

## EQUIPMENT AND CHANGING OUTDOOR CULTURE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Tomáš Kvasnička  
Lancaster University

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### The popularity of outdoor fashion

Contemplating the dense jungle of Czech outdoor pursuits, active holiday destinations (around the country and worldwide) and the antithetical urban pavement of Czech cities and towns, a well-trained eye can easily discern a rather strong inclination towards outdoor fashion. Not only in the streets and on mountains, paths, crags and river banks, but also in transitional places – buses, trains, gas and railway stations, pubs and beer gardens –, a recognisable and ever-growing proportion of Czechs are wearing fashion artefacts produced by the outdoor industry. Trekking sandals, *outdoor*<sup>1</sup> shorts or pants with a chequered motif on the knees, T-shirts with outdoor sports motifs and rucksacks give visual expression to large portions of Czech bodies in summertime. As the season moves towards autumn and winter, these items are increasingly replaced by hiking boots and fleece or soft-shell<sup>2</sup> jackets. In my experience, outdoor fashion seems to be more popular in the centre of Prague than in the prime English outdoor honeypot town of Ambleside in the Lake District. An epitomic dress code of the Czech outdoor enthusiast seems to be both solidifying and diffusing into general dressing habits.

Whether worn for pragmatic reasons or for the sake of "Bourdieu's distinction" (1984) or, most likely, a combination of both, the current scale of the use of outdoor equipment and garments is the most evident expression of the ongoing transformation of Czech outdoor culture. This culture, nowadays labelled in the Czech language by the English-sounding substantive *outdoor*, is not only changing its expressive face; the position of outdoor pursuits is in fact changing within the field of sporting activities as well as within society as a whole. Above all, their popularity is growing. *Outdoor* is hip nowadays.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the ideologies, images and practices of outdoor pursuits which became established over the last 150 years are undergoing another wave of changes.

Both the change in and the growing popularity of *outdoor* in the Czech Republic could be interpreted as a consequence of a number of social processes. These range from the postsocialist transformations of time and work-leisure relations to a shift towards publicly promoted individualist and meritocratic values. The international success of

outdoor activities has certainly contributed to the Czech trend. At the one end of the spectrum general participation is fostered by the increasing popularity of active lifestyles. At the other end – as voluntary risk-taking in extreme sports loses its former stigma (Vanreusel & Renson 1982; Lyng 1990) and as vertigo imagery penetrates popular culture – the "quest for adrenaline" is attracting more and more people (Le Breton 2000). The popularity of *outdoor* is a sign that the Czech Republic is undergoing what Henning Eichberg (1998) calls a "green wave". The pendulum of leisure preferences has swung towards nature-based activities.

This article addresses the interconnections between Czech outdoor practices, ideas and material culture. It outlines the evolution of the field from its really-existing-socialist<sup>4</sup> to its postsocialist form. More specifically, I show that the core members of the Czech outdoor sphere who catered to its material culture before 1989 initiated its postsocialist metamorphosis. They have played an integral role in setting the values and styles of both the really-existing-socialist and postsocialist forms of outdoor culture. The two historic forms of the outdoor sphere are often viewed as a dichotomous pair. Yet in fact it was the skills generated by petty enthusiast producers of equipment during late really existing socialism that made possible full expression of the postsocialist characteristics of the outdoor field. Equipment – its production, distribution and usage – played a symptomatic role in the metamorphosis of the Czech culture of outdoor pursuits.<sup>5</sup>

I first briefly describe the evolution of the tradition of outdoor pursuits into *outdoor* with respect to the ideologies and values in play. I then examine the relationship between outdoor pursuits and equipment and discuss how this relates to developments that began within the Czech outdoor sphere in the 1980s. During the late period of really existing socialism a specific mode of the culture of outdoor pursuits appeared. It resulted in quasi-resistant, rather egalitarian and collective qualities, on the one hand, and practices of closed membership, on the other. These qualities are explained as a consequence of a specific economic mode of the provision of equipment through semi-legal, small-batch bricolage-like production distributed on a semi-barter basis, for the most part among acquaintances.

