

Martin Štoll

Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

Is Kafka a Greater Czech Than Freud? The Global TV Format *100 Great Britons* in Czech Translation (A Case Study)

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Abstract | The BBC television format *100 Greatest Britons* (2002) was a pioneer on the global television market. The project is based on cultural translation and on shifts in form and content, enabling it to address the largest local target audience possible. It can consequently be considered a typical representative of so-called glocalization. A text by a TV theoretician and one of the managers of the Czech version of the format (*The Greatest Czech – Největší Čech*, 2005) provides an insider's view. It follows the steps Czech TV had to take when adapting the format to fulfil the provisions of the licence agreement and address its concrete audience in its own, specific way.

Keywords | Television – TV Format – The Greatest Czech – 100 Greatest Britons – National Identity – Czech History – Jára Cimrman – Adaptation – Cultural Translation

1 Introduction

National adaptations of the BBC TV format *100 Greatest Britons* resembled ten-year-long election caucuses running in 25 different countries from 2002 to 2012. The elitist club of the greatest elected to date consists of Winston Churchill (GB), Konrad Adenauer (D), Tommy Douglas (CAN), Gustav Mannerheim (FIN), Pim Fortuin (NL), Nelson Mandela (SA), Ronald Reagan (USA), Father Damian (B), Ernest Rutheford (NZ), Charles de Gaulle (F), Vasil Levski (BG), Oda Nobunaga (J), Stephen the Great (RO), António de Oliveira Salazar (P), Juan Carlos I (E), José de San Martín (RA), Yaroslav I the Wise (UA), Alexander the Great (GR), Salvador Allende (RCH), St. Alexander Nevsky (RUS), John Hume (IRL), Leonardo da Vinci (I), Maria de Penha (BR) and B. R. Ambedkar (IND).¹ Czech TV contributed to this tradition in 2005 when it declared Charles IV, Roman Emperor and King of Bohemia, official winner of the competition *The Greatest Czech*. What steps had to be taken to adopt the global TV format to local conditions in the Czech Republic? What values were targeted, what was the desired impact and in what way can the results be analysed? Did the cultural translation produce a typical Czech feature or phenomenon?

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¹ When visiting the University of Łódź in 2016, I asked the students why they think Polish public TV never bought the rights to the show. The unanimous answer was: why would they when Pope John Paul II is obviously the greatest Pole?

2 TV Format – Between the Global and the Local

TV formats are media products, programme ideas and plans that are produced for local markets and adjusted to their needs.² They have been the subjects of interest for professionals as of the mid-1990s when highly successful shows were turned into new formats thanks to the intensity of the impact of other markets. Since the formation of superformats, the so-called Big Four,³ production and sales practice in TV companies has changed radically, and using the formats has become one of the main principles of production and programming.⁴ Albert Moran refers to the current era full of reality shows, dating shows, game shows or cooking shows, which can be adopted for TV in all parts of the world, as “significant worldwide business” and dates it from 2000 to the present.⁵

Since these are products of mainstream popular culture with an incredible reach and business potential, the formats can also be analysed as representatives of sociological trends, or can be dealt with in the never-ending process of redefining globalization (see Giddens,⁶ Scholte,⁷ Thompson⁸). As late as the 1970s and the 1980s, these could be viewed as tools of so-called cultural imperialism, defined by Herbert Schiller in the processes of the massive spreading of the dominant culture (especially American) and the establishment of its paradigm on the level of local cultures. This concept and the variations of so-called cultural homegenization (Boyd-Barrett,⁹ Mirrlees¹⁰) were, however, abandoned in the 1990s, and since this time, the TV formats have been examined as specific bearers and originators of cultural heterogenization (Curran and Morley,¹¹ Straubhaar¹²). In stark contrast, they have actually been viewed as strong competitors on the global markets, whose strengths are used for the development of the specific culture of the defined areas. They have been viewed as creating a space for the formation of particular cultural identities. This is not due, however, to local patriotism or a desire for cultural diversity, but is merely a more elaborate means of reaching local markets with the goal of targeting the local community in the widest and most direct way. It is well known that marketing makes effective use of the same strategies.

This research is, in my view, the most valid when it focuses on those processes which transform the content in such a way that the audience can identify with the formats.¹³ TV communication theoreticians such as Silvio Waisbord have emphasised the fact that in terms of sales, it is actually undesirable that these formats should have any particular local or national meaning.

² Silvio Waisbord, “Understanding the Global Popularity of Television Formats,” *Television and New Media* 5, no. 4 (2004): 359.

³ The Big Four refers to *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, *Survivor*, *Big Brother* and *Pop Idol*.

⁴ The licence for *100 Greatest Britons* was sold by the BBC Worldwide department.

⁵ In her article, Andrea Esser mentions Moran’s periodization of the development of cross-border television adaptations: early “trailblazing” programme imitations (1935–55), “casual exchange” (1955–80), “the becoming of the format business” (1980–2000) and formats as “significant worldwide business” (2000 to present). Andrea Esser, “TV Formats. History, Theory, Industry and Audiences: Editorial,” CST online, December 12, 2013, accessed August 5, 2016, <http://cstonline.tv/tv-formats>.

⁶ Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

⁷ Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000). Online: <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/cuni/Doc?id=2002945>, accessed July 28, 2016.

⁸ John B. Thompson, *Media and Modernity. A Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

⁹ Oliver Boyd-Barrett, *Media Imperialism* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014).

¹⁰ Tanner Mirrlees, *Global Entertainment Media: Between Cultural Imperialism and Cultural Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹¹ James Curran and David Morley, eds., *Media and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006).

¹² Joseph D. Straubhaar, *World Television: From Global to Local* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2007).

¹³ Success is not automatic – e.g., *Survivor* was the only TV super-format with virtually no success with the Central European audience. (Kateřina Vachová, *Globální televizní formáty a jejich adaptace v zemích střední Evropy* [Master’s thesis, Charles University in Prague, 2016].)

They should openly “void the signs of the nation,” so that there is space for adjustment.¹⁴ It is the adaptation that provides the option to express the culture of a nation in various ways.¹⁵ A unified preparation, a reusable shell, which has already been proven right in a number of countries, can then lead to the passivity of national producers, since it is always easier to buy and fill within a licensed format than to create one’s own.¹⁶ The “cultural discount theory” by Collin Hoskins may be truly inspirational in this matter since it provides an analysis of why people have a preference for local production over imported formats, this being the reason why TV formats have changed so much over recent years.¹⁷

3 The Pioneer of TV Glocalization

100 Greatest Britons can be seen as a typical representative and to a certain extent a pioneer of the phenomenon which Roland Robertson has called glocalization from as early as 1995.¹⁸ This portmanteau, originating not in sociology, but in the vocabulary of the market (“global localization”), provides an effective characterization of the complexity of the mutually influential features of cultural homogenization, as well as heterogenization. These two terms together help create the character of the society in question. This is a situation when “globalization and localization complement, and not exclude, each other,” where “the local is an integral part of the global.”¹⁹ Robertson even argues that due to this co-existence, which in itself contains tension and cooperation at the same time, the traditional and original concepts and meanings acquire new content which the local community is able to accept. This is how glocalization actually enriches national cultures and helps communities find their place in the global space.

100 Greatest Britons was one of the first cases when the local adjustment was the very principle of the format, and therefore the direct condition for the reception of the globally perceived construction. Although production procedures and the mechanisms of the competition could be taken over, the British world view or how the British understand themselves as a nation could not.

The nominations of the historical personalities and the poll, that is, the interaction on the part of the audience in a different field than singing, dancing, cooking and other skills, was the main tool by use of which the model entered the particular regions. Rupert Gavin from BBC Worldwide stated the following: “To give people the chance to decide on the result is a fantastic way how to make the audience interested in every single country.”²⁰ There is no doubt that the idea that “the generously drafted elements of nationwide competitiveness”²¹ could be used to nurture debate on the identity of the nation and the popularization of history came at the right time. Of interest is the fact that it was a product of a traditional medium of public service, the BBC as well as the fact that the idea came to life on a channel dedicated to culture.

According to the producer of the British model format, Mark Harrison, the competition was the first significant example of a “popular show based on real events,” whose goal was to “produce a certain cultural impact.” This can be seen as a “key moment in British TV” and for

¹⁴ Waisbord, “Understanding the Global Popularity of Television Formats,” 368.

¹⁵ Ibid., 380.

¹⁶ Straubhaar, *World Television*, 150.

¹⁷ Collin Hoskins, *Global Television and Film: An Introduction to the Economics of the Business* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁸ Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,” in *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (London: Sage, 1995), 25–44.

¹⁹ Ibid., 40.

²⁰ Zuzana Gálová, “Kdo je největší Čech, Němec, Brit...,” *Lidové noviny*, December 4, 2004, 17.

²¹ Stanislav Komárek, “Neonormalizace – o moderní morálce: Orientace – Salon,” *Lidové noviny*, May 14, 2005, 4.

