

Editorial

Vážené čtenářky a vážení čtenáři,

Dear readers,

This issue of Socioweb is the third English language edition, and I would very much like to take this opportunity as editor to welcome you to the Czech Republic's leading web based sociological magazine. Socioweb provides a window for presenting current research into topics that span the range of questions examined with the social sciences and public policy making. It is the earnest hope of both this month's contributors, and the editorial board of Socioweb that you will find something of interest in the articles contained in this issue.

In previous years I have argued that an English language version of a Czech sociological magazine such as Socioweb is important for three reasons. First, it represents a "coming of age" and demonstrates the growing power and confidence of Czech social science. Second, as contemporary social science is international in scope and nature, there is much to be said for bringing Czech social research onto the global stage and ensuring that this country plays a full and equal role in shaping opinion among citizens and decision makers. Third, many of the key themes and debates in the social sciences are by definition international, one need only think of hot topics such as 'globalisation', 'global climate change', and the 'international financial crisis' to see that discussion and debate of these issues should be undertaken on an international stage.

These general principles have underpinned the articles presented in the last two years English language editions; and this year's edition will continue this work. In the first English language edition of Socioweb the leitmotif was human decision-making. Last year the focus shifted to demonstrating how social science research tackles problems within the real world. This year the general theme spanning all of the articles in this issue is the topic of trust. Trust has always been a central concern of the social sciences because it is seen as the "glue" that holds society together.

In the final months of 2008 the importance of institutional trust became headline news across the globe. This occurred because the international financial system stopped functioning because banks lost trust in their competitors and refused to extend credit to one another. Unsurprisingly, within this context it came as no shock to learn from economic commentators in the media that the word "credit" is intricately linked with trust as this key financial term comes from the Latin verb *credere*: to trust. The international financial crisis of 2008 demonstrated that while trust is often an invisible and pervasive feature of economic life: the existence of trust between individuals and across institutions cannot be taken for granted. Moreover, trust is brittle and can be withdrawn at any time leading to catastrophic consequences where there can be enormous collective losses.

One of the general lessons of the so-called "credit-

crunch" of 2008 is that if trust is absent institutions cannot operate. Just as trust or more specifically credit is the glue that holds economic systems together, a similar logic applies to political institutions. One may plausibly argue that one of the key events of late twentieth century – the collapse of communist regimes in 1989/90 – demonstrates a similar logic in the political sphere. Citizens living in socialist systems in Central and Eastern Europe lost trust in their communist political institutions and this ultimately sealed the fate of Soviet bloc regimes.

Almost a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the central question that vexed the minds of economic and political leaders in late 2008 in their efforts to avoid the worst features of a global economic depression was how to recover trust among banks? This important practical question is a concrete example of a more general consideration: Why do people trust others that they know, and more curiously individuals and institutions that they do not know personally? It comes as no surprise to learn that this has been a central theme of social theory from the beginning.

Without getting into the long history of the concept of trust, this edition of Socioweb will explore a small number of themes where trust plays an important role. Here is an overview of each contribution to give the reader a flavour of what is contained in following pages.

In our first article [Jana Chaloupková](#) examines when people decide to "settle down", that is become involved in a long-term relationship and possibly get married and have their first child. Here the importance of inter-personal trust is obvious. This article focuses on the timing of such decisions during the life course and identifies three different patterns of behaviour which shows that decisions regarding starting families are not all the same with regard to structure and timing.

In the following contribution [Marta Vohlídalová](#) explores why cohabiting or married couples decide to break-up. Just as cohabitation, marriage and having children may be interpreted as expressions of trust; one may reasonably say that for most people break-ups are primary examples of loss of trust. This research reveals that the reported reasons for break-ups vary systematically on the basis of type of relationship (marriage vs. cohabitation) age, education and socio-economic status implying that inter-personal trust within households is not the same in all homes.

Moving away from the household, trust is also one of the key characteristics of the neighbourhood in which people live. Here [Ondřej Špaček](#) in our third article presents his research on why some areas within Prague are seen by residents as being "nicer" to live in than others. This piece reveals that sense of community, an indicator of trust in neighbours, is strongest in areas that are rich and in poorer districts where apartment buildings are not large and allow residents to get to know each other.

The following contribution by [Pat Lyons](#) continues the theme of trust, but focuses instead on who to trust when interpreting the past. In a discussion of Milan Kundera's command to "tell the truth" there is an examination of

how different generations in Czech society perceive the events of 1968 and 1989. This is important as there has been debate over whether a younger generation of historians who did not experience the communist regime direct have the skills to make judgements on events that occurred during this era. In essence, this is a debate on who do Czech's trust to tell the truth about the past.

In a following article, **Marta Kolářová** looks at one salient feature of globalisation – the alter-globalisation movement. This social movement is a very interesting one as it manages to cooperate and coordinate at the transnational level largely on the basis of trust as there is no institutional framework directing efforts. Examining the demonstrations at the IMF/World Bank summit in Prague in September 2000, this contribution reveals some of the internal workings of the Czech and international alter-globalisation movements and how they manage inter-group distrust.

In the final contribution, there is a brief exploration of which Czech citizens trust political institutions most and how this has changed over time. Here **Pat Lyons** reveals in his article that there are important differences in the trust elicited by national and sub-national institutions. Curiously, the political institutions with the greatest power attract the lowest levels of trust. Moreover, the level of trust in institutions varies over time. This evidence suggests that Czech citizens' sense of trust is partly determined by the perceived performance of institutions.

I would like to conclude this introduction with an expression of gratitude and thanks to all of the contributors to this issue. It has been a pleasure for me as editor to facilitate in the presentation of the ideas and research contained in this third English language issue of *Socio-web*. Všem mnohokrát děkuji.

Příjemné čtení Vám přeje

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Is Your Life Best Explained by One or Many Events? The Sociological Analysis of Family Trajectories

Key words: family, methodology, life-course, sequence analysis

A common theme in the biographies of the rich and famous is the identification of key moments when a well-known person's life might have turned out differently. Sometimes biographers stress a single life changing event or decision, while other biographers emphasise the cumulative effects of many decisions yielding the personal history observed. In this respect, most of us have at one point or other contemplated the importance of decisions we made and the impact such decisions have had on our 'life course.' Such contemplations very quickly lead us to realise the power of society and circumstances to shape an individual's life course; and also the complexity of thinking through different decision making scenarios. Within sociology the goal is even more ambitious: how is it possible to explain the general decision-making

patterns of the members of a whole society?

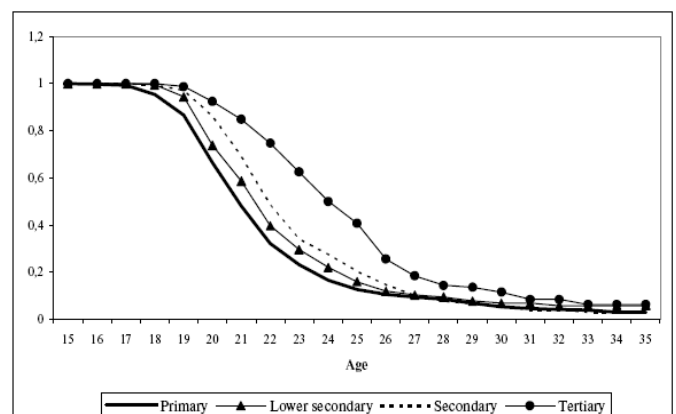
This question is important because it goes to the heart of exploring the nature and extent of social change. Sociology's interest in exploring social change through investigations of life courses has been facilitated by the diffusion of longitudinal data and the growth of statistical analysis methods that enable researchers to take the timing of decisions and life events into account. For these and other reasons, the concept of 'life-course' has come to assume increasing importance within the social sciences (Levy, Krüeger 2001; Giele, Elder 1998).

The sociological concept of 'life course' can be defined simply as a sequence of closely interrelated events that stem from each persons' life from birth to death such as starting a family, ending study, starting and stopping work, etc. Giele and Elder (1998) identify four general aspects that shape the life course: (1) human agency, (2) location in time and place often denoted in terms of the impact of history and culture, and (3) social relations where all lives are inter-linked with others. The intersection of these four aspects of the life course constitutes a fourth important aspect: (4) the timing of decisions in people's lives. This perspective sees individuals as actively making decisions and organizing their lives in a certain social and historical context and adapting their goals to structural constraints imposed by the society within which they live.

Life course as one or many events

From a methodological point of view, two main approaches have been used in the quantitative analysis of life-course: (a) an event-based approach and, (b) a holistic or trajectory based approach (Billari 2005, 2001). The first approach is based on an event history analysis and aims to explain which factors influence the risk of experiencing a certain event/transition, e.g. the decision to marry or have a child. The event-based approach has been applied by Hamplová (2003) to family formation in the Czech Republic.

Figure 1
Partnership formation by education (survival function)



Source: FFS 1997

Note: reprinted from Hamplová (2003)

Figure 1 demonstrates that a person's level of education has an important impact on the timing of their first "union", i.e. cohabitation, or marriage. Union is a technical sociological term for describing long-term relationships between couples whether they have been formalised with marriage or not. A person's level of education is important because a decision to prolong study tends to have the knock-on effect of delaying the transition from being single to living in a long-term domestic relationship or union. The event-based approach is very useful in highlighting these kinds of patterns. However, one

Table 1
Example of family trajectory for a female respondent from 18 to 35 yrs

<i>Age</i>	18	18,5	19	19,5	20	20,5	21	21,5	22	22,5	23	23,5	24	24,5	25	25,5	26	
Respondent	S0	S0	S0	S0	S0	S0	S0	S0	C0	C0	M0	M0	M0	M0	M0	M0	MC	
	26,5	27	27,5	28	28,5	29	29,5	30	30,5	31	31,5	32	32,5	33	33,5	34	34,5	35
	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC

Note: S0 - living without partner, no child; C0 2 – living in cohabitation with partner, no child,; M0- marriage, no child; MC – marriage, child.

key disadvantage of this event based approach is that it overlooks the possibility that the first union is often unstable; and that the process of family formation is often more complex. For example, a family may not result from the formation of the first union due to couples breaking up or divorcing.

Instead of examining specific life changing events or individual decisions, it is also possible to explore the life course from the point of view of many decisions made by many people at the same stage in life. More technically, this holistic or trajectory-based approach focuses on whole trajectories or sequences of events (Billari 2001). One key advantage of taking a holistic rather than event based perspective is that it facilitates looking at many decisions taken over years or decades. The holistic approach is more ambitious than its event based counterpart in that it aspires to providing a complex description of a population's life course by identifying what are called "similar trajectories" (this is jargon for making the same decisions at the same time) and factors which explain why there is not one single trajectory, but several. So how is all this life course trajectory analysis actually done?

Trajectories, sequences and matching

In practice, the holistic or trajectory based approach to life course relies on something called Sequence Analysis, and more particularly on Optimal Matching Analysis (OMA). OMA has its origins in molecular biology and more specifically in the study of DNA sequences; and was introduced into the social sciences by Andrew Abbott (Abbott 1995; Abbott, Hrycak 1990). At its simplest, OMA facilitates making a comparison between the similarities in sequences of life events using simple mathematical operations and proceeds in two steps.

In the first step, the similarity between two "sequences", which is techno-speak for two people's life courses, is measured by the total number of elementary mathematical operations (i.e. insertion, deletion or substitution) necessary to transform one sequence into the other. The researcher assigns each of these operations a specific cost using (a) theoretical criteria – think here of how much 'cost' is involved in getting divorced, changing jobs, etc. or (b) empirical criteria – which is simply the estimated likelihood of such decisions occurring using real-world observations derived from survey or census data (Abbott 1995; Abbott, Hrycak 1990).

