

The Assimilation of Post-War Generations of Czech Immigrants in Chicago

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of the research conducted since 2013 in the Czech immigrant community in Chicago. The case of Czech immigration is particularly interesting, as it can be considered a textbook example of successful assimilation. Czechs had arrived in Chicago as early as mid-19th century. During the 20th and 21st centuries, there have been several waves of Czech immigration, usually connected to political as well as economic situations in Czechoslovakia or later the Czech Republic. The research methodology is based mainly on participatory observations and interviews. The research sample includes respondents from different migration waves, especially political immigrants after 1948 and 1968 who have legal status, as well as post-1989 immigrants whose choice to migrate was largely non-political and mostly economic. Czech immigration can generally be characterized by very strong and relatively fast assimilation across generations.

KEYWORDS

assimilation, Czech immigration, Czech diaspora, generation, Chicago

Introduction

The article presents the results of ethnographic research conducted in the Czech immigrant community in Chicago beginning in 2013. Czechs had arrived in the city as early as mid-19th century during Chicago's first industrial boom and the ensuing need for workers which lured immigrants from various countries to the city. The case of Czech immigration is particularly interesting, as it can be considered a textbook example of successful assimilation. At first, the immigrants moved into established Czech neighborhoods such as Czech Pilsen, Czech California, New Tabor and Vinohrady, where they were able to lead a rich social and cultural life and felt connected to the residents who were already there vis a vis their shared language and institutions. Nevertheless, processes of desegregation and assimilation began to emerge relatively soon. Increasingly upward social mobility resulted in the ability of subsequent generations to make full use of the dynamically developing city's potential, leave Czech neighborhoods and to Americanize quickly. During the 20th and 21st centuries, several waves of Czech immigration came to Chicago, usually resulting from political as well as economic circumstances in Czechoslovakia, or later the Czech Republic. Observing the fates of Czech immigrants across centuries, one common feature stands out significantly – Czech immigration can generally be characterized by to very strong and relatively rapid assimilation into the larger society.

The phenomenon of Czech immigration to US has not been researched as thoroughly as other national immigrations. In the 1950s, Melford E. Spiro summed up results of contemporary research influenced by the Chicago school of sociology, concluding that the studies mostly focused on the issue of social status of groups and on the consequences of belonging to a minority.¹ The

1 Melford E. Spiro, "The Acculturation of American Ethnic Groups," *American Anthropologist* 57, no. 6 (1955): 1240–1252.

process of acculturation was generally ignored, with the first important studies in this respect concerning Polish (Thomas and Znaniecki), Italian (Child), and Irish (Handlin) immigration. This line of research, however, was not focused on the anthropology of the individual. Although anthropologists had examined the process of acculturation, these investigations were generally undertaken regarding non-European cultures, mostly in connection with colonialism; only rarely were these ethnic groups studied in an industrial urban setting. The first anthropological works in this area were primarily descriptive, with one conclusion indicating a direct correlation between acculturation and social mobility. Those ethnic groups which adapted to the host country's culture faster were socially more mobile and thus assimilated more readily than other groups. In other words, a low rate of acculturation resulted in a population foundering in the low strata of a particular social structure. Further, religion played a role in the process of acculturation and mobility, as it was found to prevent the formation of new loyalties by perpetuating "sectarian morals" as well as discouraging new relationships with the outside world.²

Czech immigration is a particularly good example of how fast acculturation can occur. This process was facilitated by a relatively high presence of nonreligious elements – particularly Czech freethinkers during the 19th and early 20th century. In all of the Czech immigration waves that were surveyed, assimilation was found to take place relatively quick. Therefore studying Czech imprints on Chicago is challenging for historians, as signs of Czech presence in the history of Chicago can generally be found only in historical sources, archives, architecture, etc. In formerly Czech neighborhoods inhabitants have been replaced by new waves of immigration, especially from Mexico. In our article, we do not focus on Czech immigration history, although this forms a context which has been well-explored by researchers. Instead, we concentrate on the process of assimilation of Czech immigrants in the 20th and 21st centuries and we try to shed light on the reasons why assimilation happened so easily within diverse historical contexts and in various generations of newcomers, particularly in second generation populations. We will specifically discuss waves of political immigration coming after 1948 and 1968, as well as the post-1989 immigration which has mainly been motivated economically.

