

Creativity in the Czech Context

EURO/ARTS 3005 (3 credits)

Czech Republic: Studio Arts - Creative Writing, Contemporary Dance, and Photography

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

This seminar is devoted to the intersections of human rights, civic action and the creative arts. Students meet with NGO managers and activists utilizing creative mechanisms to promote human and civil rights and raise public awareness and debate in such areas as homelessness, women's rights, civil rights, mental and physical disabilities, and the environment. They engage in cross-cultural debate on the rich history of Czech dissent and how the roles of artists and civic leaders have transformed in recent decades.

Creativity in the Czech Context focuses on field visits with associations and NGOs working in the areas of human and civil rights and how these utilize the arts and other creative strategies to impel social and political change in the Czech Republic today. Students participate in exhibitions and annual community events and local arts festivals devoted to raising public awareness of concrete issues in civil and human rights. A high level of attention is given to the ethical concerns for engaging these local communities in sensitive debates. The approach is qualitative and inductive by nature and students are asked to prepare thoroughly by way of readings and introductory discussions, to engage in field-based activities and site visits and then to present their results in a final panel presentation.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the ways in which Czech NGOs and activists utilize the arts to engage human and civil rights;
- Explain the tools and mechanisms employed by Czech activists to impact social change through the arts;
- Analyze and appraise the contemporary Czech social and political landscape based on concrete examples of civic initiatives engagement with current social issues;
- Apply knowledge about current debates and developments in the Czech civic sector in reflection papers, site visits with specialists in the field and a formal panel debate.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to the arts and civic action through field visits with Czech activists and other specialists on contemporary social issues.

Class Schedule The daily schedule varies based on current NGO events, classes for this course generally on select days from 10:00 – 11:30 AM and 12:30 – 4:30 PM.

Office Hours by appointment

The lecturer is available for office hours on Tuesday from 4 – 5:30 PM.

Course Schedule

Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.

Module 1: Human Rights Activism and the Arts in Historical and Current Contexts

Introductory discussion with specialists in Czech dissent and Czech civil society, including a review of the historical roots of the current debates in such areas as human and civil rights, feminism, and environmentalism. Local and international paradigms for creative civic engagement: the unique place of art as a tool for provocation, mediation, raising public awareness and civic action in the Czech context.

Session 1: Czech Civil Society and the Arts in Historical Perspective

This introductory session discusses some relevant historical precedents for the rich interweave of the arts with human and civil rights action in Czech society, including the human rights manifesto, Charter 77, and the role of artists and the parallel culture in a totalitarian state.

Required Readings:

- Hájek, J. (1985). *The Human Rights Movement and Social Progress* (A.G. Brain, trans.) in Vaclav Havel et. al. *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*. Translator A.G. Brain. New York. M.E. Sharpe Inc., 134-140.
- Havel, V. (1992). Six Asides about Culture in *Open Letters, Selected Writings 1965-1990*. (Paul Wilson, ed.) New York: Vintage Books, 272-284.

Session 2: the Czech NGO sector – its creation and development after 1989

Developments of the NGO sector in the post-totalitarian decades and the legacy of socialist-era policies in Czech society today. Challenges related to public acceptance and use of non-profit organizations as mechanisms for social change in human and civil rights.

Required Reading:

- Pospišil, M. and Hyánek, V. (2009). *Country-Specific Information for Non-Profit Sector in the Czech Republic*. Brno: Center for Non-Profit Research.

Session 3: Mechanisms for Change Through the Arts: A Comparative Debate

This session is devoted to a cross-cultural discussion on the role of arts in civic engagement. Students are asked to bring examples from their own experience of ways in which the arts or creative civic action has impelled public dialogue or social change in the U.S. and how they compare and contrast with examples from the Czech context.

Required Reading:

Stern, M. J., & Seifert, S. C. (2009). Civic engagement and the arts: Issues of conceptualization and measurement, 5 – 23.

