

LARSON, J. L. 2013. *Critical Thinking in Slovakia after Socialism*. NY: University of Rochester Press. 240 p. ISBN 978-1-58046-437-6.

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Jonathan L. Larson is an American political and linguistic anthropologist who concentrates on the ideologies, practices, technologies, and pedagogies underlying the human right of freedom of speech and critical inquiry. His 2013 book, *Critical Thinking in Slovakia after Socialism*, was translated into Slovak under the name *Kritické myslenie v slovenskej postsocialistickej spoločnosti* in 2017 by Kalligram. This intellectual, resourceful, and sporadically humorous book researches critical thinking as a social phenomenon when Slovakia transformed into a parliamentary and liberal democracy and market economy after the fall of the Communist regime. It is a study of public and civic criticism born from curiosity regarding critical thinking as a social phenomenon.

The cover of the book presents the state of critical thinking in Slovakia after socialism by the symbolical separation of the thick line of these main terms – critical thinking in Slovakia and socialism – both in red representing awareness of the subject and denoting what happened before and what happened after this political regime.

This ethnographic and interdisciplinary study maps some of the social dynamics and political forces that have governed the practices of criticism and have influenced the patterns of social behavior and thoughts in education and public culture in Slovakia after the Communist rule. The book has a preface and five chapters. The preface explains the first important attempts at critical thinking in the USA in the first year of a new millennium and compares it with a couple of projects (the Peace Corps, Orava Foundation for Democratic Education, the Open Foundation, and the British Council) for developing the term in Slovakia on the theoretical level, which lacks practical implications. The author's motivation to write the book was his own experience when he was a teacher at a secondary school from 1994 to 1996 and started to notice the critical thinking phenomenon. When he returned in 2002 from some field work for the Western agencies mentioned above, he soon noticed they had had reduced their presences. This led him to deeper exploration into how sociocultural dynamics form, empower, and limit knowledge and discursive acts critical of society. The author claims that even though his book was launched through curiosity about the social or public practice of critical thinking, it has become a study of the interrelationship of politics, history, acts of criticism and voicing of an opinion, socialization, and sociocultural knowledge.

In the book, the following questions are researched: How did the common people perceive critical thinking as a social problem during the 15 years after the Communist regime? What were the roles of media (newspapers, magazines, forums)? How did it all influence the trends in education? What is the situation today?

Even though the text is full of facts and dense information, the author vividly completes the statements in the book with commentaries from real people (friends, teachers, colleagues) who express their honest opinions on the subject. The researcher describes his own experiences (e.g. being on a bus) from the perspective of cultural differences. The text includes authentic jokes, e.g. about the KSČ (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia) and slogans from the Velvet Revolution of 1989. Moreover, significant newspapers, magazines and forums (e.g. *Kritika & Kontext: Časopis kritického myslenia* – Criticism and Context: Journal of Critical Thinking, *Literárny Týždenník* – Literacy weekly; *Domino fórum* – Domino Forum; OS: *Fórum občianskej spoločnosti* – OS: Forum of civic society, etc.) are analyzed. The author also illustrates Slovakia at the time through pictures of buildings, caricatures from magazines, and maps.

The language of the book demands a reader who has a background in anthropology, history and cultural studies. The tone is sophisticated, requiring the reader's full attention to the wording. Sometimes the author asks questions throughout the text. Every paragraph is heavy with new information and questions the main thesis.

The book would greatly interest academics and graduate students of anthropology and related studies in politics, social studies, and the history of East Central Europe.

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