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“one of the most successful shows ever to be broadcast on BBC 2,” writes Harrison in his Preface to *The Format Bible*.²²

It should be added that the original specific feature of this project was the local localization, as well as the time-bound one, this being a one-time only format which cannot be used again the following year. If someone would like to use it again in the future, they would have to offer it to the next generation only.

4 A Mixture of Values and Controversies

The Format Bible provided the basic questions which the show wanted to present to the audience and the entire society: “What does it mean to be great? How does it feel to live with the awareness of one’s greatness? What is the price to pay for such greatness? Do the Britons have different criteria for assessing one’s greatness? What are the deciding moments and who made British history?”²³ The general quality of the original idea and the vagueness of terms such as “greatness,” “scale,” “decisive” and “making of Britain” stand at the root of the confusion of values at the very beginning of the show. If one competes in a discipline, can those people be compared? Furthermore, this was a competition spanning all periods and scientific and artistic disciplines. What makes John Lennon (8th place) better than Oliver Cromwell (10th), or Oprah Winfrey (9th) better than Franklin Delano Roosevelt (10th)? And when we move to the multinational level – is Rembrandt (9th place) really a worse painter than Rubens (4th), or is Giuseppe Verdi (2nd) a better composer than Jean Sibelius (8th) or Antonín Dvořák (6th place)? Do we compare them as painters and composers, or as Britons and Germans? Is there a need to ask about the measure of Britishness? Why should Isambard Kingdom Brunel (2nd place) be a greater Briton than Princess Diana (3rd place)? Absurdity can even be taken to another level: is Fyodor Dostoyevsky (7th place) a greater Russian than Molière (8th place) Frenchman? The title of this article was chosen based upon a similarly absurd logic.²⁴

All of these questions have a simple answer: it is a show. It is meant to entertain the audience. Its aim was not to petrify the greatest personages forever, but to raise the interest of various target groups by means of a show. The target groups consisted of TV viewers, not nations. This was never meant to be a poll initiated by the government. The impulse to initiate a nationwide debate on shared values came from a mainstream medium which is based on entertainment and which wanted to stage the agenda of common values by means of a show. The mixture of differences actually became one of the entertaining elements of the show. Jan Štern, manager of the Czech version of the project, states: “This project is trying to awaken us from lethargy.”²⁵

In the Czech version, the confusion of values was one of the reasons the public never accepted the project. “*The Greatest Czech* is a hoax invented by the greatest humorists in our country,”

²² Mark Harrison, *100 Greatest Britons – The Format Bible* (unpublished material of BBC and ČT, 2002, author’s archive). In TV terminology, the Bible means (albeit rather heretically) the format manual. The licence holder has the right to require and check on the fulfilment of the conditions mentioned in the manual.

²³ The Czech questions were: “With this film, we are asking the following: What does it mean to become great, to live with greatness and stay great throughout history? What price does one have to pay? Does every personage have a negative quality as a rule of thumb? What are the peculiarities of Czech greatness? What is its essence? What are the decisive moments and personages who have shaped Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia? What does it take to remain in the people’s hearts? To what extent is one’s greatness his or her own merit, and to what extent is this a product of a legend?” (Unpublished press release documents, January 2015, author’s archive.)

²⁴ Neither Kafka, nor Freud were considered Czech, even though the former was born in Prague and the latter in Příbor in Moravia. Kafka may be a representative of Prague literature, but at the same time, he belonged to the German speaking Jewish minority. Freud’s German Jewish family only lived in Příbor for a few years before moving to Vienna when Freud was 3 years old.

²⁵ Andrej Halada, “Otázka: jak ho najít?,” *Reflex*, April 28, 2005, 65.

Josef Tengler emailed to the Czech TV discussion show *Hyde Park*. "I plead that the next time a poll is organised, the question be easier. My suggestion: Which of the following animals is the brightest? An Ant – a Tiger – an Earthworm."²⁶ Even one of the moderators Zdeněk Mahler stated in an interview for the newspaper *Lidové noviny*: "I approached the project with great distrust, even opposition." In the following sentence, however, he admitted that the project had a positive role as well, which was after all the goal of the entire project: "But then I found out that the level of awareness of the general public is not all that bad and that the poll provided a chance to remind us of certain values. To be honest, I rooted for all of the shortlisted," said Mahler of the ten finalists.²⁷

What were the values? "*100 Greatest Britons* is a distinctively oriented, emotional and popular series touching the psychology of the greatness and essence of Britishness," *The Format Bible* characterizes the entire project in its very first sentence. The producers wanted to define at least some principles along which the audience could think. They consequently created five so-called auxiliary categories. "We defined the basic resources in the following way: legacy, talent, leadership, bravery and compassion."²⁸ The Czech version was inspired by these categories, but decided to work with their own, especially when the final ten personages were chosen. (See Table 3) The Czech TV crew defined these as follows: 1) bravery (Hus, Žižka); 2) leadership (Masaryk, Charles IV); 3) legacy (Werich, Němcová, Comenius, Havel); 4. genius (Dvořák, Comenius); 5. compassion (Němcová, Čapek).²⁹

After the first round of the poll, the agency STEM/MARK carried out research as to what qualities the Greatest Czech should have. The 1004 answers defined them as follows: he/she should be world-renowned (46%), patriotic (41%), wise (39%) and honest (30%). The least important qualities were beauty (5%). The agency received a total of 227 different suggestions.

For a comparison, let us look at the following chart. The first column contains the prediction of the TV crew before the beginning of the show. The second indicates the results of the TV poll, and the third the results of the STEM/MARK research.³⁰

Table 1 Three charts based on the predictions of the TV crew, the results of the show and the results of the sociological research.

Czech TV crew prediction (no order)		Results of <i>The Greatest Czech</i>		Results of the STEM/MARK research
Charles IV	1.	Charles IV	1.	Charles IV
Masaryk	2.	Masaryk	2.	Masaryk
Havel	3.	Havel	3.	Comenius
Comenius	4.	Comenius	4.	Havel
Hus	5.	Žižka	5.	Hus
+	6.	Werich	6.-7.	Božena Němcová
Athletes (Jágr, Zátoupek, Lendl)	7.	Hus	6.-7.	Václav Klaus (Czech president at the time)
Musical composer (Dvořák, Smetana)	8.	Dvořák	8.-12.	Jára Cimrman (fictitious literary character)

²⁶ "Hydepark," ČT1 TV channel, July 25, 2005.

²⁷ Marta Švagrová, "Finále Největšího Čecha se blíží," *Lidové noviny*, May 26, 2005, 18.

²⁸ Harrison, *The Format Bible*, 2002.

²⁹ "Vlastnosti," internal document of Czech TV for the final night, May 23, 2005, author's archive.

³⁰ "Výzkum: V Největším Čechovi by měl vyhrát Karel IV.," *Lidovky.cz*, May 3, 2005; jp, "Nejhezčí Čech? Karel Gott," *Mladá fronta DNES*, May 15, 2005, 4; Václav Suchan, "Největší Čech všech dob? Karel IV!," *Blesk*, March 19, 2005, 1.

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Czech TV crew prediction (no order)		Results of <i>The Greatest Czech</i>		Results of the STEM/MARK research
Actor/Actress, Celebrity (<i>Pop Idol</i> winner, pop singer Karel Gott etc.)	9.	Čapek	8.-12.	Grandfather Czech (legendary figure)
	10.	Němcová	8.-12.	Karel Gott (singer)
			8.-12.	Jaromír Jágr (ice-hockey player)
			8.-12.	Jan Werich (actor)

The comparison provides an interesting intersection of five names (marked in bold in Table 1), which appeared in all three charts. It could be argued that the "Big Five" represents a certain kind of national treasure for current Czech society, which is seldom called into doubt.³¹ Overall, the final ten consists of a dignified list: two presidents representing democracy (Masaryk, Havel), two Reformation priests whose acts and thoughts were integral for European history (Hus, Comenius), four artists who participated in the formation of national identity (Němcová, Werich) and represented this identity in the world (Dvořák, Čapek), a Hussite military leader representing invincibility (Žižka) and above them all, Charles IV, Emperor and King, viewed as the quintessential wise monarch, during whose reign there were no wars. Of particular interest is the fact that Charles IV received the same result in the STEM/MARK research and in the poll itself – 18% (!).³² The historian Dušan Třeštík³³ comments as follows: "(Czechs) project their ideal of a rational, responsible and enlightened government into Charles IV, the wise administrator of the Kingdom of Bohemia, creator and founder, and the Roman Emperor. [...] the same can be said of Masaryk and also of Havel. They do not wish for a firm hand, although they do appreciate Žižka's mace. They instead have a preference for a different kind of courage, represented by Master John Hus. Comenius' wisdom impresses them, but they still want someone more down-to-earth, someone who establishes a university, but at the same time builds a bridge that prevails over thousand-year waters."³⁴

To better analyse what the Czech TV audience perceived as the "greatness" of the historical and modern personages, one has to confront the present, the chart and the particular names not only in the Top 10, but in the entire Top 100.