## The Czech tradition of outdoor pursuits

### *Romanticism and patriotism*

The tradition of outdoor pursuits in the Czech Lands<sup>6</sup> was conceived under the influence of Romanticism (Sýkora 1986, Novotný 1989) and the patriotic values of the nineteenth-century national awakening, which interpreted the Czech landscape and countryside together with their inhabitants as an authentic source for the reestablishment of national values (Čilek et. al. 2004). Hence, the patriotic inclination towards outdoors developed relatively early on. It was originally enacted in the activities of the *Sokol* movement. *Sokol*, founded by Czech patriots along the lines of the German *Turnverein*, concentrated mainly on gymnastic exercises that aimed to strengthen the awakening Czech Nation. Soon, however, *Sokol* introduced marches, trips and outings to the countryside and places of historic or geographic importance as part of its programme (Waic & Kössl 1996; Nolte 2003).

Simultaneously, inspired by the German Romantic movement, a novel understanding of nature connected with direct sensual experience (*Erlebnis*) started to spread through the Czech Lands. Apart from fostering patriotism, it created an ideological basis for the emerging rambling and hiking movement - termed *turistika*<sup>7</sup> in the Czech language. *Turistika* was therefore conceived as physical locomotion which combined kinaesthetic enjoyment with cognitive cultural (e.g. patriotic) activities. Czech-ness was expressed through "knowing your country" - being in the landscape suffused with patriotic values. Strengthened by direct competition with the hiking movement in neighbouring German-speaking regions on the fringes of the Czech Lands (Judson 2002), such a concept of outdoor pursuits gained dominance.

It proved to be so influential that the emerging outdoor sports movement developed in tandem with it. On the one hand, although competitive and performance-based forms of cycle-touring, kayak/whitewater touring, ski-touring and mountaineering<sup>8</sup> emerged within the sporting clubs, unions and associations, these bodies organised the "softer" *turistika* version of outdoor pursuits collaterally with *KČT*<sup>9</sup> (Sýkora 1986: 33-36). On the other hand, regardless of its doubts about the utility of sports for *turistika* (Boháček 1938), the *KČT* organised many sporting (mainly kayak and skiing) competitions (Walter 1938; Teklý 1938; Král 1988).

Czechoslovakia was created after World War One as a result of the Treaty of Versailles. In the circumstances of the first national state of Czechs and Slovaks, progressive industrialisation and rising living standards (regardless of economic crises), the

*KČT* and sports organisations extended their activities and expanded in size. After all, during the inter-war years the "great outdoors" was so popular throughout Europe that the term "outdoor craze" became common currency elsewhere (Walker 1985). The system of outdoor activities (Waic's & Kössl's term, 1996) founded in the Romantic tradition of appreciation of nature and patriotism was already established. Most outdoor pursuits, and first and foremost *turistika*, were delimited by this framework.

### *Collectivism and performance*

After the 1948 communist putsch and again in 1957 the socialist regime made attempts to dissolve and reorganise the structure of official bodies responsible for outdoor pursuits. The system of outdoor activities, while it survived, was not only reshaped organisationally but also reframed ideologically. To a certain extent, the content of the activities was altered as well.

During the 1950s and 1960s socialist *turistika* came to be defined as the most versatile and universal of the dimensions of the socialist system of physical exercise/education. Partly as a concession to the regime, it was depicted as contributing greatly to the rearing of socialist man (Khandl 1978:101-104) by "focusing on the education process, enforcement of the rules of a united (physical) education system and a communist ideology" (Král 1988: 37). In fact, *turistika* was the only socialist physical activity that developed a theory about its content (Khandl 1985). It was defined as a combination of physical locomotion with a cultural educative component supposedly infused with socialist ideology.

