



FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF VÁCLAV SOUKUP

Czech socio-cultural anthropology in the post-revolution period would not be in its current form, to a significant degree, if it was not for the Czech anthropologist and culturologist Doc. PhDr. Václav Soukup, CSc. Anyone who has had the pleasure of meeting this energetic individual, would find it hard to believe that this year he celebrates a significant anniversary (born 31. 8. 1957 in Mariánské Lázně).

He was born into a teaching family and grew up in Western Bohemia, where he found himself fascinated by the study of History and Literature. He extended his studies in this area in the 1970s at the Publishing School in Luhačovice, which was, to a certain extent, an acceptable solution to the problems caused by those of an unacceptable "party profile" during the communist period in Czechoslovakia. After completing his university studies at the Department of Cultural Theory at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague, he continued to work at this institution. The fact that Václav Soukup can undoubtedly be considered as one of the founders of modern Czech socio-cultural anthropology is evidenced by the subject of his thesis "*Models of Culture in Social and Cultural Anthropology*" from 1987. At that time, before the Velvet Revolution, methods of cultural and social anthropology in Czechoslovakia were still rejected as products of unwanted Western "bourgeois" sciences. The successful recognition of his candidacy at the Institute of Ethnology at Charles University was prevented by the fact of Soukup's continuous refusal to enter the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. It is one of the wonderful ironies of social and cultural change – that Václav Soukup himself observes and describes with interest – that he now works as a professor at this institution.

His fundamental contribution to the field stems also from his professional interests which always dwelt in the history of the field of encyclopaedic synthesis, which he first developed as the author of many phrases of the *Great Sociological Dictionary* (1996) and other dictionaries. Thanks to this, the Czech academic and lay communities has access to a wholly fundamental and important body of work, and in Czech historical literature, some of the weightiest monographs in the field: *The History of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (1996), *Overview of Anthropological Theories of Culture* (2000), *History of Anthropology* (2004), *Anthropology: Human and Cultural Theory* (2011) and *Prehistory of the genus Homo* (2015). Soukup's work, however, with his erudition, often modulates across the boundaries of several disciplines, creating inspirational works in which the author's profound interest in artistic creation is reflected: *Evolution of Man and Prehistoric Art* (2010), *Prehistoric Art* (2011). Together with the cultural anthropologist and art historian, Barbora Půtová, they have worked together on a number of projects, the results of which were presented to the public in collective monographs, *The Genesis of Craft and the Origin of the Human Mind* (2015) and *The Arts and Culture of the Kingdom of Benin* (2016). It is not surprising that he was also awarded the Vojtěch Suk Prize by Masaryk University or the Rector's Prize from Charles University in Prague.

From the above it is clear that there is a strong connection between Václav Soukup, the university environment and its students. In this role, he was an extraordinary instructor, for some even, revelatory. His lectures had a real authentic passion and he had a rare rhetorical talent. The listener always marvelled over the incredible stories of man and science that we call anthropology, always enriched by surprising discoveries in the field of art or literature, which emerged from his wide-ranging general knowledge. With the same passion, that he engaged his interest in his studies, he also systematically devoted in himself to the popularization and presentation of his field of study.

Václav Soukup was never a closeted researcher. Between 1992 and 2015, he conducted empirical research in Czech cities, focusing on local culture, cultural change and socio-cultural potential. He enriches his friends by revealing unexpected connections in life and the space that surrounds us. He also attained the position of the Rector of the University of International and Public Relations in Prague (since 2016). Every personal meeting with Václav really is a positive experience. An insatiable youthful elan and an ability to naturally carry away anyone in his surroundings with his ideas. Only, with a bit of distance, you are never quite sure whether or not you have just become a part of another one of Václav's anthropological surveys. I honestly hope that I have countless more of these meetings.



Václav Soukup, Czech cultural anthropologist surrounded by his works, which were instrumental in the establishment of Czech cultural anthropology in the post-communist era. Photo © Aleš Pavlíček.

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