

**UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE**  
**Fakulta sociálních věd**  
**Institut mezinárodních studií**

**PROTOKOL O HODNOCENÍ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE**  
**(Posudek vedoucího)**

Práci předložil(a) student(ka): **Caroline Bilsky (IMS, 2016/2017)**

Název práce: **Why Culture Houses Persist: Transitioning a Czech Icon**

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Vedoucí práce (u externích vedoucích uveďte též adresu a funkci v rámci instituce): **Maria-Alina Asavei, PHD** (Russian and East European Department, FSV, IMS)

1. OBSAH A CÍL PRÁCE (stručná informace o práci, formulace cíle):

Caroline Bilsky presents a consistent and well-argued exposition of an interesting cultural, social and political phenomenon: The Culture House. From the beginning of the 1920s the Soviet hegemony established Culture Houses throughout the Soviet Union and satellite countries as a strategy to disseminate and implement its cultural policy (the education of the masses). Caroline Bilsky explored in her Master dissertation *an under-researched* topic: the fate of the Czech Culture House after the fall of the communist regime. More exactly, she was interested in what happened (after the fall) to the institution of Culture House. This institution used to be a very widespread system of organization of people's leisure time during the former communist regime in the former Eastern bloc. Caroline's approach is innovative and the chosen topic is thought-provoking and interesting. After a solid literature survey, she noticed that the institution of the Soviet Culture House has mostly crumbled along with the communist and socialist regimes that instituted it all over the Soviet Union and its satellites. Yet, Caroline Bilsky's main argument in this dissertation is that in the Czech Republic's case, some conspicuous remains of this institution had persisted after the fall of the previous regime and she proceeds to disentangle how physical spaces (e.g. the Culture House as a physical Soviet icon) are able to reflect social change. To make this point, Caroline's research focused on a case study: the Zlín region (or *Zlínský kraj*) located on the Eastern border of the country, in Southeastern Moravia. She motivates this choice by stating that in this rural area the population remained mostly unchanged (unlike in the big cities) allowing a better understanding of the phenomenon of change over time.

2. VĚCNÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ (náročnost, tvůrčí přístup, argumentace, logická struktura, teoretické a metodologické ukotvení, práce s prameny a literaturou, vhodnost příloh apod.):

Appling a qualitative methodological approach (combining participant observation, surveys and content analysis), Caroline Bilsky's dissertation argued that the reinterpretation of the Culture House - by maintaining the same physical space and separating it from the past ideology - as envisioned by its staff, has allowed for the Culture House's survival and longevity in rural Czech Republic. The surveys with the Culture Houses' staff members were conducted in both Czech and English language. They are fully transcribed in the Methodological Appendix. Her argument is backed up with solid secondary literature (from cultural anthropoligy, ethnography, history, postcommunist transitology and memory studies) and appropriate primary sources. Sources are not merely described but analyzed.

3. FORMÁLNÍ A JAZYKOVÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ (jazykový projev, správnost citace a odkazů na literaturu, grafická úprava, formální náležitosti práce apod.):

Caroline's dissertation had a clear progression of ideas and she made some good use of topic sentences, transitions and keyword 'signposts' to move the points of her writing forward. Her writing is coherent and structure allows for the smooth flow of the text. The interpretation of secondary literature is sophisticated and well integrated.

4. STRUČNÝ KOMENTÁŘ HODNOTITELE (celkový dojem z diplomové práce, silné a slabé stránky, originalita myšlenek, naplnění cíle apod.):

This is a very thought-provoking MA dissertation dealing in an original manner with an under-explored topic. To support the main argument of her dissertation, Caroline Bilsky relied on relevant primary and secondary sources (all the secondary sources are very fit and well interpreted). A particular strength of the dissertation was Caroline Bilsky's willingness to use the ideas and theories of her 'sources' as a starting point to put forward her own points in a creative and original manner (especially when she deals with the concept of iconicity

witin transitology). Her ability to think independently is a key asset in her work. The dissertation is in general well structured and the analysis of data demonstrates good interpretative and analytical skills.

The next challenge remains to deepen critical analysis and ask even more provoking questions in order to show more sides of an issue and insert her voice more persuasively into the scholarly debate on the issue tackled in this dissertation (the Culture House's post-communist fate). Caroline Bilsky's conclusion was effective in that she recognized the limitations and one sidedness of her approach (the research focused only on how the Culture House's staff reflects on this institution's longevity). However, for a Master dissertation, this research has made relevant and insightful steps in opening the ground for further studies on the Culture House's transitioning. The topic can be explored further (perhaps during a PhD) by taking into account how the public (the "beneficiary of mass culture") understands and reflects on the fate of the Culture House. Caroline Bilsky already envisioned in her conclusions the possible frictions or disconnections between how the staff and the general public remember, interpret and reflect on the longevity, history and functionality of these places. From an epistemology narrative perspective these varieties of views on the longevity of the Culture House are nevertheless necessary.

#### 5. SPOLUPRÁCE S VEDOUCÍM PRÁCE (komunikace s vedoucím práce, schopnost reflektovat připomínky, posun od původního záměru apod.)

Caroline Bilsky's communication with me (her supervisor) was taking place on a regular basis. She improved her draft from one assignment to the other and integrated most of my observations and comments. She was hard working and always came prepared with questions and readings done in advance for the office hours. She invested a lot of effort to attend as many events as possible at the Culture Houses from the Southeastern Moravia.

#### 6. OTÁZKY A PŘIPOMÍNKY DOPORUČENÉ K BLIŽŠÍMU VYSVĚTLENÍ PŘI OBHAJOBĚ (jedna až tři):

As already mentioned, Caroline's conclusion was effective in that she acknowledged the limitations and one sidedness of her approach (how the Culture House's staff reflects on this institution's longevity). Perhaps, this one sided study could be developed in such a way that

would illuminate other views and world views. However, I consider that for a Master disseration the focus has to be narrowed down but I suggest developing this topic further.

**Questions:**

1. To what extent the Culture House's staff emphasized in their answers the Soviet origins of this institution?
2. How do you envision the possible frictions or disconnections between how the staff and the general public remember, interpret and reflect on the longevity and functionality of the Cultural Houses? To what extent is desirable to illuminate these possible frictions in further studies on the topic? Whose narrative about the Culture House prevails and why?
3. Is it possible to talk about a complete separation of the physical space of the Culture House from the past ideology? To what extent can be this separation explained in economical terms?
4. What is an icon's physicality and materiality? To what extent its materiality can be resistant to change?

**7. DOPORUČENÍ / NEDOPORUČENÍ K OBHAJOBĚ A NAVRHOVANÁ ZNÁMKA**  
(výborně, velmi dobře, dobré, nevyhověl):

**Výborně**

Datum: 23.08.2017

Podpis:

Maria-Alina Asavei

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Pozn.: Hodnocení pište k jednotlivým bodům, pokud nepíšete v textovém editoru, použijte při nedostatku místa zadní stranu nebo přiložený list. V hodnocení práce se pokuste oddělit ty její nedostatky, které jsou, podle vašeho mínění, obhajobou neodstranitelné (např. chybí kritické zhodnocení pramenů a literatury), od těch věcí, které student může dobrou obhajobou napravit; poměr těchto dvou položek berte prosím v úvahu při stanovení konečné známky.