

## Editorial

Vážené čtenářky a vážení čtenáři,  
Dear readers,

This issue of Socioweb is the fourth 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 within the social sciences and public policy making.

In the following pages there are a series of ten articles that address key substantive questions using some of the many methodologies used within the social sciences. Such work demonstrates how social research has the potential to inform decisions made by legislators and public policy makers. While some of the topics are at first sight of a technical or theoretical nature, it is our hope that you will find at least some of the contributions interesting, and perhaps a spur to further reading and exploration.

Over the past three years I have argued that an English language version of a Czech sociological magazine such as Socioweb is important for a number of interrelated reasons.

First, the popular science presentation of sociological research in Socioweb demonstrates the growing power and confidence of Czech social science.

Second, as social science today is a global enterprise with cross-national partnerships, there is a strong argument to be made for bringing Czech social research onto the global stage and showing how this work informs international debates.

Third, many of the key themes and debates in the social sciences are by definition international in scope. One need only think of recent events such as the financial crisis of late 2008 and subsequent global economic depression to see that discussion and debate of common problems is best undertaken on an international stage. These three motivations are given concrete expression in the following pages.

In the first English language edition of Socioweb the leitmotif was human decision-making. Last year the theme was trust – a vitally important consideration at a time of rapid financial and economic decline that was fuelled by a crisis in confidence in many public institutions. In the second year there was some consideration of how social science research tackles problems

within the 'real world.' In that 2007 edition of Socioweb the relevance of research in sociology and political science was explored in terms of the practical skills that may be acquired from embarking on a course of study within any of the social sciences. In this edition, we will return to this theme but examine it from the perspective of social scientists rather than prospective students.

This question of the relevance of academic research to the 'real world' is currently one of the burning topics in political science. In a recent edition of the American Political Science Association's journal *Perspectives on Politics* (June 2010), a number of articles explored longstanding concerns within the discipline regarding the *relevance* of published research.

Many scholars have come to the disappointing conclusion that much of what is published in the top journals lacks substance and deals primarily with issues of concern to academic specialists. As a result, much state-of-the-art work offers little that is interesting or useful to those who work outside the walls of academia.

In essence, a contemporary form of "scholasticism" has emerged. An over-emphasis on methodology in academic journals and books has stifled consideration of the big substantive questions facing the world. As a result, many of the articles appearing in the top impacted journals are often oriented toward "solving" specific methodological issues and placing results reported within the established "literature" that only deals with small 'manageable' questions. While careful detailed analysis is laudable, doing such work to the exclusion of large "messy" normatively important 'real world' questions is questionable.

With scholasticism, research is oriented toward impressing other specialists and addressing questions in the literature leading to an "escape from reality." This drift toward the modern day equivalent of estimating "how many angels can dance on the head of a pin" has its roots in (a) efforts to make the study of society and politics more scientifically rigorous and systematic through (b) the adoption of methods and theories that avoid impressionistic, descriptive and ad-hoc explanations of social reality.

Unfortunately, many of the articles published in the top journals have no impact because they elicit zero citation index scores, and are not read by anyone except a handful of specialists. Undertaking 'invisible' research is frustrating for scholars and represents a waste of both opportunities and resources to the larger community.

If scholasticism is a key problem facing the social sciences how can this crisis be addressed? The general answer seems to be that researchers should be more open minded, pragmatic and interested in dealing with real-world problems using any methods, theories and sources of information that aid in the task of formulating a solution.

In some key respects, the short articles presented in the following pages address these concerns. All of the submissions deal with important substantive questions and report research in a style that is understandable to non-specialists. More will be said on this topic in the final postscript section.

As an aid to exploring the many issues covered in this month's edition of Socioweb, a brief overview of each contribution is presented to map out for the reader the topics examined.

In our first article, **Jindřich Krejčí** explores the issue of quality in survey research. Are the results stemming from interviews of representative national samples valid and reliable measures of public sentiments? In order to ensure the quality of survey research international quality assurance systems have been developed; and these operate in conjunction with professional associations that have strict codes of practice and conduct. Knowledge of survey quality issues is important for all consumers of survey data as it ensures that the extensive resources used to measure public attitudes, preferences and values are used effectively and the results are reported and analysed in a responsible manner.

Thereafter, **Julia Häuberer** switches our focus to assessing the quality of questions asked in mass surveys. Using the theme of participation in voluntary organisations this article explores if 'long' or 'short' measurement strategies are equivalent. Comparison of the responses of the same respondents in a panel study to different questions seeking the same information involve more general questions regarding the validity and reliability of survey methods. The results presented reveal that the two questions tested yield different response patterns; and that the choice of 'long' or 'short' question depends critically on the purpose of the research.

In the following article the theme of participation is examined in terms of the Czech public's undertaking of sporting activities. **Ondřej Špaček** explores how differences in social status or position in society are reflected in the degree to which individuals play any sports. It seems that poorer people play less sport than their richer neighbours and this difference has important consequences for public health policy. Within the European Union there are important cross-national differences that reflect variation in participation in sport on the basis of social status, gender and age. The Czech Republic fits into an intermediate group of countries where playing sports is neither extensive nor avoided by many citizens.

The third article written by **Eva Mitchell** deals with another key facet of government policy: the impact of the tax-benefit system on support for different types of families. Using a tax and benefits accounting methodology defined in terms of standard family types this article maps out systematic differences in state support across twenty-two European countries. A key theme in this research is the incentives offered to *both* parents to stay at home and rear their young children. There are important intra-European differences; however, these do not reflect a general East versus West divide. In comparative terms, the Czech Republic's tax and benefits regime appears to be conservative in promoting the traditional male breadwinner model of the family.

Our fifth article explores if the Czech economy is making efficient use of migrant labour. Here **Yana Leontiyeva** using a unique survey of migrant workers presents a profile of this segment of Czech society. A typical migrant worker is a male with limited level of education who, if they worked in their homeland, had a blue collar job; and comes from Eastern Europe or Asia. A key finding from this survey research is the mismatch between migrants' skills and the work that they do. It seems that more than half of the migrant labour force in the Czech Republic is over qualified. This finding is important because it suggests that impediments in the Czech labour market are constraining the efficient use of the available human capital; and hence undermining economic growth and successful integration of migrants into Czech society.

The following article by **Jana Chaloupková** presents research on one key facet of social change in the Czech Republic: decisions on when to start a family. Using a unique methodology that allows life course trajectories to be calculated, this article illustrates how different age groups over more than half a century decided when to settle down. Differences between cohorts reveal changes in prevailing norms and values. Of particular interest are the changes that occurred with the post-communist transition process. The young adults that settled down in the 1990s exhibit a different profile to previous and subsequent generations. Such cross-generational differences indicate how large political and economic change is manifested in social development.

The spotlight changes in the next article as **Lukáš Hoder** addresses using a critical qualitative perspective how products of American popular culture have a global effect. The specific question posed is how *The Simpsons* representation of reality might influence popular conceptions of politicians and the political system at the global level? Academic analyses of international successful cultural products such as *Harry Potter* and *The Simpsons* may aid understanding of global politics. This 'critical geopolitical' perspective argues that the global influence of *The Simpsons* lies its ability to (a) shape how international audiences perceive contemporary American society and (b) what

specific social, political and economic issues to think about.

In the eight article **Jana Křištořová** explores morality for women within Islam. This topic has become salient in non-Islamic societies because of controversies over Muslim women wearing traditional clothing that covers most if not all of their bodies. Within Islam there is the fundamental question as to who has the legitimate right to decide what clothing, and behaviour more generally, is considered correct. Traditionally, the moral guardians have been male scholars and religious leaders. With the emergence of Islamic feminism there have been questions about the correctness of an Islamic moral code that compels women to play a subordinate role in society. Using Foucault's distinction between internal and external sources of moral authority, it is argued that a less restrictive moral code for women is not incompatible with Islamic beliefs and values.

The final two contributions by **Pat Lyons** explore the impact of long terms beliefs and values. Examining the importance of 'partisanship' that is a feeling of attachment to a political party, the first article reveals that identification with a party is the single most important factor in explaining vote choice in Czech elections. Moreover, the impact of party attachment is evident beyond the immediate dynamics of election campaigns. These results are important because they indicate that although the Czech party system is less than a generation old; popular attachment to political parties is an important element in party competition and the stability of the liberal democratic state.

In the second contribution, there is an exploration of the structure of Czech religious beliefs. There are three facets to contemporary Czech religious beliefs: adherence to a Christian view of the afterlife, adoption of a miscellaneous collection of 'New Age' ideas and acceptance of post-death notions often associated with the New Age movement. Importantly, these religious beliefs are interrelated suggesting that Czechs may be divided more generally on the basis of having some religious beliefs or none. Attempts to discover the consequences of religion reveal that neither religious behaviour nor beliefs have a direct impact on Czech politics.

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 fourth English language issue of Socioweb.

Všem mnohokrát děkuji.  
Příjemné čtení Vám přeje

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## **Czech Sociological Data Archive (SDA) Institute of Sociology, AS CR**

### **Gresham's Law of Surveys and Quality Standards in Survey Research**

*Key words: methodology, public opinion*

One of central requirements of all survey research, regardless of whether it is academic or commercial is quality. Are the research results valid and reliable, should this research be used to formulate public policy proposals or make commercial decisions?

Often it is difficult to tell from research reports if the data generated, analysed and presented for review is of sufficient quality to merit use for making potentially very costly decisions. Unfortunately, the situation is even more complicated because consumers of survey data are frequently confronted with information of different quality.

In such situations of uncertainty there is a real danger that bad survey research could destroy the reputation of good research (a variation on Gresham's law of monetary economics) resulting in market failure.<sup>1</sup>

It is for these reasons that quality standards in survey research are fundamentally important to surveying organisations, researchers and consumers of polling data. If survey quality is so important, how is it possible to ensure quality standards in survey research?

#### **Nature of the problem**

A great portion of social science data currently originates in sample questionnaire surveys. Any in-depth evaluation of survey data quality requires an analytic study that is difficult, costly, and unfeasible under normal circumstances. The goal of an in-depth quality evaluation thus exceeds the possibilities of individual research exercises as well as the reasonable size of a research report's methods section.

Furthermore, there is an information asymmetry between data collectors and data users. When data users are not directly involved in data collection, they have limited ability to obtain all necessary information about a survey as well as limited ability to verify the information received.

As in other fields, the quality of results in survey research is achieved by assuring the quality of the production process. As with many other products, the client of a survey agency has limited scope in controlling the quality in any mass surveying process. At the same time, the client's ability to evaluate data quality is necessary in a competitive market environment. As in other economic sectors, various standards help break the information barrier between producers and users or customers.

## Keeping up standards

While standards do not lend themselves to assuring accuracy of a given survey's results, they affirm that the organization, which is fulfilling such standards, has a structure capable of achieving certain quality in the survey production process, abides by the rules for achieving and improving quality, and is subject to certain controls. Research quality standards exist in two forms: (1) administratively imposed standards, and (2) the technical and ethical criteria of professional associations.

### (a) Administrative Standards

The aim of administrative standards is to regulate market conditions beyond legal rules in order to (1) create a background for clients to verify a product offer's compliance with national and international customs, so that they can assess the product's quality and compare offers; (2) provide a point of redress for complaints about products and services delivered on the basis of rules of compliance and professional norms; and (3) provide a framework for the self-regulation of market and opinion polling research.

Certification by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) represents the most important system of internationally applicable standards. As a relatively new addition for the field of social research, ISO standard 20252: 2006 for market, opinion, and social research has been published. This standard governs business relations and aims to apply a system of *Total Quality Management* in social research. Within this framework, it foresees (Zahradníček 2006):

- What the client is authorized to require of those conducting the research
- What is beyond the rules of mutual relations or ethics in the stages of research preparation, implementation, and results presentation
- What any research brief must clearly fulfil
- What the client has to provide to those conducting the research so that the outcome of their cooperation is effective and efficient

Certification does not guarantee the accuracy of specific results or the application of specific methodological procedures that are considered to be superior. However, it does guarantee that a research agency has an appropriate structure for the given type of research; and is capable of achieving sufficient quality at every research stage.

Before 2006, the role of this framework was played by standards formulated by the ISO 9000 group, which generally focused on business quality management issues. Both ISO 20252: 2006 and ISO 9000 are based on providing an independent assurance of an organization's management structures in terms of ability to fulfil quality requirements, apply regulatory procedures for this purpose, and ensure a continuous improvement process.

### (b) Standards of Professional Associations

The standards adopted by professional associations provide an important framework for the evaluation of data quality and comparison. In addition, professional standards define the rights of clients (as well as survey respondents), and provide guarantees for clients that member organizations will adhere to the application of specific standards. More encompassing and detailed rules with direct application to sample surveys have been created by a number of international social research organizations. Among them are Eurostat, the International Statistical Institute (ISI), the OECD, the UN, the IMF, the International Labor Organization (ILO), and many others.

Beyond the domain of official statistical services, the following international professional associations in the fields of market, opinion and social research have also defined important standards. Both organizations enforce their standards in close mutual cooperation:

- ESOMAR<sup>2</sup> is a global association of scholarly organizations in market, opinion, and social research. Producers, distributors, and users of research results are among its members. It primarily focuses on the business sector. With more than 4,500 members in more than 100 countries, it constitutes one of the most important professional associations in the field.
- WAPOR (World Association for Public Opinion Research) brings together scholars in public opinion research. Currently, this organisation operates in approximately fifty countries.

Social research takes many forms. Surveys are conducted under various research conditions. At the same time, contradictory requirements are sometimes placed upon desired features of the resulting data. Therefore, no exhaustive and unequivocal set of criteria can be set. Two complementary approaches are available for overcoming this problem.

On the one hand, minimal standards are defined. While no professionally conducted survey should ever break such standards, they often do not alone guarantee satisfactory quality. On the other hand, definitions of best practice are constructed. Such definitions are not binding but serve as useful guidelines and frames of reference.

In this respect, the ESOMAR has published an ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market and Social Research (ESOMAR 2008), which is further elaborated and specified in a set of application notes (ESOMAR 2009). The association continuously publishes and updates a large system of detailed guidelines for individual research domains and specific situations. The Code, including the application notes, is binding for ESOMAR members and has been recognized as an International Chamber of Commerce standard.

WAPOR publishes various recommendations for research practice, and it also takes part in preparing and enforcing other organizations' standards. It has adopted the above noted

ICC/ESOMAR Code for the field of public opinion research, which it helped prepare (ibid.). WAPOR also enforces the standards formulated by AAPOR (1997, 2009), an organization which it closely cooperates with. This fact is crucial because WAPOR transfers the relatively detailed and stringent US Standards into international practice. It is important to note that WAPOR standards are not binding on research agencies because membership of this global organization is not an institutional requirement.

**Figure 1, Domains for which the Association of Market Research Agencies (SIMAR) has defined quality standards**

- (a) Interviewer networks
- (b) Data collection and processing
- (c) Qualitative research
- (d) Mystery shopping
- (e) Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)
- (f) In-store interviewing
- (g) Telephone interviewing
- (h) Presentation of market research results for marketing purposes
- (i) Interviewing minors
- (j) Web based research

Source: SIMAR.

The Association of Market Research Agencies, SIMAR, enforces the standard; 5210s of social research in the Czech Republic. SIMAR has published its own standards and these are summarised in Figure 1. SIMAR standards include a number of relatively specific methodological guidelines and minimum standards that refer to ESOMAR standards. The SIMAR standards are binding for member organizations, and therefore, membership in the organization represents a specific form of data quality assurance.

**Gresham's law of surveys ...**

Ensuring the quality of survey research rests on three pillars. First, the consumers of surveys need to be aware of the minimum requirements for ensuring the datasets delivered are appropriate to the task for which they were designed. Moreover, survey research clients must have a realistic understanding of what mass survey data can and cannot do.

Second, the presentation of survey data results in the media and associated commentary by journalists the media should not the misrepresent results with the goal of making a story more "newsworthy" or seeking to direct public opinion. Such unscrupulous behaviour has the potential to destroy public confidence in

mass surveys. In this respect, editors and organisations dedicated to upholding professional standards and ethics represent one of the frontlines defending the quality of survey research.

Third, regulatory agencies play an essential role in ensuring access to the survey research market is open to allow competition to stimulate choice and innovation, but closed to those who refuse to provide quality research to clients. In addition, regulators provide consumers with assurances that sanctions will be imposed on those who seek to deceive.

The failure of any of these pillars has the potential to allow bad surveys to drive good ones from the market. Such a market failure operating on the principle of Gresham's law represents a collective loss for all, and is something systems of survey quality strive to prevent.

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**Notes:**

1. Gresham's law comes from monetary economics where 'bad' debased money of low quality was seen in a number of historical circumstances to drive 'good' legitimate money or currency from the market. The key mechanism identified was loss of reputation in an asymmetric information environment where consumers had difficulty in determining the quality of a currency from an ad ocular (informal visual) inspection. The same logic applies to the quality of survey research results. In short, survey research requires the monetary equivalent of a mint. This analogy is taken from influential American pollster, Daniel Yankelovich's (1991: 23) book length insiders' study of quality of public opinion as measured in opinion polls.

2. The acronym for this association is an abbreviation of its original name, which is the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research. However, this name and acronym are no longer used because the ESOMAR has been transformed into global organisation.

**Web Directory:**

AAPOR - World Association for Public Opinion Research: <http://www.aapor.org>

ESOMAR: <http://www.esomar.org/>

SIMAR - Association of Market Research Agencies (Czech Republic): <http://www.simar.cz/>

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### Asking the Right Question or How to Assess the Quality of Survey Measures?

*Key words: methodology, participation*

In quantitative social research surveys are used to learn more about society. Within the framework of such studies, two things are needed. First, a good sample is required. Second, appropriate questions are necessary to make inferences about social reality. A survey sample of 'bad' quality will not provide a good profile of the target population of interest. It should be noted that using conventional statistical sampling criteria (i.e. an adequacy of sampling measure,  $p \leq .05$ ) about one-in-twenty surveys undertaken will result in a 'bad' sample.

In this situation, survey estimates will be relatively speaking far away from the values observed if all citizens were interviewed, as is the case in a census.<sup>1</sup> With a 'good' representative sample the survey estimates will be reasonably close ( $\pm 3$  percent with a sample size of 1,000 respondents) to the true population value. This is the basic theory underlying all representative sampling used in mass surveys undertaken by market research companies and the quality control systems implemented in industry.

As all surveys are samples, and not a census of all citizens, the estimates observed will have error. These errors have an important property – they are random. This means the sampling errors are not the result of some special feature of the survey or the interviewing process. Indeed, the interview may generate measurement errors (Litwin 1995), if the questions asked in a survey are "inappropriate" due to factors such as: (a) respondents not understanding what is being asked, (b) interviewees have no opinion on the topic addressed, (c) respondents interpret the question posed in a manner different to that envisaged by the researcher, and (d) the order of the questions in the survey prime the respondents to give specific answers.

### Evaluating survey questions quality

We can minimize measurement error by adhering to three key criteria that determine survey question quality: objectivity, reliability and validity. *Objectivity* is the extent to which the results are independent of the person or interviewer that uses the measurement instrument. It is often realized, if a standardized questionnaire is employed with questions that contain answering categories. The interviewer doesn't have to interpret the results as in qualitative research where the respondent is asked to talk freely about a certain topic; and the interviewer draws conclusions from the respondents' answer.

The *reliability* of a measurement instrument indicates the reproducibility of results. That is to say, reliability exists if the item elicits the same response at different time points. The third and most important criterion of evaluating a measurement instrument's quality is *validity*. Generally, validity is the extent to which a measurement instrument really measures what it is supposed to, or more specifically, validity demonstrates that the survey question is really measuring the concept of interest (cf. Hendl 2004).

### An Example: participating in voluntary organisations

How can we assess the reliability and validity of survey questions in practice? One way is to use two differently worded questions that seem to measure the same characteristic of a person; and through comparison observe if both items generate the same results. We could include differently worded items within the same questionnaire but ask them at different points within the survey interview. For example, one of the comparative questions would be asked at the beginning of the interview and the second item at the end. Alternatively, we could use the items to be compared in different interviews conducted with the same person at different time points.

This was the strategy adopted in a survey exploring the "Social Relationships among Czech Citizens" conducted during 2007 and 2008. This research aimed to test, if the quality of an item battery measuring the voluntary activity of

Czechs in associations is similar to a one-item measurement. For this purpose, a random sample of 400 Czech citizens were first interviewed at the end of 2007 and then re-interviewed a second time six months later in the late spring and early summer of 2008. A total of 129 respondents participated in both waves of the survey.