In the second step, pairwise distances are calculated by OMA and these are used as input into Cluster Analysis, which is another statistical technique employed to iden-

tify groups who have similar characteristics. The goal here is to discover if the many life course trajectories observed in survey data can be reasonably reduced to a handful of generally similar patterns. Yes, this is a technical process; but the essential ideas behind identifying life course trajectories are straight-forward. Of course, having a method of analysis requires finding suitable data to analyse.

Please tell me your life story

Family trajectories in the Czech Republic can be reconstructed from data on work and family histories, which were collected in a supplement to an International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) survey module 'Family and Gender Roles III' implemented in late 2002. This survey contains detailed information about the histories of union formation, dissolution and childbearing. For the sake of brevity this article will present an example analysis of the family 'trajectories' that is the decision to get married or cohabit and have children among Czechs between the ages of 18 and 35 years. As the ISSP survey was undertaken in 2002 this research looks at respondents aged born before 1967 (i.e. 2002 minus 35) because this group of people are the only ones old enough to have had a family history between their eighteenth and thirty fifth birthdays in 2002. All other respondents are simply too young to be analysed.

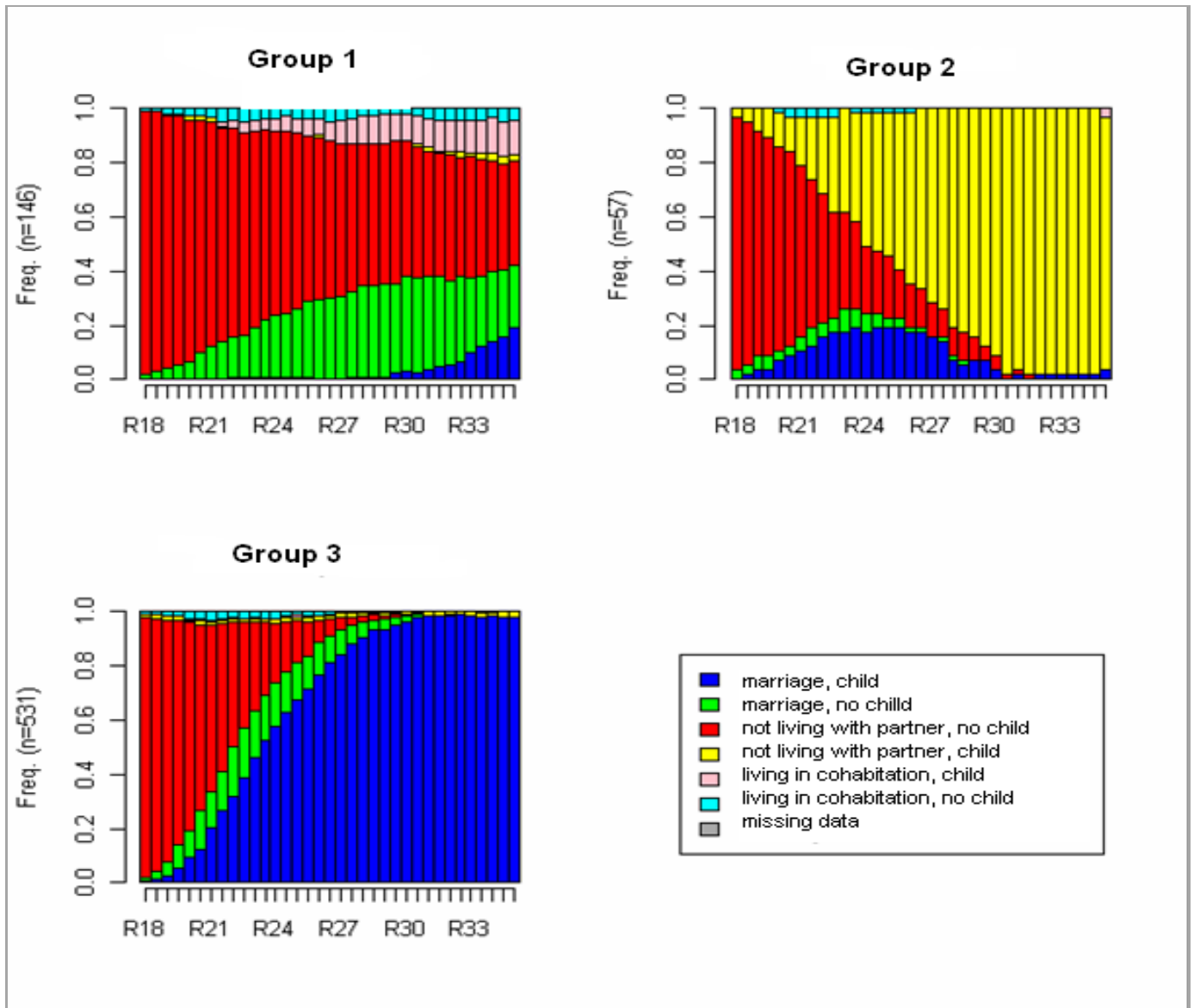
The disadvantage of this kind of research is that the entire survey sample (N=1,289) cannot be used for examination due to age constraints (a loss of 460 respondents, N=829) and missing data (a further loss of 95 respondents, N=734). With data from 734 respondents "family trajectory reports" were constructed for each six month interval between 18 and 35 years of age defining if a person was single, married or cohabiting and if their first child had been born. Mathematically this yields six possible outcomes or "states", i.e. married with child or not (x2), cohabiting with child or not (x2), and single – neither married nor cohabiting with child or not (x2).¹

The general logic of the "family trajectory report" is easy to see in Table 1 where the life course of a woman who started to live with her first partner in unmarried cohabitation when she was 22 years old; one year later she married and when she was 31 years old her first child was born. Now the question is: what can you possibly learn from hundreds of these life histories?

Q. Which trajectory are you on? Answer: Classic, Single or Lone parent

Based on OMA, we can identify three types of early family trajectories from the Czech wave of our ISSP survey

Figure 2
Early family trajectory for those aged 18 to 35 years with regard to the state distribution in each age (aggregated data)



Source: ISSP 2002, sub-sample 35+ years (N=734)

Note that Group 1 refers to the Trajectory of Singles; Group 2: Trajectory of Single Parents; and Group 3: "Classic family trajectory" with early marriage and childbirth.

of late 2002. The most common trajectory for 76% of women and 65% of men is what might be termed the "Classic family trajectory." These people entered into marriage at a relatively early age and had their first child soon after. In contrast, 29% of men and 15% of women who were typically highly educated adopted a "Singles trajectory" which means that they did not live with a partner for much of the period observed; or alternatively they decided to cohabit and postponed childbirth. The gender distribution in the "singles trajectory" group reflects the fact that men experience family related events at a later age than women. The last group called the "Lone parent trajectory" consists of single parents where 9% are women, and 6% are men. This relatively small subgroup either never married, or divorced after a short period of marriage.

The data presented in Figure 2 shows at an aggregate level the distribution of the six "family states" identified, for each six month time period between 18 and 35 years of age for the three family trajectories identified, i.e. clas-

sic, single or lone parent. The classic family trajectory is the largest with more than five hundred respondents (N=531), with the other two trajectories being considerably smaller revealing that marrying young and having a child in the first few years of marriage was the norm for those Czechs who became adults before 1967. The different patterns displayed in this figure demonstrate quite clearly the differences in (early) family decision-making between the members of our three family trajectories. In general, the configuration observed in Figure 2 matches with expectations, and demonstrates that the OMA method generates results that can be considered as having "face validity" (scientific slang for "the results are believable").

What OMA can and cannot tell us?

In this short article, the goal has been to briefly explain what is life course analysis, why it is important, and how do social scientists examine the 'big' decisions people make with regard to forming family units and having a child. The data reveals that there are important differen-

ces between adults in the Czech Republic, but that it is possible to identify three broad decision-making strategies as evident in the classic, single and lone parent trajectories. However, while this form of statistical analysis is undoubtedly a powerful technique it does place some constraints on the researcher where the data must be of high quality (i.e. few missing cases). This has an important implication for examining those who exhibit complex life trajectories; as this group is more likely to have missing data (due to memory recall constraints) yielding an underrepresentation of those who eschew society's norms. Moreover, apparently stable trajectories can hide changes in dependence on the interval of observation. In short, OMA is likely to over-estimate the degree of value consensus in society and under-estimate the level of social change.

As this form of holistic life course analysis is restricted to those who are relatively old (i.e. at least 35 years) at the time of surveying, this means that with OMA it will not be possible to explore the early family decision making choices of Czechs born after the Velvet Revolution until about 2025. This is quite an important limitation as it implies more generally that it will never be possible to explore the current life course trajectories within a society as the researcher's perspective will always be historical. Moreover, the discovery of important social changes will only be discovered after it has happened – presumably not of much use for public policy making.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the holistic approach to the study of the events and decisions that occur through an individual's life course does facilitate developing a much greater understanding of the dynamics of social change – something which very few other quantitative approaches allow. In this respect, the results of OMA analyses have the potential to make a unique contribution to understanding what has driven social change in the (recent) past; and in this respect it has the power to focus the minds of social scientists and policy makers on the central questions that should be addressed today. Asking the right question is often the first step to finding the right answer.

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Notes:

1. The calculation of the number of states is a simple permutation estimation where there are three possible marital options (i.e. single, married or cohabiting; $n=3$) and two possible family outcomes, where the first child is born or is not born during a specific six month period ($r=2$). The permutation is estimated using the following standard formula: $nPr = n! / (n-r)!$

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Breaking Up is Hard to Do ...

Why do long-term couples decide to break-up?

Key words: family

More than a few pop songs take as their theme the ending of relationships. One of the more famous of these songs is 'Breaking up is hard to do'. This particular song was released by Neil Sadaka almost half a century ago, and has been re-released many times since by other artists. This song is sociologically interesting because it has been described as "two minutes and sixteen seconds of pop magic"; which is show-biz talk for the fact that the song is popular because it resonates with common perceptions and experiences in society associated with the ending of relationships. The open lines of the song give a good sense of why this is the case.

Don't take your love away from me

Don't leave my heart in misery

If you go I'll be blue

Cause breakin up is hard to do

Partnership break up is one of the common life experiences of many people. Due to its prevalence the reasons, incentives and consequences of break ups became a topic of sociological research. The majority of these studies focus on American society. It seems reasonable to ask are things hugely different in other parts of the world? Here an exploration of the break-up of long-term relationships between couples will be examined in the Czech context. One might reasonably ask: why the Czech Republic?

The key reason is that the structure of the family in Czech Republic has been changing very quickly during the last 20 years. There are two important aspects to

this transformation. First, Czechs have one of the highest divorce rates in the EU. Second, as the share of (young) people who choose not to marry increases, the number of children born to cohabiting couples has also increased. With the growing prevalence of cohabitation in contrast to marriage it is reasonable to expect that the number of break-ups of long-term relationships is likely to be higher than the official statistics for divorce suggest.

At present, the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO) has rather limited data concerning the reasons for why couples in long-term relationships such as marriage or cohabitation break up. In fact, such data only exists for a minority of marriages ending in divorce and there is no information concerning the reasons why relationships of cohabitation end in a break-up. Within the Czech Republic there has been to date no individual level sociological analysis of what are the main factors leading to the dissolution of relationships based on marriage or cohabitation.

This article focuses on the subjective reasons given by a representative sample of the Czech adult population as to why marriage and cohabitation often end with a break-up. The findings reported below are based on a unique survey conducted in 2009 with a representative national sample of more than one thousand respondents.

Explanations please ...