Methodology of Research

From the beginning of our research in 2013, the project was conceived as ethnographical and its methodology has been adjusted to a degree with respect to the findings and collected data results. The core of the research is participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The research team members have participated in various activities organized by immigrant associations as well as by already assimilated Czech-Americans. Sometimes these involve large cultural events attended by hundreds of participants (such as Moravian Day and the Czech Beer Festival), often co-organized by the Czech Consulate in Chicago. The team has documented events and activities at which further contacts are established and following which unstructured interviews were conducted.

Our research base as well as a source of significant information has been the Czech Catholic Mission. Our team has conducted some 50 interviews, 34 of which were digitally recorded.

² Melford, "The Acculturation of American Ethnic Groups," 1243.

Apart from the participatory observations, interviews and focus groups, we also study documents, including books in the public library. The identification and documentation of materialized forms of cultural memory localized in urban spaces represent another component of our research. These include materialized forms of cultural memory such as extant memorials, statues, and buildings erected as part of the life of the Czech diaspora.

The Czech diaspora in Chicago can be seen as stratified, with one of the key differentiating factors being a respondent's identification with belonging to a particular generation. Within our research, we have managed to conduct interviews in various quantities with members of all generations whose members are still alive. Identification with particular urban spaces represents another differentiating aspect within the Czech diaspora, with specific neighborhoods gradually settled and some eventually deserted. Over time, Czech neighborhoods (or villages) were created, therefore it can be said that specific locations are characteristic for particular immigrant waves, i.e. the pre-WWI generations settled in ethnically relatively homogenous neighborhoods (almost ghetto-like) such as Pilsen and Czech California, the inter-war and post-WWII generations moved to Cicero and Berwyn, while for the post-1989 generations of immigrants "Polish" neighborhoods in the north-west of Chicago (e.g. around Belmont Ave.) have become more typical. As a result of these processes of assimilation and suburbanization, ethnically homogeneous Czech areas no longer exist, although some parts of the city contain more Czech and Czech-descended populations than in others. In our research, we have primarily focused on the neighborhoods of Pilsen, Czech California, Cicero, Berwyn and Brookfield.

Theoretical Framework: Generations and Diasporas

Keeping in mind that Czech migration to Chicago had begun in 1852, it was necessary for the purposes of the research to distinguish peak time periods of Czech immigration to US as well as phases when immigration was low or even rare. A suitable tool is to interpret the consequences of immigration, the process of assimilation as well as the lifestyle in the Czech diaspora by employing the concept of a generation. This paradigm enables us to understand the generational placement in social and urban space, the often eventful and dramatic fates of the "bearers" of culture, the temporal boundaries reflected in specific contents of a generation's consciousness as well as tensions among generations. Remaining aware of the difficulties involved in defining a generation, we base our approach on Karl Mannheim's concept,³ which emphasizes participation in common fate, sharing of memory, the presence of generational unity as well as participation in defining events as significant factors. In the case of Czech immigration, these events include fundamental social and political changes in Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic. The commonly experienced collective traumas of various generations and as well as the fall of the communist regime in the late 20th century created specific ties but also intergenerational differences. Apart from the fact that immigration was initiated by fundamental political changes, a certain period's specific situation along with the particular social, cultural and economic characteristics of Chicago must be taken

3 Karl Mannheim, "Das Problem der Generationen," in *Wissenssoziologie: Auswahl aus dem Werk* (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1964): 509–565.

into consideration. The entire social urban space of Chicago has undergone significant changes over time, with the once purely industrial town having been transformed into a global, post-capitalist suburbanized metropolis.

The concept of generations allows us to uncover the dynamics of change and the rhythm of historical development. Mapping the results of our qualitative empirical research onto this concept enables us to evaluate individual situations as well as the emphases different generations place on certain events. Seen from the perspective of generations, processes of migration from Czech lands to the USA can be structured and differentiated. The resulting typology seeks to express, on the one hand, the historicity of a particular generation of immigrants (by placing it in a specific historical moment or period), while on the other it provides a characterization of a given generation based on shared historical and life experience. Drawing on Karl Mannheim,⁴ it is possible to claim that the core of a generation is not so much biologically given (such as date of birth) but it is formed by the “participation in shared fate” or in “shared social, connecting experiences and life contents,” all of which form a significant “familiarity of contents filling the consciousness of individuals,” i.e. members of a particular generation. Obviously, there is a connection between biologically given factors such as age and participation in shared experiences, however, for our kind of sociological analysis the shared historical experiences of individual generations and their collective memory are crucial.

