



Dear colleagues,  
dear friends,

first of all, I would like to wish you Happy Holidays and all the best in a New Year!

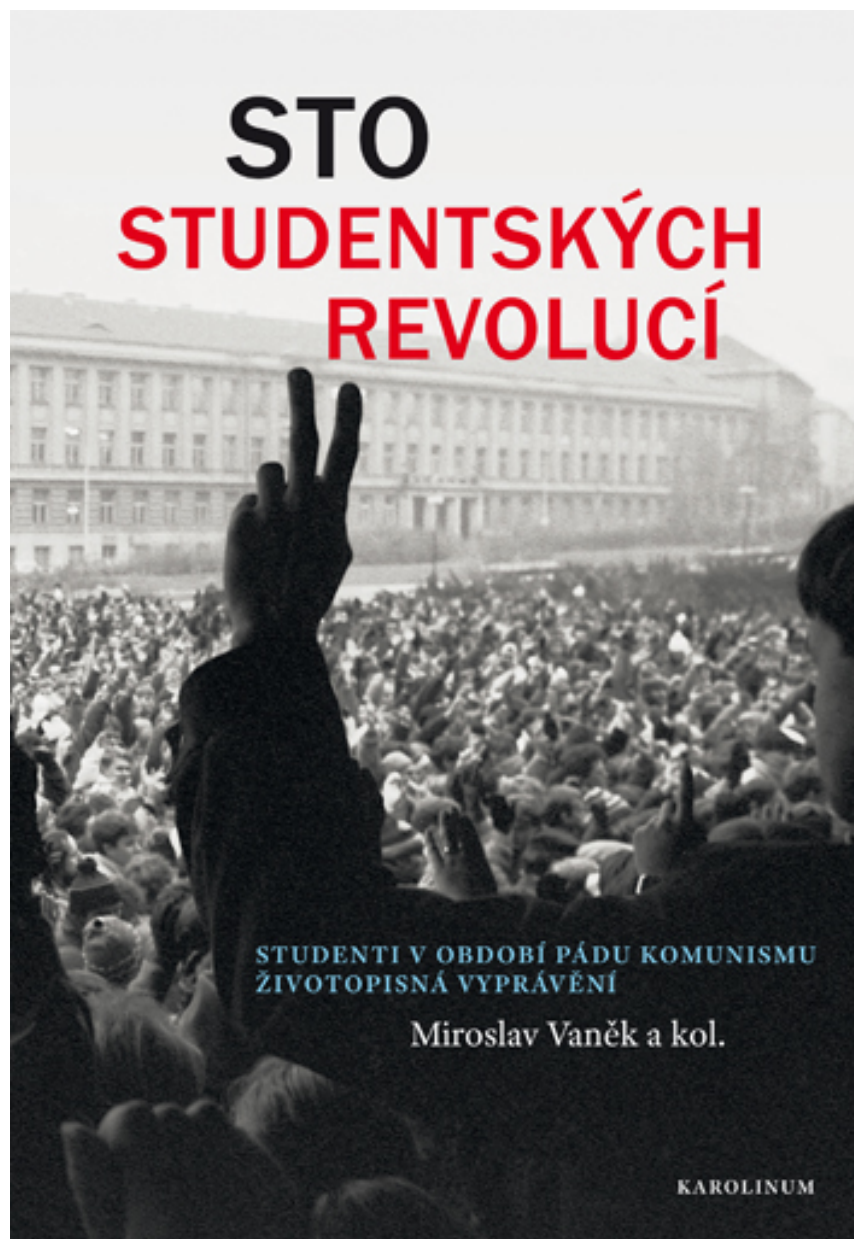
As some of you may already know, 2019 was a special one for us as it was the year of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. Not only have we published a second edition of the *One Hundred Student Revolutions* from 1999, which initially opened the door of oral history for us twenty years ago, but we also continued in this project, came back to our narrators and published the second three-volume book called *One Hundred Student Evolutions*. First volume contains interpretative studies and the second and third volumes contain our edited interviews.

For this project we also made a special website (<http://www.studenti89.usd.cas.cz>), which is currently available only in Czech, but we hope to translate at least the Czech Television oral history documentary to English (<http://www.studenti89.usd.cas.cz/dokument-ct/>) as soon as possible.