*Turistika* was supposed to further socialist political ideology. Yet this was decreasingly the case. Especially after the defeat of the Prague Spring in 1968, the majority of Czechs and Slovaks stopped taking much interest in the political process. During the normalisation period the regime did indeed cleverly exploit the growing political apathy. All that was required of citizens were modest expressions of loyalty accompanied by small concessions to the truth (Havel 1985; Šiklová 1990). Most people played the game to the extent demanded by the regime; yet at the same time they withdrew into their private lives (Možný 1991). The popularity of Czech second housing (*chataření*), a highly cherished leisure of the normalisation period and the pure expression of a normalised quiet life, started to take off (Bren 2002). Participation in sports created a residual public sphere in which it was possible to engage without compromise, without making substantial concessions to the regime. Overall, outdoor activities, whether organised or not, whether sport-, rambling- or camping-oriented, provided an

almost exclusive opportunity to retreat from the dull political reality of really existing socialism in a collective and associative manner (Waic & Kössl 1996).

During the decades of state socialism outdoor pursuits increasingly came under competition- and performance-oriented influences. Akin to the Soviet model of *turistika* (see Adělung 1951), long-distance marches and point-counting competitions started to be organised. *Tourists* were classified according to their rambling/cycling/climbing performance and given prizes and badges (see Kasalický 1956; Hlaváček 1956; 1963; Král 1988: 98-108). During the 1970s the new breed of lifestyle sports trickled into Czechoslovakia: windsurfing, rafting, freestyle skiing, hang-gliding and paragliding began to gain popularity. In everyday understanding they provided the thrills and challenges missing in really-existing-socialist reality. These developments, together with the wave of technological innovations in equipment, led to a greater stress on sporting performance, technique and style. Since then equipment has come to the fore.

#### *Egalitarianism*

Egalitarianism has a long and strong tradition in the Czech Lands (Filipcová 1993: 39). It originated in the plebeian and egalitarian spirit of the nineteenth-century Czech national renaissance/awakening, which was anti-Austrian (i.e. directed against the political institutions of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire), anti-aristocratic and anti-elitist. Due to these qualities, the whole way of life in the newly created post-WWI Czechoslovakia had a considerably more plebeian and egalitarian character than in the rest of Central Europe, where long-standing traditions of ruling-class lifestyles existed (Linhart 1988: 275-276). After World War Two, the Czechoslovak state-socialist regime utilised this anti-elitist and egalitarian spirit in political and economic measures. Czechoslovakia became the country with the greatest levelling through income redistribution (Machonin 1969, 1970). Both labour and leisure were organised according to the Soviet doctrine of collectivism.

With respect to outdoor pursuits, Romantic egalitarianism influenced both the spirit of the back-to-nature movement and the attitudes of the Czech bourgeoisie towards signifying their position through their use of leisure. This had contributed to the fact that in the first half of the 20th century the outdoor movement took the form of a toned-down mass movement. During state socialism, the egalitarian attitude - supported by the official doctrine of collectivism - continually expressed itself in outdoor

activities. Clubs offered a welcome leisure alternative and consequently attracted a wide membership. They managed to accumulate significant resources both through official state support for sports and through alternative channels. Entry costs into activities were kept low, even in so-called middle-class sports, since significant portions of the equipment were the property of the clubs. The enthusiasts' time was cheap because it was partially diverted from their occupational working hours.

Outdoor club culture was strong and thriving. It provided a much-needed alternative to the widespread withdrawal into family and private lives. In fact, as I have already noted, it could be claimed that sports and outdoor pursuits functioned as a residual non-politicised and non-policed public sphere in which people could socialise (see also Riordan 1987: 390).

#### **The evolution of the outdoor**

##### *Individualism*

Aside from the international influence of the growing world-wide interest in outdoor pursuits, the values and norms of Czech outdoor pursuits contributed to their popularity in the latter stages of really existing socialism. During the late 1980s they provided a ground for the gradual evolution into the cluster of activities later labelled *outdoor*. Nonetheless, during the 1990s the postsocialist transformation of Czech society stressed a quite different quality - individualism.

