

Memories from International Colleagues

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Petr Matějů's passing is a great loss—to his family, to his immediate colleagues, to Czech society, and to his hundreds of colleagues and friends around the world. And far too soon. Petr affected our lives in many ways—as scholar-researcher, as teacher, as political activist, as scientific organiser and leader—as a role model. My few words can add little to that extraordinary record.

I can offer some recollections of my personal contact with Petr, beginning with our first meeting—before the revolutions of the 1980s—at a Budapest meeting of RC28, the Research Committee on Social Stratification of the International Sociological Association. As I entered the conference room, Petr was beginning to deliver his paper. It was full of platitudes about the latest five-year plan. I walked out. After the session ended, Petr came up to me and asked several excellent questions about loglinear models. Given what I had just heard, I was surprised, and I told him that what I had heard of his talk was baloney—I used a stronger term. Petr replied that I did not understand the political situation, that 'the beginning of the talk was bs, the end was bs, and you should pay attention to the middle'. That sold me on him, and I obtained a very modest sum from the Soros Foundation to bring Petr to the UW-Madison as a postdoc.

We had a very good year. One of the highlights was Petr's acquisition of a small, 8086 IBM pc clone, a Leading Edge. During that year, I was contacted by the local FBI office and asked whether Petr were a spy. I said, no, and the agent asked why I thought that. Well, I said, IBM has just introduced a larger, faster PC, the 80386. If Petr were a spy, he would have bought that one. To get it back into Czechoslovakia without an excessive border tariff, Petr removed most of the memory, but not before he loaded an early version of the statistical program SPSS. Before he came to the United States, Petr told me that he and his colleagues would have to travel across town, carrying IBM cards, to reach a computing centre. Afterwards, he rented a small apartment, just to house the Leading Edge, which, in typical fashion, he shared with his colleagues.

Petr's wit was his constant companion. During his year in Madison, the State of Wisconsin was publicising its value as a vacation site by distributing large bumper stickers with the words, 'Escape to Wisconsin'. Later on—but before the restoration of democracy—I saw that sticker on the back bumper of Petr's Lada. And when Petr first showed Tess and me the building of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, he said, 'In Mozart's time, this was a whorehouse. Nothing much has changed.'

I cannot count, let alone recount, my many later meetings and adventures with Petr. On our first visit to Petr and Marta's home, I recall my wonderment at his sending David down the block for a fresh pitcher of beer. There were many RC28 meetings—and I especially recall the meeting in Taiwan, which Tess, Petr, and I followed up with a tour of Thailand along with Judy Seltzer and Rob Mare—and another in Florence, where Karolína accompanied Petr. And many visits that Tess and I paid to Prague, both before and after the revolution. On one of the later visits, not related to RC28, we met, dined, and schemed in the basement of Restaurant Mucha with the incoming leaders of the Ministry of Education. On more than one occasion, including one where Petr managed to organise a graduate training seminar, we met and played in the wonderful castle town Český Krumlov.

But let me return to the beginning of this text—Petr Matějů's contributions as scholar, teacher, and researcher, as political activist and representative, and as scientific leader. I have been trying to think of a way to encapsulate his many contributions in a few words. I can think of no better way than to suggest that, in Czech academia and society, Petr Matějů's life has been comparable to that of the American professor and senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. In both cases, contributions and memories will live on.

IVÁN SZELÉNYI

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Petr Matějů was a pioneer, and in some ways, the renaissance man of Czech sociology, or arguably Czech social sciences. He was a pioneer, since he was one of the early birds to introduce sophisticated statistical analysis. Already in the mid-1980s he was doing respectable quantitative work—all well beyond my comprehension. He was also a renaissance man since he not only covered an extraordinary research agenda (from research on urban studies, social mobility, educational attainment, costs of post-communist transition, questions of higher education, human capital, investment, and so on and so forth), but he combined a distinguished scholarly career with political involvement, serving in government and running large organisations. As far as I could tell from a distance, from the United States, he knew how to practice at the same time science and politics as vocations without violating the ethical rules of either. A rare accomplishment. I also admired his sharp mind and no-nonsense style of 'doing business'. He was not buddy-buddy to me, not someone for small talk. No, he was a straight shooter, a wise and honourable man. For me, an American, probably a little cool

in interpersonal relations, he did not have the American smile-smile style; nevertheless after a while you felt he is a friend, though not in the American superficial sense of the term.