The theoretical concept of generations based on the model of a generational dynamics in a specifically defined locality (such as a village, a town or nation state) is more complicated in case of generations of immigrants because migration is connected to a radical change of place and community. Thus each generation of immigrants brings along its own awareness of important historically formative events in their homeland as well as the experiences of significant events and contexts in their new country. This sets one generation apart from another, i.e. the already settled, newcomers as well as those yet to come. There is therefore a double barrier among generations, with intergenerational boundaries becoming more pronounced, e.g. the generation of 1968 immigrants does not share life experiences with the 1948 generation despite the fact that both waves of immigration were politically motivated. Different generations do not share similar experiences from their homeland. The repressions following the communist coup in 1948 took a different form and intensity than the “normalization” in the aftermath of 1968 Soviet invasion. Nor do these two generations share experiences in the new country, i.e. the post-WWII economic boom, the rise of consumerism, McCarthyism and the Cold War atmosphere of the 1950s differed greatly from the peaking Civil Rights movements, the counterculture revolt and the dawn of multiculturalism in the 1970s. Nevertheless, what connects the experiences of these two generations was the open attitude of American society and government towards political immigration from the communist bloc and therefore a high degree of legitimization of immigration. Differences among generations of immigrants will be further discussed below.

The second concept used in the research is the analytical category of diaspora, understood according to Fiona B. Adamson and Madeleine Demetriou as:

a social collectivity that exists across state borders and that has succeeded over time to: 1) sustain a collective national, cultural or religious identity through a sense of internal cohesion and sustained

4 Mannheim, 509–565.

ties with a real or imagined homeland and 2) display an ability to address the collective interests of members of the social collectivity through a developed internal organizational framework and transnational links.⁵

As to the first point, the means of sustaining a collective identity differentiated across generations; the larger the generation's distance from the pre-war generations, the more the intergenerational transmissions were disrupted even if a sense of cohesion with the homeland still existed; and although some ties to the homeland were destroyed by political repressions, they were renewed during less oppressive times. The organizational framework was created by a number of associations and clubs in which, although the ideology was predominantly national(istic), the primary focus was elsewhere, for example on sports or religious life. The degree to which transnational ties were maintained varies with each particular generation and can be correlated to whether the immigration was politically motivated. For the politically motivated immigrants, the sustenance of transnational links was more complicated, as there were time periods when this was easier and times when it was severely restricted.

In the context of Czech immigration, it is more appropriate to use the term diaspora in plural and thus speak of a spectrum of associations and organizations with various interests and emphases, divisible according to a variety of criteria (e.g. religion, leisure pursuits, etc.). Assimilation processes intervening strongly into the life of immigrant generations usually result in a weakening of communal life and activities – thus in the loss of internal cohesion. Observing this history of the diasporas' plurality leads us to the conclusion that assimilation disrupts collective identity and causes the dissolution of organizational structures which had been renewed with each new wave of immigration, but which finally dissolved anyway. Therefore, the growing transnationalism of immigrant communities is currently a retrieval, as it enables these populations to continue to operate with some cohesion. In this connection, Thomas Faist states that diaspora and transnationalism are dancing partners and he points to their intersections.⁶

Maria Koinova claims that we can empirically observe a wide variety of diasporic practices: radical activities, aggressive and passive nationalism, as well as relative support of democracy.⁷ The Polish diaspora, for example, had been anti-communist and pro-democratic long before the fall of communism. Applying the concept of diaspora we must, however, point out that during the entire existence of Czechs in Chicago their collectivity was not a fixed, highly organized one with strong inner ties. These ties were variously intense at different time periods and there always existed some highly individualized immigration segments refusing collective cultural forms. Similarly, assimilation processes, the consequences of which were pronounced in the second generations, disrupted the homogeneity of a diaspora. Therefore we employ the concept of diaspora while keeping in mind the strong social dynamics of this collectivity, the variability of its forms and strength of inner

5 Fiona B. Adamson and Madeleine Demetriou, "Remapping the Boundaries of 'State' and 'National Identity': Incorporating Diasporas into IR Theorizing," *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 4 (2007): 497.