Outdoor activities are an embodied form of the Romanticist idea of the individual wanting to experience and express novel sentiments. The notion that outdoor pursuits enrich the personality and cultivate virtues constitutes the moral axiom of outdoor cultures. Hence they have always stressed the importance of individual virtues such as courage, perseverance and self-confidence. In Czechoslovakia older-style outdoor activities certainly cultivated these individualist virtues, yet their ideological make-up was above all patriotic and collectivist. In contrast to this, newer forms of outdoor activities that appeared with the inflow of lifestyle sports are perceived as an expression of the individualist existential condition framed by risk, adventure, flow and speed (see Lyng 1990; Le Breton 2000; Midol & Broeyer 1995; Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

The individualist ethos of the Czech postsocialist 1990s brought these values and the possibility of their active fostering to the forefront. Participation in outdoor pursuits is becoming more and more individual-based and individualist-driven. This has been encouraged by a shift in the social organisation of time. The hurried pace of life makes

the leisure-time synchronisation of large numbers of people unimaginable.

Today, the evolving *outdoor* still exists under the influence of surviving notions of egalitarianism and collectivism. These qualities, however, collide with the neo-liberal ethos of the 1990s, which strongly favours individualism. This can be exemplified by the changing role of climbing clubs. The climbing elders used to initiate climbing novices into the practices and values within the structure of the club. While this still happens on rare occasions, most newcomers nowadays learn the activity in indoor centres. Climbing-wise, they associate only with a small number of their peers. They organise into clubs mostly in order to obtain a climbing permit from ČHS<sup>10</sup> that grants them legal access to the crags.

My description of the dynamics at work between these opposing values that have propelled a shift from the older form of outdoor pursuits towards *outdoor* would be incomplete without addressing the role played by equipment. Thus, before I turn my attention towards the question of the influence of *outdoor* trade on the values of the culture of outdoor pursuits, I shall describe the relationship of its members to their equipment in more general terms.

### The relationship to equipment

Arguably, outdoor pursuits could not exist without equipment. The associated activities and sensations and the spaces in which they are undertaken would scarcely be accessible without it. Moreover, aside from the thrilling or pleasurable kinaesthesia, the well-being and indeed the lives of the participants often depend on their equipment. In order to theorise this fundamental importance attached to equipment, I shall first make a short detour to a concept carried over from ecological psychology. I shall then go on to describe the trend towards commercialisation of the production and distribution of equipment.

The paramount role played by equipment in outdoor pursuits can be theoretically approached by borrowing a concept from ecological psychology. Indeed, the increasing aptness of this concept to the description of outdoor pursuits mirrors the evolution of ideas that ground outdoor practice. The body/mind dichotomy is dissolving. Equipment, rather than patriotic ideology, enters as a mediating element. Expressed in the relevant theoretical vocabulary, outdoor equipment provides affordances for outdoor pursuits. Dissolving the persisting dualism of subject and object, the concept of affordances was originally developed as a means of describing the relationality of the individual's perception and his/her direct environment (Gibson 1986 [1979]). Affordances

establish what actions are possible and what the consequences of these actions are (Heft 1989: 3). To put it more directly and in perceptual terms:

[I]nformation (from perception of ambient arrays) specifies directly the possible actions in a particular setting: it specifies what an object or surface affords an actor, and what is perceived is therefore an "affordance" (Michael and Still 1992: 872)

Yet it was noted by Harry Heft that the concept could provide a valuable alternative theoretical vocabulary for describing the relationship between bodies and places. Neither the environment nor the participant body serve as a sole *affordance*. They are both mediated by the technology of the equipment (see Michael 2001a, 2001b, 1996: 150). Precisely in this sense, outdoor equipment establishes what locomotive actions are possible in which spaces (taskscape). The equipment is therefore not peripheral to the activities - it is central to them.

Moreover, it could be argued that the move towards the individualist and existential framing of outdoor activities coincided with a shift in some people's attention from the broad space of kinaesthetic involvement to the very interface between bodies and places. Outdoor pursuit artefacts (gear, equipment and garments) can therefore play the role of an object which both expresses the existentialist relation of the outdoor enthusiast towards the activity and marks belonging to the culture of outdoor pursuits (see for example Pfister 2001; Mitchell 1983; Donnelly & Young 1988: 129-30 for the latter).

