

## **Czech History, Arts, and Civil Society II: Creativity in Context**

EURO/ARTS 3005 (3 credits / 45 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:  
Czech Republic: Arts and Social Change

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

### **Course Descriptions**

This elective course provides a deeper analysis of the development of democracy and civil society following the end of communism in 1989 with an emphasis on the nexus of contemporary politics and civic initiatives where the arts and creativity are key components for impelling social change. The course is introduced with a workshop dedicated to ways in which we read and analyze art, and then examines the position of art and creativity in contemporary society with a focus on Czech history and context. It includes readings, lectures, and round-table discussions on the evolution and defining characteristics of civil society in the Czech Republic today, as well as visits to NGOs, festivals, former dissidents, and activists engaged in work on such topics as youth support, alternative culture, human rights, or the integration of socially and ethnically marginalized groups. The class provides a first-hand observation and analysis of the social and cultural legacy of communism through an exploration of critical issues for post-socialist European society today.

### **Course Objectives**

- To explore how the roles of artists and civic leaders have transformed in a young democracy.
- To review and analyze critical challenges associated with liberal democracy and the legacy of communism.
- To gain firsthand experience with artists and arts managers about their work in relation to open borders, consumerism, and the free market of post-communist Europe.

### **Expected Outcomes**

Upon completion of the seminar, students are expected to have achieved:

- A solid knowledge of the intersection of Czech politics and society in the post-socialist period.

- A deeper awareness of the current state of the arts and civic initiatives in the Czech Republic and the creation and survival of civil society organizations through personal stories of former dissidents and artists and others leading social change programs.
- An appreciation for the current challenges to contemporary arts and civil society in the Czech Republic and how those challenges relate to the social and cultural legacy of communism.
- A deeper cross-cultural view on global themes such as multiculturalism, role of creative civic initiatives for social change, and individual responsibility in totalitarian and democratic contexts.

### Course Text

All texts and readings are provided at the start of the course and additional readings may be assigned. Students are expected to complete readings in advance of designated lectures as background and to prepare in advance for weekly interviews with artists and NGO leaders.

### Program Calendar

This seminar runs largely parallel to Czech History, Arts, and Civil Society I and picks up relevant themes within the post-socialist context, with considerable place given to a comparative and cross-cultural debate around these topics. Lectures on the selected themes are complemented each week by personal interviews with specialists, artists, and civil society leaders. The weekly themes and readings are as follows.

### Week II: Civil Society and the Arts: Definitions, Frameworks, and Post-Socialist Developments

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#### Readings

- Jirina Šiklová, *Aspects of the Transition and Heritage of the Revolution: changes in the Role of the State and Civic Society*. (text of speech, September 1999).
- Anna Vari, *Civil Society And Public Participation: Recent Trends In Central And Eastern Europe*. The Community Economic Development Centre: Civil Society Project (2005)
- Ivan Malý, Simona Škarabelová “Challenges for Civic Society Organizations in the Czech Republic” and Mike Geddes, “The Czech Experience viewed from the UK” in *Society in Transition: Rebuilding Partnerships* (papers from an international conference in Český Krumlov, December 12-13, 2002), pages 37 – 44 and 49 – 56 respectively.

### Week III: Meaning and Framework of Multiculturalism Past and Present

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#### Readings

- Selections from Ladislav Holý, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. (1996).
- Nedomova, A.& Kostecky, T. (1997). *The Czech National Identity; Basic Results of the 1995 National Survey*. *Czech Sociological Review*, 5, 79 – 92.
- Vašečka, M. - Vašečka, I.: *Recent Romani migration from Slovakia to EU Member States - Romani Reaction to Discrimination or Romani Ethno-tourism?* In: *Nationalities Papers*, March 2003, Carfax Publishing, Taylor & Francis, 2003. ISSN: 0090-5992
- *Multiculturalism and Universalism: A History and Critique in American Quarterly*, Vol 45, No. 2. Special Issue on Multiculturalism (June 1993), pp. 195 – 219.
- *Introduction and Chapter 2* (Němcová); and *Chapter 9* (Jesenská) Wilma A. Iggers, *Women of Prague: Ethnic Diversity and Social Change from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*

