

Jiří Večerník: *Czech Society in the 2000s: A Report on Socio-economic Policies and Structures*

Prague 2009: Academia, 286 pp.

Jiří Večerník has for many years successfully researched the fields of economic sociology and social stratification, and since 1990 has systematically mapped the changes in Czech society. This book is another logical step in this undertaking. It is indicative that Večerník deals not only with the development and conditions of inequality and a number of selected issues of social structure in the Czech Republic, but also with its reflection in public opinion (including the simplified interpretations, expectations, clichés, and myths such as 'the market will solve everything'). He also devotes attention to how these reflections correspond with values widely held among the population of the Czech Republic. The significance of these values can be illustrated by the author's choice of sub-topics. The selection is determined not only by the reliable data at hand, but by its value orientation, for example, by devoting attention to the middle class, which he regards as 'an important element in the establishment of democracy and in guaranteeing its durability' (p. 142).

The book is divided into four sections. The first focuses on fundamental policies. Večerník's descriptions of employment policy, education policy, industrial policy, tax policy, social policy, family policy, health policy, and housing policy are followed by a discussion of the development of the labour market and labour market policies and policies implementing the EU's social inclusion agenda (targeting populations such as the Roma, foreigners, homeless people, the disabled, and especially seniors, a subject the author returns to in a later chapter). In this chapter he also devotes attention to the overall trend in the development of the Czech welfare state after 1989, to reforms that the welfare state has undergone (and its actors), beginning

with the tentative first steps away from authoritarian paternalism, to the subsequent stagnation of the reform process. He focuses on both short-term performance and enduring problems (including the failure to reform the retirement pension system) and the imbalances in the Czech Republic's welfare state.

This first section lays out the issues to be addressed in the second part of the book, which is devoted to certain types of imbalance. The author concentrates on disparities in earnings that have come about as a result of differing statuses and behaviours of individuals within a changing labour market, and on disparities that are the result of the growing importance of education as a comparative advantage in the labour market after 1989. The wage gap between manual and less-qualified jobs and professions that require more advanced education gradually widened after 1989 in favour of the second group. This has been a significant change from the era of socialism, when differences were minimal between the wages of people with basic education doing manual labour and those of people with higher education; often the wages of the manual professions were actually higher. In this context there is an interesting passage in which the author describes the effects of education, industry, and occupation (as well as demographic factors) on the distribution of income in the Czech Republic. Equal attention is given to household income inequality (rising inequality and its changing structure) and the role of redistribution, taxes, and family social benefits as an instrument for regulating inequality and the legitimacy of inequality in public opinion.

The third part looks at changes in the structure of society. Večerník devotes selective attention to two points in society's structure that he regards as important to the development of democracy in the Czech Republic: the size and status of the middle class and the situation of the working and

non-working poor. In the case of the middle class this book examines their changing status and the barriers to its formation (systematically presented in the text and accompanied by graphs), and also takes note of the value orientation of middle class and the creation of a sense of middle class identity after 1989, opening up the question of 'who has profited from economic reform'. In the case of the section dealing with poverty there is a clear implicit connection with the passages in the previous chapters on social inclusion. This applies especially to retirees, whose changing socio-political status and increasing electoral share are noted. Večerník summarises the pension reform proposals of the main political parties and points out that no consensus even on fundamental principles has been reached among the political parties. The book goes on to describe the situation of both the working and non-working poor, and new measurements of social policy aimed at improving their living standards. It then examines the efforts made at preventing poverty through redistribution or through employment in the Czech Republic.

The fourth part purports to deal with values but unfortunately limits itself to work values and job attitudes or consumerism. Even so it represents a valuable insight into the structure of value orientations in the population of the Czech Republic, which it compares with those of other European countries, albeit non-systematically. The author discusses the myths, clichés, and unreasonable expectations of the public and politicians connected with the current state of development in the Czech Republic and with the results of this development, which are examined throughout the entire book. He points out how the value orientations of the population have been influenced by individualisation, demoralisation (which, according to Večerník and others, has had a negative effect on the privatisation process), and the rise of materialistic values during communism. Also in-

teresting is the passage devoted to Czechs' economic culture during the transition, in particular the changing concepts of wealth, work, and the state.