In the first interview, respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of their participation in 5 different kinds of voluntary associations. Here respondents were asked in sequence level of participation in five different organisations. This approach yields 5 separate indicators of voluntary participation. In the second interview a different strategy for measuring voluntary participation was adopted. Here the goal was to see if a single question could replicate the estimates made using a 5 question approach. This research has the practical merit of demonstrating if it is possible to obtain the same information by adopting a more efficient (and cost effective) questionnaire design. The main results from both questions are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Comparison of results for two different questions dealing with voluntary activities, Czech Republic 2007/2008**

Question type	Response options			
	≥3 times	1-2	None	DK
<b>Version 1: How often do you participate in ...</b>				
<b>Political, trade unions or professional association</b>	4	2	87	7
<b>Church, religious or charity or public beneficial body</b>	8	7	80	5
<b>Sport, fitness, cultural or interest organization</b>	23	11	62	5
<b>Neighbourhood civic association</b>	3	7	85	5
<b>Other association or group</b>	4	2	88	6
<b>Average version 1</b>	8	6	80	6
<b>Version 2: How often do you take part in any association?</b>	18	11	71	0

Source: Survey Examining Social Relationships among Czech Citizens. The sample size for both survey questions is 129 respondents. DK indicates "don't know" answers. The time period for voluntary participation was one month. The table should be interpreted as follows. In the previous month, 23% of respondents in the first interview stated that they were involved with a sports or cultural organisation. The average for version 1 are the mean percentages for all five items.

To compare both measures the answers to the 5 voluntary association questions asked in the first interview were used to create a "summed rating scale", which means that the answers to all 5 questions were added together to create an overall scale of voluntary association. This summed rating scale ranges from a minimum value of zero indicating "no voluntary activity" to a maximum of 10 representing being active in all associations examined on three or more occasions in the last month.<sup>3</sup> The 5 question voluntary association summed rating scale reveals that 55% of respondents (who participated in both waves of the study) did not undertake any activities with a voluntary association.

In contrast, the single question measure of voluntary association implemented in the second survey indicates that 71% of those interviewed may be classified as undertaking no voluntary activity. In summary, the results presented in Table 1 suggest that the two measures of level of activity in voluntary organisations yield different results indicating more formally that the two measurements have low 'test-retest' reliability. More simply the two measures tested do not give the same answer although in theory they should do so.

### Evaluating the reliability and validity of survey questions

A more formal test of 'test-retest' reliability is to estimate the degree to which the answers to both measures of activity in voluntary organisations are correlated. The correlation coefficient which ranges between -1 and +1 is a standard measure of test-retest reliability. Here -1 indicates a perfect negative relationship, zero no linear relationship and +1 a perfect positive relationship. The correlation coefficient for the two voluntary activity measures is less than .4 which is considered to be a relatively low value.

Generally speaking, a correlation coefficient of +.8 or higher is interpreted as indicating strong test-retest reliability. In practical terms, these results demonstrate that our single question measure of voluntary activity in organisations is not a good substitute for the more detailed 5 question measurement scale. This means it is not a good idea to substitute both measures, because they seem to generate somewhat different answers. Even though we find this low reliability, this does not necessarily indicate the absence of validity as well.

The validity of an item can be tested by its association (or correlation) with external criteria. For example, we can judge the survey instrument against some other method that is acknowledged as a "gold standard" for the same variable such as a published psychometric index, or we can judge it against measured criteria that are theoretically connected to the assessed item battery (Hendl 2004; Litwin 1995; Rippl and Seipel 2008). In the case of associational involvement, we don't have a "gold standard."

But we find it connected to several variables: studies showed that males, younger people and

higher educated have bigger networks than females, older people and lower educated respondents [Lin et al. 2001]. According to one influential social capital advocate, people that are involved in associations are more trusting and follow norms of reciprocity (Putnam 2000). But there is a considerable body of research which shows that this is not necessarily always the case (e.g. Letki 2006; Paxton 2007). Finally, individuals with a psychological predisposition for establishing contacts (extraversion) should participate in a greater number of networks.

Correlating our two items with measures of sex, age, education<sup>4</sup>, generalized trust<sup>5</sup>; norms of reciprocity<sup>6</sup> and extroversion<sup>7</sup> show satisfactory criterion validity. The estimates presented in Table 2 reveal that the correlations are as expected.

**Table 2, An examination of the criterion validity of two voluntary activity measures, Czech Republic 2007/2008**

Variables		Associational involvement: Version 1*	Associational involvement: Version 2
Associational involvement Version 2	t	-	.387
	N	-	123
Sex	t	-.096	-.067
	N	386	129
Age	t	-.135	-.186
	N	386	129
Education	t	.206	.178
	N	386	129
Extraversion	t	.178	.074
	N	382	129
Generalized Trust	t	.006	.052
	N	344	112
Norms of Reciprocity	t	-.022	-.058
	N	344	112

Source: Survey Examining Social Relationships among Czech Citizens, 2007/2008. Note t refers to the Kendall-tau measure of statistical association between variables that are assumed to be measured at the ordinal level. N denotes the number of cases used to estimate the Kendall tau statistic.

\* See note 2.

The associational involvement measures correlate little with sex, indicating only small gender based differences. Younger respondents participate more often than their older colleagues, and there is also an education gap where those with higher levels of schooling exhibit greater associational involvement than all others.

The correlations between associational involvement and both generalized trust and norms of reciprocity are rather small, and these match with the results of previous research work. As expected, extroverts tend to participate

more in voluntary associations than those who are less outgoing by nature.

### What to do next?

Although the two questions measuring voluntary association activity do not exhibit high levels or test-retest reliability, they nonetheless seem to measure the same thing. Thus, it is necessary to decide which measure to use. On the one hand, the 5 item version might be more appropriate, if the goal is to learn more about the concrete distribution of associational involvement of citizens. On the other hand, if the objective is to make an approximate estimate of the amount of voluntary engagement then the single item measure may be more suitable. In any case, it is important to be aware of the fact that the two different question formulations generate different results and keeping in mind this difference when interpreting the results of a particular study.

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### Notes:

1. Sampling error is in strict statistical terms not defined on the basis of 'closeness' to a census or population value. It is conceptualised in terms of the properties of many (thousands) of hypothetical samples drawn from a specific population. Population estimates necessary for assessing accuracy or quality are rarely available, and so a statistical perspective makes practical sense. However, a distributional view of true population values is a subtle technical idea; and the use of a census 'metaphor' here is primarily intended as a rough analogy.

2. For technical reasons all valid cases from the first interview were used to test the validity of the 5-item battery. However, for the test-retest reliability analysis the answers of the 129 respondents who participated in both interviews were used.

3. The summated rating scale ranges from 0-10 because the response options included two categories, only (1=1-2 times per month, 2=3 and more times per month) yielding a maximum of (5\*2) 10 points on the scale. If respondents did no voluntary activity their score is zero. Thus the scale ranges from zero to 10. The construction of summated rating scales assumes that all questions have equal value in measuring the concept of interest. This assumption may not always be valid where for example some indicators are known to be better measures of the concept examined than others. In such situations, an alternative scaling procedure should be implemented.



4. The educational categories were: compulsory (elementary) education, vocational training or skilled trade qualification, high school diploma and university degree.

5. We measured generalized trust with three items: 1. "There are only few people I can trust entirely", 2. "Generally you can be sure that others want the best for you", and 3. "Unless you take care, others will take advantage of you". All items had to be answered on a 4-point scale (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=disagree, 4 = strongly disagree). For the analyses the item "others want one's best" was recoded to assure that high values indicate high levels of generalized trust. We created the trust index by factoring the items using the regression method. Cronbach alpha = .40

6. We measured norms of reciprocity with two items: "Children are obliged to take care of their parents", and "It is alright to associate with people just because you know they might be of benefit to you". Agreement with the first item indicates affirming, agreement with the second absence of norms of reciprocity. Therefore, we recoded the first item to realize that high values indicate acceptance of norms of reciprocity. The questions also had to be answered on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree. The norms index was created by factoring the items using the regression method. Cronbach alpha = .18

7. Extroversion was examined through agreement (scale 1-4) with items where the respondent evaluated themselves as 1 "active, vigorous"(E+), 2 "he/she likes to meet new people"(E+), 3 "he/she is in the conversation with unknown people more reserved" (I+). The extroversion index was created using Principal Components Analysis to estimate regression factor scores. Cronbach alpha = .50

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## Social Structure Studies Institute of Sociology, AS CR

### Only Winners Play! Social Inequality and Participation in Sports

*Key words: inequalities, social structure, Europe*

The sociology of sports is a relatively small and new area of interest within the social sciences. Notwithstanding limited academic interest to date, sports undoubtedly have an important position in modern society, whether it is in the economic realm, culture, media or politics. One of the key sociological interests in popular participation in sport is the social sorting that takes place when individuals decide to undertake some form of physical exercise.

Some people practice sports daily with great intensity; while many others don't participate in sports at all. It is reasonable to expect differences in participation in sports where adolescents and their grandparents are not likely to be swapping opinions on the best trainers for use in the next mini-marathon for charity.

However, the relative importance of age differences should not be overstated. The cross-national evidence presented below reveals that age is not the only important factor underpinning differential participation in sports in society. There is likely to be a gender gap in sports participation where 'macho' men are more likely to be found out on the track, in the pool or in the sports field than women. Here of course there is the danger of gender stereotyping and it is important to examine the empirical evidence to determine if such expectations are fact or fiction.

### Rich people do, poor folks don't

Apart from age and gender the other major source of difference in participation in sports is on the basis of social status or relative wealth inequality. Study of the cultural dimension of social stratification has uncovered much evidence that reveals leisure sports activity is more prevalent in the upper strata of society. This pattern of social sorting in sports participation is of course sociologically interesting per se. However, social inequality in sports participation has potentially important public policy implications.

If participation in sport is explained by social inequalities in society this has consequences for differences in health within a population. Health inequalities may stem not only from differences in ability to pay for high quality healthcare but may also arise because of varying lifestyles

centring on factors such as sports participation. For this reason, understanding the degree to which social inequality helps to explain differences in sports participation provides valuable information to public health professionals who wish to provide a more effective service to citizens.

In addition, targeted sport participation programmes could yield significant savings to governments over the long-term where vulnerable segments of society are given additional incentives to play more sports; thereby reducing national health expenditure. In short, knowing who plays sports could inform a more effective allocation of public resources in society making all citizens healthier and happier in the process.

### Lounge lizards, couch potatoes and sports freaks ...

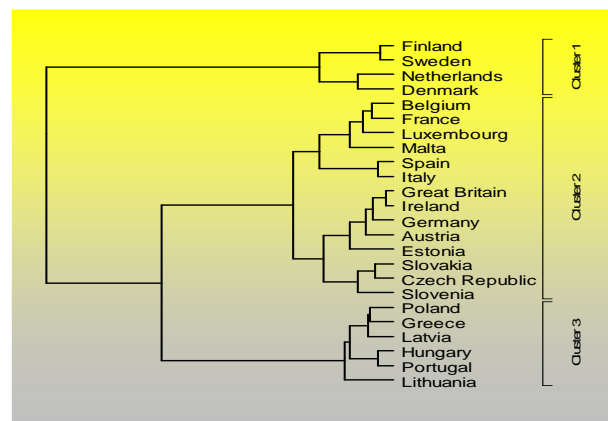
One of the most effective means of investigating sports participation in societies is to use representative sample surveying where respondents are asked simple questions about how often they undertake some physical activity during their leisure time. Fortunately, the European commission in its bi-annual (standard) 'Eurobarometer' series of surveys of EU-citizens asked a battery of questions on participation in sports in the autumn of 2004. This is a rich source of information allowing cross-national comparison.

This is the information used here. An analysis of sports participation across the European Union (EU) is restricted to 'adults' that is those aged 26 years or older where undertaking physical activity is most likely to be a long-term lifestyle choice and not linked to institutional affiliation such as attendance at university.<sup>1</sup> Sports participation was measured as a ratio (percentage) of the active population. Special attention is paid to differences in participation on the basis of four socio-demographic features of respondents, i.e. sex, age, place of residence and social status.

The dependency was enumerated as a bivariate correlation coefficient between sports participation and accordant independent variable. These two parameters were used to compare distance between all analyzed countries. In other words, two countries are considered more similar if (a) comparable proportions of the population participate in sports, and (b) participation in sport exhibits a similar relationship with key social structural features, i.e. sex, age, place of residence and social status. This analysis was undertaken using a classification procedure called Hierarchical Cluster Analysis.

This statistical procedure searches for two countries with the most similar characteristics and joins them together into a cluster. In subsequent iterations Hierarchical Cluster Analysis combines initial clusters or groups of countries into ever larger clusters until finally all countries are united into a single large cluster.

**Figure 1, Similarity of European citizens' participation in sport on the basis of nationality**



Source: Eurobarometer 62.0, October 2004. Note this dendrogram was constructed using a statistical procedure called Hierarchical Cluster Analysis. Here the goal is to classify countries into groups that are most similar on the basis of participation in sports. The top part of this figure reveals that Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark are more similar to each other regarding sports participation than all other EU-25 member states in 2004. Consequently, this group of four countries constitute cluster 1.

The process by which countries are classified into clusters may be visualised in a special type of graph called a 'dendrogram.' The basic logic of a dendrogram is that the countries that are closer together are most alike. Such patterns of closeness are easy to see in a dendrogram like the one shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 reveals that the responses given in the Eurobarometer 62.0 survey of October 2004 may be classified in three major clusters of European countries where the classification is based on level of participation on sports and similar patterns of social structuration in sports practice. The cluster most dissimilar with rest of the other countries contains Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) together with the Netherlands. These EU member states are characterised by a very high level of participation in sports, and this is a pattern that is fairly consistent across all the socio-demographic factors examined. The characteristics of countries who are members of the second and third clusters are very much alike and represent what might be called the "typical" situation in the European Union.

### Those that do and those that don't

The evidence presented in Table 1 reveals that in Europe inequality in sports participation is dominated by the impact of age and social status. It is important here to note that the correlations reported in Table 1 indicate the relationship between the factors examined; but do not demonstrate that age and social status cause differences in participation in sport.

However, it makes more sense to think that age and social status determine participation than undertaking sports determines age and social status. For this reason, it is reasonable to infer the direction of causality although strictly speaking correlation statistics refer to association rather than causality.

**Table 1, Different patterns in participation in sports across the EU**

Cluster, country	Sports	Correlation*				N
		Social status	Gender	Residence	Age	
Cluster 1	83%	.05	-.03	<.01	.09	4
Cluster 2	57%	.18	.09	.04	.23	14
Cluster 3	34%	.24	.07	.13	.24	6
Czech Republic	56%	.21	.08	.13	.24	-

Source: Eurobarometer 62.0, October 2004.

\* Note these estimates are Somers' d correlation coefficients. This statistic is appropriate for estimating the association between ordinal variables that have an asymmetrical character. Here the goal is to explore the relationship between sports participation and four socio-demographic variables. Values of +1 or -1 indicate perfect positive or negative association respectively. A value of zero indicates no relationship. N indicates the number of EU member states within each cluster of countries.

The Czech Republic belongs to the cluster 2 group of countries.

The gender differences evident in Table 1 appear to be about half as important as age and social status on the basis of the size of the correlation estimates. The difference between clusters reflect varying levels of public participation in sport where four-in-five citizens in cluster 1 do some sports and this rate drops to three-in-five in cluster 2 and to one-in-three in cluster 3. Significantly, the countries in cluster 3 who show the lowest participation in sports exhibit the strongest structural relationships, i.e. with age, residence and social status.

This evidence indicates that social inequality is most important in this subset of EU member states. The clustering pattern in participation in sports raises the issue of whether it is possible to identify some general reason that would explain cross-national differences?

Table 1 demonstrates that there is no simple geographical pattern that would explain the classification of countries. Although, the first cluster is primarily Scandinavian in nature and the third cluster has a distinct post-communist complexion; the second cluster reveals a strong mixing of states based on geography, national wealth and socio-political history.

The fact that the first and third clusters differ strongly on the basis of per capita wealth suggests that social inequality is an important factor in explaining differences in participation in sport in Europe. However, the mixed collection of countries evident in the second cluster demonstrates that the effect of social inequality must be moderated by additional factors not

considered. It is likely that social values are important in shaping the relationship between social inequality and sports participation.

This is some support for this intuition evident in the pairing of countries in the dendrogram presented in Figure 1. Here we observe pairings such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Britain and Ireland, Germany and Austria, Belgium and France, etc. that have a loose linguistic basis.

In fact, it would be surprising if citizens' beliefs and values derived from some general cultural traits did not play some role in motivating individual participation in sport; although such a relationship is unlikely to be based on a single factor such as common language.

### Czechs and sports

Moving away from considerations of participation in sports across the entire EU it makes sense to consider a concrete case to see what local structural factors are important. Here the focus will be on the Czech Republic which according to Figure 1 represents a typical European country as it falls within cluster 2 – the largest grouping of states.

After 1989, sports policy in the Czech Republic became strongly autonomous and independent of the central government. The most important actors in the field of sports at the present are several umbrella sport organizations and local governments.

Only a few of these actors have clearly defined priorities that could, theoretically, contribute to lowering the present social inequalities in sports participation. In fact, few of these sports organisations acknowledge the importance of social inequality in determining the uptake of sports. A number of empirical surveys of the Czech population demonstrate that social inequality plays a major role in determining sports participation.

This research reveals that men have a one-and-a-half times greater likelihood of being involved in sporting activities than women. Members of the middle class have a two or three times greater propensity to participate in sports than those from the lower classes.

On the other hand, the Czech Republic belongs to the second cluster shown in Figure 1, which suggests that the observed level of social inequality is in European terms somewhere close to the average. The Czech Republic differs from the other countries in cluster 2 in that there are greater differences in sports participation among citizens who live in cities, towns and the countryside.

### Playing the policy game

The survey evidence demonstrates that social inequality is associated with leisure sports participation in a majority of European countries. The fact that social inequalities have such consistent effects on what citizens do in their leisure time is important because it suggests that lack of access to resources has widespread effects.

More specifically, the next Czech governments' (2010- ) goal of making public health policy both more responsive to citizens needs and more efficient in terms of expenditure should consider the differential uptake of sports by the public.

The survey data suggest that attempts to improve quality of life, decrease health expenditure over the long-term, and promote equality in society require a targeted programme of public policies. Formulating 'sport friendly' policies on the basis of sound empirical research has the potential to make all citizens winners in their chosen sports.

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**Notes:**

1. The focus here is limited to leisure rather than competitive sport. Sports participation is understood here as doing exercise or playing sport at least sometimes as opposed to 'never'. This is admittedly a very crude measure and more detailed analysis should also take into account the frequency and intensity of sports activity.

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**Value Orientations in Society Department  
Institute of Sociology, AS CR**

**Division of Labour or Sharing the Burden?  
State Support for Competing Family Models  
in Central and Eastern Europe**

*Key words: family, social policy, parenting, work*

One of the key questions confronted by all families is who should go out into the world and earn money. Should household labour be "divided" where dad is the main bread winner ensuring that there is a "soccer mum" available to take care of the kids and manage the household? Perhaps it would be better for all concerned if household labour were "shared" where both mum and dad went out to work?

These are big and far reaching decisions confronted by all families. Sociologists often refer to these big life choices using the term "life-work balance." Much has been written about this topic in advanced economies in Western Europe and elsewhere. Less is known

about the situation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

Welfare states of the CEE region are often classified as falling into one "post-communist" group characterised by low-levels of benefits and supremacy of the social insurance system with high coverage (Aidukaite 2009).

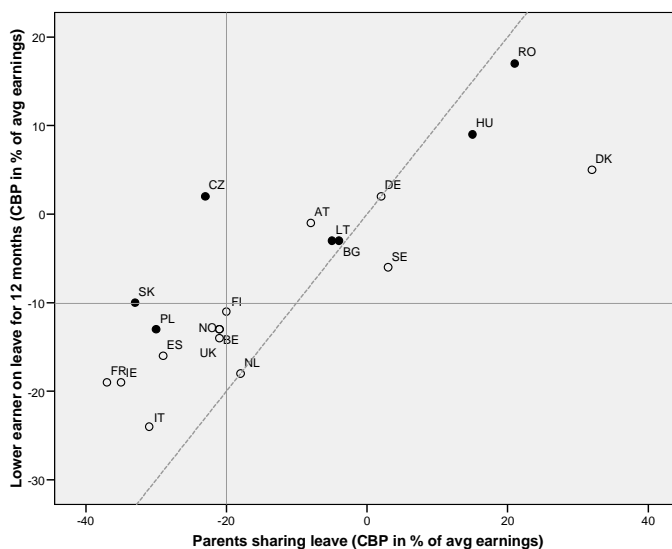
Theories suggesting that the former Eastern Block countries form a unique welfare state type despite differences in social policy that are clearly evident at the micro level is gaining acceptance among social welfare state experts (Aidukaite 2009).

