

## **2. Roots of Outdoor Education**

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### **Development in Europe and the USA**

The field of outdoor education and outdoor activities has dynamically developed in the past 50 years. In many countries in the world (predominantly in the USA, Great Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand) has gradually developed a field, which is mentioned in the English written literature as outdoor education, outdoor environmental education, adventure education, challenge education and/or experiential education (which also stands on its own without any association to outdoor education). The latest progress speaks about outdoor learning.

Although the field of outdoor education, learning and activities is relatively new, the roots of many present ideas of outdoor and adventure education, to enhance the holistic development of a man, go back to ancient philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle and others (Wurdinger, 1997). In Sparta, in Ancient Greece (6th century before Christ) adventure activities became an integral part of soldier training and it was a way in which to physically and emotionally strengthen youth for their eventual roles as citizens and soldiers (Ewert, 1989).

Quest for adventure played an important role for ancient explorers and explorers in the middle ages when discovering and exploring new areas, finding new lands, wealth and fame (Ewert, 1989). Thoughts about adventure education further appeared in writings of philosophers, pedagogues and psychologists, such as Komenský (Comenius), Rousseau, Freud, Dewey, Erikson, or Maslow. Many of their ideas have become foundational to the philosophy of adventure education and experiential learning. Rousseau claims in Emile

that learning through experience in the natural environment is important, he strictly refused the city environment – the city was filled with vice and was a place where children learn the evils of life (Wurdinger, 1997).

The UK is often regarded as the foundational country for outdoor activities and pursuits. The modern idea of outdoor education is in Britain usually dated since one person and one organisation and it is Sir Baden Powell and Scouting movement. Kurt Hahn, the German pedagogue and founder of Salem school in Germany and Gourdonstoun School in Scotland, is sometimes acknowledged as the founder of outdoor education. Thoughts of Baden Powell and Kurt Hahn create the basis of British approach to outdoor education. In the USA the modern outdoor education is often dated back to the foundation of Outward Bound School in 1962 in Colorado and to the foundation of National Outdoor Leadership School. Outdoor education in schools (in New Zealand and some other British Commonwealth countries) arose as a manifestation to the progressive educational ideology that gained credence during the twentieth century. It was a response to urbanisation and industrialisation and to mid-century and post-WW2 concerns for youth and environment, and within a context of emerging individualism and outdoor recreational expansion (Lynch, 1999).

The term outdoor education firstly appears in English written literature in the 1930s. Some terms have their origins in names of organisations, e.g. outward bound, project adventure.

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## **Roots of outdoor education in the Czech Republic**

### **Jan Ámos Komenský (1592-1670)**

The work of the Czech educator Jan Ámos Komenský (Comenius) who was known throughout Europe as the Teacher of Nations is particularly significant in the foundation and development of experiential and outdoor education. Comenius believed in educating the whole person, similar to today's holistic education concepts. According to Comenius, it is necessary to educate the mind, the tongue, the heart and the hand. By this he meant the most important experiences are the one achieved by one's own senses. He recognised the importance of travelling as a means of completing youth education and also supported the use of 'games' and 'play' in achieving educational outcomes. Comenius concluded that a learning process began and ended with experience and that teaching and learning must be inter-connected with experience in nature and must prepare for life itself.

### **Sokol movement, turistika, development of sports**

Czech history has been influenced by its position in the centre of Europe. Because of this geographical position the Czech people have been susceptible to various influences over the centuries. Relationship between the Czech people and the outdoors is inextricably linked to their culture. General interest in national history and nature in the mid-19th century contributed to the creation of the physical education movement Sokol (1862) as well as the Club of Czech tourists (1888). Turistika (tourist) activities include active movement (travelling by bike, skis, canoe, or on foot), and outdoor and cultural activities (learning about nature, local history and sights, life of local people). The following terms are distinguished, pěší turistika (similar terms: hiking, walking, rambling, scrambling, and backpacking), vysokohorská turistika (trekking, climbing), cykloturistika (cycle touring), lyžařská turistika (ski-touring – on cross-country skis), vodní turistika (touring on canoes). By the end of the 19th century there was a rapid development of outdoor sports. The English influenced the foundation of rowing clubs (1860), and the development of water sports. From the end of the 19th century cycling developed rapidly. At the same time the founders of the turistika movement and most outdoor sports realised the broad connection between sports in nature and character building.