The use of outdoor equipment and garments has always oscillated between pragmatic and expressive consumption. Such expressive consumption takes various forms: it is a combination of differing intensities of positional consumption and intensities of the existential relationship that outdoor participants have with the equipment they use. Until the last quarter of the previous century, however, members of outdoor movements tended to wear uniform attire which was often seen as unaesthetic (see Walker 1985; Holt 1987). Additionally, a well-worn outfit used to be a sign of a devoted outdoor enthusiast (Mitchell 1983: 29, 123). Aesthetically driven consumption was often discouraged. Historically, outdoor enthusiasts have been persuaded to show off through their skills rather than their equipment (see Pfister 2001: 92). Nonetheless, the aesthetically conscious production and consumption of outdoor equipment and garments have a long tradition that intensified throughout the 1970s. The interchange with fashion has been influential (Lipovetsky (2002 [1987]) and the influence on general dressing habits quite strong (Parsons & Rose

2003, with regard to fleece and waterproof tops, Booth 1999 on surfing fashion).

At the same time as elements of outdoor equipment and fashion penetrated the realm of outdoor activities, growing proliferation, specialisation and extremisation brought more exacting technological requirements. This, in turn, intensified the trend towards professionalisation of production and distribution. It is certainly true that in their humble beginnings the equipment and garments used in outdoor pursuits were adopted from gear produced for a variety of purposes, modified or possibly even self-produced. Yet, as has been shown in the case of bicycles, skis and mountaineering equipment (Ritchie 1999; Pfister 2001; Parsons & Rose 2003), commercial production and distribution with the resulting birth of numerous manufacturing enterprises started relatively early on. Outdoor pursuits, in common with many other enthusiast leisure cultures, can therefore be termed commodity-intensive leisure (Yoder 1997).

#### **From bricolage production to outdoor trade**

So far, I have attempted to present the values and ideologies that have played an important role in the evolution of the Czech culture of outdoor pursuits. I have established the centrality of outdoor equipment to outdoor pursuits and pointed out the trend towards commercial production and distribution of increasingly technologised equipment. This should help me to address the peculiar fate of a commodity-oriented subculture (see Wheaton 2000 for the term) in really existing socialism. I will point to the general characteristics of the really-existing-socialist consumer society: time-extensiveness and the social organisation of ownership. These had consequences for the production and distribution of outdoor equipment through unofficial networks of core outdoor enthusiasts.

The Czechoslovakia of really existing socialism in the 1980s was a particular form of consumer and leisure society. As Ivo Možný observed:

In the West consumer society was discussed eagerly; we on the other hand have in fact accomplished it [during state socialist Czechoslovakia] (1991: 18).

Yet there was almost no possibility of accumulating financial capital during this era (other than through creeping expropriation of the state on the basis of networks of families and acquaintances). Consequently, everything had to be consumed (Možný 1991: 18). Family acquaintances or friends had to be mobilised in order to acquire goods for consumption on semi-official markets because the official one was not able to supply them. The particular conditions of the centrally controlled

Czechoslovak economy encouraged the appearance of institutions that served as an alternative to the provision of commodities by the market (see Musil 1992: 8-9; Možný 1991; Filipcová 1993). Nepotism, familism, the grey market and networks of acquaintances were the means of distribution for scarce goods. Equipment shopping was not immune: some outdoor equipment (such as bicycles, skis, hiking boots) had to be acquired through queuing or intensive networking on the official market. Other categories of equipment were produced by sportsmen themselves. During the 1980s a number of outdoor enthusiasts started small-batch semi-legal manufacturing (followed by barter and semi-legal sales).<sup>11</sup> Such petty enthusiast production<sup>12</sup> catered to substantial portions of equipment needs in the outdoor sphere. As climber Josef Šimůnek notes:

100% or maybe 99.99% of folks have had clothing which they made by themselves. The jackets were first cut off *Larysa*, then made from *Bonekan*<sup>13</sup> The sleeping bags were stuffed with down around people's bathrooms. Everybody had to do it like this then. Every climber who wanted to go to the mountains had to obtain kit. My friend Bouda had made his own tent. I have to say that it was one of the best I have ever slept in; he made it in his kitchen. ... Most of the rucksacks were sewn at home. I had my ice axes, hammers and ice weaponry produced in an engineering factory; I had also my crampons' quick-releases made there.<sup>14</sup>

Sometimes it took a couple of years to obtain all the necessary kit<sup>15</sup>, but since there was no other option people had to live with the situation and accept this peculiarity of socialist-era consumer society.