In the domain of family policy, the CEE countries are typically described as belonging to the "re-familialised" type where the responsibility to support a family unit has been transferred from the state back to the families themselves (Hantrais 2004; Pascall and Manning 2000; Cerami 2005).

An issue that has not yet been thoroughly researched in the comparative literature is the gender division of care and the commodification of women; and the reflection of these patterns in national family policies. The labour market participation of women with children is promoted in both academic and political discourse as it helps to fight child poverty, promotes economic growth, lowers the costs connected with ageing populations and can assist in creating more jobs (Esping-Andersen 1999, 2002; Lewis 2006).

In response to this argument, European Union (EU) targets have been set to increase the female labour market supply and the importance of reconciling work with family is emphasized by both the OECD and the EU. Despite the positive tone of this discourse country specific family and labour market policies do not always encourage mothers to retain strong links to the labour market; and often indirectly promote the traditional male breadwinner model through various financial incentives.

**Figure 1, Cross national comparison of Child Benefit Packages for one or both parents taking paid leave from work, Couple with infant, Europe 2008**



Legend: Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Hungary (HU), Iceland (IS), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Latvia (LT), Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE) and United Kingdom (UK). Note the CEE states are indicated by solid black circles.



This is especially true for some post-communist countries that offer long but less than generous paid maternity and parental leave where easy access to nurseries is uncommon. As it is mostly women who take parental leave, such policies not only regulate women's relationship to the labour market but also discourage men's participation in child care.

At present, it is difficult to say with certainty what are the primary goals of CEE social policy systems. How do the welfare states of Central and Eastern Europe approach the work-family balance issues through the tax-benefit system? Do CEE countries promote mother's participation in the labour market, or do they lean toward the traditional male breadwinner model? Is there a financial incentive for the mother of a young child to take a job outside the home? More generally, how do CEE countries social policy regimes compare with those in other European states?

### Comparing social welfare systems

Quite obviously social welfare systems are very complicated with many rules and provisions that are constantly evolving and changing. Consequently, it is not a simple task to undertake a systematic comparison of social welfare state policies and objectives beyond the use of summary statistics such as the percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) spent on social policies.

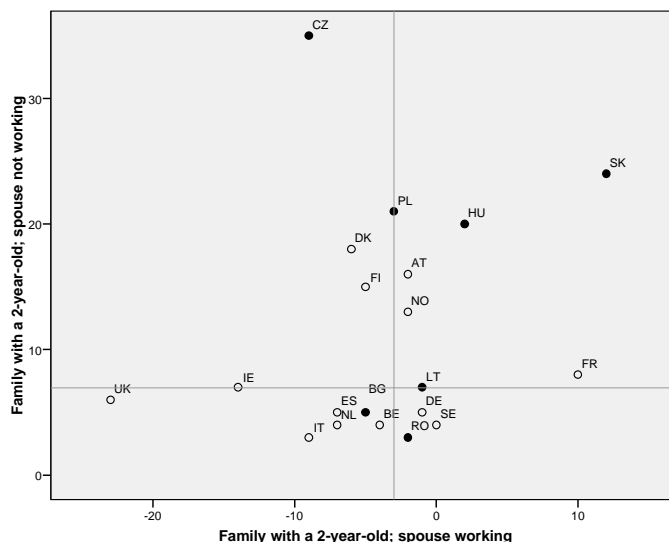
One stream of research employs the Model Family Method. This method is based on the logic of comparing "model" families that are defined in a standard manner according to income levels, number of children and the presence or absence of both parents. Its main advantage is to compare "like with like." Two indicators are used.

The first indicator is called the Child Benefit Package (CBP) which may be defined as the monetary value that equals the difference between absolute value of all child related benefits, when contrasted with the sum of benefits paid to families with no children. It essentially means a *difference in net disposable income of a household with children (a child) compared to a net disposable income of a childless couple on the same earnings after the main transfers and taxes have been taken in account.* This difference represents the contribution of public policies to households with respect to children. Using this approach, one can discover how child-rearing costs affect the family budget, and which model of family life is most promoted by governments. The second indicator is difference in the net disposable income of the traditional male-breadwinner model of the family and the dual-earner family model.

The set of the countries examined consists of seven states from Central and Eastern Europe, i.e. the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Latvia, Romania and Poland plus a number of Western democracies. The selection of countries has been made as wide as possible in order to

provide a comprehensive basis on which to compare the CEE countries. Key data come from projects such as "The Canadian Family Benefit Packages in International Context," and "A Comparison of Family Policies in Central and Eastern Europe".<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 2, Cross-national comparison of Child Benefit Packages for Single Breadwinner and Dual-earner Households, Couple with 2-year-old, Europe 2008**



Legend: Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Hungary (HU), Iceland (IS), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Latvia (LT), Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE) and United Kingdom (UK).

Note the CEE states are indicated by solid black circles. The estimates refer to income as a percentage of mean income in a country. The vertical and horizontal lines in the chart represent the median CBP value.

It is important to keep in mind that the analysis refers to one specific time point, namely December 2008. The values of all the transfers in tax-benefit system are valid for December 31, 2008; average wage is the national average for the year 2008. Net income for each family model was calculated by adding or subtracting the following transfers and taxes from earned (yearly) income:

- (a) Tax and tax credits
- (b) Social insurance contributions
- (c) Family cash benefits (both means-tested and non means-tested)
- (d) Maternity/paternity/parental leave benefits
- (e) Housing costs/benefits<sup>2</sup>
- (f) Local taxes
- (g) Social assistance
- (h) Guaranteed child support (alimony paid by the state on behalf of the absent parent)
- (i) Child care costs
- (j) Educational costs

The figures are calculated per annum and are expressed using the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) system. Using incomes based on PPP

ensures that the buying power in all countries examined is the same; as it is well known that some national economies are more expensive than others. In order to compare cross-national differences in wealth inequality family incomes are expressed as a percentage of the average national wage. In order to illustrate the logic of this type of family income accounting we will use as examples the financial situation of couples with (a) an infant aged 3-15 months and (b) a toddler aged 2-3 years.

Although the focus here is on the CEE countries, the data shown in the following Figures include fourteen other European countries i.e. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom. By adopting such a broad comparative perspective it is possible to see the "bigger picture" and ascertain the relative positioning of the CEE countries in contrast to their Western European counterparts.

### Families with infants

Let us start with families where one parent is on leave from work and takes care of a child aged between 3 and 15 months. It was noted earlier that one of the common characteristics of communist countries was the granting of relatively lengthy leaves to parents with infants and small children.

Although this is still generally the case, the level of parental benefits and the level of wage replacement paid to parents on maternity or paternity leave varies considerably among the post-communist states (Soukupová 2007). Moreover, different rules apply as to which parent can take what part of parental leave. Consequently, the net income of families with infants depends if parents take turns in using parental leave.

In most Western democracies and some CEE countries the choice of arrangement does not matter, especially if both parents have equal earnings. In Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands shared leave is encouraged through financial incentives. In the Czech Republic (and to lesser extent in Slovakia and Poland), it is more beneficial to take a single year long leave of absence. This is because only the main income earner in the family is eligible for a spousal tax credit.

As it is still very unusual for fathers to take a long leave of absence from work, the system indirectly discourages father's strong involvement in the early months of their child's life. Tendencies to promote the traditional male-breadwinner model for families with infants are even more apparent when one of the parents has a low wage. The evidence in Figure 1 shows the *Child Benefits Package* (CBP) value for

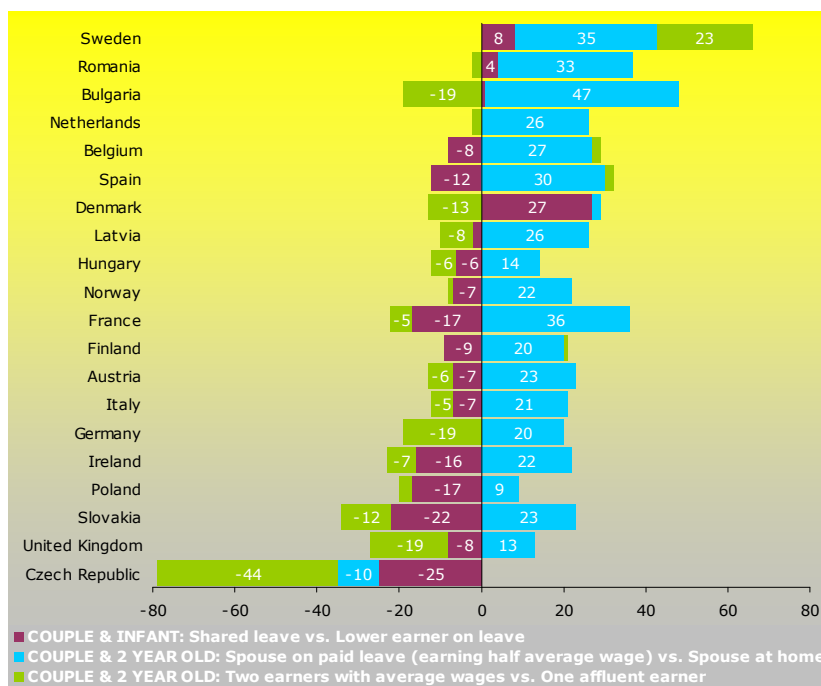
families where one parent (usually the mother) earns half average wage and the other average wage.

Essentially it shows what happens to household finances depending on whether the couple decides to share child care duties. In all CEE countries, with the exception of Hungary and Romania, the best financial solution is to have the lower earner stay at home for the whole year.

The CBP estimates for Romania and Hungary, who offer a high replacement rate for parents on parental leave and allow either parent to take the leave from as soon as the child is born, is favourable toward higher earners deciding to stay at home to mind a small child. Only in these two countries is the CBP for families with infants linearly correlated with parents' earnings.

The impact of higher earnings in all the other CEE states must contend with benefit ceilings and/or means testing.

**Figure 3, Difference in net disposable income of male breadwinner and dual earner families, Europe 2008**



Note all estimates that are 3% or less are not reported.

This leads to lower CBP scores as shown in Figure 1, where higher income earners decide to remain in the workforce because it makes financial sense to do so.

### Families with a 2 year old child

When a child reaches 2 years old, parents are usually no longer eligible for any parental leave benefits. Only the Czech Republic and Slovakia are exceptions in this respect. While countries like Romania, Bulgaria and Latvia provide a better package for families with infants (less than two years old), the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland give relative advantage to families with young children.

In most Western Europe, both parents are usually back to work by the time the child is 2 years old. In some CEE countries mothers tend to stay at home for longer periods. How much the tax-benefit system supports or inhibits such behaviour is shown in Figure 2.

Here there is a comparison between the financial support available to single breadwinner families with a 2-year-old child that is being minded by one parent and two earner families the same 2-year-old in childcare. It is no surprise that the value of CBP is always greater for single breadwinner families who (a) have lower per capita earnings and (b) do not have any childcare fees to pay. Only France is an exception to this general pattern as it offers a wide range of affordable childcare facilities where parents have the right to high child tax credits, and child benefit is not taken away when a child is placed in childcare.

What is more interesting is the relative positioning of countries. Most of the twenty-two countries examined cluster around the median CBP values. This evidence may be taken to mean that the social welfare provisions show no clear preference for either single or two income family arrangements. The evidence shown in Figure 2 reveals that Hungary, Poland and especially the Czech Republic tend to promote the single (male) breadwinner model.

One of the most striking features of Figure 2 is the difference between the Czech Republic and Slovakia.<sup>3</sup> As noted earlier, both countries provide exceptionally long paid parental leave. However, the Slovak family support system does not discriminate against parents taking advantage of childcare services rather than one parent remaining at home.<sup>4</sup>

### **Trade-offs of staying home, or going back to work**

One might argue that the difference in disposable income between childless couples and families with children is not an appropriate comparison to make. A moment's thought makes this clearer. If you were deciding about staying home and minding junior or letting mummy and daddy earn money to put "bread on the table" and nappies on the kid; it is likely you would compare different scenarios reflecting your *own* domestic situation rather than making comparison with other households.

To reflect this household oriented logic, Figure 3 presents data representing the percentage difference in net disposable income of families before and after their move toward the dual care and dual earner model. Positive figures mean higher income for the dual earner / carer model while negative values imply a financial benefit for the traditional male breadwinner (female carer) model.

The twenty countries represented in Figure 3 are ordered by level of overall support for a gender equal model of childminding. The purple bars represent differences in income where both parents (one earning a average national income and the other earning half of this mean wage)

take 6 months of leave from paid work to care personally for an infant aged 3-15 months, and a family where the lower earner (which usually is the female) stays at home for the whole 12 month period.

Most of the countries examined favour in financial terms the latter model. The Czech and Slovak Republics are prime examples favouring the single breadwinner model where there is over a 20% drop in net income if parents share leave. These countries are closely followed by Poland, France, and Ireland.

Denmark, on the other hand, stands at the other end of continuum. No other country actively encourages fathers to take as much leave as Danish dads. This is because only the parents' wages are fully compensated by the employer for the first 6 months of leave. Also families in Sweden, Hungary and Romania end up with slightly higher net income if parents share care of an infant. In Germany and the Netherlands there is no differentiation between the single or dual breadwinner models.

The blue coloured bar shows the difference in net income if a couple with a 2-year-old child moves from a single breadwinner to a dual earner model where both parents work (one earns an average wage while the other earns half the mean salary). A vast majority of countries support this move and essentially encourage a mother's return to the labour market. The only exception to this pattern is the Czech Republic.

Here the state provides parental leave for a relatively long period but stops this benefit if a child is placed into a state-funded kindergarten. The dual-earner model in France and Sweden is facilitated through a network of financially affordable and plentiful kindergartens while in Bulgaria and Romania it is more down to the relatively low net income should the family live of one income from paid work only.

Lastly, the green bars show the change that would occur if our hypothetical families shifted from having a total household income that is twice the mean where there is a single breadwinner to a situation where each household earns two separate mean salaries because both parents work. In short, what is being examined here is if the sources of income rather the actual size of the income matters. The simple answer is yes.

In all of the CEE countries the social welfare systems gives preference to families with a single 'big' breadwinner than households with two average incomes. This bias is especially true in the Czech Republic because the main breadwinner loses entitlement to spousal tax credit once their partner's earnings reach a certain level.

A substantial loss in net income is also apparent in Bulgaria, Germany and the United Kingdom. In the UK and Germany, the loss of income to a couple that decide to work results from the high cost of childcare in these countries. In contrast, for Bulgaria two income households the loss

mainly occurs because local taxes take into account the employment status of all household members.

### **Different, but not for the same reasons**

It appears that in some situations the CEE countries are the “odd ones out.” However, this difference between Eastern and Western Europe is not sufficiently consistent to suggest that post-communist states form their own, single, distinctive type of gender-equal approach to family policy.

Romania and Bulgaria find themselves close to Sweden not because they would be generous to two earner families (like Sweden) but because the level of benefits drops substantially once the child reaches twelve months of age, where mothers are given financial incentives to return to workforce. In other words, the total income for households with single breadwinners is too low and so a two-income family is simply a necessity.

The benefit package in the Czech Republic, on the other hand, is more generous to the traditional male-breadwinner model than to dual earner families. In cross-national terms, Slovakia belongs toward the same end of continuum but still encourages labour market participation by both parents once the child reaches two years old. However, Slovakia differs from the Czech Republic in that it does not take away parental benefits should the child be placed in a state-run kindergarten.

Such evidence does not imply that there are no common patterns in Central and Eastern Europe. The Child Benefit Package for families with an infant in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland are all well below average. Poland’s pattern of financial support is in general terms very similar to that of Slovakia. However, when it comes to provisions for dual earner families Slovakia is reasonably generous while Poland is among the least charitable.

All three countries, while having a relatively long maternity leave, do not offer the same high wage replacement rates as is the case in other countries. Although low, the maternity leave benefits are however high enough to prevent eligibility for other benefits, therefore the family income over the course of a year is much lower than that of a childless couple.

### **Variation in Visègrad and beyond ...**

To sum up, the Czech Republic comes last in all the categories analysed and clearly promotes in a financial sense the traditional male-breadwinner model. Poland shows similar characteristics, although its support for this model is not as extreme. Slovakia does not favour higher earners sharing the care for an infant, but does reasonably well at encouraging mothers to return to the labour market when the child gets older. Latvia oscillates somewhere between these two extremes pushing mothers of toddlers to take up a paid job (rather through low benefit provision than financial encouragement) and not differentiating between

who takes the leave from paid work when children are very young.

Hungary is similar, but it does give financial incentives to encourage higher income earners to take parental leave, although not to the same extent as is the case in Romania and Bulgaria where very high replacement rates on maternity/paternity benefits are offered. Tax-benefit systems in Romania and Bulgaria just like their counterparts in France and Sweden promote the dual earner model once child reaches the age of two. Unlike France and Sweden, though, this is done through one-earner model discouragement (low benefit levels for families with toddlers) rather than through active facilitation of the mothers return to labour market through childcare and benefit provisions.

### **Mapping differences and explaining variation**

Comparison of how tax-benefit systems across Europe treat different types of families provides important information on how citizens and their governments prioritise social spending. The post-communist states represent a key opportunity for research as they demonstrate how a shared social model from the past may give way to competing models today. The fact that some CEE states are closer to specific West European models provides a unique insight into the diffusion of family policy models cross-nationally.

Use of the CBP approach to studying the family policy aspect of social welfare states provides an invaluable means of comparing “like-with-like” but leaves open the question of motivation. Why is the Czech system so different from all others? Is the source of this difference to be found in the policy platforms of the governments that have held office since 1993, or does it reflect the policy preferences of Czech voters?

It is only by extending the CBP analysis to include the ‘supply side’ aspects of the family policy process will it be possible to understand the ‘demand side’ which reflects which family types attract public money. Mapping out international differences and then explaining this variation with a small number of institutional and attitudinal or cultural factors represents key goals in the research on social welfare systems and comparative family policy analysis.

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### **Notes:**

1. The author would like to thank Dr. Paul Kershaw, University of British Columbia, Canada



and Professor Jonathan Bradshaw, University of York, UK for providing the access to the data used in this article.

2. Housing costs were computed as 20% of average national income in all countries. While this figure is not entirely representative of the actual housing costs in some countries it resolves the issue of cross-national comparability.

3. For a more detailed analysis of the Czech and Slovak Republics, please see Mitchell (2009).

4. The rules did, however, change in Slovakia in 2009. Once a child is placed in childcare, his parents are no longer eligible for the parental leave benefit. Instead the actual cost of childcare is fully covered by a special subsidy.

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## Czech Sociological Data Archive (SDA) Institute of Sociology, AS CR

### Good for One and All! Does the Czech Economy Make Efficient Use of Non-EU Labour Migrants?<sup>1</sup>

*Key words: migration, labour market, social capital, mobility*

For a number of years the Czech Republic has witnessed one of the largest growths in immigrant populations in Europe. Despite the fact that the current economic recession has changed migration flows significantly, non-EU labour immigrants remain an essential part of the labour force in the Czech Republic.

According to official statistics about four hundred and thirty thousand foreign citizens resided in the Czech Republic by the end of March 2010.<sup>2</sup> Most of these foreigners are economically active where 60% of all migrants to the Czech Republics' are men, 39% hold permanent residence permits, and two-thirds (67%) of these people come from outside the EU.

This large group of non-EU migrants come from a wide range of countries: Ukraine (130,000 approximately), Vietnam (61,000), Russia (31,000), Moldova (10,000), the United States (6,000), Mongolia (6,000), China (5,000) and Belarus (4,000). Although the survey data reported below dates from late 2006 it is reasonable to assume that this information provides an accurate profile of current labour migration.

An important question regarding the presence of a large resident migrant labour population is their contribution to the national economy. More specifically, it is important to evaluate if the Czech economy is making efficient use of the human capital coming from non-EU states.