6 Thomas Faist, "Diaspora and transnationalism: What kind of dance partners?" in *Diaspora and Transnationalism. Concepts, Theories and Methods*, ed. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010): 9–34.

7 Maria Koinova, "Diasporas and international politics: utilizing the universalistic creed of liberalism for particularistic and nationalist purposes," in *Diaspora and transnationalism: concepts, theories and methods*, ed. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010): 149–166.

links. Yet there are many signs of a diaspora, such as politically motivated immigration, the choice of the settlement place where Czechs had already been living and had created ties to the city; the presence of collective forms of social life; national identification; formation of links and networks; intergenerational interaction and exchange; establishing of associations and clubs.⁸

Assimilation of post-war generations of Czechs in Chicago

For the purpose of our study, we can divide Czech immigration in Chicago into two historical phases. The first one includes immigrants and their families from the beginning of Czech immigration to Chicago in 1852 to the end of the Second World War. This so-called pre-war immigration is well-documented in archives, including period treatises on its history, social and cultural life. There is clear evidence of the maintenance of national identity as well as an emphasis on collective interests of the diasporas. They developed intensively, not only in terms of their numbers but also in terms of their social significance. The election of Czech immigrant Anton Cermak (né Antonín Čermák) as mayor of Chicago in 1931 can be viewed as the zenith of Czech influence during this period. Pre-war immigration was mostly economic, with people setting out for the USA in order to earn money to support their families back home, or to settle in USA permanently because dynamically developing Chicago needed artisans and servicemen. Gradually, however, Czechs began working in large- and small-scale manufacturing and, similarly to other diasporas, they became an integral part of the growing industrial metropolis. Although the immigration of this population was predominantly economic, part of it also had a political character, due to the repressive Habsburg monarchy rule after 1848. After the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, economic immigration dominated with a transnational component supported by the young Czechoslovakian state. Images of this relatively peaceful and economically successful period repeatedly surfaced in our interviews as recollections of the descendants of the pre-war immigrants who have long since fully assimilated.⁹

Assimilation is also a result of the structural needs of a transforming industrial city, needs which were in accord with many characteristics of the newcomers who largely held weakened religious ties (e.g. the Bohemian Freethinkers) and were in search of religious and political freedom. They desired economic prosperity. They were initially concentrated in overcrowded enclaves, but were able to move out of them relatively quickly. As with many ethnic groups across America, the Czechs' involvement in their community's associations and clubs gradually gave way to membership in organizations connected with the de-ethnicized middle class. Thus assimilation went hand in hand with desegregation, the disappearance of enclaves (ghettos) and with the suburbanization of the city.

8 On the interpretation of the signs of diaspora see: Michel Bruneau, "Diasporas, transnational spaces and communities," in *Diaspora and Transnationalism. Concepts, Theories and Methods*, ed. Rainer Baubock and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010): 36–37.

9 They include: a) fully assimilated Americans with Czech roots who no longer know Czech and have no links to the Czech diaspora as well as no interest in emphasizing Czech elements of their identity; b) completely assimilated persons who claim Czech origin (often identifying as Czech-Americans); they can no longer speak Czech but to a degree seek to explore their Czech roots (e.g. by looking for relatives in the Czech Republic); c) fully assimilated Czech-Americans who still speak Czech (often born in Czech neighborhoods of Chicago and having attended Czech-run schools) and who actively participate in the social and cultural activities of Czech diasporas.

The Second World War and events in its immediate aftermath represent a discontinuity which has changed the Czech immigrant community. The period brought new immigrants as a result of the post-WWII history of Czechoslovakia – the change of political system, the rise and fall of Communism. This period of post-war immigration includes immigrants arriving in Chicago from 1948 up to the present. This population is the core object of our research.