I am not the person to be able to comment on his extraordinary range of scholarly and public achievements, but twice in our life our intellectual trajectories met. Very early in his life as a scholar he was doing urban research, close to my own interests. I cannot recall exactly when we met the first time. It must have been in the early 1970s, when he still might have been a student and attended one or several of the 'new urban sociology' conferences either in Brno or in Prague that my dear friend Jiří Musil organised. One of his early works certainly belonged to this style of work, it was offering sound data on the social and ecological structure of Prague and was published in the flagship journal of the 'new urban sociology', the *International Journal of Regional and Urban Development*, as early as 1979. Next I heard from him, he was in the Sociology Department of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, during the late 1980s—at that time the best sociology department in the world. Petr was one of those hot-shot, highly sophisticated stratification and mobility researchers, working with people like Bob Hauser and David Featherman, well beyond my technical skills.

Nevertheless, our intellectual trajectories crossed one more time: after the fall of communism we both became interested in the question of 'transition' and especially in the questions of how the old communist cadres converted their political capital into economic capital (if they did so at all) and who the winners and losers of the transition were. I directed a study on 'social stratification in Eastern Europe after 1989' with Donald Treiman and Petr was one of our major collaborators in the Czech Republic. He published several outstanding articles on this topic, one of them with my former student Eric Hanley.

I believe I met him the last time when he invited me with my second, young wife to Prague—it must have been in 2003 or 2004. He was a generous host. He organised a flashy professional meeting for me and we spent a wonderful evening in his home. I will never forget that evening. Petr was not just a nice colleague, a 'university friend' in the American sense of the term, over a couple of glasses of wine—or beer—I sensed a real Central European friendship evolving between us. The next decade and a half Petr had a spectacular career as a politician and administrator. He served briefly as Deputy Minister of Education and President of the Czech Science Foundation, and he continued his scholarly work even when he was in high political or administrative jobs.

He will be missed as an inspiring colleague, as a talented administrator, and first of all as a friend. Rest in peace and I hope there are young people who will carry the torch you sadly dropped so early in life.

DONALD J. TREIMAN

Distinguished Professor of Sociology Emeritus, University of California,
Los Angeles (UCLA)

Petr Matějů was an excellent colleague and a good friend. Although we haven't seen much of each other in recent years, there was a time in the 1980s and 1990s when we worked closely and had many good times together.

First, the work. Petr was a major player in the project 'Social Stratification in Eastern Europe after 1989' (SSEE) organised by Iván Szelényi and me. This was a six-nation probability sample survey conducted in 1993 in six nations (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and Slovakia) with about 5000 respondents per nation. The SSEE had two distinctive features, common now but rare then. First, it was a genuinely cooperative effort, with strong participation from all the nations involved, rather than a centrally commanded enterprise. Second, a standardised sample design and a standardised questionnaire were adopted in all six nations, which greatly facilitated cross-national comparisons. As we can all appreciate, this sort of project design has strong centrifugal tendencies that can threaten the integrity of the enterprise. Petr was a tough advocate for and rigorous enforcer of the requirement that national variations, in both the sample design and the questionnaire wording, be kept to a minimum, despite all sorts of claims of the uniqueness of particular nations, offered by his Czech colleagues among others. He deserves a great deal of the credit for the quality of the final product, which has resulted in hundreds of papers and continues to be widely used today.

Now the fun. Petr was a pleasure to work with, tough and demanding but able to see the humour in life. He also was a pleasure to play with. We first met in Budapest at the 1984 meeting of the Research Committee on Stratification and Mobility (RC28), which apparently was his first meeting of this worldwide consortium of scholars interested in social inequality and social mobility. He revealed there that he was a sly fellow. Soviet-dominated Europe being what it was in 1984, he presented a very safe and boring version of a paper but then went around to a number of us and privately gave us a version that he said was the real thing. This, clearly, is what led him to connect with Bob Hauser at the University of Wisconsin and with me as well.