### Week IV: Regional Stays

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## **Week V–VI: Arts, Creativity, and Dissent: The Origins and Character of Totalitarianism**

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### *Readings*

- Selections from Hannah Arendt's The Origins of Totalitarianism (1968)
- Eric Fromm, The Art of Being (1993)
- Barbara Day, *International aspects of the "underground university" in Czechoslovakia, 1948-1989*.
- Barbara Day, *Supporting the Independent Culture in Czechoslovakia (the Jan Hus Educational Foundation in the years 1979-1989)*.
- Havel, Vaclav. *Six Asides about Culture* in *Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965-1990*.
- Alena Škodová, *The Jazz Section Celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*. Czech Radio broadcast, November 2001.

## **Week VII: Central Europe Excursion**

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## **Week VIII–XI: Arts and Social Change: Freedom and Public Transformation**

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### *Readings*

- Havel, Vaclav. *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvížd'ala*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.
- The Plastic People of the Universe (*Milan Hlavsa interview*)
- Jiřina Šiklová, "Courage, Heroism, and the Post-modern Paradox" in *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Social Sciences* Issue: Volume 71, Number 1 / Spring 2004 Pages: 135 – 148
- Anda Rottenberg, *Between Institution and Tradition: The Artist in Search of Freedom in from Beyond Belief: Contemporary Art from East Central Europe* Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (September 1995).

### **Student Evaluation and Grading Criteria**

Students are required to be on time to all lectures and excursion departure points, to attend all lectures, and to participate actively in classroom discussions, group assignments, and presentations. All assignments are to be handed in on the designated due date or up to three days later with a penalty of one letter grade.

Final grades are based upon performances over the course of the semester and take into consideration active participation, punctuality, and initiative for creative and critical thinking. Seminar assignments are designed to allow students to elaborate selected themes relevant to the seminar topics and to develop analytical and creative reflection skills required for the ISP. They are evaluated on clarity and depth of analysis and reflection, elaboration and synthesis of key concepts from primary and secondary sources, and overall structure, organization and presentation.

*Arts-in-Context Journal* (30%) This assignment requires that students keep an ongoing journal of performances, art shows, and other cultural events attended throughout the semester.

*Primary Documents Review and Analysis* (30%) This assignment requires analysis and reflection on one of a selection of essays written by Vaclav Havel or other former dissidents and a reflection on the contemporary relevance of the issues raised in the documents, as well as leading an in-class discussion on the topic.

*Photo Essay* (30%) This assignment requires that students create a photo essay exploring a conceptual or tangible aspect of post-socialist society and prepare an oral presentation of

observations and analysis of the chosen theme.

*Leading Interviews* (10%) This assignment requires that the students work in small groups to prepare a question set and literature review in advance of one of the site visits to artists or civil society leaders.

### **Grading Scales and Criteria**

Grades are given both fairly and rigorously and in accordance with the system below. They will reflect a combination of absolute quality of performance, progress made, and the ability to take into account and assimilate the academic director's and the teachers' advice in assessing the work done. An "A" letter grade reflects exceptional work, a perfect combination of academic competences and personal research and analysis. It shows great ability to integrate field-based investigation and personal reflection into a structured and well-argued paper. A "B" letter grade reflects serious and methodical work as well as a substantial effort at analyzing and understanding cross-cultural issues. A "C" letter grade shows the work meets the requirements but needs more in-depth reflection and personal involvement. A "D" letter grade is insufficient and clearly reflects lack of work or serious deficiencies.

The grading scale for all classes is as follows:

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64%	F

**Please note:** the syllabus, course content, lecturers, and readings may be modified by the academic director in order to better suit the needs of the course and its participants. Should any change of class topics or lecturers be necessary, students will be promptly notified.

**Academic Policies:** SIT prides itself on providing students with an experientially based program; we hold ourselves, and our students, to the highest of academic standards. Students are asked to refer to the **SIT Study Abroad Handbook** for policies on academic integrity, ethics, academic warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process.

**Disability Services:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at [disabilityservices@sit.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@sit.edu) for information and support in facilitating an accessible educational experience. Additional information regarding SIT Disability Services, including a link to the online request form, can be found on the Disability Services website at <http://studyabroad.sit.edu/disabilityservices>.