Generationally, post-war immigration can be classified into three groups: the 1948 generation, the 1968 generation, and the 1989 generation. The first two were primarily politically motivated or politically forced immigrations; the third is an economic immigration which resulted from a unprecedented social, political, legal as well as cultural situation, one completely different from earlier periods. Before focusing on the specifics of these three generations, we shall outline the generations of Czech immigrants in Chicago.

The term generation is connected to a particular date (event) which is constitutive for each generation. Karl Mannheim speaks of a shared fate and memory creating the sense of generational unity¹⁰; in our case these are usually connected to political events and ensuing changes in the social-political situation in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic respectively:

generation	Constitutive event	migration period	Kind of migration
Generation of 1848	National revolutions in Europe	1852–1918	political, economic
Generation of 1918	Establishment of Czechoslovakia	1918–1939	economic
Generation of 1939	Fascist occupation	1939–1948	political
Generation of 1948	Communist coup	1948–1968	political
Generation of 1968	Soviet occupation	1968–1989	political, economic
Generation of 1989	Velvet Revolution	Since 1989	economic enjoyment

Specifics of each post-war generation:

The generation of 1948. Members of this generation of immigrants left their homeland in the aftermath of the change of political system when communists gained power and established a repressive totalitarian regime. In a sense this generation is unique in many aspects, as its members had experienced three different political systems in their homeland – democratic Czechoslovakia until 1939; the Nazi regime in the so-called Bohmen und Mahren protectorate established after military occupation by Fascist Germany in 1939; and the communist regime following the coup in 1948. Therefore the constitutive experience of this generation is that of trauma, often of double collective trauma. Two distinct, separate experiences stand in opposition to each other – life in democracy *versus* life in a totalitarian regime. The ideological and irreconcilable conflict with an undemocratic regime is a key constituent. Frequently, members of this generation experienced dramatic circumstances during their escape from their homeland. They had to overcome dangers

10 Mannheim, “Das Problem der Generationen,” 509–565.

connected with the illegal crossing of strictly guarded state border. By running away from their homes, various migration trajectories were initiated and the individuals of this generation often experienced sojourns in many countries before finally reaching the USA. The majority of these refugees could not migrate to US directly but had to spend years in various west European countries.

The tendency to quickly incorporate into the Czech diasporas is typical for this generation together with the search for the kind of umbrella of solidarity and cultural proximity created by the pre-war immigrants. They also tried to quickly adapt to American society and assimilate. This attempt was intensified in part by knowing that a return back home was impossible, as this would have resulted in punishment and persecution. A lack of contacts with their homeland also compounded the issue, as the communist regime was closed and isolated and, above all, the members of immigrants' families left in the homeland were openly victimized. The 1948 generation came to an industrial metropolis with a plentitude of rapidly expanding firms and enterprises, and thus they usually found employment with no difficulty. On top of all that, they came to Chicago shortly after the peak of political influence of the local Czech diaspora. Nevertheless, by this time the Czech community was already beginning to be affected by suburbanization and the increasing emphasis on the "American way of life" connected with the post-war economic boom and the rise of consumerism, all factors which contributed to the rapid assimilation and Americanization of the 1948 immigrant generation. This population was also able to obtain citizenship relatively easily, thus completing the circle of assimilation. This generation's success in the labor market and each member's professional growth played a fundamental role in their easy assimilation. These are factors which are also central motifs within the individual life stories. This generation received nothing for free, they had to put a tremendous effort to succeed.

The generation of 1968. The trauma of this generation is connected to the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968. The event forcefully ended the liberalization process within the Czechoslovak communist regime which had peaked in the so-called Prague Spring, a term denoting reform tendencies of Czechoslovakian communists to somewhat democratize the system and to loosen the tight social conditions. In the years following the Soviet invasion a process of "normalization" to earlier conditions was instituted, with a consequent return to feelings of fear, powerlessness, the loss of individual self-determination and the curtailment of free speech, all of which brought on a certain anger, apathy and sense of futility for most Czechoslovaks. The majority of the 1968 generation of immigrants was born under the communist regime or had spent most of their lives in it, a factor which makes it significantly different from the previous generation of immigrants. They, too, had to leave their homeland illegally, often in the form of a dramatic escape during which their life was in jeopardy, or in the less dramatic form of never returning from a business trip or vacation abroad. Unlike the previous generation, which had fled quickly without any deliberation, the members of the 1968 generation usually meticulously planned their escape over a period of time. Lengthy preparations were undertaken, often even finding contacts abroad, where the refugees were usually received with understanding and help. This generation was also generally more educated and individualized, which certainly facilitated their orientation toward new possibilities and in finding better jobs. Likewise, they often had better foreign language skills as part of their previous education.