To figure out what is going on in an economy, it is important to have accurate indicators of structure and change in the labour market. Equally important, it is crucial to listen to the often silent voices of workers; as they provide vital information on how the labour market really works. Here personal anonymous interviews offer unique insights that remain hidden in objective economic indicators. The information derived from talking to migrants often yields some eye-opening comments on Czech society. The sense of frustration in the treatment of the largest migrant group is clearly palpable in the following heartfelt comment.

**You know, sometimes, I don't like the attitudes of Czechs towards Ukrainians. They see us only as a labour force. They treat us like the lowest, the poorest people ever. It is as if we came here because we could not survive without them.**

**- A sales woman (30) from Ukraine**

Quite obviously, from this young woman's experience there is some doubt that Czech

society is really open to harnessing the human capital of an internationally mobile workforce. The failure of hard-working tax paying migrants, such as this Ukrainian sales woman, to feel they are treated with fairness and dignity will undoubtedly lead to undesirable outcomes for both migrants and host economies.

As skilled workers with valuable experience conclude that life is likely to be better elsewhere and leave; and in the process the Czech economy effectively throws away scarce resources for no good reason. The question of making efficient use of the human capital is an important question for two reasons.

First, for an open labour market to function efficiently the skills of migrant workers must be set to work in positions that maximise their wealth generating capacity. It makes no sense for a national economy to have neuroscientists working as unskilled construction workers regardless of their national origin.

Second, migrants must see that participation in a foreign labour market provides both them and their families with tangible economic rewards. Otherwise, it may make more sense for a migrant worker to remain at home and avoid the personal costs of leaving family and friends; and the possibility of suffering formal or informal sources of discrimination.

The bottom line is that labour migration only "works" if both migrants and the host economy maximise the economic potential of a transnational labour force.

### **Counting heads and hands**

Evaluating if migrant workers are being employed in jobs that generate most wealth for all concerned is not a straightforward task. This is because information comparing migrant workers skills and their current occupations is not gathered on a frequent and comprehensive basis by national statistical offices. In the absence of official data, a national sample of migrant workers is an effective means of building a profile of how well migrant workers human capital are being utilised by a labour market.

A national survey of migrant worker was conducted under the auspices of an applied research project funded by the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and implemented by the Czech Academy of Science's Institute of Sociology (SOÚ). The survey fieldwork was undertaken by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CVVM, a specialist survey research group within SOÚ) during October and November 2006. The survey research focused on a number of key factors: the demographic characteristics of immigrants, their level of education, qualifications and skills, current profession in the Czech Republic and previous work experience, as well as their intentions concerning prolonged residence in the Czech Republic.

The data were gathered in a sample survey using quota sampling (region, nationality, sex

and age). An official database of registered immigrants served as a sampling frame and employers were used partly as "gate keepers" where selected companies were contacted with an official letter. Thereafter, interviewers received contact information for selected companies, which employ migrant workers who were then contacted requesting an interview.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the Czech language with more than one thousand (N=1,011) non-EU immigrants who hold a valid work permit. Given the Prague regions dominance in the Czech economy a plurality of respondents (44%) were based in the capital city. The average length of an interview was a little more than half an hour (36 minutes).

According to the funding agency's (the Czech labour ministry) specification the representative sample survey had a target population with three key characteristics: (1) employed foreigners from non-EU countries, (2) who had resided in the Czech Republic for at least 1 year, and (3) held a valid work permit.<sup>3</sup> With respect to the target population's distribution the main nationality groups included in the survey were Ukrainians (70%), Russians (8%), Bulgarians (5%) and Belarusians (3%) and other less numerous nationalities such as Moldavians, Vietnamese,<sup>4</sup> Chinese, Americans and Mongolians.

Most of the respondents (66%) were men<sup>5</sup> and 44% of them were married. Approximately one third of the respondents (34%) were less than thirty years old at the time of interview; another other third (31%) were aged 30 to 39 years old, and the remainder (35%) were 40 years old or older.

### **Results: who does what?**

The survey of labour migrants confirms the conventional wisdom that labour migrants from non-EU countries tend to cluster in the "lower" labour market segments often taking marginal low-skilled, low-paid, and low-prestige jobs.<sup>6</sup> The survey evidence suggests that this group of migrant workers enter the bottom end of the labour market.

More than half of the respondents (56%) worked as non-qualified elementary workers; 18% of them were skilled workers, 14% worked in sales and services. Only a small portion of the respondents interviewed occupied higher positions like clerks and lower administrative officials (3%), technicians and associate professionals (6%) or managerial, scientific and other higher professional occupations (4%).

It seems reasonable to consider if there are national differences in occupational status. While Ukrainian citizens constituted 70% of the total sample interviewed they constituted almost four-in-five (80%) of those recorded as having elementary and unqualified occupations. The implication here is that this national group of migrant workers is over-represented in the lower status occupations. With regard to gender men are occupied mainly in construction and women dominate in sales and services.

In order to estimate the extent to which non-EU workers are being “deskilled” while working in the Czech Republic it makes sense to compare current occupation with the last job taken in the country of origin and the highest level of educational achieved. This data provides direct evidence of the extent to which the Czech economy is making the best possible use of foreign skills and also provides information on the economic motivations informing migrant workers decision to move from one national labour market to another.

Notwithstanding the high unemployment rates in migrant workers countries of origin, the young age of respondents could be one explanation as to why about one-in-eight (13%) interviewees had never ever worked in their home country. About one-in-ten (9%) of those interviewed had experience in managerial, scientific or other higher professional occupations; 11% worked as technicians and associate professionals, and 6% were clerks and lower administrative workers back home. The remaining labour migrants were occupied mostly as unqualified and elementary workers (26%), skilled workers (24%) or workers in sales and services (13%).

In sum, the survey evidence suggests that there is a discrepancy between the occupations of migrants in the Czech Republic and their home country. Less than half (44%) of those who were economically active back home worked in similar positions in the Czech Republic. The success of

non-EU migrants within the Czech labour market depends on migrants own work history and the ability of the Czech economy to offer qualified and experienced foreign workers appropriate employment opportunities. *At present close to six-in-ten (56%) migrants are over-qualified for the work they do.*

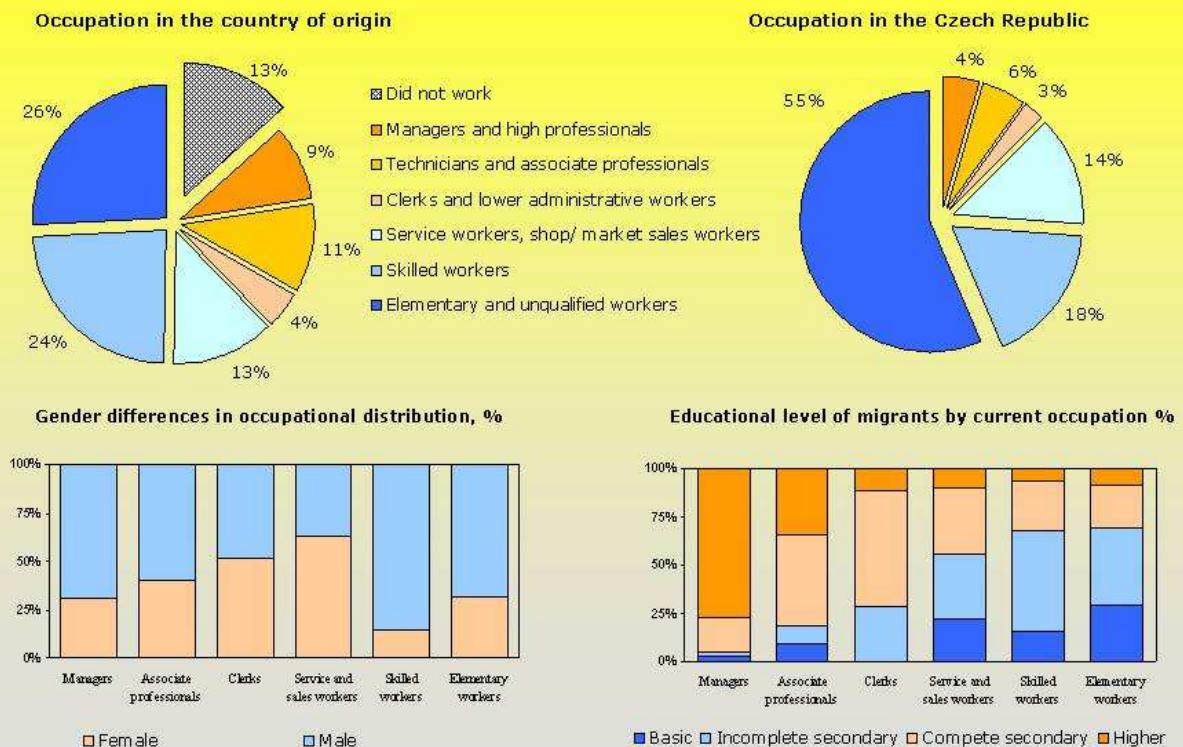
It is here that the main weakness in the Czech economy to harness the potential of human capital of migrant workers is most evident. Why are there so many migrant workers ‘under-employed’ in the Czech Republic; is this situation due to the workers themselves or labour regulations?

### Schooling, skills and status

An analysis of the educational structure of respondents showed that the largest part of this specific labour migrant population had completed secondary schooling (26%), incomplete secondary (38%) or basic (23%) education. The results of the survey of labour migrants do not seem to support common stereotypes concerning the large number of university graduated migrants occupied in unskilled jobs.

It seems that Czech building sites are not awash with foreign professionals, scientists and intellectuals who are unable to secure more high status occupational positions following the decision to immigrate. In fact, about one-in-eight (13%) of those interviewed in the survey

**Figure 1, Qualification and Educational Background of non-EU Workers and their Position on the Czech Labour Market**



Source: Employed Foreigners Survey (2006); N=1,011

had a university level of education suggesting that only a minority of immigrants to the Czech Republic are highly skilled.

Closer examination reveals that the educational level of migrant workers exhibit important generational differences. Significantly, there are no gender based educational differences among the trans-national workers interviewed. Migrants who are less than thirty years old have the lowest share of university graduates (9%), while the oldest generation of migrants (i.e. 40 years or more) have both the highest number of university graduates (16%) and people with an elementary level of education (26% compared to 25% in the youngest cohort). The middle cohort, aged 30 to 39 years tend to have a middling level of schooling with most having a (complete or incomplete) secondary education.

If an examination is made of the relationship between level of education and occupational status the survey data indicate a positive association, where those with lots of schooling tend to have good jobs. In the real world, this means that university graduates from non-EU states are rather unlikely to be found working on building sites, factory floors or fast-food outlets.

Consequently, the widely held belief among Czechs that an army of intellectuals from non-EU states are busy fixing potholes and laying sewerage pipes along the roads that traverse Bohemia is apocryphal. This is not to suggest that the Czech Republic's construction sector does not have relatively large numbers of migrant workers. It is true that many Czech construction workers are foreigners. Two points are worth emphasising here.

First, it makes sense that young non-EU migrants who often arrive in the Czech Republic without any formal qualifications having left high school before graduation and hence little human capital occupy rather low positions of the Czech labour market. Second, about one-in-ten unskilled workers possess a university degree. The survey data reveal that older men with families and children back home constitute the most deskilled group. Significantly, one third of these highly educated migrants received degrees in education, i.e. they have a professional teaching qualification.

There is a certain irony in the fact that some of the greatest waste in human capital in the Czech Republic regarding migrant workers is concentrated among former members of the teaching profession of non-EU states. This evidence suggests that failures in the home country educational systems are resulting in migrants that are either under qualified to take advantage of the occupational opportunities in the Czech economy, or incorrectly qualified to be effective in the Czech labour market. Czech schools it seems are not especially easy places for qualified Ukrainian or Russian teachers to get a job. Undoubtedly this is related to restrictions on primary and secondary education employment evident in many European states. Here the importance of migrant labour regulations comes to the fore.

In this respect, the survey research reveals that almost two-in-three respondents (64%) have never changed their job in the Czech Republic. Such low labour mobility is a product of Czech migrant labour regulations which make it practically impossible for a foreign (non-EU) worker to change jobs whilst holding a valid work permit. For this and other reasons, only one third of employed non-EU foreigners believe they have a chance for career development. Regardless of prior labour mobility, the survey evidence shows that for many migrant workers current occupation determines their career aspirations. And this is especially true for female migrant workers.

### **Deciding whether to stay or to go ...**

Given the restrictions on many migrants' career aspirations evident in the Czech labour market the issue of permanent settlement in the Czech Republic is an important consideration. One of the aims of the survey was to explore the future plans of labour migrants in the Czech Republic. More particularly the research wished to see if younger migrants holding low-skilled and low-paid jobs are likely to remain a temporary workforce or does it aspire to become the basis for a new generation of settlers?

The survey results reveal that more than a third of respondents (35%) are undecided about their future and almost half (48%) wish to stay in the country for at least five more years. About one third of respondents (31%) did not express any specific plans about changing their residence status; but 44% did express a wish to apply for permanent residency, a status which in many respects gives migrants the same rights as Czech citizens.

Respondents holding higher status positions and more qualified jobs were generally more decided about their future. Holding a "good" job in the Czech Republic appears to be one of the most important reasons for settling permanently in the country. However, highly skilled migrants are often more mobile and with higher ambitions about getting better job elsewhere. One in five highly skilled non-EU respondents indicate that they are willing to leave the Czech Republic within next five years, probably to pursue their ambitions elsewhere.

It should be noted that the strongest predictor of whether a person decides to migrate is family situation. Migrants often do not make the decision on whether to stay in the host country or to return back home solely on the basis of individual preferences. The survey results support an explanation called the "household migration decision theory" as the share of those who prefer to stay in the Czech Republic within following five years among migrants with all family members (including partner) back home was only half as likely vis-à-vis those who have a partner or at least one of the family member living in the Czech Republic (30% in contrast to 60%).



## Putting it all together ...

It seems that consistency of migration and integration policies is still a thorny issue for the Czech Republic. On one hand, the government wants to attract "more brains" from non-EU states by supporting an active policy of encouraging skilled immigrants. Selected categories of highly qualified workers are allowed to apply for a permanent residence permit, and all the advantages this brings, after a shorter waiting period. On the other hand, immigrants with "brawn", i.e. low-skilled and unskilled workers are also considered desirable because this source of low-cost flexible labour is seen to be a key component of economic prosperity and mitigating the worse effects of the current international recession.

Low or unskilled migrant labour are generally seen to be "guest" workers who ideally would be issued with "green cards" on the understanding that they return home once their labour is no longer needed. Such policies and populist political rhetoric that asserts that local jobs should be protected ignores the collective benefits of having free movement of labour. It would seem that the economic sense of giving migrant workers equal opportunities and wealth migrants labour generates for the national economy can be superseded by worries about loss of secure employment and income.

Recent developments such as the economic boom and subsequent recession provide a salutary lesson concerning the potential dehumanization and commoditisation of immigrants by public policy makers. This is evident in an instrumentalism that espouses "once we need them – we bring them, once we don't – we send them back home."

The state itself creates through rigid migrant labour regulations a number of barriers to the successful integration of non-EU immigrants (both qualified and unqualified) into the Czech labour market and society. Such a short sighted policies fail to heed the wisdom of a well known aphorism that states "nothing is more permanent than temporary immigrants." Migrant labour represents an opportunity not an obstacle to future Czech economic prosperity.

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### Notes:

1. Results from this research project were presented at the poster session of an international conference examining "Migrations –

Knowledge production/Policy-making", June 24-26, 2010, Telč, Czech Republic. See: <http://ivris.fss.muni.cz/migrations/konf2010/>

2. According to different estimations there are up to half a million foreigners not accounted for in official statistics because these migrants decide to remain unregistered.

3. Therefore, this survey excluded those who do not have a work permit, i.e. illegal migrant workers, self-employed entrepreneurs, unemployed migrants, permanent residence permit holders, employed family members of Czech citizens, etc.

4. In order to clarify why the second largest non-EU immigrant group is poorly represented in the survey it should be noted that in late 2006 less than a thousand work permits were assigned to Vietnamese citizenship. At this point, almost all Vietnamese nationals in the Czech Republic held an entrepreneur's licence or a permanent residence permit. Two years later in 2008, the situation had changed where the share of directly employed Vietnamese workers had increased dramatically to almost 30%.

5. The share of women among different nationalities varies. According to official statistics there is a predominance of female respondents from specific countries such as Mongolia and China.

6. Czech labour offices collect data about occupation of registered non-EU immigrants who apply for a work permit. Statistics show that a majority of these foreign workers occupy positions that do not require any formal qualification.

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## Value Orientations in Society Department Institute of Sociology, AS CR

### How does Society Change? Exploring Social Change through the Tracing of Life Course Trajectories

*Key words: family, parenthood*

How and why do societies change? This is one of the "big" questions of the social sciences. Given the complexity of social systems it is impossible to test a "grand theory" of social change, even if such a thing existed, because the sources and causes of societal change are unimaginably complex. Does this imply sociologists should content themselves in trying to answer smaller less important questions because such less ambitious research is "do-able"? There is a smart answer to this hard question. And the answer is: measure social change through its effects on individual decision-making by looking at a small number of key processes.

For most people the decisions surrounding starting a family represent some of the most important choices a person ever takes. Consequently, it makes practical sense to think that key features of social change will be evident in how and when people decide to settle down and start a family. Using information about when a person decided to live with a partner or get married, and when the first and subsequent children were born has the potential to provide invaluable insights into the larger social forces changing society.

### **Opting for the destandardized life**

Many social theorists argue that individual life courses are becoming more diverse, more flexible, and more unpredictable because the social norms that organise the life course are weakening. Others argue that the growing diversity is linked to greater instability in the labour market and globalisation. The term 'de-standardisation' is used to denote the fact that certain life events are experienced by declining shares of the population, occurring at more diverse ages and for durations that vary more widely (Brückner and Mayer 2005). However, the study of de-standardisation processes has revealed that, rather than being a general and uniform trend, it proceeds at a distinct pace in several respects.

First, the pace of de-standardisation of the life course differs across life domains. Although there is evidence for a growing variety of family trajectories in Western European countries over recent decades, the findings for work trajectories are less clear (Brückner and Mayer 2005). Second, it varies in important ways at the country level (Elzinga and Liefbroer 2007). Finally, there is also evidence that the extent of de-standardisation varies across social groups and impacts on men and women to different degrees (Widmer and Ritschard 2009). To date, most studies on changes in life-course patterns have focused on Western countries, while studies of post-communist countries have been scarce (Baranowska 2008).

However, studying the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe that experienced a transformation in institutional and economic conditions in the 1990s and saw family behaviour change rapidly might provide new insight into the de-standardisation process. In this article, early family trajectories observed during the socialist period will be compared with those observed after the transition to a market economy in the Czech Republic. We will focus on the question whether the early family trajectories have become more diverse over time.<sup>1</sup>

### **Changing Czechs**

During the 1990s the Czech Republic experienced significant changes in demographic behaviour: decline in period fertility and nuptiality (marriage) rates, postponement of childbearing, an increase of childbearing outside marriage, and the growing popularity of unmarried cohabitation. More specifically, we are

interested in changes affecting the heterogeneity of family situations among persons of the same age across birth cohorts. The degree of heterogeneity of status combinations is expected to be smaller under the communist regime when social institutions and social norms strongly influenced the timing of family events.

On the other hand, one would expect greater heterogeneity after 1989 as the norms guiding the life course became more relaxed and a range of new opportunities emerged. Conversely, the postponement of family formation and longer periods spent studying, which might delay a couples' decision to 'live together' (i.e. cohabit), mean that we may be paradoxically witnessing a 'simplification' of family situations among the youngest cohorts in their early twenties. This is because an increasing proportion of individuals in this age cohort decide not to have children, cohabit or get married.

### **Mapping out trajectories of change**

The analysis shown in Figure 1 uses data from the International Social Survey Project (ISSP) 2002 on 'Family and Changing Gender Roles.' This survey interviewed 1,289 respondents aged 18 years or older and contained an extra number or oversample of younger people, i.e. 18 to 35 years (n=373). In the Czech Republic, this ISSP family survey contained a special supplement dealing with union formation and information about the number and timing of children born to the respondent.

