-known, recently founded Newark University, together agreed to found Lazarsfeld's second research institute – The Newark University Research Center. The university provided the workspace and Lazarsfeld taught students at the institute and took on poorly remunerated teaching duties at Newark University. He got married again, this time to Herta Herzog, a former student from Vienna and an émigré; she would go on to collaborate with him on his work for many years.

For its first year, Lazarsfeld obtained auxiliary funding for the Newark University Research Center from Max Horkheimer, who had just recently moved his research team from Frankfurt to New York. Lazarsfeld also began working with Samuel A. Stouffer and Mirra Komarovsky to study the effects of the Great Depression on marriage and the family and was conducting market research with Arthur Kornhauser. He also wrote a useful article with Rowena Wyant analysing data on the sales rates of twenty-five major magazines in ninety US towns.

In 1937, Lazarsfeld, by then an experienced researcher, became the head of a large research project on radio broadcasting and listenerships. The deputies on this project, which became known among social scientists as the 'Princeton Radio Project', were Frank Stanton, head of CBS Radio Research Department, and Hadley Cantril, a famous psychologist from Princeton University. For Lazarsfeld this represented an opportunity to embark on a wide array of different research activities and he then founded his third research centre, the Princeton Office of Radio Research, this time under significantly better material conditions.