Prior to the beginning of the project, the producers of *The Greatest Czech* produced a list of 130 names which could make it into the Top 100.³⁵ A comparison with the actual results reveals that the names matched in 66 cases.³⁶ The list was produced on the presupposition that people would vote for positive characters and that any potential controversy would become stereotypical in a positive way over the years (or at least in the democratic era).³⁷ The other supposition was that this would be a mixture of personalities that make up part of the national canon (e.g., a number of personalities from the nineteenth century would appear on the list when the canon was

³¹ Czech TV counted upon these five individuals and commissioned the production of documentaries in the fall of 2004, even before the voting began. The other team waited for the names to be chosen.

³² Out of total 380,611 votes sent, the winning Mediaeval king of Bohemia received 68,713.

³³ Třeštík also served as a guarantor of the historical relevance and accuracy in the project.

³⁴ Dušan Třeštík, "Inventura ve skladišti českých dějin," *Právo*, June 6, 2005, 3.

³⁵ E.g., in terms of professions, the TV crew almost got it right: the estimate was 20 writers and playwrights which turned out to be the exact number; 10 athletes (11); 20 celebrities – actors and singers (19); 8 religious leaders and saints (11); 5 musical composers (3). The prediction was only off for scientists – Czech TV's estimate was 3 and the final number turned out to be 11. (Martin Štoll, "Největší Čech" – unpublished report, October 28, 2005, author's archive.)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ For example, people persecuted by the Communist regime who were labelled in their day as traitors to the state, including Milada Horáková, executed in the Stalinist mock trials in the 1950s.

established), along with those living at present who make up part of the media space in a positive way (from athletes to actors to the winner of the first season of the *Pop Idol* show – *Česko hledá Superstar*). The third element was the idea that the Top 100 would consist of a) personages that “simply cannot be left out” (e.g., it was assumed that people would not leave out Miloš Forman); b) personages representing the erudition and class of the voter (Jaroslav Heyrovský, Nobel Prize winner in Chemistry), and c) personages that were generally well known (celebrities, those remembered for winning something, recently deceased – e.g., the then recently deceased ice-hockey coach Ivan Hlinka and others).

The nominations into the Top 100 revealed, in the majority of countries, that the main value which Czech as well as British, German, Canadian or American viewers identified with were the words “great,” “greatest,” or “ours,” in a positive manner. They understood that it was a game which could be taken seriously, almost involving “state-building,” while at the same time its goal was not to divide the audience, but to bring them together. This was the reason why the organizers tried to avoid completely negative historical characters. When they selected 300 names in Germany (instead of doing a public poll), they did not include Hitler. They had to count the votes twice in Russia to ensure that Stalin did not win (he ended up in third place).³⁸ The Czech organizers were concerned about votes being cast for the only negative character in recent Czech history, the Communist leader Klement Gottwald.³⁹ He eventually ended up in 97th place. The positive nature as the ruling principle of the project was declared by Czech TV in a simultaneous Internet poll called *The Greatest Villain*.⁴⁰ Gottwald was the winner by far (26%).⁴¹ In terms of personages whose legacy has not been historically exclusively positive, Czech viewers eventually chose to accentuate their positive features. Petr Čornej commented on this fact in the case of the second Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš,⁴² who finished 22nd in the poll, living as “a positive historical character in the memory of the Czech nation;” his successor, the President during the Nazi protectorate Emil Hácha did not appear in the Top 100, but eventually finished 118th.⁴³

There was no single person in the Top 100 who would show no quality at all. The winner of the first Czech *Pop Idol*, Aneta Langerová (70th), was perhaps the most remarkable and unique in comparison with her successors. The Top 100 includes Bohemian patrons, kings-builders and all the important figures of the nineteenth century (23 in total), with the historian Jiří Rak even speaking of the “victory of the nineteenth century.”⁴⁴ The most numerous was the twentieth century, however, (61 names). In addition, apart from the Communist presidents Klement Gottwald and Ludvík Svoboda, the latter of which served as a general in WWII, there is not a single representative of the 40-year long Communist regime. In contrast, the list contains 18 names of those persecuted by the Communist regime. Also remarkable is the 9-member group of emigrants, who to a great extent represent Czech success abroad (e.g., Comenius, Baťa, Forman,

³⁸ Jefim Fištejn, “Rusko konečně zná své jméno,” *Reflex*, January 7, 2009, 12–13.

³⁹ A sentence was consequently placed into the regulations that the TV company will not violate the Penal Code of the Czech Republic, § 260. This would have occurred if Gottwald had appeared in the Top 10 and the TV would have had to create a document that presented him in a positive way and encouraged the viewers to send votes for him. “Češi si prostřednictvím ČT vyberou největší národní osobnost,” *Marketing & Media*, December 3, 2014.

⁴⁰ This is a similar type of activity that the BBC and the Channel 4 organized in 2003 – *100 Worst Britons*, with Tony Blair winning by a large margin.

⁴¹ Among the Top 10 Villains, only three representatives of the former Communist regime appeared (Gottwald 1st; Miloš Jakeš 8th; Gustáv Husák 10th); others were contemporary politicians (including the Czech president at the time Václav Klaus occupying the 3rd spot), a controversial entrepreneur (Viktor Kožený, 7th), and the ex-director of the most popular TV station, NOVA TV (Vladimír Železný, 4th).

⁴² As President, he initially gave in to the dictates of the so-called Munich Agreement in 1938 and later, in 1948, gave up power in the Communist coup. These deeds cannot be evaluated independently, however, and the opinions of the Czech public differ.

⁴³ Petr Čornej, “100 největších Čechů očima dneška,” in introduction to *Největší Čech* (Praha: Reader’s Digest Výběr, 2005), 9.

⁴⁴ Jiří Rak, “Největší Čech aneb Vítězství 19. století,” *Lidové noviny*, May 28, 2005, 5.

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Albright, Navrátilová, Tigrid, Kundera, but no Lendl), along with a group of foreigners where one can hardly speak of Czech citizenship, but related somehow to part of the Czech Lands.⁴⁵ There are also a number of pairs in the Top 100, but never side-by-side: two marital couples,⁴⁶ five parents and their children,⁴⁷ and only one pair of brothers.⁴⁸ In terms of double acts, usually one of the pair made it onto the list,⁴⁹ or there is a large difference between their ranking.⁵⁰ Also of interest is the list of those who did not make it into the Top 100. This being the case with the once loved travellers Miroslav Zikmund (114th place) and Jiří Hanzelka (107th), the painter, writer and Karel Čapek’s brother Josef Čapek (109th), the Oscar-winning director Jiří Menzel (125th), the world-renowned composer Bohuslav Martinů (127th), the writer Josef Škvorecký (139th) or athletes such as Petr Čech (101st), Kateřina Neumannová (105th), Josef Masopust (133rd) or the already mentioned Ivan Lendl (137th). The fact that these personages were not included in the list does not automatically mean that the audience had forgotten about them. It merely means others were more fortunate to have been present in the media space of the day. “This is a momentary image of who people respect,” the speaker and anchor of the project Marek Eben stated in an interview. When he discovered the audience had placed him in the 31st spot,⁵¹ he said: “It should be somebody who helped establish the Czech nation in a wider framework. Who is going to know about me one hundred years from now? My work is only ephemeral.”⁵² After reaching an agreement concerning the concept of the project, he stepped down and as a result, politician Miloš Zeman (incumbent President of the Czech Republic) moved one spot up to the 100th place.

“Upon closer inspection, this appears to be an incredible collection of varying and often contradictory images, events, movements, icons, monuments, stereotypes, literary and visual clichés, proverbs, usual gestures and clips from literary works and films, all this in never-ending variability,” argues historian Dušan Třeštík.⁵³ People have placed side by side myths and reality, the past and the present, the permanent and the ephemeral, historicity and the power of the moment. Overall, the results did not really tell us anything about the actual historical characters, but “merely about us, about today’s society – not really about who we are, but how we would like to see ourselves,” claimed theologian Tomáš Halík,⁵⁴ himself John Hus’s “advocate.” Although protests appeared from the perspective of gender, which was justifiable (82 men and 18 women), this was also an image of the society of the present and of the past. “*The Greatest Czech* [...] is based on the concept of so-called Big History, which reduces vivid reality to battles, wars, conspiracies, building and destruction. [...] To put it simply, it makes use of the presentation of history in school textbooks and historically proved greatness. Period,” wrote the apparently angry journalist Kateřina Jonášová in *Lidové noviny*.⁵⁵ There were additional peculiarities in the

⁴⁵ It is surprising that the audience voted for the Empress Maria Theresa who was never fond of the the Czech nation and it is also surprising that the audience felt warm links with the Frankish merchant Samo from the eighth century, who formed the first state on Czech soil. Czechs also interestingly accept as their kin the likes of John of Luxembourg, the Emperor Rudolph II, the then US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, or the above-mentioned pair, Freud and Kafka.