Many social philosophers explain the general increase in the instability of contemporary marriages and cohabiting partnerships in terms of two main factors: (a) the individualising effects of Western societies, and (b) a fundamental transformation of the institution of the family. Instead of transmitting material goods, the primary functions and goals of the 'modern' family are emotional satisfaction and the individual growth of all family members. In such circumstances, the relationships between couples appear to have become more fragile and less

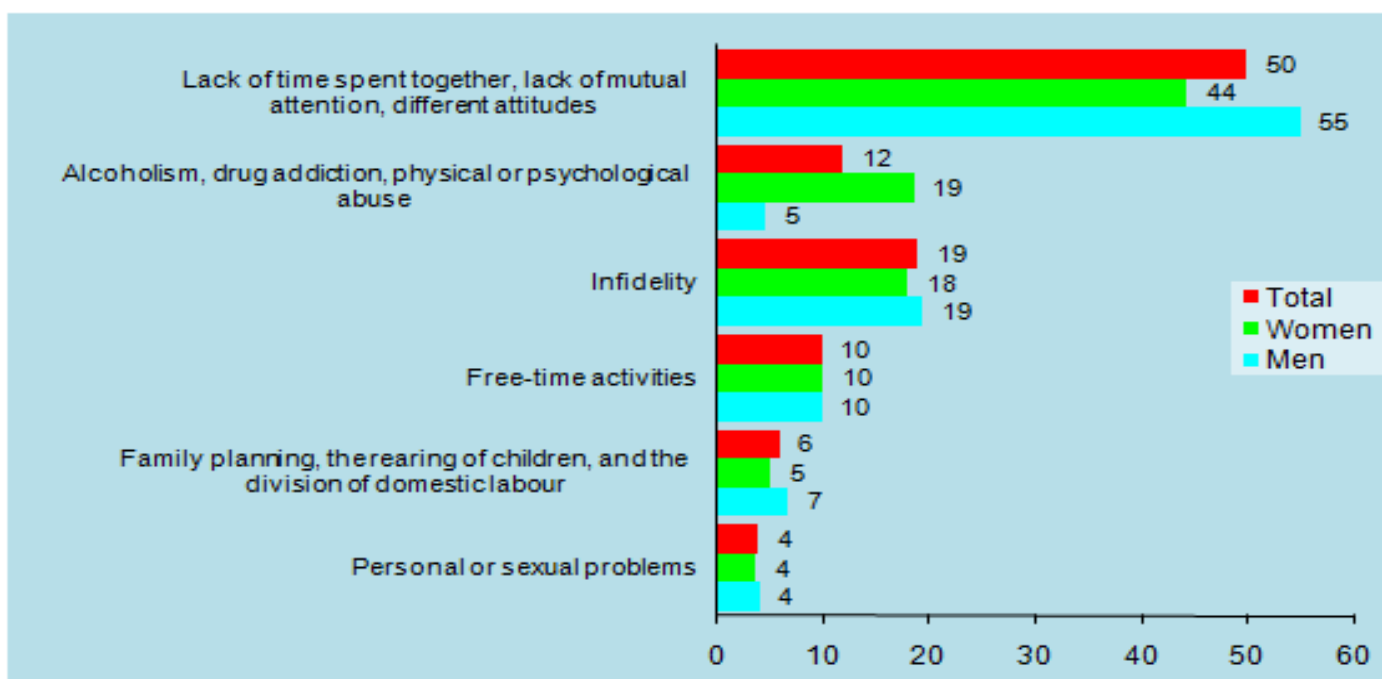
stable (Bauman 2002, Giddens 1992, 2000, Singly 1999, Beck 1995). Alongside this "macro" level perspective espoused by social philosophers where the reasons for divorce are set at the cultural and societal level; it is also possible to adopt a "micro" level standpoint where the focus is placed on individual incentives leading to divorce and the break-up of long-term cohabiting partnerships.

So what is going on?

In the past twenty years the Czech Republic has experienced fundamental changes in its demographic structure stemming from the country's transformation to a Western style democracy. Moreover, the family structure in the Czech Republic and in Europe has been dramatically transformed in recent decades. In the Czech Republic, the divorce rate (0.49) is one of the highest in Europe, which means that almost half (49%) of all marriages end in divorce. With high rates of divorce and cohabitation there has been a growth in single parent families.

According to the survey conducted in 2009 with a representative national sample of 1,107 respondents, the most common reasons for partnership and marital dissolution declared by respondents in the Czech Republic was *the lack of time spent together, the lack of mutual attention and different attitudes* (50% of partnerships ended for these reasons).¹ A relatively high proportion of partnership dissolutions were a consequence of *infidelity* of one of the partners (19%). *Alcoholism, drug addiction and physical or psychological abuse* led to 12% of break-ups. *Disagreement concerning free-time activities* ruined about 10% of partnerships, while 6% of partnerships broke-up because of *differences in opinion regarding family planning, the rearing of children and the division of domestic labour*. The same percentage of partnership (6%) ended as a result of *personal or sexual problems*.

Figure 1
Reasons for relationship break-ups by gender (per cent)



Note that the estimates refer to the total number of relationship break ups mentioned by respondents (n=688). The figure should be interpreted as follows. Half of the reasons given for break ups by all those interviewed referred to "lack of time spent together ..." This reason was mentioned more often by men (55%) than by women (44%).

Gender, education, age and type of relationship matter

Individual level survey data from Western Europe and the United States reveal that perceptions as to why marriages and long-term partnerships end are strongly associated with a persons' position in society, or more formally their socio-demographic characteristics. Men and women (Hetherington and Kelly 2003, Vaughan 1990, Amato and Previti 2003), people with different socioeconomic status (Kitson 1992), or people of different ages or marriage cohorts (Graaf and Kamijn 2006) express different reasons for divorces or break-ups. In part these subgroups differences may be attributed to varying individual level incentives toward ending long-term partnerships. Overall, the Czech data fit with the individual level incentive explanations proposed in Western Europe and the United States.

Women indicated more often than men that *alcoholism, drugs (or some other form of addiction) and physical or psychological abuse* as the main reasons leading to the dissolution of a partnership. These gender based differences most probably reflect the fact that women are more likely to have been the victims of ill-treatment in a domestic setting. Alcoholism and other forms of addictions are moreover ascertained by the courts to be primarily associated with men when making divorce judgements (CZSO 2008).

People with higher levels of education mentioned more often than all others *the lack of time spent together, the lack of mutual attention and different attitudes and disagreement concerning free-time activities*. Infidelity was indicated as the reason for divorce or break-up mainly among couples with lower levels of education. As for the age differences, the problem of *alcoholism, (drug) addiction and physical or psychological abuse* concerns mainly elder people, whereas the *disagreement concerning free-time activities* is more typical for people less than 35 years of age.

This stronger emphasis on the "relationship" aspects of a long-term partnership and on the role of free-time activities appears to be a particular feature of the responses given by the younger age cohorts and the well educated. The suggestion here is that these subgroups place higher expectations and demands on partnerships than those who are older and less well educated.

Within the Czech survey data there were substantial differences in perceptions as to why marriages and cohabitations end in break-ups. Whereas marriages end more often as a result of *the lack of time spent together, the lack of mutual attention and different attitudes, alcoholism, (drug) addiction and physical or psychological abuse and infidelity*; unmarried cohabitations are more often ruined by *disagreements concerning free-time activities*. It could be reasonably argued that these differences stem from differences in the duration of these different types of relationship. However, this is not the case. The survey findings from the Czech survey of 2009 suggest that unmarried cohabitations represent a special form of partnership with particular dynamics, values and role assignments (Seltzer 2000).

Breaking up is hard to do ...

Undoubtedly, as scores of pop songs proclaim breaking up is hard to do. However, when it does happen the main reasons appear unsurprisingly to be 'relationship' problems. This is true for both married and cohabiting couples within contemporary Czech society. This finding fits in broad terms with the evidence produced by CZSO who

found from an analysis of court records that the most common reason for divorce applications was personal incompatibility.

Fortunately, survey research gives a more detailed picture of why breaking up is not always for the same reasons. It seems that that age, gender, and education play an important role in the determining reasons given by Czech people see as grounds for relationship breakdowns and divorce. It seems that younger and more educated people focus on "relationship" problems and the role of free-time activities; whereas couples that are older and are less well educated tend to break-up for "behavioural" reasons, i.e. alcoholism, (drug) addiction or infidelity.

So while popular songs such as 'Breaking up is hard to do' paint an important picture of *what* is going on in society; sociological research has the capacity to delve deeper and give some more concrete reasons as to *why*. Such research is important because it demonstrates that from the point of view of public social policy there are no "quick fixes" to break-up and divorce problems. A broader more nuanced perspective will be basis of what, if anything can be done, to provide greater support for Czech families whatever their structure.

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Notes:

1. Respondents were asked to refer to the three most durable heterosexual partnerships / marriages in which they were living for at least six months. Each respondent was asked to indicate the two most important reasons for each break-up / divorce. The survey findings reported here represent the results for all partnership mentioned. Consequently, the percentages quoted do not refer to the total number of respondents but to the total number of partnerships mentioned.

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Sense of Space and Perceptions of Place: Resident's Attitudes to their Neighbourhood in Prague

Key words: city, housing

The development trajectories of post-socialist cities are one of the hot topics in current urban studies. Much attention is paid to the 'hard' changes in the morphology of cities, new developments and reconstructions, the restructuring of the economy, and social segregation. Less often we find studies about residents' perceptions of their city space, and how they view the place where they live.

A neighbourhood is one of the primary places that structures perceptions of space. Almost every resident of a city has a sense of what constitutes their neighbourhood, and ascribes some meaning to it. In contrast to other places in a city such as place of work, a person's stance towards their own neighbourhood is probably defined by a more intense emotional attachment. It is likely that urban residents can and probably often do ignore whole sections of their home city, but the neighbourhood is by definition a defining feature of each person's daily experience of the world.

This meaning of place is often the subject of qualitative studies. In contrast, the study reported here is based on quantitative research. The evidence presented comes from numerical scales implemented within a survey questionnaire design. Despite the roughness of this method it offers a simple way of comparing the meaning of place in different neighbourhoods.



The sunny side of the street in Smíchov

A random sample of about 30 respondents was drawn from a population of parents whose children were attending at least one elementary school in each locality. The sampling procedure turned out to reveal a highly homogeneous population of parents aged approximately between 30 and 45 years old. The questionnaire was mostly filled by mothers (over 80%). This sampling method has several pitfalls and inaccuracies, but its effectiveness and inexpensiveness compensates for these limitations.



Bound for Bohnice?