It also led to a memorable evening with Petr when my wife and I visited Prague immediately after the Budapest meeting—or, more properly, a five-hour marathon session at a famous pub in Prague frequented by working men and intellectuals (it was the Golden Tiger and apparently still attracts locals, although now many tourists as well). We were sitting on the inside of a table, against the wall, and the pub was so crowded that there was no way to move past the others on the inside. But the solution was easy—whenever anybody had to relieve himself of the prodigious quantities of beer, the people sitting at the ends of the table simply lifted it into the air to permit the needy person to duck under and head for the toilet.

Another memorable event was after the 1991 RC28 meeting, which Petr organised in Prague. Iván Szélényi, who that year was president of the Hungarian Sociological Association, had invited several of us to attend the HSA annual meeting, scheduled back-to-back with the Prague meeting. So a group of us drove to Budapest in a caravan of several cars. A highlight of the trip was stopping in a small town near the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border (this was before Czechoslovakia split), where Petr had arranged a private tour of a castle managed by a friend of his. We stayed overnight in a tiny inn near the castle where, I believe, the nightly rate was USD 15 for a double room. We had a long and boozy dinner, but at least stayed more or less upright, unlike a group of border guards who got so smashed that they kept falling off the benches. Apart from the castle, the most prominent feature of the town was the condom machines at the bus stops.

In 1994, with the 1993 SSEE survey data ready for analysis, Petr, together with his wife and young daughter, came to Los Angeles to spend several months at UCLA working with me and Iván Szélényi. Unfortunately, the Northridge earthquake, the largest earthquake ever recorded in the Los Angeles area, occurred at 4:30 am the morning after Petr and family arrived. It was everything he and I and my wife could do to dissuade Petr's wife and daughter from getting on the next plane back to Prague. Ultimately we were successful and, I believe, a good time was had by all during their visit.

Petr was a model of what a scholar /bon vivant should be. He will be missed.

JONATHAN KELLEY

Director, International Survey Center and Professor,
University of Nevada, Reno

MARIAH EVANS

Professor of Sociology, University of Nevada, Reno

A well-known champion of international, comparative sociology, Petr Matějů first ventured beyond the (then) strict isolation of Czechoslovakia to attend the historic, first-behind-the-Iron-Curtain meeting of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Social Stratification and Mobility (RC28) that Tamás Kolosi organised in Budapest in August 1984. It must have been overwhelming, because Petr was besieged by well-intentioned, but profoundly ignorant, colleagues from the West who were desperate to know what had become of their valued colleague Pavel Machonin, and eager to learn about the condition of Czech sociology, but who had no idea how much danger their intense interest posed to their informant. For many of us, Petr included, that meeting planted

the seeds of many future collaborations and opened the door to systematic, collaborative, large-scale, cross-national analyses of social stratification and mobility. Even then, the sterling qualities that shine through the rest of his career were evident: moral courage to take personal risks on behalf of sociology; curiosity and the intellectual courage to ask hard questions and risk unpopular answers; relentless commitment to sociology as a scientific enterprise, with special reference to dissecting objective inequality and mobility processes and to the roots and consequences of attitudes and values about justice and inequality; and determination to spur Czech sociology forward by weaving it deeply into the tapestry of international survey-based research using modern statistical methods.

In addition to his ongoing participation in RC28, Petr's engagement with the international community enabled him to collect data that, in the absence of a time machine, we will never again be able to harvest. These included a prompt application to join the International Social Survey Programme, which was approved in 1991. He then garnered grant support to field the annual ISSP surveys in the Czech Republic. The Czech data on attitudes and values on income inequality in the ISSP's Social Inequality II survey, fielded in 1992, are especially precious. Not content simply to go with the flow, Petr was elected a member of the Drafting Committee for the ISSP's Social Inequality III and IV surveys, as well as other rounds, and co-authored the *Analytic Guide to the International Social Survey Programme 1999 Inequality Questionnaire*, which was a seminal analysis of the measurement properties and analytic pay-off of questions included in prior survey rounds. Petr was a vocal proponent of the revision and expansion of ISSP background variables, hosted numerous ISSP meetings in Prague, and led a profound engagement of the Czech Republic in the ISSP community that has continued to the present.