Using this information it is possible to reconstruct individual family trajectories between the ages of 18 and 35. The family trajectory reports six possible situations: if the respondent lived with a partner in unmarried cohabitation (U), was married (M), or did not live with a partner (S) and if they had a child (1) or not (0) at the beginning of each six-month interval (e.g. at the ages of 18, 18.5 ... to 35 years).<sup>2</sup>

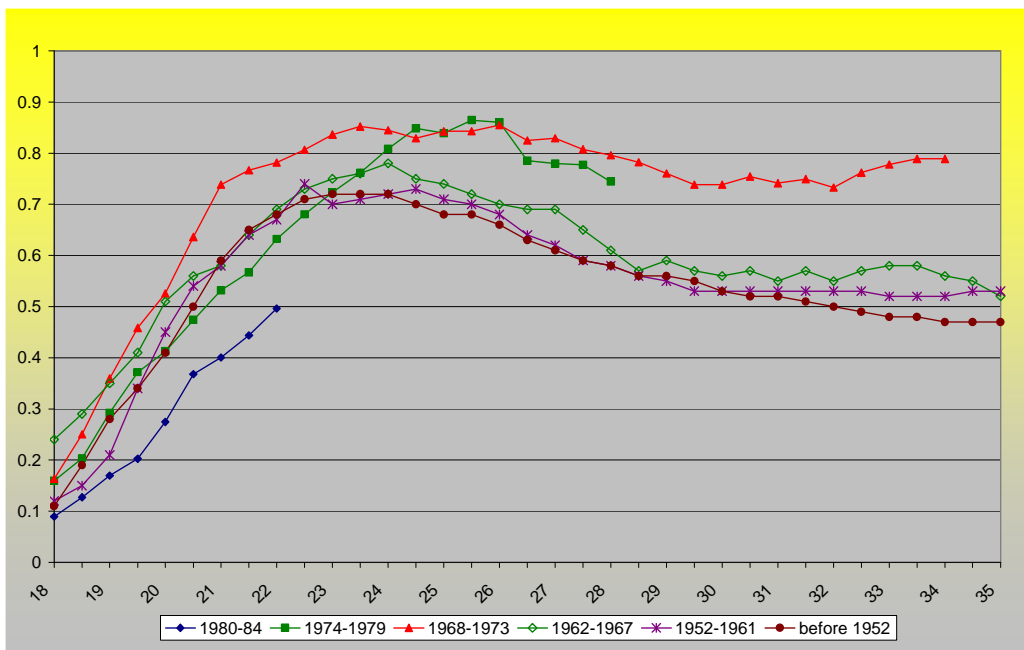
To test whether the heterogeneity of age-specific status combinations increases over time, a specific measure called 'entropy' is computed for each cohort (Fussell 2005; Widmer and Ritschard 2009). Entropy is simply a term denoting randomness or disorder. In this article, the entropy index shows to what extent the family situations of people of the same age are similar or diverse. In order to make entropy values easier to interpret they are reported as numbers that range between zero and one. Low entropy values indicate 'order' and high values indicate no predictable pattern. In practice, this means that low entropy values close to zero indicate that all (or almost all) individuals of a given age are in the same state and following a similar or standard life course. Conversely, high entropy values close to one reveal that there is no dominant pattern present; where people are all doing their "own thing" or more formally providing evidence for the presence of destandardized life courses.<sup>3</sup>

## Descent into domesticity

The results of an entropy analysis are shown in Figure 1. The patterns evident in this figure tell an important story. The sharp increase of diversity of family statuses in all cohorts in the left part of Figure 1 demonstrates that almost all people at the age of 18 years have a similar profile: they are single, do not live with a partner, and have no children. This makes sense and fits with everyday experience. Unsurprisingly, this pattern is not dependent on when a person was born and is the same for those born under communism and after the Velvet Revolution of 1989.

Later when young adults move into their twenties differences in family status increase dramatically and this is portrayed in the steep slope of family status diversity. More technically, the heterogeneity of the state distribution is said to increase and reaches a maximum at 25 years of age. Again this makes sense, as this is the period when many people start to form long term relationships, start their careers and begin having children.

**Figure 1 Differences in family status profile across different cohorts between the ages of 18 and 35 years**



Source: ISSP Family module, Czech Republic 2002 (with oversample).

Note the lines indicate the (Normalised index of transversal) entropy estimates at six monthly intervals from 18 to 35 years for each of the six cohorts examined. This figure should be interpreted as follows. The initial low entropy values (.09 to .23) on the bottom left indicate that almost all members of a cohort have the same family status, while the high values on the top right reveal that by 35 years there are considerable differences within each cohort and also between some cohorts. For example, members of the cohort born between 1968 and 1973 start off similar to all other cohorts but by the time this group has reached the late twenties and early thirties this cohort has a uniquely destandardized family status profile.

Of course not all individual are 'pre-programmed' and make the same decisions to settle down at exactly the same time point. There are considerable differences across individuals. Some people are early starters and others are late developers. Once again this fits with everyday experience. By the time people reach their thirties differences in family status decline as most have made the same decision and decided to "settled down" and have children.

## The generation game

A central feature of Figure 1 is the difference between cohorts. These differences demonstrate that a person who became an adult during the communist period experienced different family starts to a person who become an adult in the aftermath of 1989. This is evident in the distinct family status diversity in Figure 1. More generally, a comparison across all six cohorts reveals three important trends.

First, the peak age of family status diversity for the oldest two cohorts occurred between the ages of 22 and 24 years before 1979. In contrast, those born during the late sixties and seventies (1968–1979) and who became adults after the fall of communism in the 1990s, the peak of age for change in family status increased to 26 years. This implies that there

was a general shift in starting families by about two to four years suggesting a dramatic change in both the prevailing social norms and values and social and economic conditions.

Secondly, compared to older cohorts a significant increase of heterogeneity is observed in the cohorts born between 1968 and 1979. However, the demographic

behaviour of the cohort born between 1962 and 1967 and who entered adulthood around 1989 (or several years before) is more similar to that of older cohorts who lived under the communist regime. This conforms to findings in other research which show that the demographic changes noted affected those born during the 1970s and thereafter.

Finally, the cohort that was born during the 1980s exhibits in contrast the opposite trend: a decline of diversity of family statuses at a younger age. These changes can be explained by alterations in the timing of family formation across cohorts. Here family formation was delayed. This decision maybe interpreted in line

with a hypothesis which argues that there was an early family life-course (partial) standardisation within the youngest cohort whose members were in their twenties when interviewed. It is important to note these changes reflect only the beginning of their family trajectories – the period between the ages of 18 and 22. Heterogeneity in life course is likely to increase for a number of years thereafter.

A more detailed analysis shows that the variability of family status distribution differs according to gender. Women's early family trajectories are more diverse than men's. The gender gap is largest when young people are in their early twenties, which reflects the fact that men experience family-related transitions at a higher age than women. Moreover, gender differences are stronger in cohorts born after the 1970s. A more detailed analysis of family status combination reveals that it is mainly partnership status that contributes to the heterogeneity of the family situations of the cohorts entering adulthood in the 1990s, while both parenthood and marriage are less important.

### **What's going on ...**

Analysis of differences in life course across the generations in the Czech Republic demonstrates that the emergence of behaviour associated with starting a family are quite complex; and do not match with any simple model of social change. Czechs born in the 1970s and later, and who started to have families under the new social conditions following the fall of communism in 1989, are different to cohorts who became adults at earlier and later dates. This is because this specific cohort experienced more diverse and de-standardized early family trajectories which included an increase in unmarried cohabitation and living with a partner.

Significantly, the generation of Czechs born in the 1980s on the eve of the fall of communism exhibit a greater level of similarity during their late teens and early twenties. The implication here is that this post-communist generation are behaving in a much more structured manner than either their parents or grandparents, mainly because they postponed family related transitions in comparison to older cohorts. Of course the "jury is still out" on this development as this cohort has only recently reached their mid-thirties (1980/4 + 35yrs = 2005/9). It would be necessary now to go an interview this generation and observe their complete life course trajectory (with regard to family formation) in order to be able to make a proper comparison with older cohorts. This of course represents an important avenue of current and future research.

Overall, exploring social change through the prism of age when individuals decide to settle down and start families provides invaluable information on the nature of how societies change at the individual level. In the Czech Republic, the presence of a dramatic social and political change with the fall of communism provides a unique opportunity to see how such a momentous event changed the lives of

individuals who were direct witnesses to history being made. The survey evidence clearly shows the generational nature of social change and how this is given concrete expression in the decisions people take in their daily lives – events that are rarely recorded in the history books.

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### **Notes:**

1. For a more detailed analysis see Chaloupková (2010).
2. For more details on the construction of the trajectories, see Chaloupková (2009).
3. The concept on entropy used here derives from information theory (and not from thermodynamics) and the seminal work undertaken by Claude E. Shannon. There are many different entropy measures and the one reported in Figure 1 is a normalised transversal entropy index. The statistical logic and estimation procedures underpinning this measure are rather technical in nature and beyond the scope of this introductory article.

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### **The Power of D'oh! The Simpsons and the Representation of Politics in American Popular Culture**

*Key words: politics, democracy, culture, family*

During its twenty years on television (and cinema) screens, The Simpsons became an international phenomenon and could be placed among the few western popular culture products that have had a truly global impact. Created in 1987 as a series of brief animated snippets (or 'shorts') surrounding commercial breaks for The Tracy Ullman Show, The Simpsons evolved from humble beginnings to change popular culture in the United States like few other television shows. It is probably the longest-running situational comedy in television history becoming the first really successful cartoon on American prime time television since the 1970s.

A number of neologisms that originated on The Simpsons have entered popular vernacular.<sup>1</sup> Such has been its (subversive) influence that several American public schools banned T-shirts featuring Bart Simpson. In raw commercial terms, The Simpsons range of merchandise has generated billions of dollars in revenue over a two decade period (Alberti 2004: xii; Bahn et al. 2006; Griffiths 2000).

According to the TV ratings, the Simpsons are the most popular and longest running TV series in American history – in a society, where 98% of households own a television set and where the average American watches around four hours of television per day. How could this product be apolitical and without cultural influence?

***Your guilty consciences may make you vote Democratic, but secretly you all yearn for a Republican President to lower taxes, brutalize criminals, and rule you like a king!***

**- Sideshow Bob**

The Simpsons became a phenomenon comparable to internationally successful brands like James Bond or Harry Potter. However, how is it possible to connect such an influential cultural product with the world of politics? Where are the links?

### **Social construction of a yellow reality**

The link between popular culture and politics has been an important topic examined by academics. For example, social constructivists within the field of international relations have explored the influence of Harry Potter series of books and its world of wizards and witches. In trying to outline the influence of British author J.K. Rowling's most famous literary creation, Iver B. Neumann, Daniel H. Nexon and Martin Hall and others have employed a "social construction of reality" sociological perspective.

This is an influential sociological theory deriving from the work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1999). Using the concept of *representation* Nexon and Neumann (2006) edited a book entitled *Harry Potter and International Relations*. It seems that the adventures of Harry, Ron and Hermione at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry have a global significance according to some international relations experts.

At first sight such an evaluation may seem like an exaggeration, and it is reasonable to ask: Why should works of entertaining fiction, such as The Simpsons and Harry Potter, be considered influential in the "real world"?

The answer is popular culture. The Simpsons and Harry Potter have achieved what few other works of mass entertainment succeed in doing: they have become part of popular culture and have influenced how the public in many countries view and interpret the world. More formally, popular culture is important because it is the space in which the social and political life of human society is *represented*. This process of representing reality is readily evident in many television shows.

For example, it is easy to discern how creative works such as books, films and television series shape public perceptions of real world situations through the process of representation. Think here of how the Czech TV series *Redakce* (the Editor's office) represents the work of journalists, or how the US television series *West Wing* portrays in a fictional manner the political and personal struggles in the White House.

Of course, the academic study of how society is represented and portrayed in the media moves well beyond the idea that Harry Potter and The Simpsons are part of popular culture because lots and lots of people like these cultural products. The systematic study of popular culture investigates how the social construction of reality is created through mechanisms of representation.

Here is one example, taken from Nexon and Neumann's (2006: 7) study of Harry Potter, of

the issues explored and the style of thinking involved.

There are many differences between the kind of representation involved in a politician's speech and that of a fictional television program, but many of these differences are ones of degree. The former might be thought of as a *first-order representation*. It seeks to directly re-present political events. In this terminology, television and print journalism are also examples of first-order representation [...] Popular entertainment usually takes the form of *second-order representations*, in that its narratives re-present elements of social and political life through a layer of fictional representation.

Political scientists tend to neglect second-order representations and thus the impact of popular entertainment on the real world is neglected in favour of the more formal features of "political theatre" surrounding parliament and government.

This academic bias is unfortunate as there is considerable research evidence that demonstrates that both citizens and top politicians do not formulate attitudes and preferences on important policy questions purely on the basis of expert advice or the considered opinions of serious journalists.

Citizens and their political representatives also base their policy preferences on the political culture within which they live and work which means that public policy is influenced by such things as war movies, political thrillers, novels and TV series. From this point of view, the realms of politics and popular culture are intimately interconnected.

The study of the second-order representations represents an important opportunity in expanding understanding of contemporary politics and society. Nexon and Neumann (2006) highlight four distinct areas where the "yellow reality" of The Simpsons should be explored by political scientists: (1) popular culture and politics, (2) popular culture as mirror, (3) popular culture as data and (4) popular culture as constitutive.

The first category reflects the very close relationship between politics and culture where cultural events have direct *effects in* or are *caused by* the political world. Such concerns highlight the importance of examining the impressive success of The Simpsons' global merchandising operations or attempts to ban such products on the basis of their undermining public order.<sup>2</sup>

The second category is *popular culture as mirror* of political and social reality and relates to sociological concepts such as 'ontological displacement' where the basis for judging reality moves from direct experience to evaluations derived from messages taken from mass media products. The argument here is that The Simpsons provide to global audiences an illustration of the reality of party politics patterns in the USA, the role of religion in the society, the

life of traditional nuclear family in contemporary society or the educational system of the elementary school directed by Principal Skinner and Superintendent Chalmers.

The third area of relation between popular culture and politics is using *popular culture as a source of data* for social science research of political preferences or policies in the country. An example beyond the world of The Simpsons is the work of social constructivist Ted Hopf who used Russian trashy literature to reconstruct the image of "the self" and "others" in contemporary Russia. The Simpsons could be seen in a similar manner to be a source of data for the study of the US society, the US entertainment industry or a source of evidence for comparing the different impact The Simpsons has had on various countries across the world.<sup>3</sup>

The last area of inquiry concerns the *constitutional role of popular culture* in relation to politics. In this case, the difference between the first-order and second-order representation is a little blurred. The constitutional effect of pop culture is seen in four different ways – determining, informing, enabling and naturalizing (Nexon and Neumann 2006: 17).

Bart Simpson can *determine* the behaviour of children in their attitudes toward school and education. The audience of The Simpsons series could be *informed* by Lisa Simpson's views about environmental protection or about jazz music; The Simpsons portrayal of the Republican party as a sect living in the Dracula-like castle and reading from the lexicon of the evil can *enable* Democrats to rely on this narrative in their political speeches. And finally, the nuclear family structure of the Simpsons can *naturalize* the idea that it is still "normal" to live in the traditionally structured family.

### **Popular geopolitics and the "yellow peril"**

The idea that The Simpsons could have an impact on politics at the global impact level requires a little explanation. In essence, geopolitics refers to adhering to a global view of politics. Today such a perspective seems perfectly reasonable, but the development of a geopolitics as a discipline contributing to political decision-making has been controversial. For example, the ideas of nineteenth century German strategic thinkers Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Haushofer were seen as motivating the Nazi regime toward starting the Second World War.

Although discredited, geopolitics nonetheless became influential following the end of the war. Through the works of British geographer Halford Mackinder and Dutch-American geo-strategist Nicholas J. Spykman global planning in the United States during the Cold War era was dominated by geopolitical considerations such as containing communism. A more recent example of this type of thinking is evident in Samuel P. Huntington's (1996) 'Clash of Civilisations.'

This thesis asserts that conflict in the twenty first century will centre on cultural and religious differences at the global level. As this brief history of 'classical' geopolitics illustrates the

concerns of this stream of thinking have ranged from 'butter and guns' to values and beliefs. The evolution in geopolitical thinking from primarily economic and military concerns toward the realm of ideas began in the 1970s.

During the 1970s and 1980s it became increasingly fashionable to use the term "geopolitical" and for a new generation of academics to work in such fields as "nuclear geopolitics", "geopolitics of peace" or poststructuralist "critical geopolitics."

After the end of the Cold War the scope of geopolitics expanded, used economic perspectives and rejected old concepts evident within the British Empire and German expansionist policies (Mamadouh 1998). One of the new branches of the discipline was *critical geopolitics* which was inspired by the post-positivist revolution in social sciences where human knowledge is not seen to have solid unchallengeable foundations based on what can be observed and measured.

The main proponents of critical geopolitics are Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby who first used the term and became the most important proponents of the approach. In their influential book *Rethinking Geopolitics* (1998) they presented a manifesto for critical geopolitics, and rebuffed traditional concepts by defining new ways of doing research.

For Ó Tuathail and Dalby, critical geopolitics is divided into three parts – *practical geopolitics* of politicians, bureaucrats and political organizations; *formal geopolitics* of the academic world, think-tanks and strategists and *popular geopolitics* which focus on artefacts of (inter)national popular culture such as movies, TV series, comics or novels.

From this perspective, James Bond, Major Zeman, Harry Potter or Star Trek could be studied with the tools of the critical (popular) geopolitics (note, Bílek 2007; Dodds 2005). This sub-discipline is interested for example in such questions as:

- (1) Why is the location of James Bonds' missions often located in former colonies in the Caribbean or Southeast Asia?
- (2) Why is the independence of British Secret Service (MI6) from America's Central Intelligence Agency emphasised in Bond movies?
- (3) Why do frontiers play an important role in differentiating the known home ("the self") and abroad ("the others") where Bond represents not only all white men, but also the West's position in the geopolitical order. Geographical locations play important role in identifying the good and the bad and Bond is symbolic player in all of the unfolding drama.

The Simpsons world may be seen from various perspectives in the realm of popular geopolitics. Inspired by the specifics of French geopolitics, Wood and Todd (2005) criticize contemporary urban life and the urban environment by using

Springfield (the town where The Simpsons live) as the source of insights into a dislocated and fragmented environment encompassing public spaces in contemporary America (Claval 2000).

Alternatively, Bronson's (2010) comparison of Western and Eastern interpretations of members of The Simpsons as a proto-typical (dysfunctional) American family and their travels around to world represents an interesting starting point for popular geopolitical studies of this influential television series.

Of course, one might criticise the geopolitical approach to popular culture as giving too much emphasis to the power of fictional cartoon characters such as The Simpsons to shape political change at the global level. Quite obviously, popular consumption of The Simpsons has not *directly* shaped developments in the big global news stories of the last decade in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq or North Korea.

However, this misses an important point which is that watching television series such as The Simpsons may not tell its audiences what to think; but such programmes may influence what viewers think about and consider to be important in future decision-making.

### **Homer the philosopher of d'oh!**

Turning attention to what The Simpsons can tell us about the world it is likely the most insightful channel of research will be on popular culture in the United States. The Simpsons are sometimes described as a post-modern version of the first television sitcoms of 1950s, which depicted the social life of a nuclear family (e.g. *My Little Margie*, 1952-1955). This is considered to be an important feature of The Simpsons television series (Cantor 2010: 244). This post-modern interpretation of The Simpsons is evident in a number of defining features of the show.

The subversive style of The Simpsons is evident in Homer's apathy and Bart's pranks. The programmes progressive message is portrayed in Lisa's liberalism and environmentalism, and various episodes treatment of issues such as homosexuality. The show's presentation of politicians such as Mayor Quimby as John F. Kennedy-like character and portrayal of federal government and big business interests in a generally negative light provide an important subtext to the portrayal of contemporary family life in the United States.

However, such features are built on top of conservative foundations where The Simpsons defend in an admittedly ironical dysfunctional manner the traditional values of family, importance of religion and the strength of local community (Cantor 2010: 240-267). Here there is considerable scope for interpreting the messages evident in this influential TV series and how such messages are likely to be perceived by its global audience.

The corpus of more than four hundred episodes of The Simpsons has provided philosophically inclined scholars with ample material for exploring the influence of the figures such as

Aristotle, Marx, Camus, Sartre, Heidegger, and Kant in an appropriately entitled tome called: *The Simpsons and Philosophy: The D'oh! of Homer*. In this perceptive and interesting book Irwin, Conard and Skoble (2001) offer insight into The Simpsons with help of well known philosophers; and use philosophical concepts to interpret hidden meanings in this product of American popular culture.

