

Remembering Jiří Musil (1928–2012)

Jiří Musil, an outstanding Czech sociologist and intellectual of European importance, died on 16 September 2012 at the age of 84. After graduating in 1952 from the Faculty of Arts of Prague's Charles University, he devoted his whole scientific life to studying the inter-relationships between space and society. He founded this field of social science studies in Czechoslovakia and contributed to the education of scores of specialists in urban sociology, social geography, demography, social anthropology, architecture, and urban planning. He directed numerous research projects and was author, co-author, or editor of a large number of scientific papers, books, and book chapters on urban and regional issues. His works were published not only in his native Czech language but also in English, German, Polish, Italian, and other languages. Musil's intellectual range was admirably wide—he worked with geographers, demographers, architects, ethnographers, and historians, many of whom were inspired by his wide outlook, and he was author of both empirical and theoretical studies. Although the major part of his professional life was lived under the communist regime, Musil did not yield to its pressures, and, unlike many of his contemporaries, did not compromise himself by taking up a political career or by reciting in his works the regime's obligatory ideological junk. He remained loyal to his great inspiration—the sociologist Max Weber and the philosopher Karl Popper.

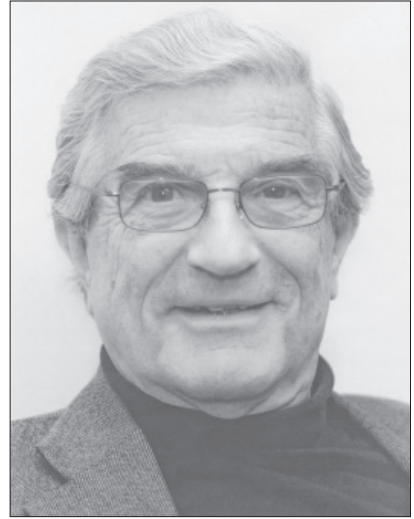


Photo courtesy of A. Miltová

Jiří Musil

The demise of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia in late 1989 and the country's democratic transition opened up an entirely new horizon to Jiří Musil, who was already in his sixties then. With incredible energy he devoted himself to a number of roles, projects, and activities both in his own country and on the international level. He became a professor at Prague's Charles University, director of the renewed Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, was elected President of the European Sociological Association, travelled and lectured abroad, and published with a renewed energy.

An important factor in Musil's post-revolutionary life was his acquaintance with the Hungarian-born international financier and philanthropist George Soros and his appointment to the post of academic director of the Central European

University's Prague College, which was founded by Mr Soros. Involvement with the university shaped Musil's professional life for years to come.

Upon learning of Jiří Musil's demise, Mr Soros expressed his deepest respect for the deceased sociologist.

Michal Illner
Institute of Sociology AS CR, Prague

My original plan for the Central European University was to have three campuses: Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest. Being of Hungarian origin, I wanted the Prague campus to be the first in order to ensure that all three campuses would have equal weight. Jiří Musil played a key role in establishing and running the Prague College as its academic director. In fact he was the most important local participant in a bold and innovative venture. He was greatly inspired by the mission with which he was entrusted and lived up to it fully. He was an inspirational leader and enjoyed my full support, but the Prague campus could not be maintained because of the implacable opposition of Václav Klaus. We lost the building that was given to us by the previous government and we moved the headquarters of the university to Budapest. We continued to maintain a small presence in Prague however; largely because of the insistence of Ernest Gellner and the persistence of Jiří Musil. Both of them remained associated with the Central European University until their death. I worked with Jiří Musil closely during the early years. I enjoyed his company and I admired his devotion to the cause. His passing is a personal loss.

George Soros

Jiří Musil, Czech Sociologist, Dies

Jiří Musil was born in Prague in 1928 and lived through all the seismic upheavals of Central Europe in the last two centuries. As a leading European intellectual, these experiences helped to shape his thinking as well as his life. During the Nazi occupation and Second World War, he spent some time in Terezín concentration camp. In 1952 he obtained his PhD in sociology and philosophy at Charles University, and despite the fact that sociology was actively suppressed by the communist authorities, Jiří, from his position within the Institute for Town Planning and Architecture (VÚVA) and later the Czech University of Technology, managed to establish a worldwide reputation in urban sociology. Writing in English as well as German, his works on socialist city planning and urbanisation were widely read and seminal texts on the subject, even if he was seldom allowed to travel or present his ideas in person.