

A True European from Central Europe

Jiří Musil was a true gentleman of science, one of the 'old guard' from the previous era, rarely—if at all—encountered in the contemporary, commercialised, and grant-driven scientific reality. Jiří seemed to be above it, writing, teaching and organising international scientific life in his inimitable, grandiose, yet at the same time modest manner, radiating his personal culture, wisdom, and humour.

Jiří Musil was one of the breed of Central European intellectuals who had no Polish or Hungarian complexes nor harboured anti-German phobias. His academic interests lay with the city, a topic to which he dedicated many papers and books. He was the most famous Czech sociologist in Europe and an indisputable authority for many Czech, Polish, Slovak, and German colleagues. I first met Jiří thanks to my friend, Zygmunt Pióro, in the mid-1960s. Then came the infamous year 1968; fortunately Jiří did not suffer particularly brutal repressions: he found shelter at VÚVA, the Institute of Town Planning and Architecture, where he was given a kind of asylum and offered the possibility to continue his research work. The 1970s and the 1980s were a period of friendly and frequent contacts between Polish and Czechoslovak sociologists, which later included researchers from West Germany. Polish-Czechoslovak seminars held in the Bohemian Forest and Piešťany provided a forum for sharing thoughts, research findings and reflections on the future of cities. This was followed by a series of meetings bringing together Polish, Czechoslovak and West German researchers, organised in Bad Homburg, Wiśla and in the Rzeszów region, and initiated by Bernd Hamm, Wendelin Strubelt, and Jiří Musil. During the recent years, Jiří held lectures at the Central European University, in Prague, Budapest, and Warsaw.

Jiří was a good and wise man, a friend of Polish sociologists, not without a touch of self-criticism and irony. Once, I recall, Jiří and I were strolling through the Old Town market square in Warsaw, discussing the meaning of sociologists' work. Who do we write all our papers for? For colleagues, came Jiří's witty and ironic reply. This statement did contain a pinch of truth about the role of social sciences in the contemporary world.

Jiří was also a true European and at the same time a true Czech patriot. At the beginning of the transformation, when Czech cities and towns began to emerge from their shabby state in which the socialist times had left them, in Tábor, a medium-sized Czech town, we spotted a Western-made machine vacuum-cleaning the streets. We in Poland still had to wait some time to see such luxuries, but Jiří proudly said: 'We are in Europe!' Yes, now we are all in Europe—a pity Jiří Musil is no longer with us! We shall all miss him—not only as a scientist and intellectual, but also as a friend who kindly shared his friendship with us.

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