The specific leisure society of really existing socialism cultivated a time-extensive orientation towards lifestyle and leisure. The means of acquiring consumption items were quite different from Western societies. When outdoor sportsmen attempted to satisfy their consumption needs they had to rely on petty enthusiast production, mutual self-provision, barter and smuggling. The fact that obtaining any kind of outdoor kit meant investing a vast amount of time was not a problem for one simple reason: there was still plenty of time for the lifestyle because Czechoslovakia was a time-extensive society. Time simply mattered less.

During the period after the Prague Spring, when the regime attempted to undo any reform changes and restore order, history seemed to stand still. People retreated from the political and public spheres and invested what they had saved in their families, circles of friends and leisure activities. The really-existing-socialist organisation of labour hampered professionalism and personal initiative at

work (Havel 1985: 62). Additionally, a rather relaxed stance grew up towards societal property. Using state property as a personal resource became a favorite economic strategy. The maxim "whoever does not steal [from the state], steals from his/her family" gained broad acceptance. Many people therefore managed to turn substantial portions of their wage labour time to their own advantage, hence saving their personal time resources.

Paradoxically, the overall effect of these circumstances contributed to the ease and speed with which the distribution of outdoor equipment after 1989 followed market principles. Consumers were used to investing vast amounts of time and effort in obtaining goods to which they felt a special commitment. In a sense every outdoor enthusiast was an outdoor equipment expert by virtue of necessity. In the years after the revolution of 1989 people were still accustomed to sacrificing their time and knowledge on the purchase of equipment. They did not hesitate to:

get on a blue [intercity line] bus and look for some [lady] who was making jackets... in the countryside ... and they did this in July, even though they needed the jackets in winter.<sup>16</sup>

Even today outdoor participants are still willing to make sacrifices to acquire their kit:

Normally [people buy equipment] with their surplus money after they secure food, a video-recorder and a car, but these people have totally different preferences. They sometimes literally starve just so they can buy hiking boots, and then when they have them, they start to save for their new Gore-Tex jacket.<sup>17</sup>

While the commitment to goods continued, it started to take on a different guise – one shaped by the rules of the consumer market. The economic practice of late really existing socialism was already replete with various forms of grey-market entrepreneurship. Moreover, for the first time in decades the economic reforms of the late 1980s allowed small private enterprises to operate. The year 1989 was welcomed by many as an opportunity and challenge to become self-reliant and provide for themselves through their craftsmanship and tradesmanship. This spirit released the "vast capital of formerly un-used individual initiative" into start-up entrepreneurial activities (Večerník 1998: 25).

Former enthusiast producers realised that they possessed a store of know-how with regard to scarce products. Under the new economic conditions it made sense to capitalise on this expertise. The rapid and enthusiastic establishment of the market for equipment and services relating to outdoor activities started to dissolve the old spirit of outdoor activities

based on a feeling of community and camaraderie that had influenced the nature of social institutions in the outdoor sphere. The time-extensive collective forms of outdoor practice, weekend club excursions by bus, collective work on club-owned cottages and clubrooms and individual volunteer work started to seem less sensible in the new hurried and individualist times. On the other hand, the entrepreneurial drive mobilised the extensive know-how of outdoor equipment producers, who had hitherto worked mostly under semi-legal and semi-private conditions.<sup>18</sup> Stanislav Šilhán, one of the many outdoor enthusiasts who had started his own business, remarked on post-revolutionary entrepreneurial enthusiasm:

After the revolution [of 1989], many of the climbers thought that it was ideal to have their own small business. The childish assumption that a small store or company would run smoothly gave the feeling of freedom with which mountaineering/climbing is connected (Šilhán in Růžicka 2001: 26)

The views of many newly-born outdoor businessmen on the nature of the emerging outdoor equipment market might have been naive. However, only through the legalised entrepreneurship of producers and retailers could the almost endless demand for outdoor equipment - whether of imported or of domestic production - begin to be satisfied. Many of the early outdoor trade participants note that they just shovelled products towards the tills, where customers were happy to pay for them. The Czech female mountaineer Soňa Boštíková comments on this:

In relation to retailing: ...Our friends who are running their own stores say that until 1997 it was totally incredible. It was a goldmine; there was such a hunger for any outdoor equipment goods on the Czech market. ... The stores started to spring up like mushrooms after rain... We know that in the period before 1997 people [were so eager to] shop for equipment because for so many years they had been unable to find such things in the stores.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the transition from the really-existing-socialist system of equipment provision to the current one of commodification was a smooth one. Czech society in general happily indulged in "shopping away" the bottleneck of suppressed consumer aspirations. Outdoor enthusiasts were no different. The commitment to equipment was reinforced by the increasing lack of spare time to waste on "hunting" for kit. Market distribution of equipment both among consumers and producers or retailers was warmly welcomed. During this period the market principle, which enabled the shortage of equipment to be "consumed away", clearly showed its functional

superiority. Arguably, this enabled the system of outdoor activities to acquire a robustness that could not have been achieved in the really-existing-socialist mode. Yet the newly invented Czech *outdoor* market would probably never have gained such broad popularity had it not also expressed the new individualist ethos of postsocialism. The *outdoor* would not currently be so pervasive if the intensified application of the principle of positional consumption did not allow for perfect expression of individual success. Wearing *outdoor* clothes in the Czech Republic is hip nowadays:

You can say that the *outdoor* image is cool (relaxed) and people like it when they look cool. So even a manager who buys them (*outdoor* clothes) wears a T-shirt and pants and looks cool.<sup>20</sup>

As the latest phenomenon in the sphere of outdoor pursuits, *outdoor* is embedded in the traditions of Czech outdoor activities. Yet its growing preponderance is the result of its compatibility with the postsocialist individualist and meritocratic ethos. As Georg Simmel noted a hundred years ago in a similar context relating to the popularisation of Alpine outdoor pursuits, the spirit of an era can leave its trace not only in the material world but also in the world of ideas ([1895] 1991: 96).

During the 1990s the market showed itself to be a much more effective mechanism of equipment provision than really-existing-socialist semi-private production and distribution<sup>ix</sup> through networks of acquaintances. Commodification ended the equipment shortage and thus enabled the full expression of *outdoor*, that is by its nature an equipment-intensive and commodity-oriented activity.

While *outdoor* bears certain individualist qualities which make it suitable for enacting the postsocialist individualist ideology in sport, dialectically the hurried and individualist character of the present shapes the *outdoor* by its demands. Under the pressure of commodification and the incorporation of the *outdoor* into the logic of consumer society, developments which were paradoxically promoted by core adherents of outdoor pursuits (turned outdoor entrepreneurs), its values are changing. Czech *outdoor* is gradually being transformed into an individual, expenditure-intensive, commodified activity.

### Conclusions

After the revolution of 1989 petty enthusiast producers of equipment used their manufacturing and distribution know-how and started their own small businesses. The networks of acquaintances that constituted the core of the former outdoor culture created the basis for current outdoor trade. Hence, a

rather paradoxical situation arises inasmuch as those actors that are most deeply socialised into the older egalitarian collective form of the culture are at the same time prime actors in shifting its patterns towards commodified and semi-privatised, yet open leisure forms.