⁴⁶ John of Luxembourg (74th) and Elizabeth of Bohemia (84th) – parents of Charles IV; Václav Havel (3rd) and Olga Havlová (80th).

⁴⁷ Ottokar II of Bohemia (16th) and Wenceslas II (68th); Wenceslas II (68th) and Elizabeth of Bohemia (84th); Elizabeth of Bohemia (84th) and Charles IV (1st); John of Luxembourg (74th) and Charles IV (1st); Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (2nd) and Jan Masaryk (50th).

⁴⁸ St Wenceslas (17th) and Boleslaus I (87th).

⁴⁹ E.g., Miroslav Šimek (97th), but not his partner Jiří Grossmann.

⁵⁰ Jan Werich (6th) and Jiří Voskovec (94th) or Zdeněk Svěrák (25th) and Ladislav Smoljak (79th).

⁵¹ Jan Štern and Martin Štoll, “Slovo úvodem,” in introduction to *Největší Čech* (Praha: Reader’s Digest Výběr, 2005), 5.

⁵² Alena Plavcová, “Marek Eben: Radím se s mámou. Rozhovor s M. Ebenem,” *Lidové noviny*, April 29, 2005, 4.

⁵³ Třeštík, “Inventura,” 3.

⁵⁴ Tomáš Halík, “Hlasujeme, jací chceme být,” *Lidové noviny*, May 19, 2005, 5.

⁵⁵ Kateřina Jonášová, “Měla by to být Největší Češka,” *Lidovky.cz*, April 12, 2005.

chart (for example, the most frequent first name was Jan – 11 times – or that only 22 people were alive when the chart was published).

Despite the declared positive nature and cultural impact, the concept literally begged for controversy. It amounted to a fight between David against Goliath. The defined qualities therefore merely defined the battleground, and the fact that incomparable characters from different historical periods and disciplines appeared side by side, actually became the very source of entertainment. The concept assumed that people would nominate important figures as well as freaks, including themselves.⁵⁶ Where “public boredom” and school-like praising of the great were looming, controversial advocates came up who had a link to their “client,” but at the same time represented pop culture (e.g., Jeremy Clarkson, Andrew Marr, Alan Davies and others). The biggest clashes were supposed to take place during the final night, where these popular personalities were supposed to secure the best spot possible for “their great.” The victory of the historical characters was therefore also a victory for their advocates.⁵⁷

The clashing principle also manifested itself in the promotion campaign for the show with advertisements in the press, billboards, city light displays and tram advertisements which always showed two characters and mottos: e.g., the Queen of Hearts vs. the Queen of England, Bridget vs. Bond, Morse vs. Marple, etc. In the Czech Republic, one of the pairs was St. Wenceslas and the Hussite military leader Jan Žižka, whose mottos were, respectively: Martyr vs. Guerilla of God. The conflicts which were supposed to entertain the viewers were also included in biographical videos of the 100 characters on the nomination night, where music was used regardless of the historical period (Beethoven's *Für Elise* for Elizabeth of Bohemia), or with cultural or scientific advocates chosen from “another field” (the head of the Prague ZOO Petr Fejk advocating a politician, the army general Pavel Štefka advocating culture, the chief justice of the Czech Constitutional Court advocating Gottwald, etc.).

From this point of view, the creators of the Czech version met with success. The following chart shows eight controversial pairs in neighbouring positions in the Top 100:

Table 2 Controversial pairs in neighbouring positions in the final Top 100.

13 th and 14 th	Karel Gott vs. George of Poděbrady	pop singer vs. king who invented the idea of a united Europe
17 th and 18 th	St Wenceslas vs. Václav Klaus	Czech Patron Saint; as a prince, he tried to cooperate with the neighbouring countries vs. president, well-known for his anti-EU opinions

⁵⁶ In the Czech version, a certain Václav Linkov made it onto the list thanks to a clever Internet campaign. Linkov was a young man who applied to be chancellor of Masaryk University at the age of only 25. He suggested establishing a department of erotic studies and establishing a university brewery. He also nominated himself as the greatest personality of Brno, tried to become director of a Slovak TV company, etc. See “Největší Brňák Václav Linkov,” *liberalove.cz*, March 3, 2008, http://liberalove.bluefile.cz/archives_of.php?co=1206478400.

⁵⁷ In the Czech version, this had a negative effect: the 10th place of Božena Němcová, writer and popular collector of fairy tales, is clearly the result of the bad choice of her advocate, the singer Yvonne Přenosilová. In contrast, the BBC speaker Jeremy Clarkson successfully placed “his” Kingdom Brunel ahead of Shakespeare and Darwin with quotes like “In the morning, you can make it to work without the help of Darwin, but clearly not without Brunel. Brunel constructed the underground Brunel Tunnel under the Thames.” In the German version *Unsere Besten*, the lobbyist Gregor Gysi, once the leader of the post-Communist Party of Democratic Socialism, placed Karl Marx on the 3rd spot. His argument was that Marx treated the social question in a way nobody before him did. (Gálová, “Kdo je Největší Čech, Němec, Brit...”)

20 th and 21 st	St Agnes of Bohemia vs. Tomáš Baťa	Czech Patron Saint, Abbess of St. Clare Convent in Prague vs. world-famous entrepreneur, shoe manufacturer
27 th and 28 th	Jaromír Jágr vs. Maria Theresa	contemporary world-famous ice-hockey player vs. Hapsburg Empress who introduced compulsory school attendance
25 th and 26 th	Daniel Landa vs. Milada Horáková	extremist singer vs. politician executed in the Stalinist political trials
57 th and 58 th	St. Adalbert of Prague vs. Josef Bican	Czech Patron Saint vs. football player
69 th and 70 th	Madeleine Albright vs. Aneta Langerová	American politician born in Czechoslovakia vs. <i>Pop Idol</i> winner
85 th and 86 th	Vladimír Remek vs. Milan Kundera	Czechoslovak astronaut (during Socialism) vs. writer, emigrated to France after the invasion in 1968, fleeing Socialism

The goal of the project, which was to gain popularity and initiate a debate on the values and the essence of being British, Czech, etc, was without a doubt accomplished. 81% of Czechs knew about the project, and although the project could be called a classic example of an educational programme, its ratings were around 18% and 7% with the documentaries, this being comparable with the results of other mutations (e.g., France 21%, Finland 20%, Germany 11.4%, the Netherlands 25.4%, and Britain itself 19%).⁵⁸ "Czechs were fortunate to have chosen the right things from the warehouse of the national memory. They defined for themselves what the ideal was, what they would like to become, and we can only wish the best for them. Nothing surprising happened, but what is more important, our nation did not cause any shame," Třeštík summed up.⁵⁹

5 Processes of Czech "Translation"

The public TV company had never executed such a large-scale and grandly conceived licensed project before. It therefore first had to establish a variety of communication channels and gain at least some experience. Not everything went smoothly. "For the first time in its history, Czech TV was preparing a project of this magnitude, with the great potential to reach the widest public," read the internal material drawn up by the marketing and PR departments of Czech Television.⁶⁰ It was one of the first projects that attempted nationwide coverage, and headed outside the area of the usual Czech TV product. (This does not include, of course, the daily news coverage of exceptional events such as floods or various elections in 1997 and 2002.) It was also the first major project that linked a documentary, entertainment, PR and marketing across

⁵⁸ Specifically: the 130-minute nomination night (May 5, 2005) had a rating of 18.4% (1,573,000 viewers); the average rating of the documentaries promoting the Top 10 was around 7%, which is above average for deceased personages (with the exception of Václav Havel), which represented "every twentieth spectator sitting in front of the TV;" the final live broadcast (June 10, 2005) had a rating of 18.2% again (1,018,000 viewers). (Martin Krafl, "Největší Čech? Úspěšná hra!" *Lidové noviny*, June 20, 2005, 11; Karel Zeman, "Sto největších Čechů v centru divácké pozornosti," internal document of Czech TV for a press conference, June 2005, author's archive.)

⁵⁹ Třeštík, "Inventura," 3.

⁶⁰ Tereza Typoltová, "Cíl kampaně," internal document from the Department of Marketing and PR of Czech TV, September 12, 2004, author's archive.

the Czech TV company, and which involved a great deal of pressure in terms of advertising or cross-promotion. "The project is quite an innovative combination of marketing, advertising, entertainment, documentary and education. Commercial tools in the service of culture, this is something unprecedented," said the then head of the project, the experienced producer of entertainment programmes Jan Štern.⁶¹

The team had 15 members and met every Wednesday. Some were stripped of their existing projects and were assigned exclusively to *The Greatest Czech*, e.g., the author of this text. At a press conference in December 2004, the Czech TV CEO Jiří Janeček announced the project as the main programme priority for the first half of the following year. This exclusive position began, however, to turn against the project itself during the realization. As it gradually took up most of the production capacities of the TV company, the atmosphere inside the institution shifted to aversion, and I can testify in person and only with slight exaggeration that although we began the project as makers of a highly innovative nationwide experiment, at the end we were finalizing the project as guerilla warfare, against almost everyone. I only mention this because *The Greatest Czech* showed how unprepared the institution actually was and how the scope and reach of the project surprised us. Fortunately, we learned the lesson for future large projects, such as the Czech version of *Strictly Come Dancing* (*Stardance – Když hvězdy tančí*).

