

Pat Lyons and Rita Kindlerová (eds.). *Contemporary Czech Society*. The Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, 2016. 552 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$14.00 (paperback).

*Contemporary Czech Society*, edited by Pat Lyons and Rita Kindlerová, is a wide-ranging study of current attitudinal trends and changing realities, based on insights drawn largely from mass survey data. This highly engaging and thought-provoking work, which employs a social scientific framework, seeks and largely manages to present a value-free account of popular perceptions of the self and others. The publication comprises five sections: Preface; Introduction; Theory, methods, and structure; fifty-seven short empirically-informed chapters; and Conclusion, which contains a 'cross-validation'. The separate chapters include contributions from eighteen different scholars, although Lyons' own input merits special recognition, not least because it exceeds that of all the other authors as a whole. The main body of the text is divided into five broadly conceived thematic parts, which consider Czech society from economic, historical, political science, psychological, and sociological perspectives. Each chapter adopts an erotetic (question and answer) approach, and is grounded in solid scholarship, with reference to numerous secondary sources, and models and frameworks, but without conventional academic citations and footnotes. The study is thus presumably intended both for a general educated market keen to learn more about the dynamics and values Czech society, and for a more specialized readership, with an interest in particular aspects of the subject area.

Amongst the questions posed in Part 1, relating loosely to economic affairs, are 'Do Czechs know and trust official economic statistics?'; 'Do Czechs want equality?'; 'Are there too many university graduates in the Czech Republic?'; and 'What are the attitudes of Czechs towards climate change?'. Part 2: Historical Perspective, asks, inter alia, 'Who voted for the Communists in the election of 1946?'; 'Why did Czechs and Slovaks allow their leaders to dissolve Czechoslovakia in late 1992?'; and 'What is current public opinion towards the Velvet Revolution?'. Questions informed by political science include 'Are Czechs nostalgic for life under communism?'; 'What can be learned from analysing Czech election ballot papers?'; 'What is Czechs' level of knowledge about refugees and asylum seekers, and is it important?'; and 'Czexit?'. In Part 4: Psychological Perspective, Lyons addresses questions such as 'What are the main personality traits of the Czechs?'; 'Do Czechs think they know more than they really do?'; and 'What does a study of a Czech internet user tell us?'. The final part looks at a range of questions from a sociological perspective, including 'Are Czechs a nation of grumblers?'; 'Is religion dead in the Czech Republic?'; 'What is the nature of sexual behaviour in Czech society?'; 'Is there equal treatment of ethnic minorities in the Czech Republic?'; and 'How do Czechs spend their free time?'.

Inevitably, with a multi-authored study of this length and breadth, there is some variation in the scope and style of the analysis, and a degree of repetition (with terms such as 'heuristic', 'TOP 09' and 'IPSOS-MORI' being explained more than once). Nonetheless, Lyons' recurring voice ensures an appropriate measure of authorial continuity, while the repetition allows for the various sections and chapters to be read independent of the whole. Different readers will bring their own interests and expertise to the book, but I particularly enjoyed the chapters which employed historical and sociological perspectives, in addition to the illustrations by Miroslav Kemel, which offer a touch of light relief. Amongst the many intriguing characterizations of the Czech people is one derived from a European Social Survey (2012), which identifies the Czechs' unique combination of collectivist and conservative values (pp. 316-18). The contributors to the different chapters deserve credit for their recognition of the limitations of the sources cited; their acknowledgement of the inconsistency in people's responses to public opinion surveys; and their adherence to a particularistic perspective (which largely avoids more generalized comments about ideologies and orientations). The application of Alvarez and Brehm's concepts of ambivalence, equivocation and uncertainty (pp. 450-51) to explain occasional contradictions in the data is particularly apposite and well-judged, in this context.

If I were to be nitpicking, I would, first and foremost, like to see some discussion of how outsiders and foreigners within the Czech Republic (especially the Roma, Vietnamese and Ukrainians) perceive both themselves and mainstream Czech society. The current approach effectively excludes their opinions from the narrative, even though they are very much part of the wider community. Second, I would question the inclusion of the cross-validation (A cinematic view of Czech society) in the Conclusion. The analysis is fascinating in itself, and parts of it could have been included in earlier chapters, but it seems to add little to the overall argument here. Finally, from a cultural-linguistic perspective, I would have liked the study to give a stronger flavour of the conceptual and terminological specificities of the Czech-speaking world. I would have welcomed greater exemplification of and metalinguistic reflection upon typically Czech notions and phrases, à la proverbs cited in the Introduction (pp. 27-28); the references to the clinking or jingling of keys ("zvonění klíči", "cinkání klíči") (pp.127 & 131); religious exclamations in Czech (p. 325); and the discussion of the words "Roma" and "Gypsy" (pp. 397-405). Given that nearly every reader of the book will have more than a passing knowledge of things Czech, and almost certainly some interest in the language, the publication would have benefitted from more citations in the original, with translations in parenthesis. (There is certainly no need for the translation of Czech names, such as Helena/Helen, Sára/Sarah and Petr/Peter, with which Czech scholars inexplicably persist.)

Notwithstanding the aforementioned quibbles, *Contemporary Czech Society* is an illuminating and highly readable study of people's perceptions and changing realities, and adds significantly to the existing body of scholarship. It not only successfully synthesizes various research perspectives and attitudinal data, but it also makes an important contribution to knowledge in its own right. Students and academics of diverse disciplines, and with differing requirements and expectations, will find this a useful and timely resource.

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