Although this wave of immigration was primarily politically motivated, economic motives must also be taken into consideration as well. Even if these people were fleeing the communist regime, they often had not been directly and personally persecuted. They were certainly limited by the regime in their professional careers and individual abilities and were unsatisfied, thus part of their decision to emigrate was a desire for professional advancement or more meaningful work. The longing was reinforced by news from abroad where, unlike the economic stagnation of communism, the economy was prospering. Freedom for this generation therefore had both political and, perhaps even more so, economic implications. Another difference from the previous generation was in the institutional framework of immigration. West European countries were now prepared for immigrants: a refugee infrastructure was in place and a system of redistribution of immigrants enabled this generation to reach the USA as well as other destinations faster and more easily.

The 1968 generation arrived in a different Chicago than their predecessors – no longer a primarily industrial city, but a modern metropolis with an economy based on services and modern technologies. These immigrants became not only industrial laborers, but educated specialists who were needed and thus they able to find jobs in services and professional fields. The Czech community in Chicago had also changed. The 1968 generation arrived right at the peak of suburbanization and Czechs were no longer concentrated in predominantly ethnically homogeneous neighborhoods. Thus the newcomers could not form such strong links to the diaspora as when its life had been centered in enclaves. In biographies, we can see reflections and recollections of disappearing Czech cultural and social institutions. On the other hand, similarly to the 1948 generation, the 1968 immigrants usually had little problem legalizing their stay, i.e. to obtain a residence permit and eventually citizenship. Nevertheless, some did not take advantage of the opportunity to gain American citizenship, as their US legal status allowed them to travel to Czechoslovakia if the communist regime did not oppose it.

The 1989 generation. By its very character, this generation represents a dissimilar kind of immigration than the previous two. The fall of the communist regime and the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia resulted in the opening of unprecedented possibilities for personal freedom. The events beginning in the year 1989 meant a kind of “grand opening up” for the majority of Czech population. It included not only political freedom and economic possibilities but especially previously only dreamt about spaces for personal capabilities, growth, seeking of opportunities, as well as for the imagination. Thus this generation is one of “seekers” who have tried out various alternatives in order to learn about the world and to enjoy themselves. Leaving Czechoslovakia (or the Czech Republic after the split into two countries) clearly had an economic dimension but a great role was played by the desire to get to know the world and various peoples and their cultures, to learn languages, to travel as well as to try one’s luck abroad. Often the motivation of this immigration can be summed up in the words: “let’s try it.”

People left their homeland individually as well as in organized groups. They were, at least initially, heartily welcomed as people to whom freedom had been denied for so long and who finally achieved it. Their travel to the US as a long-established democracy was perceived as a just and natural part of exercising the newly gained freedom. At first, they were welcomed by the previous generations of Czech immigrants as well. Unlike them, though, they had a distinct disadvantage – while the previous immigrants were perceived as political refugees and could obtain

citizenship or otherwise legalize their stay easily, this was no longer the case after the break down of communism. The 1989 generation were not refugees, but migrants from a free country where there was no political persecution and thus they needed no political protection. This resulted in a kind of stalemate – they arrived legally and rather easily but many decided not to return when their visas and other legal documents expired. Thus the originally short visits were extended repeatedly into long stays, and the migrants ended up as illegals, i.e. over-stayers. Some re-migrated, some, during their stay in Chicago, gave birth to children who therefore gained legal status (unlike their parents). This is one of the paradoxes of the illegals – their children can travel back and forth to the country of their parents' origin, while the parents cannot. Thanks to their children who are legal citizens their parents can eventually legalize their status once the children reach legal adulthood.¹¹ The children speak English as their native language, no longer Czech, because they are fully socialized among their American peers (also thanks to school attendance). They have no need to learn Czech, and they speak English among themselves as well (unlike their parents). Some learn Czech only after being prompted by their parents. Many immigrants in the years after 1989 have returned home to the Czech Republic, but some have remained in Chicago. A key role in their decision to stay is played by their fully Americanized children as well as the declining economic benefits of immigration caused partially by the fact that the economic situation in the Czech Republic has improved and the exchange rate of Czech crown to the American dollar has become more favorable to those who have Czech crowns.