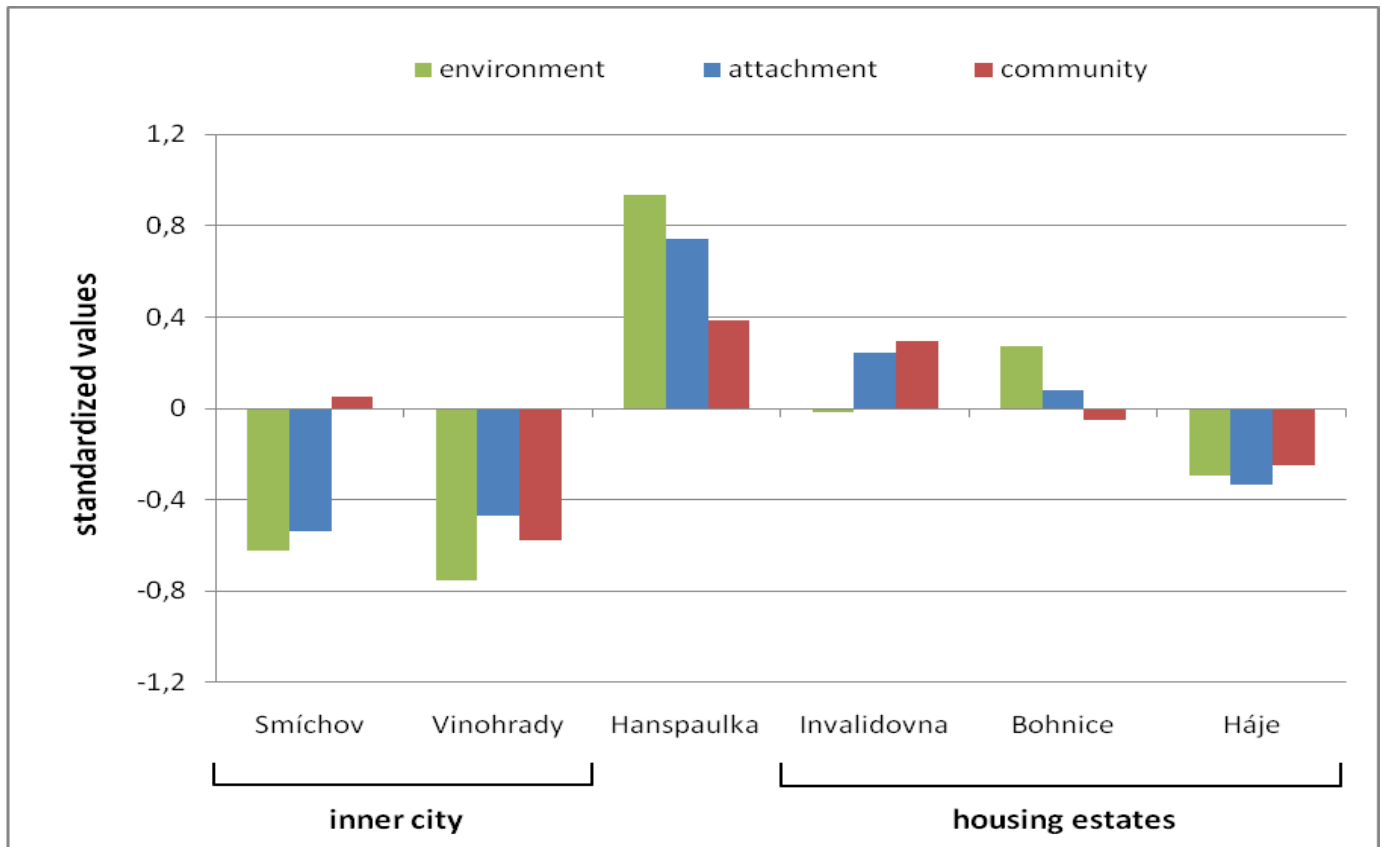
Three main dimensions of meaning are explored. Firstly, an *environment* scale measures respondent's satisfaction with their neighbourhood as a locality. The second scale measures each respondent's *attachment* to his or her neighbourhood. And finally, the *community* scale measures each respondent's attitude towards his or her neighbours and refers to the trust and quality of social ties in the neighbourhood.

Exploring the Prague neighbourhood scene

Studies from Prague from the 1970s and 1980s found a rich neighbourhood life in the inner city districts. There were also developing communities in the housing estates in the suburbs, despite the common belief that these environments were characterised by alienation and anonymity. This led researchers to propose a 'convergence hypothesis' regarding the patterns of neighbourhood life within inner city and housing estates neighbourhoods. It was proposed that the pattern of neighbourhood life in both places would become increasingly similar over time. For the study discussed here six different localities in Prague were selected. Each locality represents one of three major morphological types within Prague's contemporary residential landscape: older blocks of flats, villa garden cities, and housing estates.

Older blocks of flats: *Vinohrady* and *Smíchov* are older inner city districts built during second half of the 19th century. *Vinohrady* was built mainly for middle and upper classes and remains one of the more socially desirable addresses in the inner city. In contrast, *Smíchov* was originally an industrial district, but nowadays has become an emerging commercial district. The photograph presented on the left illustrates a typical neighbourhood scene with an older block of flats where one can immediately see what might be called the "social cosiness" of this type of residential environment.

Figure 2
Perceptions of place in six neighbourhoods in contemporary Prague



Note the data refer to (a) Older blocks of flats in Smíchov and Vinohrady, (b) Villa city gardens in Hanspaulka, and (c) Housing estates in Invalidovna, Bohnice and Háje. The standardized values represent the difference in the observed scale values for each of the three neighbourhood types and the overall sample mean and dividing these differences by the standard deviation for the entire sample. These normalised scores facilitate making comparison across scales that have different units, e.g. 3, 5, 6, 7 or 9 point scales. Here zero represents the sample mean and deviations from this value indicate positive or negative scores.

Villa city gardens: The garden city of Hanspaulka is one of the most prestigious residential addresses in Prague. As a privileged neighbourhood, its inhabitants tend to have a higher social status than residents in other parts of the city. Houses here are often owned by residents, and are typically passed from one generation to the next as family heirlooms.

Housing estates: The final three neighbourhoods examined are examples of housing estates constructed from prefabricated concrete blocks during the communist era (1948-1989). *Invalidovna* dates from the early 1960s and is an early example of this type of urban development. The accommodation here is small in size and built in close proximity to older parts of the city. In contrast, *Bohnice* and *Háje* represent large-scale housing estate complexes built during the 1970s. The aim of these socialist housing developments was to create new independent residential "towns" in a circle around Prague. While decentralisation was a success there were more misgivings concerning the infrastructure underpinning this process. Currently, about one-in-three residents of Prague live in housing estates. The photograph on the right of the previous page of Bohnice elicits a broader more distant impersonal feeling than that portrayed in older blocks of flats such as in Smíchov (on the left).

Perceptions of place in Prague

The survey evidence presented in Figure 2 above illustrates residents' responses across three scales (i.e. envi-

ronment, attachment and community) that aim to measure residents' sense of place across the three different types of neighbourhood in Prague described earlier. With regard to the representativeness of this sample a caveat is in order. The neighbourhood survey was aimed at young families, a sub-group who undoubtedly have specific housing requirements.

Figure 2 illustrates differences in scores in the three attitude scales across the six localities surveyed. Neighbourhood type is not considered here. So it is the inter-neighbourhood variation in residents' perceptions between localities that is explored in this figure; and not dissimilarities in views between the three neighbourhood types discussed earlier. The differences attributed to the observed variation across each of the six localities examined accounts for about one third of variance in the 'environment' dimension, and one fifth of the variance in 'attachment' dimension.

The 'community' dimension exhibits much less variance across the three neighbourhood settings where less a tenth of the total variance (9%) can be explained in terms of neighbourhood type. The remaining variation unaccounted for by residential context may be attributed to differences between individual residents. Overall the survey evidence presented in Figure 2 is important because it reveals that inhabitants of one type of neighbourhood tend to perceive physical environment very much in the same way. However, their perceptions of

their neighbourhood community (in contrast to environment and attachment) do not exhibit the same degree of intra-neighbourhood consensus.

When we explore the differences in attitudes between residents in the three neighbourhood types in greater detail, it is possible to identify a number of important patterns. For example, residents living in inner city neighbourhoods tended to give low scores on the environment and attachment scales. This evidence suggests a degree of dissatisfaction with their local neighbourhood. In this respect, the very low community scale score from residents living in Vinohrady is a noteworthy feature of Figure 2 and appears to be in part a product of sampling procedure used. In contrast, the residents of Hanspaulka (an example of an upmarket Villa city garden) expressed strongly positive evaluations of their neighbourhood on the three scales examined when compared to the sample mean scores.

Turning our attention finally to the residents of the housing estate neighbourhoods the evidence shown in the centre of Figure 2 reveals that the people who live in the oldest and smallest of this type of neighbourhood have the strongest sense of community. The attitudes of the residents of Bohnice are characterised by their positive perceptions of their residential environment. Significantly, the dismal public image of Háje as a grey, anonymous and unfriendly place to live is not shared by its residents. The respondents from Háje exhibited greater satisfaction with their neighbourhood than their generally wealthier inner city counterparts in Vinohrady.

Different perceptions for different neighbourhoods

Overall, the survey evidence demonstrates that the meaning of neighbourhood for residents in Prague is highly differentiated. The inhabitants of older inner city districts display rather negative attitudes towards their neighbourhood. In fact, the residents of Smíchov and Vinohrady often consider their place of residence as being provisional. If they had the opportunity to leave, they would. More than one third of Prague's citizens live in large housing estates built during the communist era. These forms of residence have a poor reputation for being rather dull neighbourhoods full of anonymous dormitory communities. Despite this reputation, the survey data shows a different reality: the inhabitants of housing estates have deeper relations with their neighbours, have a relatively high opinion of their residential environment and express stronger attachment to their neighbourhood than the stereotypical image would suggest is likely.

At present, we can only guess at the sources of these differences in inter-neighbourhood perceptions. A number of important questions arise from the survey research described here. For example, is the rejuvenation of inner city neighbourhoods through enterprises devoted to commercial activities or night life incompatible with residents' expectations of what are the bases for a 'good' neighbourhood? Does increasing living standards and residential environment help to explain residents' positive perceptions of life in a housing estate? And what role does different ownership types, such as rental vs. co-operative, play in giving residents a positive sense of neighbourhood? These and a host of other important questions have yet to be answered.

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The Eleventh Commandment: Current Public opinion toward Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution

Key words: politics, public opinion

"Tell the truth!" This is the eleventh commandment in Milan Kundera's novel 'Immortality' in which a discussion of media power is defined in terms of reporting truth based on facts. Ironically in light of recent events,¹ Kundera argues that demanding someone tell the factual truth creates an inequality, where the inquisitor has power over the interviewed because the latter is able to select the questions asked.

Politicians resist such truth based media power by using image management, or to use Kundera's awkward (if pronounced in English) term "imagology". Kundera's concept centres on the view that media reportage often has little to do with reality. For him the "critical instrument" of imagology is published public opinion polls. Whatever the truth of Kundera's actions in late April 1950, factual or otherwise, this recent debate does have the merit of highlighting a much more general question of truth.

How should a younger generation of Czechs interpret a political system in which they have not lived? With the passing of time direct links with the events of 1968 and 1989 are for an increasing number of Czechs something that they hear about from their parents and grandparents, or read in school history books and the media. Imagology in action, Kundera might argue.

