



May 20, 2020

**Posudek na habilitační práci Dr. Terezy Pospíšilové: *Středoevropská univerzita v Praze a česká sociologie***

**Evaluation of Tereza Pospíšilová's book (habilitation thesis)**

To whom it may concern,

It is my pleasure to support Dr. Tereza Pospíšilová's habilitation application at Charles University. I have had the pleasure of reading her **habilitation thesis**, *Středoevropská univerzita v Praze a česká sociologie* (SLON), and was profoundly impressed by its originality, research rigor and its broad appeal.

It rarely happens that a book's relevance increases with time. Pospíšilová has written precisely such a book. Rooted in extensive archival work, interviews, document analysis and a thorough analysis of biographical material, the book provides a theoretically rigorous framework that spans the disciplines of sociology, social policy, political science and international relations. It offers its readers three well-integrated layers - descriptive, theoretical and testimonial – that I will now discuss in that order.

The first layer of the book engages in a thick description of the rise and fall of Central European University's Prague Colleague. The narrative is complex, the assessment of the material is fair and the conclusions are always well supported. Pospíšilová's attention to detail, the depth of the analysis and her drive to "get the narrative right" have forged an exceptional piece of original scholarship.

At the theoretical level, the book addresses a crucial and often overlooked topic: transnational philanthropy in an emerging democracy. This is a novel and a challenging area of research. The theory building required the author to situate the phenomenon of Prague's CEU in the context of parallel complex processes: social transformation, democratization, globalization and the emergence of new transnational actors operating in under-institutionalized environments. The book masterfully creates a universalistic narrative while being sensitive to the complexities of Czech politics, the changing role of dissent and structural transformations in higher education. The book also presents a compact, well-balanced evaluation of Czech sociology and Czech academic culture after 1989.

The book's argument combines agency and legacy. It shows that the fate of CEU in Prague was shaped by the interactions between the domestic and transactional actors. When considering agency, the book

focuses on players within the University. It demonstrates that internal divisions and fights over resources shaped the demise of Prague's CEU. Simply put, the Hungarian faction won. The book also surveys the agency of Czech political and academic actors, and demonstrates that E. Gellner's premature death and the unfavorable domestic environment were additional factors that prevented the CEU from making deeper roots in Prague.

The book also engages in a historical argument and considers the detrimental role of communist legacies in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary. It highlights the structural constraints of CEU-Prague's operations in the early 1990s. This historical approach underscores that Hungary had a head start because it was open to philanthropy before 1989 and its academic circles were internationally connected. Hungary also provided more favorable conditions for CEU in Budapest (until recently). The book also reveals a paradox: given low levels of identity polarization in the Czech lands, the Czech "plebiscitarian" elites did not feel the urge to embrace, and to "domesticate" an elite and cosmopolitan project. Polish and Hungarian elites were primed to embrace cosmopolitanism not only because of their embeddedness in international academic networks but also because of the national-cosmopolitan cleavages that have traditionally defined Hungarian and Polish societies, and positively associate elitism with transnationalism. This insight is compatible with the seminal study of post-communist party systems by Kitschelt et al. (1999), which demonstrates that national-accommodative regimes in communist Poland and Hungary were based on vastly different social contracts than the Czech bureaucratic-authoritarian regime.<sup>1</sup>

Pospíšilová's book therefore convincingly shows how context, history and the strategic configurations of domestic actors shaped the success of transnational philanthropy. Pospíšilová's insight about the nature of giving in transnational philanthropy is seminal: gifts are social constructs. If gifts are not "appropriated" by domestic elites, the project is doomed to fail no matter the generosity and the genuine intentions of the donor. This is an important insight for the study of transnational activism. In their study of transnational activism, Keck and Sikkink (2014) underscore that activism beyond borders can challenge sovereignty and can undermine its own objectives. If domestic actors respond to top down incentives at the expense of cultivating bottom up linkages, they weaken the core mission of advocacy in the long-term.<sup>2</sup>

The study uncovers the conditions under which transnational giving has had an enduring, sustainable impact. Recent events in Hungary show that if transnational institutions do not build deep roots and are not viewed as complementary with the interests of the political establishment, they can be forced out. CEU is currently in the process of moving to Vienna, despite its stellar academic reputation and the massive amount of resources that Soros has poured into Hungary.

The third layer of the book is testimonial. The clash between Klaus and Prague's CEU was a precursor to Orban's clash with Soros. Both originated in incompatible visions of nationhood and statehood. In Prague, the process of "rejecting" the cosmopolitan intruder's gift took only two years, whereas it was a painful, protracted process in Hungary. The book speaks to the origins of illiberalism in Central Europe, which has long been salient in the region. Animosity towards cosmopolitan projects and hostility to openness, combined with concerns over sovereignty and national dominance, have been constitutive elements of defending the status quo. This book highlights the historical origins of this approach, and identifies the agents of the status quo who either via passivity or via active opposition contributed to the failure of CEU in Prague.

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<sup>1</sup> Kitschelt, Herbert, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markowski, and Gabor Toka. *Post-communist party systems: competition, representation, and inter-party cooperation*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn Sikkink. *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics*. Cornell University Press, 2014.

The book's testimony transcends time. I personally know many of the actors described in the book. Professor Musil recruited me to apply to the CEU in Budapest, where I completed a Master's degree. In addition to providing a history of old conflicts, the book captures the essential elements of the Czech sociological community and social sciences in general. Pospíšilová's book was published ahead of its time. The book is a masterpiece that combines historiographical insights with theoretical rigor, and captures the essence of Czech academia and the legacy of illiberalism in Central Europe.

I am thrilled to support Dr. Tereza Pospíšilová's application. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions.

With my best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lenka Bustikova', with a horizontal line underneath.

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