These immigrants are finding themselves in a situation different from the two previous generations. They arrived into a post-capitalist city in the era of social media, which enables them to maintain transnational relationships and to observe closely events on both sides of the Atlantic. An interesting part of their immigration experience is the beginning of their entrance into the labor market, searching for their first jobs and accommodations, often achieved thanks to other national support networks (particularly those of the Polish community) or employment agencies which helped placing newcomers in the labor market, but exploited them simultaneously. However, from the point of view of many immigrants – this is ancient history. In the interviews, the fact that tens of thousands of young Czechs have stayed in the city were mentioned – there again the processes of either re-emigration or assimilation played their roles.

Conclusion

The paper presents the results of ethnographic research conducted in the Czech immigrant community in Chicago. The case of Czech immigration is particularly interesting, as it can be considered a textbook example of successful assimilation. Interestingly enough, scholars have not noted this example of successful immigration and have not used it as a textbook example, especially

11 The fate of their minor children obviously plays a key role in the strategies of immigrant parents. If the parents have not yet managed to legalize their stay (e.g. by obtaining a green card), their hope is that once their children are legally adults, the children can become their parents' "sponsors" in the parents' quest to obtain legal status. However, this option cannot be fully relied upon, as something unexpected can happen which results in the deportation of one, some or all of the family members. Conversely, the parents may decide to leave the US before their children reach majority. Regarding our study, this uncertainty is also a reason why many of the parents we examined insist on their children learning Czech, a skill which may prove vital should the parents be deported back to the Czech Republic.

when the contemporary theoretical concepts of immigration were being formed. The broader concept of the integration of immigrants was patented in social sciences in the 1960s particularly under the influence of assimilationism. Later, assimilationism was criticized at the peak of ethnic revitalization in the USA, partly also because the concept did not take into consideration cultural differences. Although research was conducted on for example Polish, Italian, and Irish immigration in US, Czechs have not been studied so far. The existing studies of US immigration have also not focused on anthropology and only rarely followed the acculturation in specific ethnic groups. It is worth mentioning that acculturation of Czech immigrants effected every single generation of newcomers, even if they had come for diverse reasons and at various historical moments. During the 20th and 21st centuries, several waves of Czech immigration emerged, usually connected to political as well as economic situations in Czechoslovakia, or later in the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, Czech immigration can generally be characterized by very strong and relatively fast assimilation.

Czech immigration to the US has not been researched as thoroughly as in the case of other nationalities. But it is particularly their case which proves that the assimilation theory of the Chicago School is still applicable nowadays. Unlike traditional theory, here we have the opportunity to study inner dynamics and variety within one ethnic group over time while studying the influences of the dynamically changing urban milieu of Chicago from a traditional industrial city to a global metropolis. We can also observe different aspects of the process of assimilation in time and within periods' contexts.

The article presents the process of assimilation of immigrants in the 20th and 21st centuries as well as sheds light on some of the causes of their quick and easy assimilation across diverse historical contexts and generations of newcomers. Special attention is devoted to the political immigration after 1948 and 1968, and predominantly non-political, economically motivated immigration after 1989. Comparing the situations of the three generations, we can conclude that they share greatly varied contents of collective memory. The divergence of these contents gave rise to significant barriers among the generations. In fact, the barriers have been so great as to cause a rather extensive collective forgetting and thus low chances for the reproduction of national (and other) identity. Generations are a relational phenomenon – and we can witness mutual identifying and aversions as well as a comparison of values, and especially the benefits this population brings to American society, which itself shows a definitely assimilationist attitude. Each generation has created a certain stereotypical image of the other two. It seems the immigration and assimilation process was most difficult for the 1948 generation – they suffered from deep collective trauma, a lack of institutional support for migration, lower human capital, the demand for integration as well as links to the pre-war generations. These factors all slowed down the process of assimilation in comparison with the later generations, even if assimilation was seen as desired by the 1948 generation.

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