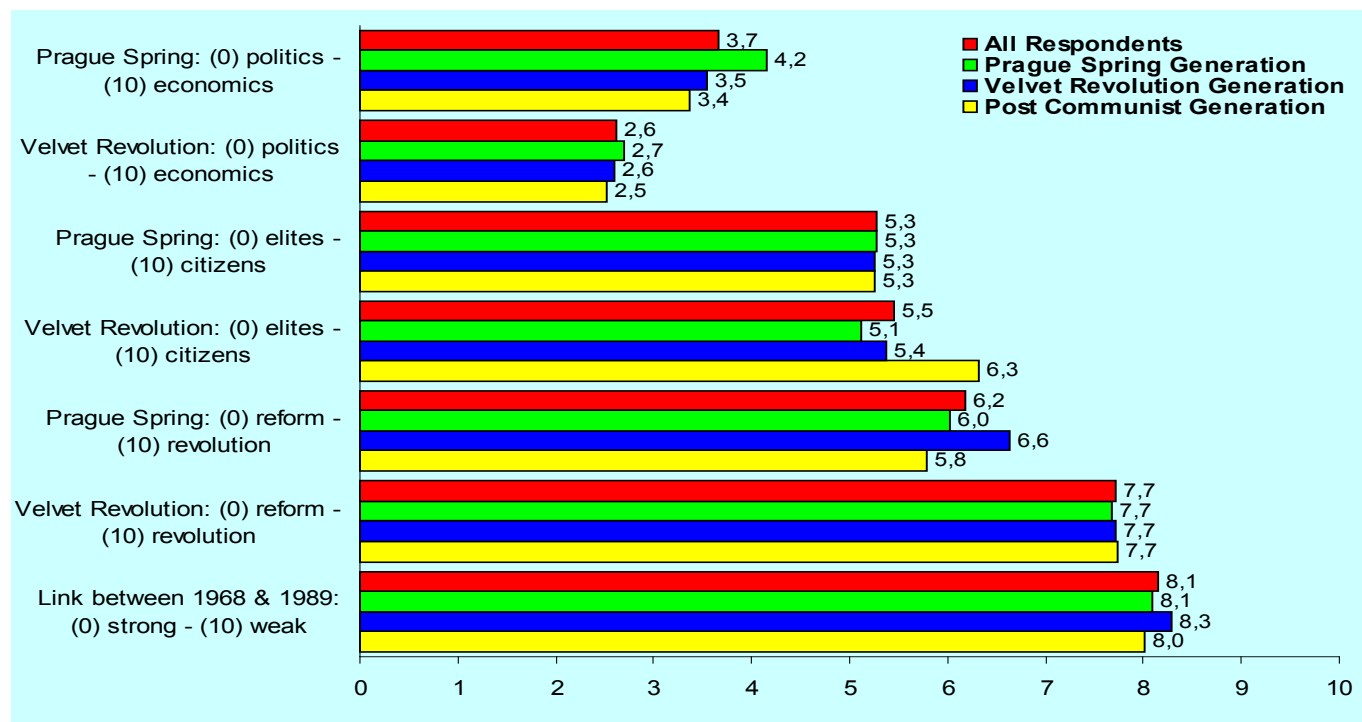
Not unreasonably, those of Kundera's generation who had direct experience of these key political events in Czech and Slovak history worry that the post-communist generation will not understand the events of 1968 and 1989. Even worse, some perhaps are concerned that the younger generation see these unique moments of history as something that have little to do with their lives today, i.e. pure imagology.

Lots of time could be spent debating the significance of the Prague Spring and Velvet Revolution where little more than anecdotal evidence is discussed. However, it is possible to gain some sense of what is public opinion toward the events of 1968 and 1989 by systematically asking the Czech public what they think. This is of course the basis of undertaking nationally representative opinion polls. Contra Kundera's concerns about the imagological use of public opinion polls the goal here is to search after the object of his eleventh commandment, i.e. some version of what ordinary people see as the truth.

In May 2008 a national survey was undertaken by the Institute of Sociology, AV ČR on the fortieth anniversary of a unique political survey that followed close on the heels of the Action Plan of April 1968: the nearest thing to a blueprint that ever existed for the Prague Spring reforms.

An obvious problem in exploring current public opinion toward two historical events that occurred two decades apart is how is it possible to make any meaningful comparison? One method is to select key general features of both historical events that allow us to answer three fundamentally important questions: who, what and why? The 'who' question inquires as to which groups led the way in bringing about the Prague Spring and Velvet Revolution – ordinary citizens or (counter-) elites? The 'why' question addresses the purpose of the events of 1968

Figure 1
The same or different? Public opinion toward Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution



Source: CVVM May 12-19 2008, N=1,012. All scales are 11 point (0-10) and include all respondents aged 15 years or more. Note the 'Prague Spring Generation' refers to respondents who were 15 years or older in 1968 (n=328), and similarly for the 'Velvet Revolution Generation' in 1989 (n=358). The 'Post Communist Generation' refers to all those born after 1974 and only came to early adulthood, i.e. 15 years after 1990 (n=347). The bars represent the average (interpolated median) scores for these three different age cohorts.

and 1989, in short was the goal reform or revolution? Lastly, the 'what' question looks at the consequences of these two key events in contemporary Czech history in terms of whether the changes proposed in 1968 and 1989 centred more on political or economic change?

Speaking with one voice?

Using these three criteria plus an additional direct comparison of citizens evaluation of the link between what happened in 1968 and 1989 provides a basis for mapping how contemporary Czech citizens see these two turning points in their recent history.

An examination of the Czech public's perception of the Prague Spring movement and Velvet Revolution reveals that the public is split into three groups that lie at the left, centre and right of all seven scales investigated. This evidence is important as it implies that there is not a strong consensus on what the events of 1968 and 1989 mean, rather there are distinct facets of opinion. Estimation of an agreement measure for all scales supports this finding. There are moderate levels of consensus with current public opinion ranging from a low on the question of whether the Velvet Revolution was led by an elite group of dissidents rather than being seen as a mass movement to a high value on the question of the strength of the link between the Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution.

This survey evidence is important as it confirms the expectation that different groups within Czech society hold different perceptions of the nature and consequences of the reforms associated with 1968 and 1989. In order to test this idea it is possible to divide the May 2008 opinion poll into three age groups or generations, i.e. Prague Spring, Velvet Revolution, and Post Communist; and to

examine if these cohorts of citizens have different political attitudes.

Experience matters, or does it?

In this respect, it seems sensible to think that these differences centre on citizens experiences. The expectation here is if a person "came of age" during times of great political change such as in 1968 or 1989 they would have different perceptions of these events to all others because of their direct experiences at a formative age.

The opinion poll results shown in Figure 1 demonstrate that in general there are few large differences between the three cohorts identified. Close inspection reveals three noteworthy patterns. First, the older generations are more likely to think that the Prague Spring and Velvet Revolution had a strong economic aspect than the younger cohorts. Second, the younger post-communist generation is more likely to think than those present at the events of 1989 that the Velvet Revolution was driven by citizens rather than elites. Thirdly, those who were young adults in 1989 have a stronger belief that the Prague Spring was a revolutionary rather than reformist movement.

These three inter-generational differences make considerable sense and appear to lend support to the opinions expressed during the 'Kundera affair' of late 2008 (see note 1) that age and experience do matter when Czech citizens come to view key events in their recent past. Nonetheless, while these differences are interesting they should be treated with some caution as the differences are not very large. In fact, from a surveying point of view it seems fairer to conclude that there are in reality few differences in opinion across the generations.

The bottom part of Figure 1 shows that Czech public

opinion, of whatever age or political experience, think that the links between Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution are weak. Moreover, when those interviewed were asked what words came to mind when the term "Velvet Revolution" is mentioned almost nobody saw it in terms of 1968. Curiously, one of the abiding memories in the public consciousness regarding 1989 is the "ringing keys" – demonstrating the enduring importance of political symbolism, or imagology perhaps?

Obeying the eleventh commandment

Czech public opinion does not speak with one voice about the Prague Spring and Velvet Revolution. However, what divisions there are do not centre on age and experience. It is likely, as is the case in many European countries, that when Czech citizens do think about the past they often do so in terms of current political and economic considerations. In an ironic way the concerns emphasised about "correctly" interpreting Kundera's actions almost sixty years ago also apply to larger political events.

The opinion poll evidence, for all its imagology, reveals that Czech citizens of all ages do genuinely grapple with the historical truth. This is hardly surprising for two reasons: (1) participants in the events of 1968 and 1989 differ on their interpretations, and (2) non-participants are compelled to give significance to events without knowing all the facts. Despite all the inconvenient facts and truths that the past throws up, perhaps the imperative of Kundera's eleventh commandment does yield some wisdom.

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Notes:

1. On October 15 2008, *Respekt* an influential weekly Czech current affairs magazine published an article claiming that the influential Czech novelist Milan Kundera had cooperated with the authorities in April 1950 in capturing a "western spy" of Czech origin. This person was imprisoned for more than twenty years and lost all their property. Kundera rejected these allegations and was supported by other renowned writers with direct experience of authoritarian regimes such as Salman Rushdie and Günther Grass. During this affair commentary by figures such as former Czech President Václav Havel suggested that "young historians" may not have sufficient understanding and experience to interpret documents from the communist era. In this sense, generational differences were seen to be important in attitudes toward communism.

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Making Necessity a Virtue: The Czech Alter-Globalization Movement's Strategy of Making S26 a Success

Key words: democracy, Europe, justice, participation, politics

Since late 1990s, there has been increased discussion of what has been described as a new phase in the development of social movements. Recently, a new form of social movement has emerged whose central characteristic is its transnational rather than domestic scope. One example of this novel form of social movement is associated with a campaign to promote greater transnational cooperation and interaction among peoples of different countries, but who oppose the exploitative nature of greater integration of the global economy. This particular social movement is called the "alter- (or alternative) globalization movement."

What makes the alter-globalization movement different?

Today the alter-globalization movement is one of the most significant transnational actors. It has some innovative features that distinguish it from the social movements of the past. First, it is described as a "multitude" which means that the alter-globalization social movement is not one single campaign; but is composed of many different groups who are loosely united for a common cause (Hardt and Negri 2004). Second, it is characterized as a "coalition" suggesting that the many groups are cooperating in an organized way (Buttel 2003). Lastly, the alter-globalization movement is characterized as being tolerant and having a plural identity where each group within the movement retains its autonomy and own policy agenda (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005). Given this rejection of a centralized formal organizational structure, one might reasonably ask: what holds the alter-globalization movement together?

One answer is that this social movement's "master frame", i.e. a broader theme that unites the interpretation of issues seen by the movement, is its re-definition of globalization from being a purely economic process (often described in academic jargon as a "neo-liberal



A Prague "pink fairy" in full flight ...

Source: <http://artactivism.gn.apc.org/photos/pinkfairy.htm>

project") to being a "globalization from below" which is shaped by concerns such as ensuring "global social justice" (Brecher et al 2000; Della Porta and Tarrow 2005). In addition to these (master frame) ideas providing cohesion for the alter-globalization movement, the use of specific protesting methods such as large theatrical puppets, non-violent direct action often attracts members and groups who might not otherwise cooperate with one another (McDonald 2006). Many of the explanations of the success of the alter-globalization movement over the last decade have been based on the experiences of western advanced industrial democracies. Much less has been written about the effectiveness of social movements in other parts of the globe such as Central and Eastern Europe.

The alter-globalization movement in post-communist states

The alter-globalization movement has appeared in many regions of the world and Central and Eastern Europe is no exception. This region is specific because of its twentieth century history and its experience of decades of communist rule. Under communism citizens were not free to participate in protests or other forms of collective action as they were viewed by the government and security services as a form of opposition to the socialist regime. Therefore, while social movements have a rich history in Western Europe and the United States they are a relatively new phenomenon in post-communist states such as the Czech Republic. This is not to suggest that citizens in communist countries, such as Czechoslovakia, had no outlet for their ideas and aspirations. The family, networks of close friends, and dissident groups were an important channel of expression during the 1970s and 1980s. However, the types of social movements well known in western world only made a recognizable appearance in places like the Czechoslovakia after the fall of communism in 1989.

It is important to keep in mind that the post-communist transition process has been strongly linked to globalization and free market economics (known more formally as the "neo-liberal paradigm"). In other words, the key characterization of globalization as favoring an open market, a strong private sector, and reduced government interference in the economy, has also been a defining feature of the post-communist transition process. Unsurprisingly, there has been opposition to this embrace of unfettered capitalism. The decision to hold a summit of the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in Prague on September 26 2000 became a defining moment in the development of the alter-globalization movement in the Czech Republic.

Making necessity a virtue ...

The IMF/World Bank Summit of September 26 2000, known more colloquially to the alter-globalization movement as "S26" (after the date of the summit), was seen to be a success as the protests succeeded in their goal of disrupting the summit. Moreover, S26 was the first successful alter-globalization protest to take place outside the United States following the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in late 1999 (Chesters and Welsh 2004). Notwithstanding, the transnational dimension of S26 the alter-globalization demonstrations in Prague represented a coming of age for the Czech movement who came face-to-face for the first time with methods and tactics of international activists. It seems reasonable to ask: did the Czech alter-globalization movement operate similarly to its international counterparts at the S26 demonstrations?