Indefatigable in his determination to weave Czech sociology inextricably into international comparative sociology, he also spearheaded Czech engagement in other important international collaborations. Steadily pushing and focusing colleagues' efforts on collecting the data necessary to study the strength of the influence of institutions and the degree of resilience of culture and micro-processes of stratification and mobility, he led the Czech component of the Social Stratification in Eastern Europe after 1989 project, and the International Social Justice Project (fielded approximately every 5 years since 1991–2006).

PÉTER RÓBERT

Senior Researcher, TÁRKI, Budapest

I was shocked by the news: Petr Matějů is dead at age 66. Given the data on life expectancy by demographers, this cannot be true. Though we all know, those values are fully probabilistic. Still, at least we can say, it is not fair.

I preserve three 'photos' of Petr in my memory. In the first one, Petr is attending the RC28 meeting in Budapest organised by Tamás Kolosi behind the Iron Curtain in 1984 and giving a talk on educational inequalities. Given the political circumstances in Czechoslovakia at that time, Petr could not participate in any conference in the West, but this occasion allowed him to build contact with scholars in stratification research. These contacts developed later into significant academic and friendly relationships. He also used the opportunity to visit a Budapest cinema in order to watch a film by Milos Forman that was unavailable in Czechoslovakia at that time. The second memory is of Petr sitting in the drafting group preparing the 'Social Inequality' Module for the ISSP led by Jonathan Kelley, where he is arguing for the inclusion of topics, particular questions, sometimes even particular words in the text of a question, and doing so with a strong academic understanding of social inequalities. I recall the heavy debates over that module and Petr's work contributed to the fact that the Inequality module became one of the most frequently analysed ISSP surveys. The module was particularly relevant for post-communist countries in 1992 (Social Inequality II); we even developed together a set of additional questions in order to study the change in opinions and attitudes about social inequalities in connection with the socio-political transformation in our societies. The third image in my memory is from the last time we met personally, in 2012. We had both been invited to the Institute of Education in Justus-Liebig-University of Giessen (JLU) for a conference called 'Political Opportunity Structures and Higher Education'. Petr gave a comprehensive lecture on communist and post-communist developments in the inequality of educational opportunities in Czechoslovakia / Czech Republic. His lecture clearly demonstrated his sensitivity to and expertise in both analytical and political issues connected to education, a highly important element in social stratification and mobility research.

Petr Matějů was a great scholar and a fantastic person; I am glad that I knew him and worked with him in RC28 and ISSP.

HANS-PETER BLOSSFELD

Professor of Sociology, European University Institute, Florence

It is with a heavy heart that I learned that Petr Matějů had passed way at the age of 66. He was a very influential sociologist in his home country and on the international stage. I first met him in the late 1980s at one of the RC28 meetings. This was the period when communist Czechoslovakia was opening up. Petr was very active in spreading the use of rigorous statistical methods in inequality research in Czechoslovakia. He wrote and edited several books and published many important papers on social stratification research, educational sociology, and gender issues. In the early 1990s, we collaborated more closely. He contributed an excellent chapter on Czechoslovakia to the volume *Persistent Inequality: Changing Educational Attainment in Thirteen Countries*, edited by Yossi Shavit and me in 1993. Petr was also very active in including his country in international data collection programmes such as ISSP, ISJP, or PIAAC. For many years, Petr engaged in the political arena. Recently, he again devoted more of his time to sociology. In particular he sought to advance longitudinal research in the Czech Republic. We planned to organise a workshop together. We will all miss him. He was a very friendly, nice, and reliable colleague. I would like to extend my deepest condolences to Petr's wife, children, and family. My heartfelt compassion and sympathy are with them during this painful time.