

68. LETNÍ ŠKOLA SLOVANSKÝCH STUDIÍ V PRAZE

Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy



Closing Speech of the Director of the 68th Summer School of Slavonic Studies

Svatava Škodová, 11 August 2025

Your magnificence, Professor,
Spectabilis Vice-Dean,
Cives academici,
Esteemed colleagues, participants, guests,

Let me start by reminding ourselves that we're in a place that has for centuries stood as a symbol of learning and a crossroads of cultures. Within these walls, the past meets the present: the tradition of Czech higher learning and education combines with the living energy of 103 participants from 30 countries of the world who came to Prague in order to learn more about the Czech language and Czech culture and to discover the Czech Republic from up close.

The ceremonial character of our meeting was not created only here in the Karolinum. Right from the start, it was emphasised by our admission to the Old Town Hall where participants could peek into the centre of the city's symbolism and administration. Another important moment was the visit to Lužany Château on invitation of the Hlávka Foundation, where we remembered the legacy of the architect, benefactor and promoter of education Josef Hlávka. The Summer School also collaborated with Czech Centres, which offered an inspiring overview of women who played a prominent role in Czech culture.

Over the course of the four weeks, intensive language classes were running in twelve parallel courses at all levels, from complete beginners to advanced students who are able to discuss expert topics in Czech. We pay careful attention to the concept of teaching and its quality to ensure that the language benefits of these four weeks are as extensive as possible. This concept includes among other things a series of textbooks that we publish solely for the needs of Summer School students. While the foundation of the programme is work in language classes, there were also many specialised workshops – for example on Czech phraseology, the language of poetry, drama and Czech media and the public discourse; students explored the melody and rhythm of Czech in the phonetics laboratory and learned how to use artificial intelligence in learning languages. Some workshops opened the path towards language learning through music and art, proving that we learn not only with our reason, but also our heart and our senses.

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The accompanying programme, designed to combine language, history and culture, offered many extraordinary experiences. This year's edition started with a violin concert that created the atmosphere of a shared experience. Our trips outside Prague took participants for instance to Kutná Hora, we climbed Říp Mountain, embarked on a hike around Štěchovice and visited other places whose cultural and historical legacy completed the image of Czech landscape and identity. From unconventional locations in Prague, let's mention at least the commented tour of the metro which, among other things, taught students about its architectural value.

An important theme of this year's edition was dada poetry and Brut Art. Students learned about this artistic movement not only in theory, but also during an authentic authors' reading. A completely different facet of visual art was explored at the exhibition of the work of Jiří Trnka, an artist who managed to combine his distinctive style with animated film and whose work remains a living part of Czech cultural identity.

Every year's summer school is a place of intense meetings of people across cultures, generations and professions. Every year I'm surprised by the wide range of ages (this year, the difference between the youngest and oldest participants was 64 years), but also by the fact that our programme is attended not only by students of Slavic languages, but also many people who come into contact with the Czech Republic as part of their research or work. In a short period of time, we create a community that, despite all the linguistic and cultural differences, can understand each other and find a common language – literally and metaphorically. This ability to listen, understand and respect each other may be the most valuable thing we'll take home from the Summer School.

Let me at this point thank everyone who took part in this year's edition. I wish to thank the organising team for their daily commitment in resolving even the tiniest details in the programme, the teachers for their expertise, patience and ability to inspire, students of the Faculty of Arts who helped us as assistants, interpreters and guides and served as a valuable bridge between the participants and the organisers. I also thank the leadership of Charles University and the Faculty of Arts for their support and access to their facilities without which the Summer School wouldn't be possible.

But most of all, I want to thank you, the participants. I hope you will be leaving Prague not only with new language skills and knowledge, but also friendships, inspiration and the feeling that you belong to the global family of students of Czech. My wish is that Czech becomes a language you'll love coming back to – as students, researchers or friends.

Esteemed audience, I am convinced that the 68th edition of the Summer School of Slavonic Studies successfully built on the respectable tradition of Prague's summer schools, enriched the academic tradition of our faculty and reminded us that education in the humanities remains indispensable in our time.

Thank you.