As you can imagine, it wasn't easy, but: stálo to za to = it was definitely worth it! :-)

I hope to see you soon and I wish you all the best!

Warm regards,  
Mirek



Two decades have passed since the publication of *One Hundred Student Revolutions* (1999) and since then, research on the contemporary history of universities and the field of socially-oriented histories of students have undergone major developments. Similarly, much progress has been made in the Czech context on individual events and periods during which students “entered history” (on both the nationwide and general level), whether in 1945/1948, 1968/1969 or in 1989. The decision to investigate university students active during the Velvet Revolution through oral history methods was, from today’s point of view, a good choice. University students played a distinctive and unquestionable historical role on 17 November 1989 and in the weeks that followed. They became, so to say, “workers of the revolution”. Moreover, the group in question was relatively homogenous, stood on the winning side of the barricade and was willing to openly speak about their life experiences in the 1990s. Nevertheless, the original research team, led by Miroslav Vaněk (\*1961) and Milan Otáhal (1928-2017), faced a number of complicated questions and interconnected problems at the beginning of their research, conducted between 1996 and 1998: how to capture with maximum accuracy and specificity the ways in which university students acted during the November events, and describe their motivations and actions, including how they themselves experienced these events and how they reflected on the period from the retrospective vantage point seven or eight years later, including their individual or, conversely, collective student role. The research team’s goal was not to formulate a sociological analysis of the social group of former students, nor to construct psychological portraits of student protagonists and the revolution’s “foot soldiers”, but rather to understand the historical process captured in life stories, “micro-histories” of the individual fates and everyday lives of the protagonists.

Twenty years later, the new team of authors decided, among other reasons thanks to encouragement from the Karolinum publishing house, to republish a new, extended version of the book, not only because it represents a distinctive historical source, but also as an example of how the discipline of oral history has moved on. *One Hundred Student Revolutions* represented a milestone on Czech oral history’s journey towards becoming

an established discipline within Czech research on contemporary history. Given the progress that has been made since then, the book has been extended to also include the topic of the history and memory of students in modern and contemporary history, as memory as a field of research has become very popular in recent years and is intimately connected with oral history. The new edition also has a partially altered and enriched structure.

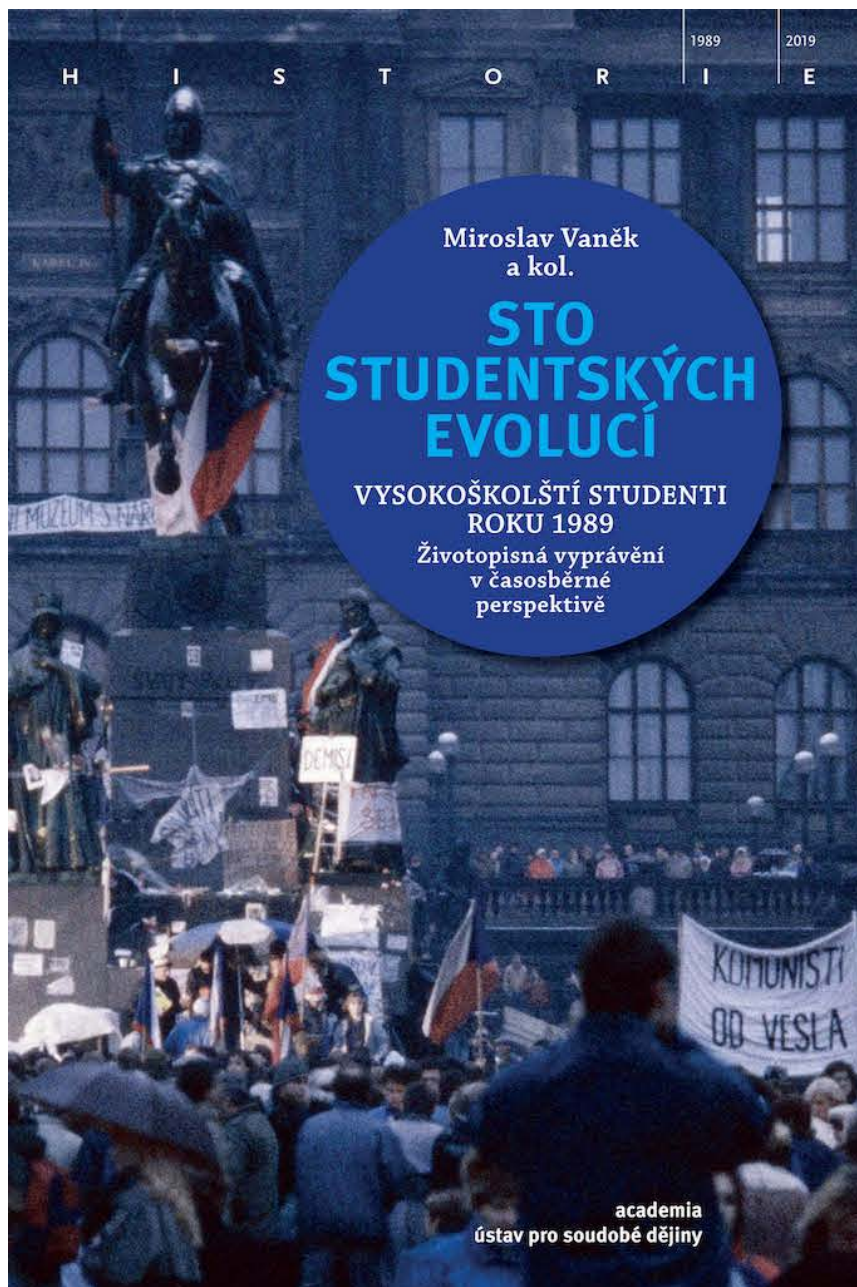
The historical introduction, which places students as a socio-cultural group into the context of period events (especially after 1968), has been left in its original form. This is in order to clarify the starting point and state of the art at the time of the original project's realization (1996-1998) and also for the actual interviews with the former students to be intelligible. This is followed by a new study about the history and memory of student protagonists in longer historical perspective. The chapter works with sources related to oral history interviews – i.e. published memories such as personal diaries or memoirs – in order to demonstrate the similarities as well as differences between these types of memory documents. These memory works are placed in period historical context, as well as the context of the process of the creation of historiography and the formation and changes of social collective memory.