At some point in June 2004, the project Bible landed on the table of the team. All the mechanisms (competition rules, voting methods, timing etc.) were adopted with the utmost care. The principles of the programme were described in the Bible in 8 points:

- a) "participation" – the final list should not be a selection of experts, but that of the audience;
- b) "appeal to a diverse audience" – the documentaries needed to be attractive for the older audience, but also had to have a style sufficiently accessible to younger audiences;
- c) "marketing" – the campaign was divided into five phases and different communication methods were chosen. The team member responsible for marketing, Tereza Typoltová, described the campaign as follows, "In this case, the campaign is not merely a marketing tool, but consists of part of the project, especially the nomination phase. The success of the first part of the campaign depends on the success of the entire project."⁶²
- d) "prime time placement" – all the components of the project (the nomination night, the final night and all the documentaries) were placed in the schedule of the Czech TV Channel 1 during prime time;
- e) "celebrities" – see below for the choice of "advocates;"
- f) "online and interactive support" – in addition to voting with text messages or newspaper clippings, an interactive project website was established, and a number of accompanying events (Internet poll of the greatest villain, a contest of children's drawings, etc.) were also created;
- g) "secret" – this involved creating an atmosphere of expectation, which was implemented in three ways – a secret as part of the campaign (a countdown to the beginning of the show on TV a few months in advance, an airing of confusing hoax reports about who would appear there, etc.), incentive on the part of media partners to speculate and varying degrees of confidentiality even within the TV company;
- h) "collective creative management" – a team set up across the Television.⁶³

⁶¹ Halada, "Otázka: jak ho najít?," 65.

⁶² Typoltová, "Cíl kampaně," 2004.

⁶³ See Harrison, *The Format Bible*, 2002

It might seem as if all of the points are versatile and aimed at general TV and marketing professionalism, and that none of them required any adaptation to local conditions. This was predominantly true. In the case of *The Greatest Czech*, however, the need for a specific shift occurred in four areas.

5.1 Name

A large internal discussion addressed the fears that people will interpret the term “Czech” in an ethnic and national way, in which case the definition would negatively affect other nationalities living within the Czech Republic, for example, provincial nationalists in Moravia and Silesia. The estimates were accurate that the name of the show would cause controversy in the media, from tabloids to newspapers. The journalist Jaromír Slomek, for example, wrote: “Of course, the phrase *The Greatest Czech* is inept, hapless, dumb, simplistic, and unintentionally comical – on the other hand, even the greatest imbecile will understand it.”⁶⁴ In his article “Let’s Not Search for a Czech, but for the Nation,” Třeščík provided an analysis: “We silently assume that the Czech nation is only one, that it is a single, relatively well-defined, cohesive community. This is how our modern nation was created, and therefore we think that it is natural and necessary. But it is not, the Czech nation today actually means more.”⁶⁵ There is some truth to the fact that the way the project was concerned with national identities meant that despite efforts for the mobilization of great values, it became an accelerator of the simplest shortcuts and stereotypes, an active provoker of “banal nationalism,” as Billig defines it in his book.⁶⁶ The authors of the project hoped that the word Czech would provide inspiration for a Bauman-esque conception of an imaginary community⁶⁷ or the concept of the nation, which is closely linked to culture as it is inscribed in it.⁶⁸ Indeed, Macura’s emphasis on the role of mythology in creating cultural and national identity is well-known, and this competition would prove him right.

The team eventually chose the title *The Greatest Czech*, and added the motto: “Vote for the greatest personage from Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia!” It was difficult to come up with a different name at that point. Although the Germans chose a more general name *Our Best*, the Argentines picked *The Argentine Gene* and the Russians named the show *The Name of Russia*, the vast majority of the mutations of the project mentioned nationality and some variation of the word “great” or “the greatest.”⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Jaromír Slomek, “Největší Superstar,” *Lidové noviny*, June 18, 2005, 4.

⁶⁵ Dušan Třeščík, “Nehledejme Čecha, ale národ,” *Lidovky.cz*, January 17, 2005.

⁶⁶ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: SAGE, 1995), 93.

⁶⁷ Zygmunt Bauman and Tim May, *Thinking Sociologically* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2001).

⁶⁸ Vladimír Macura, *Český sen* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1998), 61.

⁶⁹ 1. *100 Greatest Britons* (BBC, 2002); 2. *Unsere Besten* [Our Best] (ZDF, 2003); 3. *The Greatest Canadian* (CBS, 2004); 4. *Suuret suomalaiset* [Great Finns] (YLE, 2004); 5. *De Grootste Nederlander* [The Greatest Dutchman] (KRO, 2004); 6. *Great South Africans* (SABC3, 2004); 7. *De Grootse Belg/Le plus grand Belge* [The Greatest Belgian] (VRT 2005); 8. *New Zealand’s Top 100 History Makers* (PTNZ, 2005); 9. *Největší Čech* [The Greatest Czech] (ČT 2005); 10. *The Greatest American* (AOL + Discovery Channel, 2005); 11. *Le plus grand français de tous les temps* [The Greatest Frenchmen of All Time] (France 2, 2005); 12. *Benukume България – Velikite Bulgari* [The Great Bulgarians] (BNT, 2006); 13. 超大型歴史アカデミー史上初1億3000万人が選ぶニッポン人が好きな偉人ベスト100発表 [The Top 100 Historical Persons in Japan] (Nippon Television, 2006); 14. *Mari Români* [100 Greatest Romanians] (TVR, 2006); 15. *Os Grandes Portugueses* [The Greatest Portuguese] (RTP, 2007); 16. *El Español De La Historia* [The Spaniard of History] (Antena 3, 2007); 17. *El Gen Argentino* [The Argentine Gene] (Telefe, 2007); 18. *Benuki українці – Veliki Ukrainci* [The Greatest Ukrainians] (Inter, 2008); 19. *Μεγάλοι Έλληνες – Megali Ellines* [Great Greeks] (Skai TV, 2008); 20. *Grandes Chilenos de Nuestra Historia* [Great Chileans of Our History] (TVN, 2008); 21. *Имя России – Imja Rossiji* [The Name of Russia] (Rossija 1, 2008); 22. *Ireland’s Greatest* (RTÉ, 2010); 23. *Il più grande italiano di tutti i tempi* [The Greatest Italian of All Time] (Rai 2, 2010); 24. *O Maior Brasileiro de Todos os Tempos* [The Greatest Brazilian of All Time] (SBT, 2012); 25. *The Greatest Indian* (CNN-IBN + History Channel, 2012).

5.2 Communication Code and Faces of Entertainment

The second major area was which type of communication should be elected for the Czech audience. The team thought that the audience would have difficulty accepting the clearly aggressive style of Anne Robinson,⁷⁰ although Jan Štern repeatedly suggested that the provocative actor Jan Kraus could serve as the anchor face of the project. A counteroffer appeared in the name of the then well-known actor and presenter of the Czech version of the super-format *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, Vladimír Čech, who was known for his noblesse and ability to work with a secret. His surname was a huge plus, since Čech means *Czech*. Czech TV management did not accept him, however, since Čech was one of the main faces of their main competitor, the private television NOVA TV, and the management did not want to link him with the public television network. The choice finally fell on Marek Eben whose moderating career was exclusively linked with Czech TV, and who at the time, already had extensive experience with moderating various TV competitions (*The Treasure of St. Agnes of Bohemia – O poklad Anežky České*). He had also been the prestigious moderator of the largest film festival in the Czech Republic, the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, and had his own talk show *At the Swimming Bath (Na plovárně)* for a number of years. Eben also brings (as is expected from him) a certain type of subtle and intelligent humour that some may find too “public service,” while others find extremely sophisticated.⁷¹

