

**A Research Colloquium in Honour
of JUDr. Michal Illner
on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday**

On Thursday 27 May, a group of friends, former and current colleagues, and other researchers met in the beautiful Villa Lanna to discuss the research topics that form the lifelong subject of the professional interest of Dr. Michal Illner, the former director of the Institute of Sociology, whose 70th birthday was the key reason for the event. Although the main reason why the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic organised the colloquium was quite personal, the participants did not refrain from using the opportunity to provide valuable scientific insights into various topics that were parts of the colloquium's official subject matter. Overall six presentations were made, followed by fruitful discussions.

Tomáš Kostelecký, a senior researcher at the Institute of Sociology, devoted attention to the role of political parties in local politics in the post-communist Czech Republic. He described the process of party emergence on the local level after 1989, which was replaced by the gradual disappearance of parties from the local political scene. Although political parties actively have used their powers to change the electoral laws relating to municipal elections, they have been unable to prevent independent candidates from replacing them in the majority of small municipalities in the Czech Republic.

Martin Hampl, a professor of geography at the Faculty of Science of Charles University, described the post-communist development of Czech society from the point of view of a human geographer. He analysed the changes in commuting patterns, internal migration and the recent development of settlement structures. The process of the spatial concentration of settlement has gradually been replaced by the concentration of jobs, and after that by the process of the concentration of jobs in tertiary sector. The most re-

cent trend is the concentration of the influence and power of cities. The largest metropolitan areas in the Czech Republic may not be growing in terms of population, but their influence and power is growing substantially.

František Zich, a professor of sociology working at the Institute of Sociology, devoted his presentation to the selected issues connected with the formation and the recent development of Euroregions in the Czech-German border regions. He analysed factors that influence the institutional performance of individual Euroregions, and described recent changes connected with the entry of the Czech Republic into the European Union.

Both Lubomír Falán, the director of the Institute for Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava, and Milan Turba, Director for the Strategic Planning City Development Authority Prague, focused on recent changes in the capital cities of Slovakia and the Czech Republic respectively. It was clear from the comparison that both cities have undergone the same type of processes, which have led to similar changes to socio-spatial structures. The functions of different city parts, specifically the historical centres and the commercial suburban zones, have tended to change substantially.

Professor Jiří Musil, urban sociologist, and the first post-communist director of the Institute of Sociology, allowed himself to depart from both his professional field of interest and the overall topic of the colloquium and devoted his presentation to the role of friendship in contemporary societies. Friendship, he argued, is becoming more important in societies in which traditional interpersonal ties within families are declining. His presentation broke the ground for Michal Illner's presentation, titled 'My Socio-spaces'. This presentation carried the audience into the second, non-scientific part of the day, which was the celebration of Michal Illner's birthday.

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JUDr. Michal Illner was born 19 May 1934 in Prague. He early became interested in the social sciences. However, the situation in 1952, when he finished secondary school, was very unfavourable for a man who did not want to co-operate with the communist regime while studying society. Michal Illner solved the dilemma of the conflict between professional interests and available options by deciding to study at the Faculty of Law. After his graduation in 1956 he left Prague and worked for several years as a company lawyer. Later, he also served in different functions in various industrial companies. The East–West détente, followed by limited liberalisation of the Czechoslovak Communist regime in the 1960s provided Michal Illner with a chance to become involved in social science research. In 1965 he joined the Department of Methods and Techniques in the newly established Institute of Sociology of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.

His scientific career at the institute soon started developing in a very promising way. In 1967 he spent some time at Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung in the German city of Cologne. In 1968 he passed the higher examination in Administrative Law at Charles University and obtained the title of JUDr. (Iuris Utriusque Doctor). The invasion of Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia in August 1968, however, had a deep influence on Michal Illner's professional life. Although he was allowed to go through with his already planned stay at the Bureau of Applied Social Research in New York (1969–1970), his career development was seriously damaged immediately after his return. His non-ideological research topic, 'social indicators', allowed him to remain at the Academy of Sciences, but he was not allowed to defend his already written doctoral thesis. During the 1970s and 1980s Michal Illner lived in a sort of 'internal emigration'. He concentrated on research topics that were connected with communist ideology to the least possible extent, such as social indicators and social statistics. His research interests also broadened

in the direction of social geography and demography.

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, Michal Illner applied his expertise and joined in with the people who were helping to rebuild sociology as an independent scientific discipline within the Academy of Sciences. He established a department that began studying local and regional aspects of social transformation. His research interests connected sociology with demography and human geography. He was appointed vice-director of the Institute of Sociology in 1990 and later (1993–2001) served for eight years as the director of the Institute. In addition to his managerial and administrative responsibilities he was still able to continue in his scientific work. He published a large number of articles in both domestic and foreign scientific journals. The list of chapters he has contributed to edited books is even longer. Michal Illner has also led several research projects, and is co-editor of the books *Changing Territorial Administration in Czechoslovakia* (1992), *Local Democracy and the Processes of Transformation in East-Central Europe* (1996), *Central Europe in Transition: Towards EU Membership* (2001), *Local Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (2003). Owing to his position within the scientific community he has served in many other important posts – he has been a member of Standing Committee for the Social Sciences of the European Science Foundation and a member of the Core Group of that Committee, a member of Board of Research Committee 05 'Comparative Studies in Local Government and Politics' IPSA, the Chair of the Commission on Sociology of the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic, and a member of the Scientific Council of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.

Despite the large number of Michal Illner's various duties he has always devoted a good deal of his time to students. Since 1990 he has been lecturing at the Department of Human Geography and Regional Development at the Faculty of Science of Charles University. Since 1992 he has also been