Another example of a philosophical examination of The Simpsons is Margaret Betz Hull's (2004) Foucauldian analysis of this family's fight against order, the strict organization of affairs, normalization of life, and the attenuation of differences in society. With the help of humour, which is interpreted as a Nietzschean moment, The Simpsons overcome the pessimism of Foucault's view of society and in the process promote a message of hope with change.

**... not by wrath does one kill but by laughter. Come, let us kill the spirit of gravity.**

**- Nietzsche (1961: 68)**

In conclusion, the Simpsons are important because they represent a globally successful product of American popular culture; and deserve the attention within the social sciences as an example of how a second-order representation of social reality operates.

Episodes dealing with the adventures of the 'first' American family tell us a lot about the current state of the global entertainment industry and American popular culture; but also provide valuable insights into contemporary society, social institutions and politics.

Social constructivism, popular (critical) geopolitics and philosophy are only some of tools that can be used to think about the global impact of the most successful television series of our era.

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#### Notes:

1. For example, Jonah Goldberg from rightist National Review used groundskeeper Willie's description of the French as "cheese-eating

surrender monkeys" in 2003, after France's opposition to the war in Iraq (see also Younge and Henley 2003).

2. It should be noted that The Simpsons were banned in Russia in 2008 and replaced with programmes teaching children to be patriotic (Blomfield 2008). In 2006, the Chinese government attempted to protect the domestic animation studios and stopped series like The Simpsons to be airing in prime-time (Gorgan 2006). In Venezuela, The Simpsons were deemed inappropriate for children watching the morning television and were replaced by another series (Wolff 2008).

3. In case of Harry Potter books and movies, differences in impact were studied on Swedish and Turkish reactions to this global product and the effect of "glocalization" (global reach but local understanding of the product) was described (Nexon and Neumann 2006).

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**The Devil Wears Prada, Pious Women Wear Hijab. Different Perspectives on Morality for Muslim Women**

*Key words: Gender, Values, Sexuality, Reform*

With the rise of political Islam on the global stage and loss of confidence in multiculturalism as a model for integrating immigrants from the Islamic faith into Western societies; the question of how different conceptions of morality should form personal behaviour has come to prominence. These issues are often most pronounced in the case of Muslim women, especially those living in Western societies, where there are conflicting pressures to adapt to local secular norms or retain traditional religious beliefs and customs.

Recent decisions by the Belgian, French and Syrian parliaments to stop women from wearing in public place clothing that conceals their personal appearance such as the 'burqa' raise

fundamental questions about who should have the power to decide moral issues.<sup>1</sup>

Within the Islamic world itself, this question has been discussed from two contrasting perspectives: the conservative ideas of mainstream Islamic scholars and the less well known views of Islamic feminists. Although the conservative perspective is still dominant and the Islamic feminist approach is held by a minority, a comparison of both formulations of what should inform morality for women living in an Islamic family and community provides valuable insight into important debates in Western societies and the Islamic world.

More specifically, the arguments and strategies that have been formulated against the dominant conservative perspective represent key contemporary discourses.

**Power to Define**

The influential Egyptian Islamic scholar Yusuf Al Qaradawi represents one of the most salient conservative voices on moral questions associated with how Muslim women should act in any society. Al Qaradawi is popular for his television programme on Al Jazeera called *Shariah and Life* which has a global audience of about forty million viewers. He is also the author of many publications. Translations of his book into many languages such as Czech of *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* are available at mosques or on Internet.

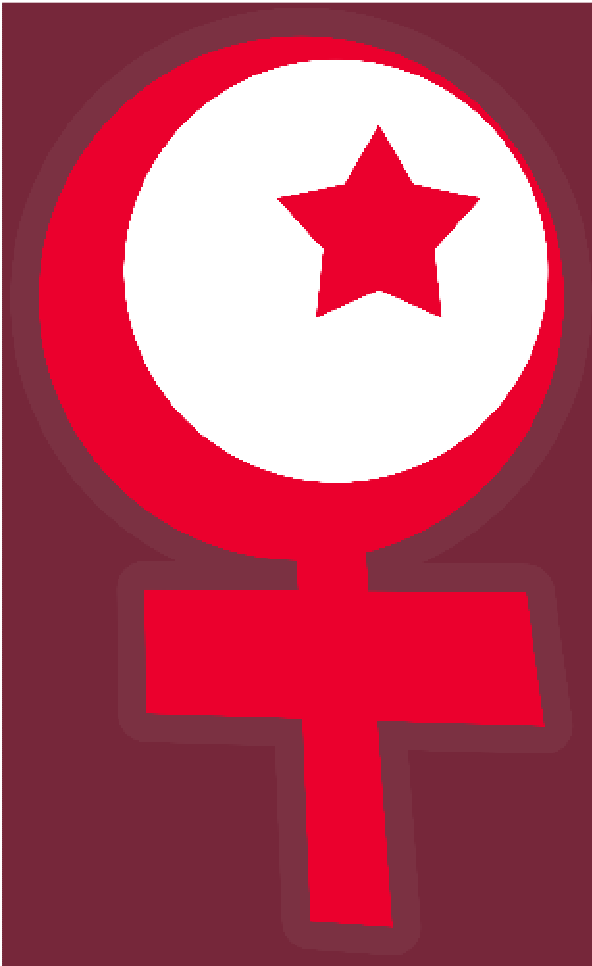
Key assumptions within mainstream Islamic thinking on morality for women have been questioned by 'Islamic feminists' such as Amina Wadud. In her two most important publications, *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (1999) and *Inside the Gender Jihad - Women's Reform in Islam* (2006) Wadud argues for equality for all Muslims regardless of gender. More generally, Islamic feminism aims to draw out feminist ideas that are already present within Islam. This ideal is evident in Figure 1 below which shows the symbol used to represent Islamic feminism.

Wadud in her writings and public engagements she has consistently argued on the basis of key Islamic texts that a less restrictive interpretation of religious practice and personal morality is compatible with being a devout Muslim. Her role as an Imam in organising mixed sex Friday prayers has led to controversy and resulted in Al Qaradawi describing her as a heretic espousing un-Islamic ideas.

In order to ground the debates within Islam in a more general framework a more theoretical and philosophical structure is very useful. Such a theoretical structure is provided by Michel Foucault, an influential French philosopher, sociologist and historian. In his book *The History of Sexuality* Foucault outlines two distinct types of morality.



**Figure 1, Symbol of Islamic Feminism**



Source:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Islamic\\_Feminism\\_Symbol.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Islamic_Feminism_Symbol.svg)  
*Note this symbol incorporates the Crescent Moon and Star, the symbol of Islam with the Female symbol.*

The first is morality as obedience to a code defined by an outside authority. In Islam, Foucault's 'outside authority' could be either an Imam in a mosque, Islamic jurists or scholars who provide interpretations of the Quran, or perhaps some other authority from the community of believers. The second type is more dynamic. It is characterized by permanent work on oneself to behave as a moral person.

This distinction between these two types of morality serves as a starting point for introducing the context of present debates about reform within Islam. Obedience to a code is characteristic of a conservative interpretation of personal morality, while in contrast permanent work on oneself is promoted by the feminist approach within Islam. In order to see how moral codes determine acceptable social behaviour and public order the themes of "modesty in appearance" and sexuality within Islam will be used to demonstrate the importance of the power to define what is moral.

#### **Modesty in Prada ... mmm ...**

The topic of Muslim woman's dress and headscarf has been a popular topic with the western media in recent years. Headscarf or hijab in Arabic, niqab or burqa<sup>2</sup> are recently

reported in the media as symbols of women's oppression. There are many reasons for a woman to wear hijab. For many Muslim women the hijab represents their identity as a Muslim woman. It is a sign of their devotion to the God. It shows their modesty and marks them as moral persons. Opinions on the hijab vary from the position that it is a Muslim woman's obligation to wear hijab to the notion that hijab is neither necessary nor obligatory.

Al Qaradawi formulates clear rules on woman's dress. He advises Muslim women not to touch unknown and unrelated men, cover their body with the exception of face and hands. No tight clothes, no man's clothes like trousers are allowed. He encourages women not to imitate non Muslims in appearance.

Hence, Al Qaradawi recommends developing and maintaining a characteristic Muslim appearance, because it is important to show the difference in their appearance, faith and attitudes from secular western citizens. Finally, certain types of accessories are prohibited such as perfumes and jewellery with the exception of a ring. The most important goal for a modest Muslim woman lies in not attracting the attention of men, much less encouraging sexual fantasies or desire (Al Qaradawi 2004: 112 -113).

The Islamic feminist perspective on Muslim woman's appearance is on the contrary much more flexible. There are no special rules for clothing or covering any parts of the body. Modesty is defined according to the current notion in particular society. The covering of a Muslim woman's head (hijab) is not considered to be a religious obligation. Wadud quotes a verse from the Quran (7:26) which states: "the best dress is the dress of moral consciousness" to point out to the internal and spiritual dimension of modesty.<sup>3</sup>

From this reading of the Quran, moral consciousness is more than a simple matter of outward attitude or performance. Morality is embedded in the heart and mind of the believer (Wadud 2006: 219, 46). Wadud concludes that the 45 inches (1.2 metres) of clothing material does not represent the border between heaven and hell. Hijab has multiple meanings where from outward appearance one cannot distinguish between a hijab of coercion or a hijab of choice. For this reason, Wadud does not ascribe any moral value or religious significance to the hijab.

Key sources of contention for Islamic feminist authors like Wadud are the consequences of the conservative views represented here by Al Qaradawi. Covering and limiting the presence of women's body in the public places underpins the notion that a woman's body is a sexual object, where a woman is endangered from sexual harassment by men. Consequently, the order on covering woman's body is presented as a reasonable source of protection for modest women (Al Qaradawi 2004: 110).

A woman without cover cannot consider herself as a moral agent. The Islamic feminist approach on the other hand tries to promote a de-

sexualizing of a woman's body. Women are considered to be fully equal agents with men. Once women have respect from men "then even a naked woman should be safe from male abuse" (Wadud 2006: 221).

### **Do what I say, but not what I do**

Al Qaradawi engages in the topic of sexuality in several places in his book. The chapter on marriage deals with the three most important rules. The first and probably most disputable rule covers the polygamy. Al Qaradawi presents the example of childlessness within marriage, the greater sexual needs of a husband or a wife's illness as reasons for allowing Muslim man to marry up to the four of wives.

The second rule deals with sexual acts that are forbidden: anal sex among heterosexual couples or homosexual acts. Here it is argued that only the natural connection between males and females that guarantees biological reproduction is morally correct.

The third and most general rule is derived from a verse in the Quran (2:223) which asserts that "Your women are a tilth for you to cultivate." According to Al Qaradawi, this and other tenets within Islam evaluate sexual life positively where sexuality in marriage is not restricted as it was in other religions.

But the positive value of sexuality exists only within the institution of marriage: sexual intercourse outside of marriage – fornication, is strictly prohibited. Overall, the mainstream (conservative) formulation of moral ethics relating to sexuality deal explicitly with the needs of men, but remain silent concerning the sexual satisfaction of women.

Wadud's position on sexuality opens with a criticism of the gender bias regarding sexual satisfaction presented in some parts of the Quran. She claims equal right for sexual satisfaction for both women and men and promotes a sexuality based on mutual respect among couples (Wadud 2006: 228).

To support her position Amina Wadud looks at the general principles evident within the Quran such as social justice, harmony and equality; and she concludes that general principles take precedence over particular verses in Quran dealing with sexual relations. Homosexuality, which is according to Al Qaradawi prohibited, is in Wadud's view a legitimate part of Muslim identity (Wadud 2006: 85).

### **A new moral compass for living with AIDS/HIV**

In discussing sexuality, Wadud stresses the implications of the AIDS epidemic for Islamic societies. The dominance of the male sexual experience in Islam, which is maintained by a conservative point of view, is a very influential factor increasing the vulnerability of Muslim women to HIV infection. The moral rule for a Muslim wife to be a subordinated "tilth" for her husband is seen by Wadud to be an insufficient criterion for ensuring effective protection against infection with HIV.

This is because the conservative moral code present within Islam denies women access to knowledge about sexual health and practices. Thus, according to Wadud (2006: 239) the prevailing moral guidelines for Muslim women should be revisited; where women should have all rights associated with control over their bodies and decisions regarding the terms on which they have sex.

It is important to stress that within mainstream conservative Islam sexuality is not taboo. However, there are restrictions for any sexual act to be considered as spiritual and moral. A husband is provided with the right of sexual satisfaction, while women's satisfaction is not considered by conservative scholars.

Such double standards are challenged by Islamic feminists who adhere to Foucault's second pillar of morality, a permanent work on self, where it is women themselves who are instrumental the morality that guides their daily lives.

From a feminist perspective, sexuality is not only connected to spirituality, but to the politics as well. Wadud criticizes the notion of sexual practices as natural. For Wadud (2006: 237) sexuality belongs to the sphere of political, and this brings two key consequences: (1) all activities, desires, fantasies etc. have to be understood within a larger system of subordination; (2) the deformed sexuality of patriarchal culture must be replaced by sexuality of mutual respect.

Wadud and other feminist authors pose fundamental questions of moral ethics and social relations for conservative Muslims: Why should women be restricted in their right for full participation in public sphere, while men are not considered to control their sexual desire? Is it not now the time for men to control their conduct and show real respect for the intellectual and social capacity of women in the private and public spheres?

These questions posed by Islamic feminists represent an important challenge to conservative thinking regarding the subordinate role played by women in Muslim societies.

### **Morality, Quran and Foucault**

Current debates within Islam on the rights and power of women reflect two contrary perspectives: conservative and feminist. It is possible to place both visions and theories of Islamic moral code within Michel Foucault's influential of moral codes as residing in external and internal authorities.

Undertaking this exercise reveals the key differences in legitimization used by the conservative and feminist approaches. Conservatives stress the importance of specific rules for outlining a moral framework for Muslim women where the authority to decide on the rules is external in that is reserved to the expert judgement of a select group of male scholars. For Foucault this is an example of an externally defined moral system based on obedience and discipline.

In contrast, Islamic feminists have stressed the need for a gender neutral inclusive approach when interpreting the Quran. Here the morality of Muslim woman is determined by the individual. For this reason, Islamic feminists are not willing to enforce one understanding "as the only right understanding."

Interpretation of the guiding principles for Muslim woman from the Quran is understood as a dynamic process which is open to critical revision and a wide range of possible understandings. Within Foucault's understanding of morality this represents an internal model where the definition or rules and their enforcement are based primarily on the self.

In discussing Islamic morality using concepts derived from Michel Foucault, it becomes easier to see how religious codes are used as means of social control. In order to promote peace, stability and economic development social control is an important feature of all institutions and states.

By shifting from an external rule based approach to a more internalised perspective may not lead to a loss of social order and religious values. Foucault's studies reveal that internal modes of morality (or self-policing) are equally effective in promoting shared norms, values and social stability.

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#### Notes:

1. The burqa is a piece of clothing that covers a woman from head to foot. There is an opening for the eyes, but the rest of the body, except the hands, are covered.
2. The niqab is a veil for the face.
3. Verse of the Quran cited according to Wadud (2006: 219).

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#### Infatuation, Love and Marriage to a Political Party! Partisanship in the Czech Republic

*Key words: politics, democracy*

The general election held on May 28-29 2010 in the Czech Republic was full of surprises. The two largest parties lost 1.4 million votes when compared to their previous performance in 2006; two parties lost all their representation in parliament (Christian Democrats, KDU-ČSL and Greens, SZ); two parties lost their leaders on the basis of poorer than expected electoral showing; and two new centre-right parties made a breakthrough with TOP09 (Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 2009) and VV (Public Affairs) becoming the third and fifth largest parties in parliament respectively.

In contrast to previous elections the parties of the right won a convincing victory winning 118 out of 200 seats. All in all, this evidence points to a sea change on the Czech political scene.

In the immediate aftermath of the formation of the Czech government composed of ODS (Civic Democrat Party), TOP09 and VV, a survey released by STEM on July 19 2010 found that the level of voter attachment to the two most successful parties in the May 2010 general election was considerably weaker than their older competitors.

ODS and the Communists attracted greatest attachment (72% approx.) followed by ČSSD (67%) indicating that strong majorities of their voters exhibited loyalty. In contrast, the new parties on the block, i.e. TOP09 (50%) and VV (45%) attracted much lower levels of loyalty suggesting that their vote base could drop precipitously in the future as their roots in the electorate are shallow.

The key point here is that strong psychological attachment to a political party is something that develops over time; and by definition new parties cannot have large numbers of strong partisans. The strength of partisanship question used by STEM is problematic because it deliberately conflates partisanship and vote choice.

This is unfortunate because partisanship and vote choice are not the same thing; and are best measured separately. The former refers to a long term psychological attachment and the latter is a decision made on polling day that may be the result of short term factors (see, Converse and Pearse 1985).<sup>1</sup>

In other words, strong partisans may not vote for their preferred party due to campaign effects. This is why partisanship and vote choice

are treated as being distinct features of voting behaviour. If partisanship exhibits less stability than vote choice then the measurement of party attachment has little or no meaning. The presence of party attachment is generally considered to be an indicator of party system stability and therefore a positive indicator of representative democracy.

### **Weird, wonderful and in love**

At first sight, the idea of "identifying", "feeling close" or being "attached" to a political party is ... well in a word ... weird. In fact, this idea of psychological attachment to a party makes cross-national study of partisanship difficult; as it is often difficult to write survey questions that make sense (Sinnott 1998). In some countries such as Denmark partisanship has been examined on the basis of being a fan of a party, just like a person might be a fan of a football team like Sparta Prague, Slavia or Bohemians. Still most Czechs would find it strange to be asked by a kindly middle aged lady from a surveying company if they considered themselves as fans of ODS FC, KČSM United or Dynamo ČSSD.

Despite the apparent weirdness of "feeling close" to a political party, especially when popular sentiment is generally one of antipathy toward politicians and parties, there is nonetheless something in this idea. In fact, the most important factor explaining vote choice in the Czech general elections of 2006 was party attachment: it trumped the importance of social class, ideology, policy positions, economic concerns, campaign and leadership effects (Lebeda et al. 2007: 205-213). Powerful feelings of attachment it seems can determine election outcomes.

The theory underpinning party identification is a relatively old one having its origins in the American Voter Model (1960) outlined a half century ago. Here identifying or feeling an attachment to the Democrats or Republicans in America of the 1950s was seen to be at base a product of socialisation within the family. Voters came of age as fully fledged partisans having grown up in Democrat or Republican households. Independents and the flotsam of floating voters were seen as a segment of the electorate without partisanship and who cast ballots on the basis of other, most likely short term, criteria (Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes 1960).

In countries, with a party system that is relatively old the idea of partisan families makes sense. Quite obviously in other places such as the Czech Republic where most political parties are less than a generation old; partisanship based on family socialisation cannot be the full story especially with the success of new parties such as TOP09 and VV. One intuitive way of thinking about partisanship in countries like the Czech Republic is like falling in love. Admittedly, this idea requires more than a little imagination.<sup>2</sup>

### **Jitka's story**

Okay, let's consider the following scenario. Jitka (Judith) has recently turned eighteen and is facing her first election and has definitely resolved that she will be a responsible citizen and vote. That decided the next big question for Jitka is which party? Coming from a non-political family there are no wise words from mum, dad or babička (grandma, who was something of a komunista in her wild young days is unreliable) to give Jitka inspiration. Oo-oo-oh, what to do!

Consequently, being unattached and "looking for a party" Jitka scans the political scene to see if there is anything that appeals. Newspapers and television are not of huge help as all the "pols" look the same in their standard issue "wannabe" power suits. The droning cadence of state expenditure forecasts or the shrill accusations of incompetence or corruption are not endearing. Hardly, the stuff to motivate confused Jitka our first time voter.

Then one evening while checking through her ever more burdensome Facebook account Jitka comes across a YouTube link for "Admirál." With some time to kill before going out, Jitka watches the one straight minute election video. Bingo! Jitka is infatuated with this new party that has an admittedly long winded name, although the acronym is okay-ish; importantly the old admiral leader guy with the off-beat accent that is strangely groovy is beating up on the other parties. Co-oo-ol! Stage one is complete: infatuation.

Later that week while Jitka is having a cappuccino with her friends she discovers that Honza and Hana are also thinking of 'giving the nod to' (voting for) the Admirál and his crew; and magically a certain shared love of what this new party represents emerges. Suddenly, the natty bow tie and the "Sleeping with K" pillow advertisements strike a chord. A quick check of the "how-to-vote" website reassuringly advises voting for the Admirals crew. Phew! Stage two is complete: love.