There was actually a dispute between representatives of the producing centre of entertainment shows who wanted the documentaries about the finalists to be as explosive and aggressive as possible, as was the case in the British original, and representatives of the centre of documentaries, who constantly warned of the ephemeral nature of the two evening shows in contrast with the lasting quality (and possible reruns) of documentaries. The documentary film-makers had to reject certain ideas for possible “advocates” (such as when the extremist singer Daniel Landa, who had inclined to neo-Nazism in the past, was supposed to serve as advocate for John Hus). The dramaturgy of the documentaries counted on a lengthy controversy, which had, however, a certain logic. Paradoxically, there was a Catholic priest Tomáš Halík advocating John Hus, although the fact that Hus had been at least partially rehabilitated by the Catholic Church was to Halík’s advantage. The rock singer Michael Kocáb who spoke for Antonín Dvořák had studied organ music in school and considered Dvořák’s *Stabat Mater* one of the greatest pieces of classical music. The director Igor Chaun who served as advocate for President Václav Havel had been one of the student leaders during the revolutionary days of 1989, etc. The following pairs were supposed to be amusing and entertaining: the before-mentioned actor Jan Kraus, known for his wit and eloquence, was to advocate the Hussite military leader Jan Žižka, while Jan Werich was given to Halina Pawłowska, a writer and moderator who is well-known from the screen as a lover of celebrities and parties. The choices were closest to the British version when it was decided that Karel Čapek would be defended by fellow journalist Andrej Halada and Tomáš G. Masaryk by Zdeněk Mahler, a skilled rhetorician and scholar. In contrast, the biggest problem occurred in the cases of Božena Němcová, Comenius and, paradoxically enough, Charles IV. Němcová was repeatedly offered to one of the Czech feminists, the director Olga Sommerová, who repeatedly refused. The writer Alexandra Berková also refused and Němcová was then finally “adopted” by the singer Yvonne Přenosilová, who unfortunately had no deep relationship to her “client” and could not handle her part. The creators chose the well-read actor Viktor Preiss for Comenius who, however, became nervous about the fact that the show was to be broadcast live, turned them down and had to be replaced by the actress Eva Holubová. For Charles IV, who was predicted right from the start as the clear winner, the producers had originally intended to get Marek Eben,

⁷⁰ Anne Robinson, who hosted *The Weakest Link!*, was the voice and face of the British project.

⁷¹ Since then, Eben, together with Tereza Kostková, has hosted the show *Strictly Come Dancing – StarDance*.

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who would have provided the best service to the sophistication and popularity of Charles IV. Eben had become the face of the entire project, however, so Charles IV was irrationally assigned to the actor Jaroslav Dušek who changed his mind just two days before the shooting of the project began. The final choice for the Roman Emperor was the actor and architect David Vávra, which turned out to be a great idea, as Vávra was known to the Czech audience from the TV series *The Graceful Cities* (*Šumná města*). Eventually, Vávra's own specific poetry and passion, or perhaps the documentary itself, eventually sat Charles IV on the imaginary throne of winners.⁷²

The choice of advocates demonstrated that the Czech media environment lacks educated, but also popular and well-known journalists in the vein of those who defended most of the British top ten. Apart from Zdeněk Mahler, who would have been able to speak on behalf of any of the potential nominees, advocates were recruited from actors, who are well-known. There was a likelihood, however, that they would fail in a personal defence during the final night (such as with Viktor Preiss). It would have been logical to address historians and university teachers who would master the defence, but most of them had no experience with performing in front of camera and are not publicly known.

For the documentaries on selected personalities, well-known directors were chosen (such as Igor Chaun or Olga Sommerová), but the emphasis was primarily placed on experience, creativity and filming skills (such as the case with Petr Kaňka, Josef Čisařovský, Ondřej Kepka, Roman Vávra, Alena Činčerová and Petr Kotek). Space was given to younger directors as well (Petr Bok, Marián Polák). Some of the addressed directors, however, refused to take part in the project (e.g., Helena Třeštková).

5.3 Targeting

The entertainment rate began to be an issue for another reason as well. Most national mutations of *100 Greatest Britons* were produced by public service television companies, often on their second programmes. Czech TV, in an effort to achieve nationwide impact, decided to place the project on the first, mainstream programme ČT1, even though the second programme, ČT2, was profiled at the time as a culture channel, making it definitely more suited for this type of project. The placement on the first programme created unrealistic expectations within the company, not perhaps so much concerning the number of viewers, but as to the composition. Although the British experience had clearly defined that “our main audience consisted mostly of men aged 45 and with a secondary education,”⁷³ Czech TV decided to focus on the audience with a primary education as well and adapted the attractiveness of certain elements of the campaign for them. They also chose, for the first time in its history, the tabloid newspaper *Blesk* for its media

⁷² The original ideas about the advocates were different, and alternatives were taken into account: the connections between Charles IV and Marek Eben, and between Jan Žižka and Jan Kraus, had always been obvious. In Comenius' case, we counted on Zdeněk Svěrák, the renowned “teacher of the nation” from the very beginning. Svěrák was even born on the same day as Comenius, but he declined the offer. For Dvořák, Libor Pešek, the world-renowned conductor based in Liverpool, was an obvious choice, while for Čapek this was Josef Abrhám, who starred as Čapek in the biopic *A Man against Destruction* (*Člověk proti zkáze*, 1989). The writer Michal Viewegh or the journalist Jaromír Štětina were pondered in case he declined the offer. The following names could be used universally: Halina Pawłowska; the actors Tomáš Töpfer, Bolek Polívka, Jiří Lábus and Iva Janžurová; the writers and journalists Ondřej Neff, Lída Rakušanová and Petra Procházková; the singers and songwriters Jiří Dědeček, Jan Burian and Jan Vodňanský; the singers Karel Gott, Jiří Korn and Lucie Bílá; controversial visual artists David Černý and Milan Knížák; the sociologist Jiřina Šiklová; or the medical doctor and translator from English Jaroslava Moserová. Václav Havel had the most alternative suggestions – apart from Chaun, Miloš Forman, Jan Tříska, who was a close friend of Havel's, Jiří Bartoška, who acted in Havel's plays, or the journalist Michal Horáček, who played an important part in the Velvet Revolution in 1989. The idea that Havel's wife, the actress Dagmar Havlová Veškrnová could be his advocate was rejected immediately. (Martin Štoll, *Největší Čech – první studie k dokumentům*, unpublished production material, 2004.)

⁷³ Harrison, *The Format Bible*, 2002.

partner, and created an opportunity to vote by use of ballots placed at the Tesco store chain. It was a lost battle, however, right from the start since the largest commercial channel NOVA TV ran the second season of *Pop Idol (Česko hledá Superstar)* against *The Greatest Czech*. An analysis confirmed that the audience consisted mostly of older men with a tertiary education (the final night received a rating of 31.9% of such viewers with a share of 60% of those with a tertiary education!).⁷⁴

Table 3 The ratings and share of the project. Corresponding results in bold. (Int ČT 2005d)

	RATING (%)		SHARE (%)	
1.	Werich	10.00	Werich	22.9
2.	Havel	9.23	Havel	21.18
3.	Žižka	9.12	Žižka	20.02
4.	Charles IV	7.40	Němcová	17.57
5.	Masaryk	7.35	Charles IV	15.44
6.	Němcová	7.30	Masaryk	14.23
7.	Čapek	6.10	Čapek	13.93
8.	Dvořák	6.03	Dvořák	13.02
9.	Comenius	5.44	Hus	12.10
10.	Hus	5.07	Comenius	11.37
	Cimrman	3.63	Cimrman	9.23

5.4 Czech Contribution to the Global Format: Cimrman

During the first week of the nomination period, votes for Jára Cimrman began to appear in great numbers.⁷⁵ Cimrman is a fictional character whose poetics are based on a Jack-of-all-trades quality and genius, constantly underrated and unappreciated by the entire world. Over the last 50 years, Cimrman has been rooted deeply in the Czech (and Czechoslovak) cultural space.⁷⁶ It is not surprising that he appeared among the nominees, as he remains a metaphor for Czech skills, but also of a certain insufficiency and a desire for greatness on the part of the small.

Since the goal, however, of the project was to search for the “essence of Britishness,” or, respectively, “Czechness” and since in a few short days, Cimrman moved ahead of Charles IV, the producers began contemplating the idea that they might make a deal with the licence holders. The Cimrmanesque prank and his Švejk-like type of behaviour would consequently enter the global project as a Czech particularity. Czech TV contacted the BBC Worldwide with a letter in which we tried to explain the phenomenon (it was very difficult – a bit like *Forrest Gump*, but in Austria-Hungary...), and the answer we received was the following: “The character of Jára Cimrman apparently has a lot to say to the Czech audience. Our format, however, stipulates that candidates must be real persons, either historical or still living.”⁷⁷ This stood in direct opposition, however, to the fact that the UK’s top one hundred placed legendary King Arthur in the 51st place. If this was the case, why did the Czechs have to strike off Cimrman, and apart from

⁷⁴ Krafl, “Největší Čech? Úspěšná hra!,” 11.

⁷⁵ Unfortunately, the votes stopped being counted even during the nomination process, so it remains unclear as to how many votes Cimrman would have received in total.

⁷⁶ Jára Cimrman was invented by the founders of the Jára Cimrman Theatre – Jiří Šebánek, Zdeněk Svěrák, Ladislav Smoljak, and Miloš Čepelka in 1966.