Session 4: Module I Reflection.

The concluding session is devoted to a student-lead review of the key characteristics of the Czech NGO sector today and the historical reasons for its perceived strengths and weaknesses with respect to facilitating social change. They will further identify questions and assumptions about the ways in which arts may be utilized as tools for social change that will provide some baseline for their interaction with specialists in the field.

Module 2: Arts, Gender, and Society

A look at the evolution of Czech feminism in the local and international contexts. Women's solidarity and participation in Czech civil society. Site visits devoted to the intersection of the arts and civic initiatives devoted to cultivating social empathy and diminishing stereotypes and gender-based prejudices.

Session 1: Defining Czech Feminism: A Cross-Cultural Debate

The session is devoted to a discussion of student reflection papers on the topic of Czech feminism, the role of young Americans in the feminist debate after the fall of communism and the changing face of feminism today. The session also considers the intersectional aspect of women's issues with other civic and human rights.

Required Reading:

Ferber, M. A., & Raabe, P. H. (2003). Women in the Czech Republic: Feminism, Czech Style. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 16(3), 407-430.

Nash, R. (2002). Exhaustion from explanation: Reading Czech gender studies in the 1990s. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 9(3), 291-309.

Šiklová, J. (1997). Feminism and the Roots of Apathy in the Czech Republic. *Social Research*, 258-280.

Session 2: Case Study: Arts, Women, and Society

This session is devoted to preparing for a site visit to one of the NGOs utilizing the arts to raise awareness around women's issues or provide support to marginalized women, such as the NGO Jako Doma (Like Home) whose projects deal specifically with violence against women and support homeless women.

Required Reading:

Hetmáňková, R. (2013). Back from the Bottom: Focused on Women. A Research Report of Jako Doma, o.s.

Session 3: NGO Site Visit

This session is devoted to meeting the women involved in the creative programs of the NGO (Catering, Exhibitions and Theatre Programs) to learn how they utilize arts and other creative programs to address the rights of homeless women.

Session 4: Module 2 Reflection

The concluding session is devoted to a student-lead review of the historical precedents for women's initiatives and the character today of Czech feminism. They will discuss the issues raised by the case study and reflect on how that particular NGO utilizes the arts to address their mission.

Module 3: Arts and Environmentalism

The long history and critical role of environmentalism in Czech society has galvanized some of the strongest and active civic movements in Prague and across the country. Students participate in bike rides or other community events devoted to such topics as sustainable living, diminishing pollution, recycling and public park protection and enhancement.

Session 1: The Czech Environmental Movement, Yesterday and Today

This session is devoted to a discussion of students' reflection papers and questions about the long-standing impulses for Czech environmentalism that emerged under socialism and the ways in which it has transformed in recent times.

Required Reading:

Carmin, J. (2010). NGO capacity and environmental governance in Central and Eastern Europe. *Acta Politica*, 45(1-2), 183-202.

Shriver, T. E., & Messer, C. (2009). Ideological cleavages and schism in the Czech environmental movement. *Human Ecology Review*, 161-171.

Session 2: Case Study: Creative Interventions and the Czech Environment

This session is devoted to preparing for a site visit to one of the NGOs utilizing the arts to raise public awareness around environmental concerns such as the NGO Automat that is focused on public interest and public space; making the city bike and pedestrian friendly, school programs and engaging Czech politicians through their watch-dog function. Students may participate in the 'A Different City Experience' where cars are removed the streets and throughout the city roads are open for music, theatre, visual arts, and other community events. Other "poetic interventions" like angels and musicians playing in the busy streets can be observed during some of the events this NGO organizes.

Required Readings:

Mareček, M. (Director). Šlajer, V. (Producer). (2009) *Auto*Mat*. Prague: Bionaut, s.r.o. (A Documentary Story about urban streets replete with bicycles, politician's false promises, death and hope).