Similarly to other areas of research, oral history too has moved on – both in the international and national context. While the oral historical methodological introduction in the first edition at the time served as an alternative to other manuals and handbooks of teaching and conducting oral history projects, today this function is successfully fulfilled by specialized publications and historical-methodological overviews. For this reason, the outdated theoretical-methodological part of the book has been omitted and only the part dedicated to the actual realization of the research project between 1996 and 1998 remains. This part also offers current readers a historiographical and historical insight into how such a research project was conducted two decades ago, during the “middle ages” of Czech oral history.

For the same reason, the book includes the original chapter on everyday life during so-called Normalization and its individual aspects interpreted from the perspective of the interviews recorded with the

students. This chapter, too, is a result of the times it was produced in and should be read for “educational purposes”, demonstrating how Czech historians learnt to work with at the time untraditional and only rarely used sources, as two decades ago, oral history was mostly used as a source of knowledge supplementing missing written sources. The original summarizing conclusion of the book (1999) is now complemented by a new Afterword (2019), which reflects the changes in the meanings of the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of November 1989 by student activists and the unexpected influence of the project and the publication of *One Hundred Student Revolutions* on the inception of the civic initiative “Thank you, time to go” in the autumn of 1999.

The final part of the book comprises the original sixty-five edited, authorised and published interviews from the end of the 1990s, which have with the lapse of time and from a longitudinal perspective only gained historical significance. Having left their twenties and thirties behind and being now around fifty years of age, many narrators perceive various topics differently. And it is in the unique opportunity to capture this shift and evaluate it in an unbiased manner that we see a great challenge as well as satisfaction that oral history projects conducted in this way present new dimensions, major contributions, and unforeseen challenges.



The book *One Hundred Student Evolutions. University Students of 1989 in Longitudinal Perspective. Biographical Interviews After Twenty Years* focuses on student activists of 1989. It presents a continuation of the successful project *Students during the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia – biographical interviews (1997-1999)* and the publication *One Hundred Student Revolutions* (Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 1999 and Karolinum, 2019). Through the newly applied method of longitudinal oral history, the book has the ambition to capture the influence of the formative experience of the November 1989 revolution on the life stories of the narrators, former student activists of 1989, encompassing the personal, professional, as well as political level. Our work is informed by the concept of „symbolic centres“, i.e. a set of valences and values attached to crucial events of national history, in this case the revolution of 1989.