⁷⁷ Gra, “Největšího Čecha Cimrmana fešila BBC,” *zpravy.idnes.cz*, February 14, 2005.

the Tesco store chain. Commercial channel NOVA *the Greatest Czech*. An tertiary education of 60% of those with

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gan to appear in great a Jack-of-all-trades e world. Over the last (vak) cultural space.⁷⁶ a metaphor for Czech part of the small. of Britishness," or, re-read of Charles IV, the h the licence holders. onsequently enter the dwide with a letter in ke Forrest Gump, but The character of Jára 2005d) However, stipulates that ood in direct opposi- y King Arthur in the rman, and apart from

ains unclear as to how many

ěk Svěrák, Ladislav Smoljak,

him, also the mythical princess Libuše or Grandfather Czech as unconfirmed historical figures? A BBC deputy, in charge of the Czech version, told the project leader during a personal interview that the figure of "the Unknown Soldier" placed 76th in the UK. The "Unknown Soldier" might be a vague figure, but it represents real heroism, and to grant Cimrman, a figure who mocks heroism, the same position would stand "against the spirit of the competition" and might be viewed as an expression of "disrespect." The official statement continued: "The BBC Worldwide believes that the format should provoke a debate about what is the essence of greatness, and how qualities such as a heritage for future generations, genius, leadership, courage or compassion may contribute to it. A fictional character lacks these properties, because they emanate from within. The qualities of fictional characters have been assigned to them and therefore cannot be considered their merit."⁷⁸ Thus, in cultural translation: It is a game, but should not be playful. It is an entertainment project, but at the same time it is serious. And hands off King Arthur!

Scrapping Cimrman provoked a violent backlash. Dozens of disgruntled viewers called the TV company every day, demanding an explanation and complaining that Czech TV lacks a sense of humour. Explaining the conditions of the license and publishing the letter from the BBC had no effect and a press conference had to be organized. A petition *Let Jára Cimrman Become the Greatest Czech* was immediately launched on the Internet. The author of the petition was the twenty-five-year-old František Haupt and the petition was immediately signed by 10,000 people.⁷⁹ The creators of Jára Cimrman and his works were wary: "When the nation finally matured to appreciate Cimrman, a handful appeared which still denied him the trophy," commented Zdeněk Svěrák.⁸⁰ However, as he stated, neither he, nor the co-creator Ladislav Smoljak, initiated a campaign for the return of Cimrman to the contest, nor did they encourage it. "We stand aside with all refinement," stated Smoljak.⁸¹ "It demonstrates that the Czechs recognize humour as a value,"⁸² added Svěrák. Smoljak also believed that "the tendency of people to appreciate humour, which lies dormant here, received a chance for manifestation here."⁸³

In personal conversations with the author of the study, however, they were both basically unhappy that their Cimrman was abused as a tool to disparage the competition and that the victory of a fictional genius was not the question. "The nomination of a fictional hero is a typical Czech subversion of the project, which the basically anarchist and antiheroic Czech public rightly interpreted primarily as an attempt by Czech TV to increase the rating of its programmes," wrote University of Glasgow professor Jan Čulík in his online newspaper *Britské listy*. "Czech TV had to reject this irony of course and tried to justify it by the use of the 'authority' of the BBC," he writes in an article with the subheading "Helpless Czech TV Seeks Advice with the BBC."⁸⁴ Čulík's presumption of the audience is merely a speculation, and consultations with the BBC were not, as has been shown above, a sign of helplessness. On the contrary, Czech TV asked the BBC for an exception to shoot eleven documentaries instead of the usual ten. The final result was a poetic documentary project about Cimrman, with Svěrák and Smoljak acting as speakers, although people were not allowed to send votes during the broadcast. Furthermore, Czech TV asked about the possibility of establishing a nomination night designated for fictional characters with the participation of other characters (e.g., Švejk, the Little Mole or Maya the Bee), which

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ "We, the below signed citizens of the Czech Republic and subscribers of Czech TV, require that Jára Cimrman be recognized by Czech TV to be the greatest personage in Czech history who we have the right to vote for in the project *Greatest Czech*." See "Cimrman," accessed July 28, 2016, <http://cimrman.nazory.cz>.

⁸⁰ Ondřej Štastný, "Největší Čech: Jára Cimrman," *Mladá fronta DNES*, February 2, 2005, 5.

⁸¹ Alena Kodlová, "Ve volbě o Největšího Čecha Cimrmanovi nepomáháme," *Piževský deník*, January 29, 2005, 27.

⁸² Štastný, "Největší Čech: Jára Cimrman," 5.

⁸³ Kodlová, "Ve volbě o Největšího Čecha Cimrmanovi nepomáháme," 27.

⁸⁴ Jan Čulík, "Největší Čech a Jára Cimrman," *Britské listy*, February 2, 2005, <http://blisty.cz/art/22012.html>.

Cimrman masterfully won. The *Czech Unique* prize was handed over to both his creators, a statuette of a woman in a bikini (another "invention" of Cimrman). The astrophysicist Jiří Grygar presented the prize to them, because as of 1998, Cimrman has had his own asteroid in space.⁸⁵ At this point one needs to note that the entire Cimrman affair became a major inspiration for the last play of the Jára Cimrman Theatre, *Czech Heaven* (*České nebe*, 2009), where Czech greats received votes to ascend to heaven. The entire play can therefore be considered a by-product of the transnational project.⁸⁶

What serves to confirm my thesis that the majority of voters actually abused Cimrman in order to subvert the project, that these were not his actual admirers? Firstly, it was the aggression with which they protested Cimrman's disqualification. The phone calls were full of shouts, insults, slander and threats (for example, claiming that they would immediately cancel their licence fee), and cutting calls were frequent. Some presented their legal analyses of the situation. They took the definition of who can become *The Greatest Czech*⁸⁷ and argued that even if Cimrman never lived, he certainly "worked" here. Others went further and attached legal documents demonstrating that when an act claims streets cannot be named after living persons,⁸⁸ but only after the deceased, and there are several streets named after Cimrman in the Czech Republic, then in legal logic this means that he had to die at some point and thus lived prior to his death. The legal department of Czech TV analysed the very same law in a different way. These details, together with many others, are mentioned here because aggression is in direct contrast with the poetics of those works. The humour of the theatre is, in vivid contrast, humble and subtle and it seems likely that the genuine admirers of Cimrman would have been reluctant to make use of the fictional character for an attack. The second aspect indicating that these were not true admirers of Cimrman was the rating of the documentary itself. If all those who had sent their votes had watched it, the forecast carried out by the tabloid magazine *Story* on 31 January 2005 would have become reality. A *Story* article named "Do Not Take Our Jára Away from Us!" optimistically stated that "a documentary about Cimrman would take a decent bite out of the rating cake!"⁸⁹ The reality was, however, that the documentary reached only 3.63% in the ratings, which was the lowest out of all the Top 10 documentaries. The third, albeit indirect evidence, is the place Cimrman reached in the afore-mentioned survey carried out by the STEM/MARK agency, in which Cimrman finished at a joint 8th to 12th place. This result was more consistent with possible views of the population and it was not an activity directed against the competition.

In summary, it should be noted that Czech TV and Cimrman could not have done more for one other. Cimrman became a lightning rod for all those who wanted to ridicule the show, and thus saved Czech TV from a situation whereby for the same reason the Communist president and dictator Klement Gottwald would have appeared in the Top 10. (The fear was justified, as at that time, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia had an election potential of 18%.⁹⁰) Cimrman's disqualification, in contrast, confirmed the poetics of this fictional character, a principal disregard for the Czech genius who "was elected into the top ten, but had to finish

⁸⁵ The asteroid was discovered by the astronomer Zdeněk Moravec at the Klet observatory in South Bohemia and its catalogue number is 7796.

⁸⁶ The face of the project, Marek Eben, himself an actor and singer-songwriter, used his nomination in the lyrics of his song "Monument" (Pomník; album *Chlebitky*, 2008), where the chorus is "Don't make me out of limestone, I would crumble soon..."

⁸⁷ Only those who were born, lived or worked in what is today Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia could take part in the competition.

⁸⁸ The paragraph in question is §29, Municipality Act, and paragraph §13, Act on the Capital City of Prague adopted in 2000; in Prague, this provision has been in effect since 1925.

⁸⁹ "Neberte nám Járu!" *Story*, January 31, 2005, 6.

⁹⁰ In the last general elections to the Chamber of Deputies, 18.51% of votes went to the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia. See "Český statistický úřad," *volby.cz*, accessed July 29, 2016, <http://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2002/ps2?xjazyk=CZ>.

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eleventh.”⁹¹ After all, just imagine if Cimrman would actually win! The fifty years of work of the Jára Cimrman Theatre would have been ruined. Eventually, as Dušan Třeštík put it, although “the Cimrman tradition is rooted in the very nature of the Czech national character,” his victory “would have ruined the game.”⁹² The game per se, the Cimrman game.