Composition – a multitude with a plural identity?

The coalition Czech of protesters participating at S26 cannot be described as a multitude, or as possessing a plural identity. In fact, the Czech organizers were a narrow group of radical left (mainly anarchist) groups who were typically young and who had no links with formal organizations such as trade unions or environmental non-governmental organizations. Moreover, the Czech protesters

appear to have felt little collective identity. The only source of consensus was their common dislike of globalization being determined by economic considerations. Unsurprisingly, given this profile once the S26 demonstration had ended the Czech alter-globalization movement quickly dissolved. All of these features contrast sharply with the sustained cooperative and tolerant stance adopted by the international activists who participated at S26.

Globalization as a master frame?

The master frame of the Czech radical leftist movement since the 1990s has been opposition to capitalism. Globalization may be said to have become a salient transnational issue with simultaneous 'Global Street Parties' held in many cities (including Prague) on May 16 1998. These parties were colorful family-friendly theatrical events that involved the temporary blocking of a central urban zone for a few hours where ordinary citizens were encouraged through non-violent direct



Flying the flag for a more confrontational form of demonstrating at S26 in Prague

Source: <http://artactivism.gn.apc.org/photos/flag.htm>

action to "reclaim the streets." The key message made at these street parties was that the power of large corporations to control citizens lives, as evident in globalization, should be resisted using peaceful methods. This critique of globalization became the master frame of the alter-globalization movement. It should be noted that this frame followed up on the 'autonomous anarchist' strand, not because of the issue as such, but through a transmission of a particular protest form – the street party.

It seems that this innovative form of protesting was especially popular among the younger generation and those attracted to alternative lifestyles such as squatting. Moreover, on the radical left the anarchists had a greater mobilizing power than their ideological rivals the Marxist and socialist. It should be noted that any group espousing Marxism in the Czech Republic will encounter resistance from the general public who associate these ideas with the worst excesses of the communist regime. With regard to S26 this anarchist rather than Marxist orientation meant that the Czech alter-globalization movement did not focus on purely economic issues such as getting rid of sweat shops in developing states.

However, in the Czech Republic once S26 ended the cohesive power of this master frame and the alter-globalization movement disintegrated also because of infighting and state repression. This failure to forge a consensus in late 2000 represented a lost opportunity for the Czech alter-globalization movement to develop and consolidate itself.

Protest tactics – innovation and making necessity a virtue

The alter-globalization movement has been characterized by its innovative use of protest techniques. For example as the photo on the top right and on the next page illustrates, two of the most famous sights at S26 were samba bands and large theatrical puppets. In addition, to the music and theatrics different protesting tactics were employed. An important innovation was use of the "block" tactic where groups holding diverse ideologies and styles of protesting all campaigned together under the same general banner. Blocks were identified by colors as these are politically neutral, or "empty signifiers". At S26 there were three blocks: pink, yellow and blue leading to three separate marches to the IMF/World Bank conference venue. This 'color coded' strategy was successful and was adopted at subsequent alter-globalization movement demonstrations (such as Genoa in 2001).

The groups participating in S26 varied a great deal. One group called the 'Pink and Silver Block' used a mix of street entertainment, theatrics and demonstration to oppose capitalism, consumerism and loss of public places to business interests. In contrast, on the previous page shows there was the 'Black block' who used confrontational tactics which included fighting with police and destroying property of multinational corporations. Another group from Italy called 'Ya Basta' performed civil disobedience by blocking the way to the Congress Centre.

Overall, the ability of the Czech organizers to effectively manage the disparate groups attending S26 was impressive and suggests considerable foresight. Unfortunately, such an impression is misleading. This is because the Czech alter-globalization movement was split in September 2000 between Trotskyites who wanted a unitary mass march and anti-authoritarian groups who preferred decentralized direct actions. Ironically, this inner conflict resulted in the 'color coded' compromise, which proved to be an innovative strategy that was later adopted internationally for creating a temporary unity among groups with disparate ideas, aims and tactics. In short, the



Prague's first experience of a "pink" samba band
Source: <http://nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agg/s26/praga/pictures/personal/s2602.jpg>

Czechs cleverly made the practical necessity of having separate marches a 'virtue' in that all groups were satisfied and the overall aims of the demonstration were met: disruption of the IMF/World Bank Conference.

At S26 itself, Czech radical left activists (mostly anarchists) preferred to join the more militant Black Block who busied themselves building barricades and fighting the police. The less radical Czech participants appear to have used the opportunities offered by S26 to learn effective tactics of civil disobedience and active non-violence techniques from their more experienced colleagues from the United States and Western Europe. What is curious about S26 is the fact that the experience gained from the non-violent protests during the Velvet Revolution of November 1989 seems to have had little or no impact on the Czech alter-globalization movement. Given this complex picture of the Czech contribution to S26 what can we say is the legacy of S26?

Success and legacy of S26

In terms of the current theories of the alter-globalization movement, it seems that the Czech alter-globalization movement does not fit with the standard interpretations based on experiences in Western Europe and North America. One might argue that the social movements that have emerged in post-communist states such as the Czech Republic are insufficiently developed for historical and other reasons. One insufficient explanation is that the Czechs are "backward", and the Czech movement is contentious, lacks a collective identity, adopts a localized ideological frame, and uses violent tactics. There are two reasons to reject this argument.

First, the alter-globalization movement in the Czech Republic is different from the protest movement in the West and the latter are more plural, have broader focus framed by globalization issues and use creative tactics. But there had not been the wave of new social movements in the Eastern Europe in the 1960s and this stage of protest is significant for shaping the contemporary transnational social movements. The Czech alter-globalization movement was being created in the era of globalization with no comparable background. If this is so, the theory of social movements should reflect not only the western experience of protest but also include the data from Eastern Europe (and other regions too).

Second, the focus of western explanations of the alter-

globalization movement has been on the well publicized mass demonstrations in Seattle (1998) and Genoa (2001); assuming that the features evident at these events are permanent features of this type of social movement. This may not be true and this unity of action and innovation may be an artifact (arising from selection bias) of choosing to examine events over short time periods. A more extended analysis of alter-globalization movements cross-nationally over extended time periods that is between major demonstrations may reveal greater similarities between all alter-globalization movements as they all face common problems relating to the costs of communication, cooperation and coordination.

Therefore, the success and legacy of S26 has been far reaching in both practical and theoretical terms. The emergence and operation of alter-globalization movements are fascinating examples of "sociology in action"; and demonstrate that current understanding of this important phenomenon requires more painstaking transnational analysis over longer time periods. Here the Czech strategy used in S26 of turning 'necessity into virtue' might prove to be a useful approach for those researching social movements in regions such as Central and Eastern Europe thereby making an important contribution to the study of social movements in a global age.

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Walking on Water, or Skating on Thin Ice? Trust in Political Institutions in the Czech Republic

Key words: democracy, trust, public opinion, politics

Popular trust in political institutions is puzzling. Populist theories of democracy argue that citizen trust in political institutions is the foundation for a legitimate and stable polity. In contrast, classical liberal political theory contends that lack of popular trust in institutions of government is a good thing because the essence of an effective democracy is citizen scepticism of those who hold power (Riker 1982; Hardin 2002).¹ It is immediately obvious from this theoretical debate that it is important to

distinguish between political institutions and officeholders. Having trust in an institution but not in a specific officeholder who is underperforming is a perfectly reasonable position for a citizen to take.

Previous explanations of the origins of trust in political institutions have focused on two key dimensions: (1) the long and short term of sources current levels of political trust, and (2) the mechanisms that explain the sources of trust where a "top down" perspective contends that it is the activities of institutions themselves that determine public trust, in contrast to a "bottom up" perspective where it is the pattern of attitudes among citizens themselves that determines the level of observed trust in institutions.

Within this article a third dimension, rarely explored in previous research, differential trust across a range of political institutions will be examined (Rose and Petersen 1999; Denters 2002). All political systems have a range of institutions dealing with specific tasks ranging from collecting domestic waste to negotiating international treaties it is reasonable to think that public trust will vary across these institutions. The question of why trust across institutions should vary across institutions has often been answered in terms of perceived performance. Performance encompasses a wide range of considerations typically reduced to economic, political or personal criteria. In order to illustrate the survey evidence regarding public trust in political institutions there will first be an examination of which sub-groups in Czech society trust specific political bodies, and this will be followed by an overview of trends in political trust over a ten year period.

Profile of Trust in Political Institutions

It makes sense to think that not all subgroups in society will express the same level of trust in political institutions. Moreover, most theories of trust in political institutions argue that there will be systematic differences in the level of trust across different sectors of society. As the central focus of this chapter is on political institutions the Czech National Election Study (CNES) of June 2006 provides a unique opportunity to explore both the subgroup and individual level foundations of political trust using a comprehensive set of variables not normally asked in public opinion polls.

A first task is to establish if public trust in political institutions is based on a single underlying attitude, or is in fact composed of a number of distinct components.² Consequently, a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) was estimated for the six political trust items in the CNES 2006 dataset, i.e. President, Government, Chamber, Senate, Regional and Local Assemblies.³ In simple terms, PCA (also known more generally as 'Factor Analysis') uses the correlation between answers to different questions to see if the common variation observed can be explained by a smaller number of more general features or factors. A similar procedure is used in intelligence (IQ) testing where the performance on a number of different tests is seen to be an indicator of "general" intelligence.

The analysis indicated that two factors best explained the patterns in the data. The first factor relates to public trust in the President, Senate, Regional and Local Assemblies, while the second one to trust in the Government and Lower Chamber. This two-fold division in political institutions appears to suggest a broad division on the basis of saliency where the Government and Lower Chamber are more frequently discussed in the media in contrast to all other institutions.

Table 1
Profile of public trust in political institutions in the Czech Republic, 2006 (%)

<i>Survey item</i>	<i>Subgroup</i>	A	B	C	D	E	F	N
<i>Total</i>	<i>All respondents</i>	63	43	29	25	47	60	2,002
Marital status	Single and living alone	63	40	28	26	45	56	835
	Married, or living with a partner	64	47	30	25	48	63	1,167
Age	18-24 yrs	72	33	24	26	42	52	296
	25-34 yrs	72	40	32	31	53	59	362
	35-44 yrs	64	37	27	23	44	63	324
	45+ yrs	58	50	31	24	47	62	1,016
Gender	Male	61	42	28	24	46	59	972
	Female	66	44	30	27	47	60	1,030
Level of education	Elementary or less/DK/Other	57	43	28	23	42	55	411
	Secondary without graduation	59	45	28	20	44	59	819
	Secondary with graduation	69	43	32	30	49	62	517
	University/College	76	40	29	36	57	64	255
Political knowledge	Lowest quartile	55	34	25	22	29	45	331
	Low quartile	63	44	27	22	44	58	698
	High quartile	65	47	33	28	52	64	535
	Highest quartile	68	46	32	30	57	69	439
Subjective social class	Lower	50	44	27	18	36	52	781
	Middle	71	44	31	29	52	64	1,046
	Upper middle and highest	78	36	28	39	62	66	175
Employment status	Currently unemployed	80	36	28	29	44	57	177
	Full time employee	66	42	30	24	47	61	880
	Self-employed or business owner	73	33	28	37	55	62	174
Religious attendance	Never attend religious services	63	42	28	23	43	56	1,170
	Once or several times a week	64	46	28	29	57	67	104
HH income (month)	First income quartile, <13,999 CZK	52	49	31	24	44	59	323
	Second income quartile, 14 to 22,999 CZK	62	51	35	26	49	60	353
	Third income quartile, 23 to 34,999 CZK	62	44	29	23	47	61	402
	Fourth income quartile, >35,000 CZK	71	41	29	32	55	66	394
Interest in the campaign	Did not follow the campaign closely	64	40	27	22	42	56	1,353
	Followed the campaign closely	63	50	34	31	56	68	649
MIP: country	Govt. - outcome	63	47	33	27	49	64	464
	Corruption	70	41	25	26	53	62	274
	No opinion, don't know	63	42	26	22	43	53	297
MIP: personal	Health	60	57	35	22	59	67	253
	Taxation	80	34	28	34	59	69	235
	No opinion, don't know	59	39	25	22	38	48	398
Post election preferences	Have opinion on ALL govt. formation options*	66	47	32	28	52	63	1,294
	NO opinion on some (1-3) govt. formation options*	67	47	28	22	45	64	375
	NO opinion on most (4-6) govt. formation options*	51	26	19	17	29	42	334

Source: Czech National Election Study, 9-21 June 2006.