Review the AutoMat website at <http://www.auto-mat.cz/what-we-do/> and the Different City Experience website at <http://zazitmestojinak.cz/en/>.

Session 3: NGO Site Visit: Activists as Artists

In addition to participating in The Different City Experience, students will meet with members of the Auto*Mat NGO to discuss the NGO's approach to working (or not) with municipal authorities to facilitate their activities and the dual role of artist/activist with particular regard to the ethics of some of their creative interventions such as stopping traffic for a piano concert.

Session 4: Module 3 Reflection

The concluding session is devoted to a student-lead summary of their experience and observations in the field *vis-à-vis* assumptions and questions raised in the introductory session. They debate how the arts are utilized in this Czech example as a form of civic engagement, to provoke public discussion, social and political change.

Module 4: Arts and Social Marginalization

This module is devoted to citizens marginalized for reasons such as physical or mental disability or drug addiction. Students may participate in theatre or ceramics workshops with clients or visit a social enterprise such as cafes managed by citizens in with disabilities.

Session 1: Social Services and the Role of NGOs in Support of Socially-Marginalized Citizens

Social support NGOs occupy a unique place in the complex history of support to marginalized citizens that is rooted in the former socialist policies and influenced by both positive and negative trends in the post-socialist transition period. Through a cross-cultural reflection on the role of social service NGOs in the Czech and US contexts students are asked to consider the place of the government and third sectors social services as well as public attitudes toward human and civil rights are addressed differently in the Czech context.

Required Readings:

- Holland, D. (2014). Social entrepreneurs and NGOs for people with mental disabilities in post-communist Europe: implications for international policy. *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, 6(4), 7-24.
- Křízová, E. (2012). Volunteering and mutual aid in health and social care in the Czech Republic as an example of active citizenship. *Central European journal of public health*, 20(2), 110-119.
- Sinecka, J. (2009). The Czech Republic: Report on the current state of disability law and policy. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 19(4), 195-203.

Session 2: Case Study: The Arts as a Bridge for Addressing Social Exclusion

While some Czech NGOs are devoted exclusively to the support or integration of one group or another, a number of NGOs take an intersectional approach in which they will support any citizen excluded by virtue of ability, mental or physical, health, gender, ethnicity etc. One example is Studio Citadela, a social and cultural center with a café, gallery open to the public and with arts programs supporting citizens for reasons of mental health, ethnicity, gender, mental or physical disability.

Required Readings:

Holland, D. (2014). Social entrepreneurs and NGOs for people with mental disabilities in post-communist Europe: implications for international policy. *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, 6(4), 7-24.

Review of the Citadela Studio NGO. <http://studiocitadela.cz/index.php/en/>

Session 3: NGO Site Visit: Arts as a Bridge & Public

Students meet with performing or visual arts teachers working in art therapy and other programs to discuss the ways in which theater, visual arts, and other arts programs are utilized to provide support to their clients. This NGO also helps to dispel stigmas about people with special needs to visitors to the café and other members of the general public. If possible, students take part in a workshop or attend a performance or exhibition opening.

Session 4: Module 4 Reflection: The Arts and Social Exclusion

The concluding session is devoted to a student-lead summary of their experience and observations on the site visit and to consider how this example compares or contrasts with projects they know addressing social-exclusion in the US. What questions does this case raise about the place of arts as a bridge among people and tool for diminishing social stigmas?

Module 5: Arts and Ethnic Minorities

A discussion around the current situation for immigrants, refugees, and other ethnic and religious minorities in the Czech Republic in light of Czech and European policies and political situation. Students meet at a community center with managers of a music festival, arts workshop for children or may participate in a cooking lesson with women at the center who offer 'ethno-catering' services.

Session 1: Culture, Arts, and Ethnicity in Czech Society Today

This session is devoted to student reflections on what they have learned about the Czech approach to immigrants and refugees and what the reasons for the Czech refusal to meet EU quota for refugees based on a review of current newspaper articles. Further, we consider in what way the complex historical events that influenced the homogeneous character of Czech culture and society today influence public attitudes toward refugees and migrants.