At this point, we leave Jitka to consummate her declared love and go voting on polling day. Years later, Jitka has voted in most if not all elections and while there have been two or three admirals her attachment to the party has become a long-term thing. Like her arrangement with Honza, Jitka muses that her loyalty to the Admiráls' party is kind of like a marriage. Such latent notions surface when ten year old Lucie asks "How will you vote mummy?" Mum surprising herself gives a decisive unprompted reply: \*\*\*\*\*. Finally! Stage three is complete: marriage ... or its equivalent.

While some artistic licence has to be given to this storyboard of voting, the key point is that it provides a stylised account of how an initial decision to vote for a political party can become a standing decision that forms the basis of a long term feeling of attachment. Moreover, this account provides a channel through which family socialisation may influence the next generation as the American voter model asserts happens in established party systems.

**Table 1, Importance of "feeling close to a party" as an explanation of electoral choice in Chamber Elections of 2006 compared to rival explanations**

analysis was employed for ČSSD, KSČM and other party voting, where voting for ODS is the reference category. All models were estimated with 1,382 (all party voters) cases using unweighted data. With the Akaike and (Schwartz) Bayesian Information Criteria (i.e. AIC and BIC) smaller values indicate a better model fit. In contrast, with the McFadden R<sup>2</sup> higher values suggest a better model fit. The percentage

correctly classified and Lambda (λ) estimates, i.e. the proportion of correct guesses that is better than that obtainable from simply choosing the largest (or modal) category, are also known as 'adjusted count R<sup>2</sup>' and 'count R<sup>2</sup>' respectively. \* Voting for ODS is the reference category. \*\* A further 243 cases are excluded (N=424) from analysis because they predict perfectly the dependent variable. These 'problem' variables relate to party attachment best party to deal with the most important issue and refer only to ČSSD and KSČM.

Of course, it is not possible to record all the Jitka, Hana, Lucie and Honza stories in an electorate. And so testing the idea that feeling an attachment to a party is important is done with a generic survey question that makes no reference to infatuation, love or marriage. However, this is dispassionate scientific methodology ensures that the research results are not biased and are replicable across both time and space. Here the key idea is that if feelings of closeness to a party are important in deciding elections, then evidence of this relationship will be present in survey data. In short, political romance meets political science.

#### Political romance meets political science

While it would be very nice to demonstrate the link between sense of attachment to a political party and vote choice in the May 2010 elections; this is not possible as the data for such an exercise

is not currently available. Therefore, attention will focus on the previous general election to show the importance of party attachment for understanding Czech electoral behaviour. In this respect, the patterns evident for ODS, ČSSD and

Models	Goodness of fit statistics				
	AIC	BIC	McFadden's R <sup>2</sup>	% Correctly classified	Lambda (λ)
<b>Voting for ODS versus voting for all other parties</b>					
Objective social class	1695.94	1722.10	.06	67	.05
All socio-demographics	1650.29	1749.68	.10	68	.09
Economic voting	1551.43	1577.58	.14	72	.20
Issue performance	1160.19	1180.88	.33	81	.49
Issue proximity	812.32	842.80	.48	86	.60
Party leaders	747.17	768.10	.59	89	.68
<b>Party attachment</b>	<b>589.87</b>	<b>610.36</b>	<b>.65</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>.75</b>
Combined model	324.45	508.02	.82	96	.89
Combined model & strategic voting	326.41	514.94	.82	96	.89
<b>Voting for ČSSD, KSČM and Other parties (&gt;5% support)*</b>					
Objective social class	3584.72	3663.19	.04	40	.08
Economic voting	3371.76	3450.23	.09	45	.16
All socio-demographics	3291.98	3590.17	.14	47	.19
Issue performance	2557.37	2630.61	.32	58	.36
Issue proximity	1836.87	1928.30	.43	68	.50
Party leaders	1746.61	1809.38	.53	76	.63
<b>Party attachment</b>	<b>1361.01</b>	<b>1439.47</b>	<b>.64</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>.68</b>
Combined model	776.83	1360.93	.83	91	.87
Combined model & strategic voting	776.73	1376.08	.83	91	.87

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

Note that the explanation of vote choice for ODS (the 'winning party') vs. all other parties was estimated using a binomial logit model. A multinomial logit



KSČM voters in 2006 are almost certain to have been replicated four years later. So our dated example still has merit.

**Table 2, Comparison across two waves of the panel survey in partisanship and vote intention items (per cent)**

**Waves 4 and 7:**

		Wave 12: vote intention							
Wave 10: partisanship	Response options:	ODS	ČSSD	KSČM	KDU-ČSL	SZ	Other parties (<5%)	Non-voter	Total
		<b>ODS</b>	<b>96</b>	1	0	4	3	8	16
	<b>ČSSD</b>	0	<b>94</b>	6	0	0	23	32	39
	<b>KSČM</b>	0	0	<b>88</b>	0	0	0	6	7
	<b>KDU-ČSL Green Party</b>	1	0	0	<b>96</b>	3	0	4	6
	<b>Other parties (&lt;5%)</b>	1	0	3	0	<b>90</b>	0	12	10
	<b>Non-partisan</b>	0	1	3	0	3	<b>54</b>	4	3
	<b>N wave 12</b>	2	4	0	0	0	15	<b>26</b>	11
		100	159	32	26	31	13	190	551

Note that the estimates represent the transition of responses from wave 4 (May 5-11, 2008) to wave 7 (May 26 to June 1, 2008). All column percentages (for wave 7) sum to one hundred. This table should be interpreted as follows: 95 per cent of the respondents who said they intended to vote for ODS had expressed some level of closeness to ODS some four weeks earlier in wave 4 of the panel survey.

**Waves 10 and 12:**

		Wave 7: vote intention							
Wave 4: partisanship	Response options:	ODS	ČSSD	KSČM	KDU-ČSL	SZ	Other parties (<5%)	Non-voter	Total
		<b>ODS</b>	<b>95</b>	3	0	0	10	12	16
	<b>ČSSD</b>	2	<b>88</b>	6	0	0	12	30	38
	<b>KSČM</b>	0	2	<b>87</b>	0	0	0	8	8
	<b>KDU-ČSL Green Party</b>	0	2	0	<b>96</b>	0	0	3	6
	<b>Other parties (&lt;5%)</b>	1	1	0	4	<b>79</b>	12	14	9
	<b>Non-partisan</b>	0	1	6	0	7	<b>53</b>	6	4
	<b>N wave 7</b>	3	4	0	0	3	12	<b>24</b>	9
		110	182	31	28	29	17	154	551

Note that the estimates represent the transition of responses from wave 10 (June 16-22, 2008) to wave 12 (June 30 to July 7, 2008). All column percentages (for wave 12) sum to one hundred.

It is possible to empirically construct a comprehensive model of all the factors that are known to influence vote choice using survey data. Estimation of such a model reveals that vote choice for ODS was primarily determined by partisanship and the impact of Mirek Topolánek as party leader. Support for ODS was significantly less among low skilled workers and public sector employees. While feeling close to the party in left-right ideological terms was also

important the importance of economic considerations while statistically significant does not seem to have been especially strong motivator. All of this makes sense and matches with previous profiles of this right wing party's electoral base.

A very similar pattern for the determinants is also evident in popular support for ČSSD. Here the key differences are in the

social basis of the social democrat vote where all workers and public service employees support this party. Much of this evidence is in agreement with results presented in Table 1.

Electoral support for KSČM has as expected a working class and public sector base, and is very strongly associated with partisanship and leftist orientation. Curiously, although the Czech government between 2002 and 2006 was a social democrat led coalition leftist party voters

all felt at a personal level they had lost out economically during the year prior to the election. In political science jargon this is known as a retrospective egocentric orientation.

Lastly, a model of party support for KDU-ČSL and SZ demonstrates support for these parties left-right ideological positions and distance from ODS. Moreover, voters for these parties were

generally critical feeling that their personal economic situation had declined that the issue performance of the other parties was generally negative or (statistically speaking) negligible.

In general, the modelling results presented in Table 1 reveal that the basis of vote choice for the main parties in the 2006 Chamber Elections were primarily associated with partisanship and party leader effects. Issue voting was of less importance as was policy performance and economic voting. Social class and socio-demographic factors had only a minor impact on electoral choice (Lebeda et al. 2007: 208).

### **Party attachment and vote choice during inter-election periods**

The evidence presented in Table 1 clearly shows that voters' feelings of psychological attachment to a political party are the most important explanation of vote choice. However, as the American voter model predicts there is not a perfect link between partisanship and party choice. This is because some voters vote 'against' their long-term feelings for a party for short term reasons such as disliking the party leader or the electoral platform.

The cut-and-thrust of personalised election campaigns with lots of 'negative' campaigning is likely to mobilise and polarise an electorate. This is a reasonable assessment of the 2006 general election campaign. However, what happens during the long inter-election periods when there are no elections: do voters' partisan feelings go into hibernation? It is true that political interest declines outside of elections, but attachment to a party remains intact and plays an important role in structuring political attitudes. Here use will be made of results from a unique panel survey undertaken during the first half of 2008 when the same set of respondents were repeatedly asked the same questions over a four month period (see, Škodová and Nečas 2009; Linek and Lyons 2009). This exercise is vitally important because it is the only means of figuring the stability of political attitudes and exploring the dynamics of attitude change at the individual level.

As noted earlier, a defining feature of the party attachment measure is that it is an attitude that is based on long term attachment to a party, and is more stable than voting behaviour where a voter may decide to support a different party on the basis of short term considerations. This implies that responses to partisan survey questions should be more stable than answers to vote intention items. In order to avoid methodological effects, the party attachment and vote intention items were asked in different waves of the panel survey analysed.

The results confirm expectations where partisan responses are indeed more stable than vote intention answers. Unlike the partisan transition pattern where respondents tend not to cross the ideological divide, defection in vote intentions tends in the main to be associated with decisions of whether or not to vote.

If a voter is unhappy with a party the tendency is either to express a consistent vote intention for the party, or declare that they will not vote. Thus for example, 17 per cent of ČSSD voters in wave 12 of the panel survey declared

themselves to be a non-voter five weeks earlier in wave 7. With the micro-parties (with less than 5 per cent popularity) support tends to come equally from non-voters (23 per cent) and 'floating' voters of the two largest parties, i.e. ČSSD and ODS (23 per cent).

In sum, feelings of attachment to a party and vote intentions are not the same thing and this difference justifies discriminating between attachment to a party and voting for a party in the Czech Republic. Nonetheless, it is important to ascertain the strength of the association between partisanship and vote intention among Czech parties.

The evidence presented in Table 2 reveals the association between the sources of party attachment at an initial time point with vote intention at a later second time point. Two sets of pairwise comparisons are employed to reduce the risk that the estimates are the result of specific short term effects. The central idea behind the analysis presented in Table 2 is that partisanship as a long term attitude is a key determinant of vote intention. The estimates show that expressed partisanship at an earlier time point has a strong association with vote intention expressed at a later point.

For the two largest parties this association is very strong (88 per cent or more) where partisanship from other parties contributes little to vote intention. In general, expressing partisanship for the five parties with representation in the lower chamber is strongly associated with expressing vote intentions for a party. Another key feature of Table 2 is that intention not to cast a vote in a forthcoming chamber election is mainly composed of partisans from the ČSSD, ODS and Green Party, with less than one-in-five (12-15 per cent) non-voters being self-described non-partisans.

This evidence suggests that electoral abstention (using inter-election vote intention survey data) is not primarily associated with having no party attachment; but is likely to be associated with weak levels of partisanship among the main parties. The implication here is that variation in level of closeness to a political party is interconnected with changing levels of electoral participation across time and between different types of elections. This suggests that floating voters are primarily composed of weak partisans – a topic to which we now turn.

### **Link between the stability of partisanship and vote intention**

In the last two analyses of variance there has been a comparison between: (a) parties in terms of level of partisanship using a between subjects design; and (b) individuals in the stability of their responses to the party attachment across two waves of a panel survey using a within subject design. Here use will be made of a statistical technique known as Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) which explores meaningful differences between groups.

In essence, the model being tested here is if partisanship measured in waves 4 and 10 was

influenced by the expression of a vote intention choice in wave 7 which is treated here as an intervention effect. Here the goal is first to check if level of party attachment changed over time, second to compare vote intentions for different parties and level of partisanship, and lastly to determine if change in partisanship was different on the basis of vote intention.

With regard to the first question the descriptive statistics reveal that level of partisanship declined between waves 4 and 10 of the panel survey. In fact, a measure called the Wilks' Lambda statistic (.97,  $p \leq .001$ ) suggests a significant decline in partisanship effect across the two time points examined. However, the Eta squared statistic estimate (.03) indicates a small to moderate effect according to conventional interpretations of these values. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that no important change took place in level of party closeness within the panel survey. This finding is consonant with the view that attitudes of partisanship are best characterised by stability.

With regard to the issue of whether there is a significant difference among the different level of partisanship groups (i.e. very close, fairly close, sympathises, not close and non-partisans) in waves 4 and 10 and expressed vote intention in wave 7: the answer is yes. The measure of association (Wilk's Lambda=.96,  $p = .003$ ) indicates in overall terms a significant difference in feeling close to a party on the basis of expressed vote intention. This indicates that there are important differences in level of partisanship across the voters for different parties. However it is important to note that this particular effect is small to moderate in nature (Eta squared=.04).<sup>3</sup>

Turning now to question of whether change in level of party closeness in waves 4 and 10 is associated with vote preference given in wave 7? The answer to this question is also yes. The between subjects effect or difference in closeness to a party by vote intention is significant ( $F = 23.16$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ) and its effect is quite strong (Eta squared=.23).

In short, there would seem to be important differences in partisan response stability on the basis of vote intentions. However, some care is required in interpreting this finding for two main reasons.

First the descriptive statistics do not reveal important mean changes in level of partisanship across the waves of the panel survey for individual parties. Second, an examination of the change in mean closeness to a party on the basis of vote intention reveals that much of this change is linked to differences between two groups of partisans: (a) those who intended to vote for mainstream parties, i.e. all those parties with representation in the Chamber of Deputies and; (b) supporters of small parties and non-voters. Therefore, it seems more reasonable to conclude that the observed stability in party closeness responses is not always strongly associated with expressed vote intentions.

## Does party attachment matter?

In post-mortems of general elections media and expert commentators try to divine the hearts of voters and explain why the election was won and lost. In the theatre that is part and parcel of most elections the success of party leaders and their "teams" are most often judged in terms of performance during the campaign: Which party had the biggest war-chest? Which party had the best election advertisements? Who won the leadership debates? Where did key segments of the electorate such as the "floaters", "defectors" and "first-timers" finally settle?

Surprising as it might seem, often times the short term effects of election campaigns are not as consequential as media commentators suggest. In fact, the results of many elections can be predicted months ahead of polling day. This is not to say campaigns don't matter, they do, but they may not always *decide* an election outcome.

If a party concluded that it was certain to win a forthcoming election and did not bother to mobilise its support: it would most certainly lose. Campaigns often confirm the 'underlying' preferences within an electorate and mobilise these voters to participate in an election. This point is a subtle one, but vitally important to keep in mind when undertaking election post-mortems.

These underlying preferences are most often based on feelings of psychological closeness to a political party. This is what decades of electoral studies research teaches us. The empirical evidence demonstrates the power of these sentiments. One might be forgiven for thinking that long term factors such as partisanship are unimportant. This is because such things are consistently down played in Czech and most countries' media accounts of elections. Rather than simply criticise the media it is better to understand why this might be the case. Two points of explanation may be made.

First, media stories that emphasised the loyalty of core party voters would make for rather dull reading while zipping to work on a busy morning tram where there is hardly elbow room. An emphasis on uncertainty, change and new strategies announced at media events makes for interesting news copy and images on the evening television news. Second, grizzled journalists, politicians, political junkies and policy wonks all know that the stability of Czech left and right governments between 1996 and 2010 was balanced on a knife-edge. Therefore, big stories and scoops await anyone capable of figuring out the small differences between winners and losers in an endless political game of one-upmanship.

Treating politics as theatre show composed of heroes and villains with a large supporting cast vying for a starring role in government dramas has a very undesirable consequence. Voters are made to appear as a passive audience whose role is limited to providing applause on cue. What if the audience lost interest in its

peripheral role? Quite obviously the political show would close, and not long after the theatre itself would cease to exist.

At a fundamental level, voters' long term sense of attachment to parties is what keeps the democratic 'show on the road'. Party attachment is important, and does matter even though it is un-cool, boring and un-newsworthy. Here political science provides an important re-balancing of media based accounts of elections by placing the citizen-voter at the centre of political events determining the development of Czech democracy.

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#### Notes:

1. The important issue of how to measure party attachment using survey questions within the European context will not be addressed here. For more details see, Katz (1985); Heath and Pierce (1992); McAllister and Wattenberg (1995); Sinnott (1998).

2. A similar idea has been used to explain the origins of political community when individual preferences become a social commitment (Mackenzie and Rokkan 1968: 5; Wessels 2007: 210). Here it is argued that a similar sense of commitment underpins the partisanship and through this channel also supports more general feelings such as system support and legitimacy.

3. According to Cohen (1988) .01=small effect, .06 is a moderate effect, and  $\leq .14$  is a large effect.

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#### Road to Perdition or Bound for Elysium? Contemporary Religious Beliefs in the Czech Republic

*Key words: public opinion, politics*

Religious belief might seem like an ultra boring topic. Mention the term "religious belief" in Europe and an image of old folks sitting for hours in a church rattling off endless prayers come to mind. Supposing senility eventually comes to all who reach old age, are the superstitious beliefs of those hanging out in churches for hours on end seeking Elysium (paradise) following years of perfidy really worth bothering about?

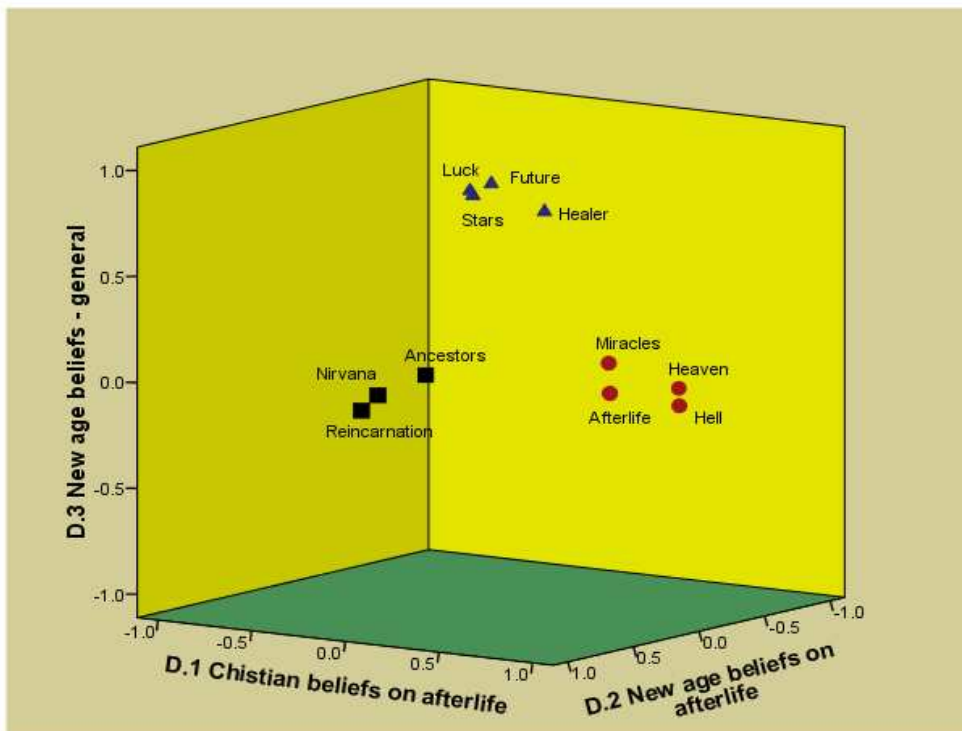
Prior to the events of 9/11 the prevailing wisdom in academia was the world was secularising, and religion was inevitably losing its grip on peoples' lives as their general level of education, income and expectations rose. The events leading to the destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Center have become increasingly associated with a sharp decline in the perceived inevitability of a secular world (Greeley 2003; Norris and Inglehart 2004; Wald et al. 2005; Elshain 2009).