Data weighted to match election results. The columns are labelled as follows: (A) President, (B) Government, (C) Chamber of Deputies, (D) Senate, (E) Regional Assembly, and (F) Local Council. * This data also include preferences for early elections. MIP refers to Most Important Problem. Row percentages refer to those who "definitely trust" and "rather trust" as a percentage of all respondents. Figures in bold and underlined refer to statistically significant differences between a specific subgroup and all respondents where the subgroup has a lower value. In contrast, bolded estimates with a grey background indicate a subgroup with a value that is higher than the total percentage. Statistical significance here indicates that there is less than one-in-a-twenty odds that the differences found were due to chance. The data should be interpreted in the following way: 72 per cent of all 18 to 24 year olds in the survey sample expressed trust in the President and this is statistically significantly greater than the percentage for all respondents, while 33 per cent expressed trust in the government and this statistically lower than the estimate for all of those interviewed (43 per cent), etc.

The evidence presented in Table 1 provides a profile of trust in six key political institutions in terms of a number of important factors often identified within previous research as having an influence on political attitudes such as trust in institutions. It is important first to note that the data presented in Table 1 relates to the percentage of all respondents who express some trust in four national (President, Government, Chamber of Deputies and Senate) and two sub-national (regional and local representative assemblies) institutions. The estimates for all respondents at the top of Table 1 demonstrate that there is a clear hierarchy of trust in political institutions in the Czech Republic. An examination of CVVM's monthly poll-

ing data between 1996 and 2006 reveals that this hierarchy in expressed trust is a stable feature of Czech public opinion.

It is readily apparent that the sub-group profile of trust in the Government and (lower) Chamber of Deputies, presented in Table 1, is different to all other political institutions examined. This pattern complements the PCA results just discussed and underscores the importance of the broad two-fold division in citizen trust in political institutions. Another point to note is that the survey data reported in Table 1 were recorded in a period when a coalition government was in the process of formation. Therefore, respondents with strong partisan feelings

may have been thinking of two different administrations: (1) the "past" ČSSD, KDU-ČSL and US-DEU government (2002-2006), or (2) the "future" ODS, KDU-ČSL and SZ coalition that assumed office in early 2007.

The results presented in Table 1 highlight statistically significant differences between subgroups and the overall sample in terms of being higher (bold and grey) or lower (bold) than the trust values observed for all citizens interviewed. In general, the office of President and Local Councils elicited most trust while national political institutions – government and houses of parliament attracted the least amount of trust. Given that each political institution is seen to be somewhat different from all others it is not surprising to find that there are few common subgroup patterns across all the six institutions examined.

The most notable salient pattern of low levels of trust occurs for those who had no opinion on government formation or early elections in June 2006. This section of society would appear to be those who are dissatisfied, disaffected, or perhaps alienated from Czech political institutions. In contrast, respondents who followed the 2006 general election closely and who have the highest level of political knowledge and education, and who think of themselves as in the higher social classes exhibit the greatest levels of trust in most political institutions.

Such evidence suggests that possession of resources and wealth represents an important socio-demographic division among citizens in feelings of trust in political institutions. However, a simple division of society where the rich are more trusting than the poor is not supported by the data for differences in household income per month. The evidence in Table 1 reveals that while households with the highest income express most trust in the President, Senate, Regional and Local Assemblies; those in the two lowest income quartiles show higher than average levels of trust in the Government and Chamber of Deputies.

These income differences could be indicators of partisan effects and may be related to class based voting patterns (Vlachová and Řeháková 2007: 138-143). Lower income supporters of the ČSSD would have been more trusting of the incumbent government and its control of the lower chamber. In contrast, higher income supporters of the ODS would for similar partisan reasons express greater than average trust in the President (Václav Klaus, founder of ODS), the Senate (ODS was the dominant party in 2006 with 51 per cent of all seats) and ODS majorities in many sub-national assemblies.

The bottom part of Table 1 reveals that egocentric (personal) rather than sociotropic (national) issue preferences are associated with statistically significant differences among Czech citizens relating to political trust. Again, the evidence suggests an underlying basis for differential levels of trust in specific institutions. Those respondents who spontaneously mentioned health as the most important issue for them personally showed higher than average levels of trust in the Government and Lower Chamber. Since party platforms are defined by issue positions it seems sensible to think that concerns about health and taxation will be primarily associated with specific parties.

In the Czech general election of June 2006 ČSSD supporters were particularly concerned about the future of the health system, while ODS partisans favoured reform of the tax system (Lyons and Linek 2007: 180, 188-189). This pattern is then reflected in the trust estimates where those ČSSD partisans most concerned about the health issue were most trusting of

government, whereas ODS partisans who emphasised taxation expressed above average trust in the President, Senate and sub-national assemblies.

Overall, the evidence presented in Table 1 demonstrates that (1) trust in the two key national institutions exhibit a unique subgroup profile, (2) this difference appears to be based on the fact that trust in the Government and Lower Chamber is less strongly determined with position in society or with resources associated with the ability to articulate political opinions, (3) inter-institutional differences in trust appear to be partly determined by partisanship as indicated by the association with the health and taxation issues, (4) overall trust in political institution appears to be higher among groups with greater resources such as education, political knowledge, and income.

Trends in political trust

An examination of CVVM's standard trust in political institutions series, which is composed of six bodies of political representation, shown in Figure 1 demonstrates two things. First there is a definite hierarchy in public trust as some institutions are consistently more trustworthy than others. Second, all political institutions exhibit variation suggesting that public trust is based on some form of evaluation that changes with political and economic developments.

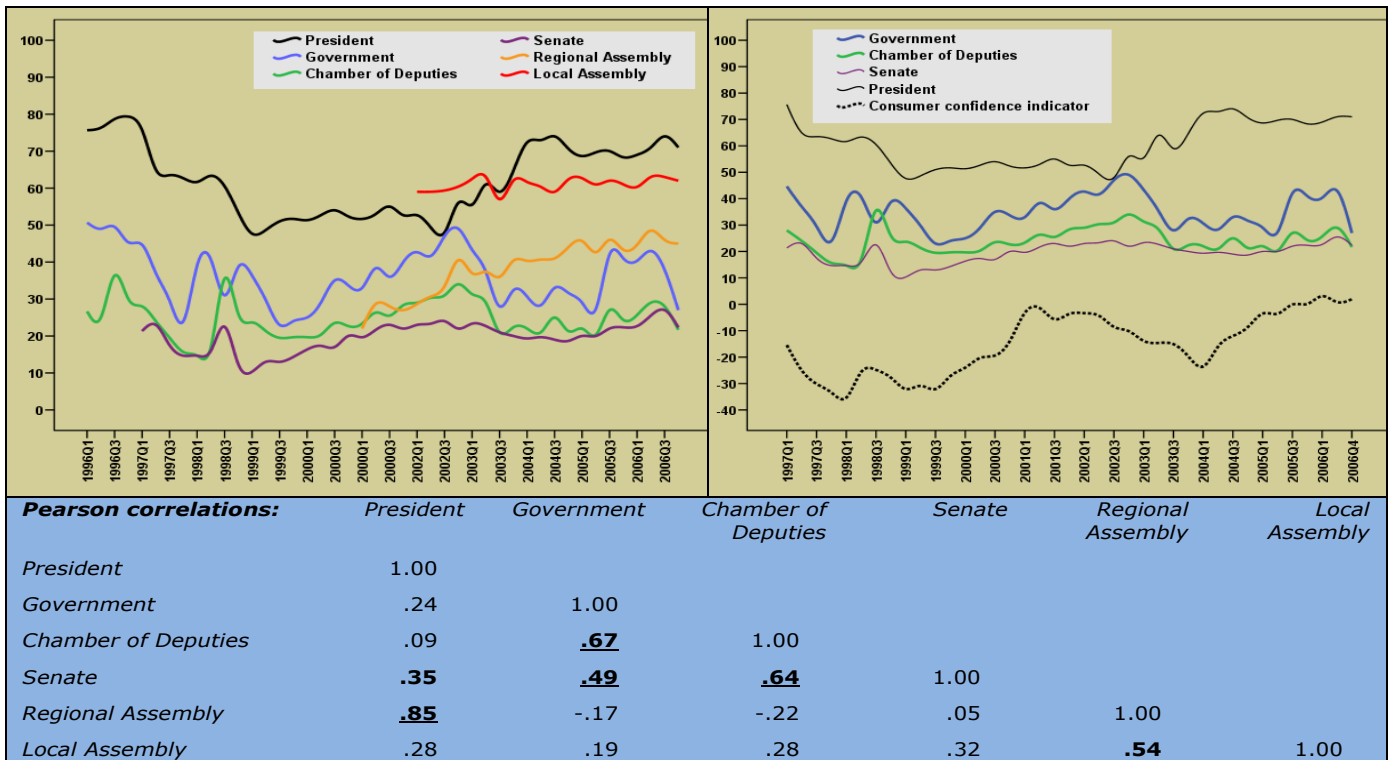
Hierarchy in political trust: Turning first to the hierarchy pattern in the CVVM data, at present, the most trust political institution is the Presidency followed in descending by trust in Local Councils, Regional Assembly, the Government, Chamber of Deputies, and Senate. This ordinal ranking reveals that institutions whose officeholders are selected through national elections tend to attract the lowest levels of trust. Moreover, the high levels of trust are associated with institutions that are proximal to the citizen, in other words institutions where citizens can associate the institution with specific individuals that are not responsible for government decision-making.

This time series is interesting for another reason because in the period examined (1996-2006) two new political institutions came into existence, i.e. the Senate (late 1996) and Regional Assemblies (2000). In the case of the Regional Assemblies, the CVVM data reveal that the level of opinionation (i.e. number of respondents willing to evaluate this body rather than reply "don't know") increased from 55 per cent in the first quarter of 2001 to 80 per cent by late 2005. Simultaneously, trust in this body increased from 22 to 45 per cent. In contrast, the level opinionation toward the Senate increased from 68 to 94 per cent; however, the level of trust has remained essentially constant at 20 per cent within the decade examined.

Why there should be such a different trend between these two "new" institutions would seem to reflect public perceptions of what these institutions actually do. The fact that Regional Assemblies deal with local practical issues undoubtedly gives them a greater salience in Czech citizens' daily lives, and this would appear to translate into greater political trust. In contrast, the Senate appears to be perceived as the "poor cousin" of the lower chamber and government because these three time series exhibit similar patterns of change.