It might seem that such a constellation would cause a conflict between oppositional residual communal qualities of the socialist era and the present expressive individualist drive behind the change in *outdoor*. Yet it should be noted that enthusiast leisure cultures have quite a strong ability to negotiate between the stresses to which they are subject. Consequently, they often embody contradictory values (Bishop & Hogget 1986: 129). As I have tried to show, the culture of outdoor pursuits is a historic product of mutually influencing practices, ideas and material culture. In response to various social processes, equipment became increasingly important to outdoor pursuits over recent decades. In the Czech case it has played a decisive role in the evolution of *outdoor* out of the really-existing-socialist outdoor sphere. The state socialist history of bricolage equipment production and distribution has given way to the consumption of commodities. It would be a mistake, however, to deem outdoor pursuits less or more worthwhile because of this change.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The English-sounding term *outdoor* is currently used as a noun and adjective in the Czech language. There is no correct English alternative that would cover all the dimensions of its content. When the word *outdoor* is employed in italics in this article, it signifies its nascent English-sounding use in the Czech language. All other terms in italics are untranslated Czech terms and names of organisations.

<sup>2</sup> A fabric for the outmost layer of outdoor clothing that affords a compromise between comfort and water / wind resistance.

<sup>3</sup> In this respect it might be interesting to compare the Czech Republic to other Central European countries. According to a Czech outdoor equipment tradesman, *outdoor* as the Czechs practice it does not exist in Poland or Hungary (recorded interview with J. Dupal, July 09, 2004, L. Pravda March 15, 2006). This might be documented by the online Wikipedia: there is no entry under “outdoor” in Hungarian, in Polish the entry refers to outdoor advertising, and in Slovak there is no separate entry although the term is mentioned under the entry “turistika”. Only the German and Czech “Wikis” have “outdoor” defined as a cluster of outdoor activities [accessed on 23.03.06 and 05.11.06].

<sup>4</sup> In this article the term "really existing socialism" (and its adjective "really-existing-socialist") refers to the period between the 1970s and 1989. It acknowledges the fact that the state socialist regime did not fulfil many of its socialist ideals. Yet it is used here for the purposes of periodisation rather than as a theoretical concept. In similar fashion, the term "postsocialism" refers to the period after 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Most of the empirical material presented here was gathered for my MA thesis that dealt with the phenomenon of Czech *outdoor* in more general terms (Kvasnička 2003). The main argument of this article and some supporting information are based on my PhD work that attempts to dissect the "economy of outdoor equipment" during the rapid Czech transformation.

<sup>6</sup> This term refers here to Bohemia, Moravia and part of Silesia.

<sup>7</sup> In this essay, the signified of the concept of *turistika* will be addressed by the term *turistika* (in italics). Derivative terms *touring* and *tourist* (in italics) will also be used.

<sup>8</sup> The Czech terms for these activities are derivatives of *turistika*: *cykloturistika*, *vodní turistika*, *lyžařská turistika* and *vysokohorská turistika*.

<sup>9</sup> KČT (the Club of Czech Tourists, *Klub českých turistů*), one of the oldest and strongest *turistika* bodies.

<sup>10</sup> Czech Mountaineering Union, *Český horolezecký svaz*.

<sup>11</sup> Recorded interviews with P. Polanecký, July 16, 2003 and S. Boštíková & J. Šimůnek, May 7, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> I am using Abercrombie and Longhurst's term (1998) here. All enthusiast groups might be seen as producers of cultural artefacts (Bishop and Hogget 1986). Petty producers are those enthusiasts who have professionalised their hobby activity by entering into a market with such artefacts. In a different context this is also referred to as lifestyle entrepreneurship.

<sup>13</sup> Both are substitutes for today's fleece. Larysa is a felt-like textile used extensively in blankets in the 1980s; Bonekan is an artificial fur textile.

<sup>14</sup> Recorded interview with S. Boštíková & J. Šimůnek, May 7, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Recorded interview with P. Habětín, June 3, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Recorded interviews with P. Polanecký, July 16, 2003 and S. Boštíková & J. Šimůnek, May 7, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Recorded interview with S. Boštíková & J. Šimůnek, May 7, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Recorded interview with J. Dupal, June 6, 2003.

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