Today, it is hard to see religious belief as being unimportant or "boring" in a world where taking

a flight could end in an unscheduled landing in martyrdom – even if atheism is your thing. It seems that we now live in a world that is divided into camps.

On the one side, some people live in societies where dull religious conformity is the order of the day – otherwise something bad might happen, and we are not talking about “rapture” or “end-of-days” scenarios. On the other side, there are societies where being religious is seen to be something rather quaint and maybe even a little sinister in a social milieu where religious scepticism is the norm.

**Figure 1, Structure of religious beliefs in the Czech Republic in 2008**



Source: Czech wave of ISSP Religion (2008) Module. The sample size of this survey is 1,506 respondents. In this analysis the sample size is 969 due to an average item non-response rate of 36 percent within the battery of religious belief questions. Additional analysis of the total sample where “don’t know” and “no answer” answers are treated as evidence of a passive form of “disbelief” yields the same results. The three underlying religious belief dimensions (D1, D2 or D3) are correlated  $r_{1-2} = .38$ ;  $r_{1-3} = .53$ ;  $r_{2-3} = .43$  implying that (dis)belief in one facet of religious belief is associated with similar (dis)beliefs on the other two dimensions. However, this relationship is not perfect demonstrating that some religious beliefs, i.e. general new age ideas, are more popular than others.

Leaving to one side cataclysmic arguments about a future “Clash of Civilisations” between Christians on Crusade and Islam embarking on Jihad; religious belief is not something monopolised by extremists (Huntington 1996). Away from endless media reports of suicide bombings that are often “explained” as being motivated by zealous religious belief; the religious beliefs of people going about their daily lives in secular societies such as the Czech Republic is important. Religious beliefs are worthy of careful study because they deal with

the two most important considerations faced by all people regardless of creed or colour: how to live and how to die.<sup>1</sup>

While religious studies are concerned with doing right and avoiding wrong; the sociological view of religion is less concerned with how a deity or deities judge individuals, but is more concerned with how religious beliefs inform all other aspects of daily life and public policy making preferences.

### Mapping religious beliefs

A portrait of the contours of the underlying structure of Czech religious belief presented in Figure 1 reveals that there are three key facets. This exploration of popular Czech religious beliefs ignores the question of church attendance and focuses individuals’ beliefs. Moreover, the survey questions were chosen with the goal of making systematic cross-national comparisons across more than thirty states exhibiting considerable differences in religious traditions and intensity of beliefs.

The set of eleven questions refer directly to *general* religious beliefs but avoid thorny issues like belief in God. This is because such questions in a highly secular society are likely to influence (or prime) respondents toward adopting a secular orientation in all subsequent questions.

Consequently, this analysis leaves to one side five components of religion that are part and parcel of the social context of religious beliefs: (a) the behavioural components of religion such as prayer and charitable works, (b) moral and ethical values, (c) belief in the essential truth of religious texts such as the Bible, Koran, and Torah, (d) image of god or deities, and (e) the merits of having a secular states, religious tolerance and religious groups involvement in public policy.

Here the goal is to map out ‘general’ religious beliefs as a first step, and thereafter consider the consequences of such beliefs. Fortunately, the Czech wave of the International Social Survey Project’s (ISSP) module on Religion undertaken in September 2008 has two batteries of general religious attitude questions yielding a total of eleven questions that facilitate creating a map of religious belief.<sup>2</sup>

The central idea here is that the pattern of answers to the religious attitude questions provides information about underlying beliefs.



Using a statistical technique called Principal Components Analysis (PCA) it is possible to estimate dimensions of belief. The results of such an analysis are shown in Figure 1.<sup>3</sup>

Unsurprisingly given Czechs long Christian heritage, stretching back twelve centuries to time when saints Cyril and Methodius brought Christianity and the Cyrillic script in the late ninth century, Christian beliefs dominate.

Figure 1 reveals that the Czech Christian heritage is most evident in central tenets of belief surrounding death: heaven, hell, the afterlife and miracles such as life after death or cures from deadly or debilitating diseases. Popular disbelief in each of these four core Christian beliefs characterises the central plank of the widespread agnosticism or atheism present in contemporary Czech society. For the devout Christian minority it must be quite something to think of so many souls choosing the road to perdition (eternal damnation).

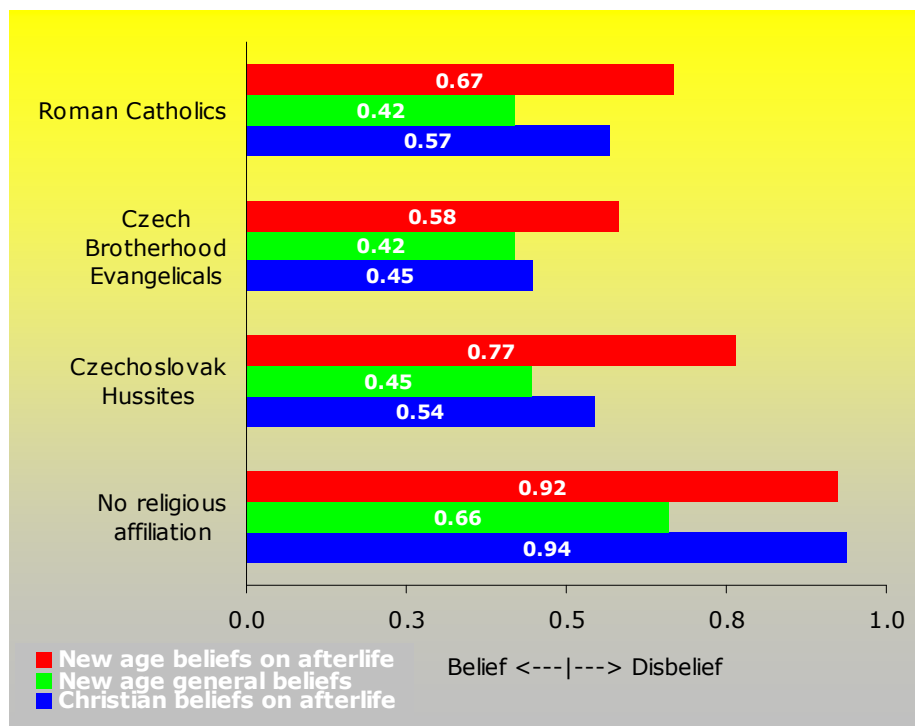
#### Modus operandi: Belief and disbelief

It makes sense to think that those who say they are Catholics or a member of a Protestant church will have a Christian religious belief profile that matches up with official church doctrine. The profile of Catholics, Protestants and the 'unchurched' (sociological jargon for people for those who never set foot inside a church) shown in Figure 2 demonstrates that Christian church membership is associated with higher levels of belief in Christian beliefs about the afterlife.

It is also possible, that the three types of religious beliefs identified earlier in Figures 1 and 2 do not directly influence political behaviour such as turnout or party choice, but may have an impact on general political attitudes and values. For example, popular confidence in public institutions and trust in other people (interpersonal trust) may be influenced by the presence of religious beliefs. The argument here is that religious beliefs underpin a sense of social solidarity and increase trust in other people and political institutions.

Czech Protestants appear to have stronger beliefs in heaven, hell, the after life and miracles than Catholics. Unfortunately, there are too few Protestants in the ISSP survey sample to ensure that is not an artefact of the sampling process. For this reason, only sensible comparisons may be made between Catholics and the unchurched. Six-in-ten Czechs are unchurched and express few religious beliefs.

**Figure 2, Religious affiliation and level of religious belief in the Czech Republic**



Source: Czech wave of ISSP Religion (2008) Module (N=1,506/969).

A key feature of Figure 2 is that Catholics have higher levels of belief (or lower disbelief scores) for all facets of religious notwithstanding its Christian content. This is surprising because it suggests that churchgoing Catholics are exhibiting patterns of belief that are in contradiction with official Vatican doctrine. Moreover, this implies that drawing a distinction between "traditional" and "alternative" religiosity may not be warranted (cf. Hamplová 2008: 712ff.; Hamplová and Řeháková 2009: 64-74; Hamplová 2010).<sup>4</sup>

There are two reasons for this conclusion. First, the different facets of religious shown in Figure 1 are not independent of each other but are correlated. More specifically, belief in a Christian afterlife is positively associated with accepting general New Age beliefs ( $r=.38$ ) and the inter-correlations among the other religious beliefs are stronger (see note under Figure 1). Second, Figure 2 reveals that there is a stronger level of belief in general New Age thinking among Catholics and Protestants than among those with no religious affiliation.

The central point to be emphasised here is that the patterns evident in Figures 1 and 2 suggest that those with religious beliefs tend to hold attitudes that are not restricted by strict theological doctrines and those who are unchurched tend not to believe in anything. These survey results are important because they indicate that the division between traditional and alternative or Eastern religious beliefs in Europe may be overdrawn by academics.

The failure by individuals in their daily lives to discriminate between beliefs on doctrinal

grounds does make some sense in a historical context. This is because much of Christian belief and practice is derived from earlier local religions where pragmatic church authorities simply absorbed prevailing religious beliefs into Catholicism. This strategy has a long history and is known more formally in the social sciences as 'syncreticism.'

Therefore, it is not very surprising to see contemporary Czechs with a predisposition toward religious beliefs accumulating in a "magpie" like fashion all manner of appealing religious ideas. Demonstrating the presence of different religious in the contemporary Czech Republic leads inevitably to the question of whether religious beliefs and behaviour have important consequences.

### **Religion and politics**

One way of assessing the importance of religion in society is to look at elections. In some countries such as the United States religion is seen to play an important role in helping to explain election outcomes. In most European states, the impact of religion on voting behaviour is considered to be much weaker today than it was in the past.

Within electoral studies there are normally only a small number of religion questions. Typically, there is a question on religious affiliation and level of attendance at religious ceremonies. Often it is this latter variable that is most important in explaining political behaviour.

An exploration of the impact of level of attendance at religious services on voter turnout reveals some influence. In 2006, those who went to church a few times each week voted at a higher rate in the lower chamber (general) elections than all others (80 vs. 60 per cent). However, when this factor was compared with the other determinants of electoral participation attendance at religious service turns out not to have significant effects (Linek and Lyons 2007: 76-83).

Looking at party choice in the 2006 general election reveals that religion mattered in a limited sense. If an examination is made of all of the factors associated with position in society on vote choice, it seems that level of attendance at religious services is significant.<sup>5</sup> Frequent attendance at religious services is associated with supporting smaller parties such as the Christian Democratic KDU-ČSL. Unsurprisingly, this segment of the electorate was very unlikely to vote for the Communist Party (KSČM). Moreover, the right-wing Civic Democrats (ODS) also did not attract a religious vote.

However, when the full panoply of attitudinal factors are used to explain vote choice the impact of attendance at religious ceremonies loses importance. This suggests that there is no simple link between being for example Catholic and voting for the Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL) across the entire Czech Republic.<sup>6</sup> This evidence demonstrates that Czech electoral behaviour is not *directly* determined by religious factors.

One might argue that religious beliefs reflected through socially conservative policy positions should be evident in issue voting. The classic example of a 'religious' political issue is abortion. An exploration of the saliency of sixteen issues in the Czech National Election Study (2006) reveals that this was considered to be the least important issue by the electorate. This is because access to abortion services is widely accepted; and is not a divisive moral or political issue as in the United States (Lyons and Linek 2007: 179-181).

It is likely that the importance of religious values such as those associated with Christian Democracy is incorporated into the left-right basis of party competition. Given the dominance of the left-right cleavage in Czech party competition, it is possible that religious considerations play some role in these more general partisan divisions.

The association in late 2008 between interpersonal trust and confidence in a range of public institutions, i.e. parliament, business and industry, religious organisations, and the legal and educational systems, and religious beliefs is weak. It seems that none of the religious beliefs described earlier (Christian post-death beliefs, general New Age beliefs or New Age beliefs in the afterlife) results in significant differences in confidence or interpersonal trust. This preliminary evidence suggests that religious beliefs are largely divorced from political attitudes.

Moreover, there is practically no association between the different facets of religious beliefs and left-right orientation reinforcing the idea that Czechs religious beliefs are a private matter. One general implication of these findings is that the connection between religion and politics is strongly institutional in nature.

When a society like the Czech Republic becomes highly secularised then the direct impact of all religious beliefs on politics declines. The question of whether religious beliefs have significant *indirect* effects on political life is something that requires more research.

For this and other reasons, the Czech case is an interesting one in comparative terms because the 'invisibility' of religion provides a fascinating insight into what it is likely to happen in other European states that become equally perfidious and ungodly in the future. On the 'big' question of whether most Czechs are destined for perdition or some New Age Elysian fields is something that social science is not qualified to answer!

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has been kindly funded by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic.

### Notes:

1. In this short article larger issues within the sociology of religion and more particularly the different streams evident within Czech sociology of religion will not be addressed. In this respect the interested reader should consult: Nešpor (2004a,b; 2008), Lužný and Nešpor (2007) Lužný and Nešpor et al. (2008), Hamplová and Nešpor (2009) and Nešporová and Nešpor (2009).

2. For this reason, the questions may seem a little "artificial" in some national contexts. However, these items do have the merit of exploring the link between religious beliefs and attendance, and the impact of religion on other key domains of society such as the economy and politics.

3. Principal Components Analysis (PCA) is one of a group of statistical techniques known often as Factor Analysis for exploring the relationship between a set of variables through an estimation of underlying concepts predicted by theory. Specifically, PCA transforms a set of variables that are correlated into a smaller group of (un)correlated variables, or latent factors.

4. It is important to note that the structure of beliefs evident within the Czech society depends critically on the type and number of survey questions analysed with latent variable methods such as PCA. Hamplová (2000) using sixteen items from the ISSP Religion (1998) module identified four facets of religious belief among Czechs: Christianity, Occultism, Fatalism and Faith in humanity. In a subsequent analysis, Hamplová (2008) using eight items from a survey exploring "untraditional religions" implemented in 2006 identified two dimensions: Traditional and Alternative religion. More recent work by Řeháková and Hamplová (2009: 64-75) using the same dataset as this article report similar results to those in Figure 1. These authors labelled the three factors extracted as: Traditional Christianity, Alternative religiosity and Eastern traditions. This analysis included the "belief in god" question. In the analyses reported in Figure 1 this item is deliberately excluded on methodological and theoretical grounds. Methodologically, restricting religious beliefs to monotheism (i.e. God) and having no questions exploring polytheistic or deistic beliefs increases the risk of response bias or multiple interpretations of the term "god" ranging from the Christian God to a universal deistic entity. Theoretically, adherents to non-Christian religions are not likely to believe in God but may believe in many gods or a general life force permeating the universe. In the absence of good measures of these important theistic or deistic differences it is prudent to exclude this item from a consideration of religious beliefs. Analysis of European Value Survey (EVS) data yields additional mappings (note, Spousta 2002). The question of how many dimensions validly

represent the structure of Czech religious belief is an important question requiring additional research using alternative datasets and methodologies such as Latent Class Analysis and Latent Variable Structural Equation Modelling.

5. This structural model of vote choice includes objective social class based on occupation, a standard set of socio-demographic variables: age, sex, marital status, employment status and sector and income; and region of residence. A set of logit and multinomial logit regression models reveals that a pure structural model of party choice relatively little of the total observed variation (10 to 14 per cent).

6. Within specific regions such as Moravia the link between Catholicism and support for the KDU-ČSL is quite strong. However, at the national level this confessional party linkage plays little role in party competition and vote choice.

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## Postscript:

### Scholasticism in the Social Sciences

Concerns about the merits and values of published research have been of concern to social scientists for decades. Such is the concern with relevance of social research that there have been fierce battles fought over the correct direction taken by disciplines such as sociology and political science.

Within many social science disciplines the 1960s saw the emergence of the "behavioural revolution" where the use of quantitative methods was embraced by a large number of scholars and researchers. Much of the impetus for this change was a desire on the part of younger scholars to use academic research to address and answer some of the key social problems of the day. One of the core elements of a more quantitative social science was the aspiration to be more "scientific" (Sigelman 2006; Mead 2010; Sil and Katzenstein 2010).

In some disciplines such as political science this change was associated with the emergence of

rational choice, game theory and formal mathematical modelling. The equation approach to social and political reality has been accused of colonising some of the most prestigious journals and securing the most sought after academic positions. Unsurprisingly, this has resulted in a series of backlashes (Walker 2010; Mead 2010).

A revolt against the 'establishment' resulted in political science having its own 'perestroika' almost a decade ago. The proponents of restructuring the discipline argued that the study of politics required methodological pluralism that should be reflected in the top journals. A decade later and little appears to have changed; the same concerns about the relevance of research and a "flight from reality" continue unabated (Shapiro 2005: 2).

Today, it is argued that the current structures within social research provide incentives for scholars to write almost exclusively for their peers in top impacted journals. This is seen to be one of the main characteristics of "scholasticism" in the social sciences. The growing trend toward quantifying and indexing researchers and research outcomes appears to reinforcing this 'scholastic' trend. This has led some academics to think that there is a real danger that the skills necessary for engaging with substantively important social research questions are being lost.

In the context of such "big" debates, it is both interesting and worthwhile to consider the merits of publishing research work in electronic outlets such as Socioweb. The set of ten articles published in this issue cover a broad range of topics and employ both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. One of the guiding principles in each of these short articles is to demonstrate how a concrete piece of research contributes to a collective understanding of some larger substantive question.

The initial pair of articles by [Krejčí](#) and [Häuberer](#) provided insights into how the quality of survey research is assessed. This may seem like a narrow methodological concern of interest only to specialists. As these articles cogently argue, considerations of data quality reflect not only on specific substantive issues such as participation in voluntary organisations; but also underpin public confidence in the whole enterprise of mass surveying.

The contributions of [Špaček](#) and [Mitchell](#) demonstrate how use of comparative datasets may be used to address big questions that affect all our lives. The fact that participation in sport is shaped by position in society is vitally important in formulating public health policy whose goal is to increase collective welfare where there are tight budget constraints. Comparison of the tax benefits given to different types of families demonstrates that public policy is selective; and this is something that voters should be aware of when considering competing party platforms in general elections.

A similar orientation is evident in [Leontiyeva's](#) article on the utilisation of migrant labour skills

in the Czech Republic. This empirical research reveals how understanding the experiences of an important segment of the workforce provides insight into the big substantive questions faced by Czech society. Moreover, this research provides information that is not currently available to decision makers through official statistics.

An interesting example of tackling a big substantive question using what some might consider a rather technical methodological approach is **Chaloupková's** use of an entropy index (an idea that has its origins in the theory of information used in telecommunications) to plot life course trajectories. This study reveals how differences across cohort patterns in starting families are associated with larger changes in Czech society such as the fall of communism.

The following two submissions by **Hoder** and **Křištořová** adopt a critical qualitative to two issues with strong international dimensions. Although some of the theoretical work underpinning the research presented, i.e. critical geopolitics and Islamic feminist theory, is rather specialised the exposition in both cases is geared toward a general audience. These two articles demonstrate how the critical stream within the social sciences can contribute to a deeper understanding of social reality and play a role in formulating solutions to legislators and decision makers.

The final two pieces are based on analyses of Czech survey data and explore some of the important substantive questions tied up with the long term beliefs of citizens. Here **Lyons** reveals that psychological feelings of closeness to a political party is a key factor explaining vote choice and is also a central pillar underpinning the legitimacy of the state. The analysis of the structure of Czech religious beliefs points to key features of social attitudes in terms of the coexistence of Christian, New Age and atheistic beliefs. Given the highly secular nature of Czech society, it is not terribly surprising to find that religious beliefs do not have a direct impact on politics.

In conclusion, concern about the emergence of scholasticism in the social sciences highlights the need for research to be disseminated in multiple formats. It would be naive to think that social scientists could simply abandon a career structure that emphasises scholarly articles that are characterised by 'methodologism', 'nonempiricism' (avoidance of primary data gathering and adoption of mathematical models and secondary data analysis) and a focus on the scholarly literature (Mead 2010: 454-455). To do so would risk professional suicide.

However, high quality research that is targeted to specialists in prestigious journals can and should be re-formulated so that it is accessible to the general public, decision-makers and other interested stake holders in the public policy making process.

In this respect, the outlet provided by Socioweb for "popularising" research that will also exist in academic journals is a prudent strategy ensuring research results are available to all interested parties. It is to be hoped that the articles in the preceding pages provide a practical example of how such a pragmatic approach to publishing social science research may be implemented in an Internet age.

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