Shared variation in political trust trends: With regard to the second key pattern evident in Figure 1, it is readily apparent that the government and chamber experience changes in level of public trust, though from different levels of base support. Simple correlation analysis,

Figure 1
Evolution of trust in political institutions in the Czech Republic, 1996-2006 (per cent)



Note all trust data is based on CVVM surveys. The window on the left shows the level of trust for the main political institutions and is taken from the responses of those aged 18 years or more between 1996 and 2006. This data has been aggregated to quarters represent between 886 and 4,683 responses. The solid lines represent elections to the lower chamber. The window on the right focuses on the CVVM trust in government and Chamber of Deputies (Lower Chamber) time series in terms of a key indicator of economic performance, i.e. consumer sentiment. The latter time series is based on Eurostat's consumer confidence survey undertaken monthly in all EU member states with samples of one thousand respondents. These estimates are seasonally adjusted and represent the balance between positive and negative responses, and for the most part during this time period negative. All data has been aggregated to quarters. In the bottom correlation matrix bolded estimates are significant at $p \leq .05$ and bolded and underlined estimates at $p \leq .002$.

shown at the bottom of Figure 1 demonstrates that the association between trust in government and the lower chamber is moderately high ($r = .67$, $p \leq .001$), and with the Senate is lower but statistically significant ($r = .49$, $p = .002$). Moreover, the correlation between trends expressed levels of trust in both parliamentary chambers is also considerable ($r = .74$, $p \leq .001$).

Curiously, the strongest correlation exists between trends in trust in the President and in the Regional Assemblies. This strong association may be shaped by partisanship as both institutions were dominated by ODS from early 2003 and both trust trends co-trended upwards between 2003 and 2006. This raises an important methodological point regarding interpretation of correlations of time series data. Strong bivariate correlations may be spurious in capturing little more than common trends due to third factors such as partisanship in the presidential and regional assembly trends or may be due to chance. Therefore, it is not valid to infer causality from the correlation matrix at the bottom of Figure 1 without undertaking appropriate time series econometric modelling – a topic for further research.

Keeping this methodological caveat in mind the window on the right of Figure 1 shows the trends in trust in government and the lower chamber and consumer sentiment. Subjective economic indicators are typically used to explain satisfaction with government performance and often positive consumer sentiment, sometimes known as

the "feel good factor", is used to predict vote choice in elections. This subjective economic performance indicator has strongest correlation with trust in the Senate ($r = .75$) and lesser association with Chamber of Deputies ($r = .43$), Government ($r = .39$), President ($r = .32$), Regional ($r = -.02$) and Local Assemblies ($r = .06$).

In short, the trend evidence suggests that trust in political institutions in the Czech Republic does have an important economic performance component, but this evaluation is focussed on national level politics. Why the Senate and consumer confidence indicator should be so strongly correlated requires more sophisticated modelling. However, one possibility is that trust in Senate is more strongly associated with citizens' personal resources, such as higher levels of education, political knowledge and income as shown earlier in Table 1. And it is this subset of citizens who are more sensitive to changing economic sentiment because many members of this group are key figures in business. For the moment such explanations must remain speculative and represent an important avenue for future research as little has been written on how economic factors shape political satisfaction ratings in the Czech Republic.

Trust is good, lack of trust is bad ...

Evaluations of the meaning of low levels of trust in political institutions as measured in mass surveys tend to adopt one of two positions. The first asserts that low trust ratings indicate that political institutions are "skat-

ing on thin ice" as the legitimacy of the state is in a state of weakness and could break unexpectedly. The second viewpoint suggests that attenuated levels of trust evident in survey data reflects dissatisfaction with office holders, and that the legitimacy of political institutions who "walk on the water" of daily political events where citizen dissatisfaction with office holders has no direct impact on the legitimacy of the state. These two contrasting positions are not necessarily contradictory as evident in a famous (Miller-Citrin) debate in the American Political Science Review in 1974, but are more correctly seen as representing different facets of public opinion.

Such a multi-faceted conception of trust suggests the "skating on thin ice" and "walking on water" perspectives are simply consequences of two central paradoxes of democracy: (1) lower levels of institutionalized trust are associated with greater spontaneous trust in politics; (2) an extensive system of institutional checks and balances elicit high levels of trust, though such mechanisms should be used rarely in order to elicit public trust (Sztompka 1999).

Ironically, low levels of citizen trust in political institutions may be taken as an indicator of citizen beliefs in the robustness of the democratic state to manage the misuse of power by office holders. Therefore, interpreting survey based measures of trust is not as simple as it seems because it is not clear what respondents have in mind when answering trust questions. What is certain is that survey based measures of trust in political institutions should not be taken at face value. This underscores an important general point that "facts" presented for public debate only have meaning through interpretation; and interpretation derives from assumptions which are often implicit to the arguments presented. Thus a policy of 'caveat emptor' when interpreting polling results seems sensible.⁴

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Notes:

1. Populist theories of democracy are primarily associated with Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762) and (negative) liberal theories of democratic representation in the Isaiah Berlin's *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958). Due to space constraints the details of the debate between these two visions of democracy will not be examined here (see, Dahl 1989; Held 1996: 70-156).
2. This standard question asked by CVVM (Institute for Public Opinion Research) in almost all of its monthly surveys since the early 1990s, and this is the data examined here. "And can you please tell me more specifically, if you trust or do not trust the following institutions?" The response options are: (1) Definitely trust, (2) Rather trust, (3) Rather not trust, (4) Definitely do not trust, (5) Don't know. The standard set of institutions examined are: a) Government of the Czech Republic, b) Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic, c) Senate of the Czech Republic, d) Your Regional Authority, e) Your Local Council.

3. This analysis was based on a Direct Oblimin, or Quartimin ($\Delta=0$), rotation where the two factors were correlated ($r=+.20$) and explained 44 (Eigen value = 2.6) and 22 per cent (Eigen value = 1.3) of the total variance respectively. The KMO measure of sampling accuracy = .65 and suggests there are some problems with small partial correlations among the trust variables. The Bartlett test of sphericity indicates that PCA is appropriate (Chi square approx. = 2850.89, $p<.001$).
4. Caveat emptor is Latin for "Let the buyer beware" and implies that it is the responsibility of the consumer of public "facts" such as published opinion poll data to be aware of the inherent limits of such sources of information and their susceptibility to selective interpretation.

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Postscript:

What have we learned about trust?

The importance of trust has been a consistent theme in writings on society across history. Abraham Lincoln famously warned "If you once forfeit the confidence of your fellow citizens, you can never regain their respect and esteem." Within this warning we see the three key elements of trust: (1) it is a relationship between two or more people; (2) it exists because of the essential uncertainty of the world and represents a prediction about the future; and (3) it is normally conditional on observing reliable behaviour.

Within the social sciences trust may be considered a 'master theme' which is often the subject of research although the term 'trust' is not used. For example, the extensive literature on the Prisoner's Dilemma and Game Theory more generally is a good example of extensive discussions of trust without using this term. The articles presented in this issue of Socioweb demonstrate this point in a neat way.

Given the ubiquity of trust, it is not surprising to find out that there is not one single conception of trust in the social sciences. One perspective based in political philosophy conceptualises trust as something that cannot be measured because it is a psychological state or more specifically a moral position (Fukuyama 1999). A second perspective originating in social (rational choice) theory argues that trust is evident in behaviour and hence can be measured (Coleman 1990). Within the empirical social sciences it is the second conception that has been most influential.

One interesting and ambitious work which essentially tries to integrate the two perspectives noted is Sztompka's (1999) *Trust: A Sociological Theory*. This work is interesting in that it attempts to explain changing levels of trust during the first decade of post-communism in Poland. It is ambitious in that it attempted to show why levels of trust in the transition process changed over time using survey data. Unfortunately, the empirical analysis presented in this book lacks sufficient rigour to present a convincing case for the theory proposed.

In this general sense, the articles presented in this issue of Socioweb illustrate some of the many different ways in which trust in a society may be analysed. Sztompka's (1999) two-fold classification of how trust is evaluated is a useful way of thinking about research on issues related to trust in different areas of life. Actor related or "primary" trust is based on three indicators: reputation, performance, and appearance that are directly observable by a person. In contrast, institutional or "secondary" related trust is based on perceptions of the accountability and commitment of key organisations.

Primary targets of trust

In the first two articles by Chaloupková and Vohlídková the focus was on the making and breaking of relationships. In both articles the focus was on individual decision making and the identification of patterns indicative of the establishment or loss of trust. A general finding of both articles is that there are systematic differences between individuals and these variations arise from differences in attitudes or values and (socio-demographic) position within society. Of course the richness of this research could not be presented in such short articles. However, the general message from both contributions is that inter-personal trust is a central feature in understanding the formation, operation and destruction of family units. What underpins or underlines trust between people lies at the heart of research into the sociology of the family and social policy.

Our exploration of the residents of six neighbourhoods in Prague presented by Špaček revealed that the presence of higher or lower levels of inter-personal trust (or sense of community) between neighbours is strongly associated with: (1) satisfaction with the local environment which appears to be interconnected the general wealth of an area, and (2) a general feeling of attachment to both the people and place in which a person resides. One important feature of this research for our understanding of trust is the cross-linking of the personal and institutional; where the reputation of different neighbourhoods across the entire city appears to be an important predictor of neighbourhood features such as inter-personal trust, but general reputation is not always the only important consideration.

Secondary targets of trust

The fourth article by Lyons examined an issue that is likely to be topical in the coming months with the twenty-

tieth anniversary of the Velvet Revolution of November 1989. As the events surrounding the fall of communism recede increasingly into history, a question that becomes increasingly important is what is legacy of such events for citizens? Interpreting this event involves making an evaluation of life under communism and there is some distrust among Czechs on who is best placed to explain the past to a post-communist generation. One answer to this important 'trust' question is to follow Kundera's eleventh commandment and "tell the truth". However, in situations where trust is lacking different interpretations of historical "facts" may reduce trust even further. Notwithstanding, the heated debate within the "chattering class" the survey evidence reveals little difference in interpretations of the past among ordinary Czech citizens. This consensus is important because it implies that the foundations of the current Czech state lie on firm foundations.

Social movements provide an important test of any general theory of trust as they represent an uneasy mix of individual and institutional features. This is even truer in the case of transnational social movements such as the alter-globalization movement. Kolarova's account of the S26 demonstration in Prague in late 2000 and the emergence of the Czech alter-globalization and new forms of demonstration specially suited to collaboration between groups who have both different values and activities. The fact that the different Czech alter-globalization groups did not trust each other sufficiently because of inter-personal differences had the important consequence of compelling the Czech organizers to innovate. This finding is very interesting because it demonstrates that the absence of trust is not necessarily a bad thing – it has the potential to be an important source of social change. Again, within this article we see the important inter-connections between institutional/group context of trust and inter-personal dynamics.

In the final article by Lyons the focus is political institutions and the survey evidence presented revealed in addition to the accountability and commitment Czech citizens' sense of trust is also shaped by performance evaluations. However, one might easily using Sztompka's (1999) ideas that the hierarchy in level of trust observed is primarily based on institutions reputations – something that changes constantly over time due to real-world events. Again the question of whether trust, or its absence, is good or bad for society is not always clear. Here we saw that one interpretation of low levels of survey measures of trust is that they indicate a damaging erosion of democracy; while in contrast others argue that a distrustful critical society is an indicator of a vigorous and healthy democracy.

So what is the bottom line? The articles presented in this issue of Socioweb increase our understanding of trust by demonstrating that different models are employed to explain inter-personal and institutional trust. There is no general theory of trust. This is because the ubiquity of trust makes it very difficult to discuss it in a meaningful way in general terms. To borrow a cliché: context counts. The mechanisms driving trust and its evolution over time are determined by individual actions and strategies and external circumstances. While trust may be a slippery thing to explain there is no denying its fundamental importance in personal relationships, the stability of families and neighbourhoods, our understanding of the past and the future of the planet, and our faith in political decision-making. It is hoped this issue of Socioweb gives some flavour of the importance and exciting nature of this stream of research within the social sciences where many important discoveries have yet to be made.

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