Required Reading:

Barmaki, R. (2009). Criminals/refugees in the age of welfareless states: Zygmunt Bauman on ethnicity, asylum and the new 'criminal'. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory*, 2(1), 251-256.

Uherek, Z. (2003). Some Aspects of Transformation Processes in the Czech Republic: International Migration and Integration of Foreigners. *ANTHROPOLOGICAL JOURNAL ON EUROPEAN CULTURES.*, 12, 87-102.

Students are asked to review the current Czech news at praguemonitor.com for updates on the Czech policies toward refugees.

Session 2: Case Study: The Arts as Expression and Communication Tool Across Cultures

NGOs devoted to refugees and migrants in the Czech lands have a support role of offering legal and social services to facilitate integration, and an activist role aimed at raising public

consciousness and impacting public policy. Students discuss different arts festivals aimed at highlighting the work of ethnic minorities as well as ethical challenges related to offering a platform for debate and performance without contributing to public 'othering'. Students discuss the history and programs of the In Baze Community Center, and the Ethnocatering project, a social enterprise offering catering services of traditional foods prepared by women migrants where the profits gained from the service is re-invested in the community center's arts, education, and social support programs.

Required Readings:

Review of the summary of the InBaze and Ethnocatering websites at <http://www.inbaze.cz/jazyky/english/> and <http://ethnocatering.cz/en/>.

Session 3: NGO Site Visit: Arts & Communication Across Cultures

Students take part in a discussion with members of the community center staff and migrant women engaged in the ethno-catering service and if possible, take part in a cooking lessons offered by the center.

Session 4: Module 5 Reflection: Cross-Cultural Communication and the Arts

The concluding session is devoted to a student-lead summary of their experience and observations on the site visit and to consider how this example provides a model for creative communication across ethnic and cultural lines. We consider the role of the arts for communicating difference and dispelling negative stereotypes around refugees and migrants.

Module 6: Panel Presentation and Debate

The seminar wrap-up is a panel presentation in which students summarize their work and present papers on the course themes to their colleagues and invited guests. They reflect on the roles for art and culture for civic engagement as identified in the initial module and readings, some specific tools utilized by Czech NGOs; and what conclusions can be drawn about Czech political and social landscape, public opinion and the role of the arts in Czech society. A cross-cultural approach to the final analysis is implicit and students are encouraged to include a comparative view with examples from their home country.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Description of Assignments:

(5) Reflection papers (60%):

Students are required to prepare a reflection paper for each thematic module in preparation for their discussions with experts and debrief about site visits. The papers should include comments and analysis of the readings; a cross-cultural reflection on the topic that integrates the student's experience on the same theme (environment, social services, migration, etc.) in their home country; and two to three questions to be raised in expert discussions and site visits.

Final Panel Paper (30%):

The final panel debate requires all students to prepare a paper focused on a topic as determined with the lecturer in advance and for an audience of other students and guests. As noted above they are asked to reflect on specific tools utilized by Czech NGOs to address contemporary issues in human and civil rights through the arts. Students are then asked to give a 10 – 15 minute presentation on the topics of their paper. Students will follow up with a debate among themselves also including audience questions and discussion with the panel.

Participation (10%):

All students are expected to prepare for classes as assigned and to submit reflection papers in a timely manner, to attend and participate in all class discussions and site visits.

Assessment:

(5) Reflection Papers	60%
Final Panel Paper	30%
Participation	10%

Grading Scale

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

Program Expectations

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

- **Storing Your Work:** Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available to despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- **Personal Technology Use:** Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- **Course Communication:** Course documents and assignments will be posted on the learning management system, Canvas. Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- **Content Considerations:** Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.
- **Classroom recording policy:** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.