The same sample of original narrators was approached for the project; 12 narrators were replaced by new respondents, as some had passed away, could not be traced, or in three cases, refused to participate in the project. Altogether, between January 2017 and November 2018, we recorded interviews with one hundred narrators from nine regions of the Czech Republic, comprising more than 200 hours of audio recordings (in addition, video recordings were made with 65 narrators). In total, the transcripts of the interviews run to cca. 6,500 standard pages.

The longitudinal approach was applied for the first time in the context of Czech oral history. In the methodological part of the book, the authors compare this experience with colleagues from the fields of psychology and documentary filmmaking. They also introduce a new, previously undiscussed research dimension, termed „longitudinality within longitudinality“, where the gap between the first and follow-up interviews comprised about 8-12 months. In the meantime, parliamentary and presidential elections took place in the country, which provoked strong reactions from our narrators. Aside from the social dimension, the book also reflects on the changes that happened in the narrators' personal lives during the twenty years since the last project. All the covered episodic events convinced us that we develop during our lives and react to new stimuli, and demonstrate how memory develops.

The chapter *Generations* attempts to answer the question whether we can speak about a student generation and if so, to what extent was it a homogenous generational grouping. At the centre of our research interest stood the meanings attributed to this generation, but historical influences such as luck and chance were also taken into account. The chapter attempts to evaluate to what extent the connecting element of the narrators' shared historical experience was a common ideology of the former students or just opposition to the existing communist ideology. It also discusses the presumed and real influence of the Socialist Union of Youth on the former student activists, as well as their difference, as representatives of "organized youth", from the "free youth" of the Underground. Our research focus also covered intergenerational understandings of November 1989 and the events that followed from the perspective of both the generation of the parents and children of our narrators.

Our research shows that while some former student activists use the term "generation", they refer primarily to themselves, i.e. university students, rather than all young people in the country, all people of the same age, or even all universities or all students of their own university. At the centre of their life stories stands only the minority that actively took part in the student protests and strike. The former students can thus be described as the generation of the experience of November 1989, yet such an experience was shared by society as a whole. For the students, the added value in relation to this historical event is their own activity and participation in the student strike and Velvet Revolution of 1989.

The chapter *Variations of the Revolution* attempts to follow the ways in which the former students relate to their experience of the Velvet Revolution and asks whether and how this experience still influences their present lives. Three different approaches arose from a study of their life stories: A) the revolution as a "commitment"; B) the revolution as a "fulfilled obligation"; C) the revolution as a "prepared coincidence". If for the first two groups interest in current events appears natural, the difference between them lying primarily in their understanding of their own public engagement, the view of the third group differs in the

question of whether any kind of engagement has any real chance of success. In this context, a noteworthy finding is that regardless of the strategy used to relate to the revolution, a special place in the narrators' stories is occupied by Václav Havel, not only as one of the key actors of the revolution, dissent, or Czech post-1989 politics, but also as a symbol of the revolution. Using Havel's relationship towards civil society, we attempted to explain why our narrators, if they at all actively comment on current events, perhaps also as a result of their professions, tend towards civil society rather than "traditional" politics.

The final chapter *Golden Nineties?* focuses on a wholly new topic compared to the previous project: the 1990s and how the former students remember this period. While the original interviews were recorded during this time, the new interviews demonstrate that this decade is now clearly considered to be part of the past by the narrators, and moreover represents a formative time for them. The chapter examines the motif of positive, even nostalgic memories of the „wild nineties“ amongst our sample, which they confronted with the growing critical reception of the transformation years in the public sphere. The chapter thus considers the double-edged nature of the memories of the 1990s oscillating between euphoria and criticism, as well as individual and collective memory. It identifies two main narrative strategies the narrators employed: separating their personal experiences from wider political and social developments and self-criticism relating to the naivety with which they placed hopes in the new era. A further significant motif of the memory of this decade covered by the chapter is the ethos of individualism, which emerged strongly in the current interviews, but was absent in the original project. The current set of interviews thus presents a valuable source not only for investigating the events of November 1989, but also the period that followed.

Regardless of the various individual experience and life journeys of the one hundred narrators, their stories show that the experience of the Velvet Revolutions is inherently connected with them. If in 1999 the authors did not take a possible longitudinal continuation into account, today they are planning to finish the project in fifteen years' time.