6 Summary

The theorists Jolien Van Keulen and Tonny Krijnen have pointed out that if a national version of the global format is to obtain the attention of the audience, the format has to be adapted on three levels: the linguistic, the cultural and the intertextual.⁹³ All three levels were achieved in the case of *The Greatest Czech*. The essence was, according to Chalaby, a typical narrative⁹⁴ defined by the format,⁹⁵ filled with a local content and emphasised by the way of distribution and marketing support. “We might ask how the creators made use of the opportunity, what new things we learned about the greats of Czech history and how the results of such surveys might be interpreted,” Marta Švagrová, journalist from *Lidové noviny*, wrote in a final summary. “The answers are: little, nothing, none whatsoever. The Czech TV poll will fade away... the patriotic wave will disappear and historians will probably take a long time – if ever – to rectify the deformations of their opportunistic predecessors, who in each historical period altered the points of view of the deeds and lives of the great as was required.”⁹⁶ One might argue at present, twelve years after the show, that the historical consciousness of *The Greatest Czech* remains associated with Charles IV (whose importance was again commemorated last year on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of his birth), the “betrayal” of Cimrman (90 years ago it would have been Švejk). The project occasionally comes back to life for forty minutes when the documentaries are rerun (esp. the John Hus one, which is screened almost annually). Is this too little?

The experience remains. The experience of the team and the institution of Czech TV, the experience of the nation, the experience of a selection of its own idea of greatness, or perhaps only a memory. Czech TV jumped into the unknown, and although it partly misjudged its abilities, the project was implemented to the satisfaction of the licensees. Cimrman, who could be a great contribution on the part of Czechs to the treasury of global heritage, revealed the limits of the format. Or was it merely a contradiction which the conservatively oriented BBC failed to absorb with grace, a contradiction between seriousness and mock seriousness, although this project was primarily an entertainment show. Cimrman could have boldly stood next to King Arthur, since both represent the essence of the national mentality.

This consisted of a typical project by a public service TV not only in terms of the content and the attempt to trigger a nationwide debate concerning the values and specific personages of the past and present, but also in terms of the degree of sophistication. Public TV companies would be unwilling to cross the line and present it in a way commercial TV companies would.

⁹¹ Štoll, *Největší Čech – první studie k dokumentům*.

⁹² Třeštík, “Inventura,” 3.

⁹³ Jolien van Keulen and Tonny Krijnen, “The Limitations of Localization: A Cross-cultural Comparative Study of Farmer Wants a Wife,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 17, no. 3 (2014): 277–292.

⁹⁴ Jean K. Chalaby, “The Making of an Entertainment Revolution: How the TV Format Trade Became a Global Industry,” *European Journal of Communication* 26, no. 4 (2011): 293–309.

⁹⁵ In the internal provisions of Czech TV, the format is described as follows: “This is an entertainment show based on real events, a show that rediscovers historical stories for the nation [...]. We want to tell a story to the viewer. A story about how and by what means a single human could enter the minds of the millions over the years and centuries that followed. Stories about the cultural legacy of our great historical personages. Biographies are lively stories. A legacy is also a story.” (Internal Provisions of Czech TV, ČT 2004a.)

⁹⁶ Marta Švagrová, “Lid diskutuje... a Vávra se směje,” *Lidové noviny*, June 13, 2005, 11.

In contrast, a number of them actually avoided seeking out more invigorating elements from their dead history.

The poll, the debate at all levels and the results have been, at least in the Czech Republic, a certain reflection of maturity on the part of the participants. The mixture of values and big words which the project made use of, pulling them out of a hat like a magician would with rabbits, did not confuse the audience or the voters. The fact that we do not need to feel ashamed about the Top 100, let alone the Top 10, was undoubtedly partially a result of the parallel broadcasting of *Pop Idol*, a programme priority of NOVA TV, which attracted a different target audience. The particular names are, however, a showcase of who Czechs identified with in 2005, and who they consider part of their identity, naming Maria Theresa, Kafka and Freud quite spontaneously. Given that the Austrians did not appreciate the inclusion of W. A. Mozart in the German charts and the Poles did not like the inclusion of Nicolaus Copernicus therein, one wonders what the Germans would make of Charles IV. They would definitely accept him as a Roman emperor and a Luxembourg, but not as a Czech.⁹⁷

Finally, additional undocumented consequences should be recalled. Czech TV began to prepare *The Greatest Czech* and bought the license in 2004. At that time, the Czech Republic had joined the European Union along with other countries. This historical moment was in all probability one of the motivations on the part of Czech TV to react as quickly as possible, and by means of a global format join the European intellectual milieu. "The Britishness of the British is disappearing, but the Scots and the Welsh regenerate, and the Frenchness of France is falling apart into local and other identities. It is no different for us. We entered the European Union, but it does not seem as if we want to become Europeans," Dušan Třeštík stated at the time. In the project *The Greatest Czech*, we raised the issue of not only what we would like to be, but who we would like to be in the new European community. "We want to be Czechs. Czechs in Europe."⁹⁸

Table 4 TOP 10 (in alphabetical order) with the characteristics mentioned on the *Nomination Night*

Karel Čapek (09/01/1890–25/12/1938) writer, journalist, playwright	<i>His name is a symbol of humanism and democracy. His journalism activity is associated with the most renowned period of the newspaper Lidové noviny. In his stories, novels and plays, he did not hide his fears of the rising Nazism. He was nominated several times for the Nobel Prize for Literature.</i>
Antonín Dvořák (08/09/1841–01/05/1904) musical composer	<i>A world-renowned musician. He was invited to America as the director of the National Conservatory in New York to teach young composers how to compose national music. He also worked in England and Germany but always enjoyed returning to his native Bohemia. The New World Symphony and Rusalka rank among the jewels of world classical music.</i>
Václav Havel (05/10/1936–18/12/2011) playwright, dissident, president	<i>He criticized the mechanisms of totalitarian power in his theatre plays. He was imprisoned several times during the normalization period for his civic attitudes. As president of the Czech Republic, the country obtained international prestige and respect. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize several times.</i>
Jan Hus (1371(?)–06/07/1415) priest	<i>He dedicated his life to the fight for the reform of the Church and society. As Rector of Charles University, he tried in vain to defend his ideas in front of the Catholic council and was burned at the stake. He became a role model and the message of his life became the basis for one of the most important historical periods in our history, the Hussite movement which bears his name.</i>

⁹⁷ Milan Šmíd, "Největší Čech, Jára Cimrman, a česko-německé pohledy na historii," Louč.cz, January 19, 2005, <http://www.louc.cz/05/1400118.html>.

⁹⁸ Třeštík, "Nehledejme Čecha, ale národ."

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Charles IV (14/05/1316–29/11/1378) King of Bohemia and Roman Emperor	<i>The most important European ruler of the late Middle Ages. He made Prague the seat of his empire. He established the New Town of Prague and the University. He had a stone bridge built, began the construction of St. Vitus' Cathedral. He strengthened the cult of St. Wenceslas and had the crown and regalia made. His character became a national legend, earning him the nickname Father of the Homeland.</i>
Jan Ámos Komenský (Comenius) (28/03/1592–15/11/1670) pedagogue and philosopher	<i>Humanist, teacher and priest, known as the Teacher of Nations. He was also a theologian, writer, historian, linguist and ultimately a politician who tried to find help abroad for his nation.</i>
Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (07/03/1850–14/09/1937) philosopher and politician	<i>During the First World War, he organised the anti-Austrian resistance which resulted in the founding of an independent Czechoslovak Republic. He became its first President upon its establishment. His name is the supreme symbol of the democracy of the First Republic.</i>
Božena Němcová (04/02/1820–21/01/1862) writer	<i>The Fairy tales Three Golden Hairs, Twelve Moons or Mr. Long, Mr. Broad and Mr. Sharpeye are an integral part of our culture. Thanks to her vast collections of folk tales and especially her novel The Grandmother, Němcová became one of the national icons. Her emancipated attitudes are also cherished.</i>
Jan Werich (06/02/1905–31/10/1980) actor and writer	<i>A noble comedian, a clown-philosopher, an original actor and the author of modern fairy tales. Together with Jiří Voskovec, he was the author of the repertoire of the Liberated Theatre. After the War, he found a new stage partner in Miroslav Horníček, but eventually became more interested in literature and film.</i>
Jan Žižka (1360(?)–11/10/1424) military leader	<i>All of Catholic Europe feared the invincible leader of the plebeian armies of Czech heretics. Not even his greatest enemies could deny his military genius. For Czechs, Žižka was a national hero and a remarkable role model over the centuries of German oppression.</i>

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Translated by Richard Olehla

prof. MgA. Martin Štoll, Ph.D.
 Institut komunikačních studií a žurnalistiky
 Fakulta sociálních věd Karlovy univerzity
 Smetanovo nábřeží 6
 110 00 Praha 1
 Czech Republic
 martin.stoll@fsv.cuni.cz

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