Večerník's book is valuable for its broad range of information and for the connections it draws. As he admits in his Preface, the author indeed goes into more breadth than depth. Even so the book is more than just a descriptive 'report which mines datasets from various statistical and sociological surveys and important Czech sources on particular areas to several main issues' (p. 11). The author also limits himself thematically by focusing only on apparent changes at the micro level of socio-economic life. In this limited range, however, there is much room in which to manoeuvre, as there is a balance between the study of the social structure and the study of social values; for instance, in the case of social welfare and policies, the focus is not just on the process of moving away from authoritarian paternalism, but also on the key actors in this process. Much of the information in the text will to the informed Czech reader sound like generally acknowledged truths. In the book, however, these truths are shown not only systematically but chronologically. On the other hand, some of these accepted truths are revealed in the light of data to be unfounded mythology. The information contained in the book, which is published in English, is aimed at an audience that has little knowledge of the status and development of Czech society. For this audience (and undoubtedly for the majority of Czech citizens as well) this book provides an in-depth and telling picture of what has taken place in the Czech Republic after 1989 in the labour market, in the shaping of the social state, changes in the structure of inequality and its legitimisation, and in the value orientation of the populace. The book would have benefited from a more systematic comparison of the Czech Republic's data with data on other European countries,

which would help readers to distinguish which conditions, processes, and changes in the social structure and values are specific to the Czech Republic, and which it has in common with other post-communist countries. But perhaps this would be too much to ask of this publication, given the non-existence of comparative data in some cases, and the methodological problems involved in comparing some of the data that exist.

Petr Mareš
Masaryk University, Brno
pmares@fss.muni.cz

Irmgard Eisenbach-Stangl, Jacek Moskalewicz and Betsy Thom (eds.):
Two Worlds of Drug Consumption in Late Modern Societies
London 2009: Ashgate, 298 pp.

This book aimed to compare the quantities and costs of illicit drug use across six European Union cities: London, Amsterdam, Turin, Vienna, Prague, and Warsaw. Split into two parts, these findings formed the second part of the book with the first part given over to contextual detail for each city from which the findings could be embedded. In contrast to the dense and often superfluous detail provided in the first part, the second part of the book gives an illuminating picture of drug consumption across the six cities. Set against the backdrop of Europe as one of the largest consumers of illicit drugs, this book identified a dearth of information on the quantity of drugs consumed per capita across the continent. Where there was available information, the book reported, it is often limited to 'heavy' drug users and employs varying methodologies in the different countries. Additionally, the price of drugs is also often ignored.

The overall aim of the research was to 'contribute to the development of useful

and appropriate models of estimating drug consumption through the assessment of consumption patterns of five main drugs – heroin, cocaine, amphetamines, ecstasy and cannabis.' (p. 22) However, a key subsidiary aim was to estimate the consumption and spending patterns of two distinct types of drug user for the five most prevalent illicit drugs (Amphetamine, Cannabis, Cocaine, Ecstasy and Heroin) across six European Union cities; a focus which was kept throughout the book.

This book followed in the footsteps of the Pompidou Group, who are well known for carrying out comparative multi-city research, by examining two drug using populations from the six large Northern European cities mentioned above. They first examined the social and political situation for each city largely in the context of its drug using population. However, a clear rationale for this choice of 'multi-city' approach and for the choice of cities was not made apparent in the book.

The authors were keen to point out that this study aimed to extend the drug using population under study beyond the frequently researched 'hardcore' samples who are often more visible through contact with police and treatment facilities. As such, they identified two distinct drug using groups. The first group, containing frequent (at least twice a week) users of heroin and/or cocaine and/or amphetamines, and recruited principally through health services and penal (drug) services, are likely to be the commonly researched 'hardcore' group. The second, containing relatively frequent users of 'recreational' drugs, such as cannabis, cocaine, and ecstasy, are likely to be the less frequently researched drug users. Thus, reflecting on the definitions used by the authors to classify drug users into the two groups it seems that they have indeed succeeded in their aim to extend beyond the 'hardcore' sample. However, the authors' use of the labels 'marginalised' and 'socially integrated' for these two