### **Scouts, Woodcraft, YMCA, & Tramping**

The ideas of English Scouting, American Woodcraft, and the YMCA met with great interest in the Czech lands. The Czech founder of scouting, the secondary school teacher A. B. Svojsík, also involved major scientists and politicians in its formation. He adjusted scouting to Czech conditions, by finding motivation in Czech history and decided on the Slavic title – Junák. His book ‘Základy Junáctví’ (The foundations of Scouting), published in 1912, is a key work for that time.

The books and ideas of E.T. Seton and his Woodcraft Indians were also translated and adjusted for the Czech context by another secondary school teacher of natural science, translator and writer Miloš Seifert (1887-1941). Seton’s and Seifert’s ideas of Woodcraft are still alive today in Czech, as Lesní moudrost (League of Forest Wisdom), and focus on leading a simple life in nature. This movement brought to summer camps understanding of the beauty of nature, the camp fire, staying in nature in basic Indian Teepees, and interest in the native people from different parts of the world, especially North America in the ways of rituals, songs, clothing, and games.

After World War I, the Czech association YMCA was formed and focused on academics and students coming to huts and cottage camps. In this organisation, the ‘stay in nature’ was linked with other

sports, less common games, and rhythmical exercises. The main focus was personality and leadership development. The YMCA brought to summer camps the link between exercise and music.

Of note is the contribution of Eduard Štorch, who with the support of T. G. Masaryk who was the first President of Czechoslovakia, rented a piece of land on the Prague Libeň Island in 1926, which was almost a wilderness at that time. He built an outdoor school for youth education with a focus on the concept of eubiotics (in Greek eu- good; bios- life), life in balance with nature. Štorch organized trips encouraging learning by exploring (local history, archeological work, etc.). Unfortunately, he had to leave Libeň in 1934 due to other interests (Štorch, 1929).

“Our landscape. Our home. Our school.”

Erasmus + project

Jaroslav Foglar (1907-1999), experienced scout leader, journalist, educator and writer, led many scouting camps and helped create many special features of Czech scouting. His work has been influencing many children and youth organisations for more than 70 years. It brought, competition, adventure, small group work, metaphors and games to camps. Foglar's (1937) book *Hoši od Bobří řeky* (Boys from the Beavers' river) was about boys' friendship whilst exploring and having adventures in nature. It influenced a whole generation's relationship to nature and camping. His famous cartoon series *Rychlé šípy* (Swift Arrows) is still well known by children and adults in the Czech Republic. Foglar's outdoor education was based on character, self-control, individual decision making, and 'Beaver badges' could be achieved for fitness, knowledge and creative activities.

Inspired by American adventure literature and movies, many young people, especially from working class families, informally went tramping and camping at weekends. The specific Czech phenomenon 'tramping' started in the 1920s fed by the natural longing of young people for freedom and life in nature, and as a reaction to industrialised society. A specific tramping culture was created, which combined different outdoor sports, outdoor activities, camping with music (tramping songs), artistic and handmade creativity. Motivated by Western films and Jack London stories (*White Fang*, 1906; *The Call of the Wild*, 1903), basic wood hut settlements were built with Western names, including sheriffs etc. These settlements are still popular and quite common around rivers and lakes; however, camping in National parks and forests is more regulated within these protected areas.

Outdoor activities were developed in physical education programmes, sport corporations and in turistika and scouting organisations. The term *výchova v přírodě* (outdoor education) was adopted by the scouting movement in the 1920's.

### **1945 - 1989**

The Nazi occupation and Second World War interrupted these developments. However, social life and the activities of all pre-war organisations were quickly restored after the war, but in 1948, the Communist Party took over power and the Soviet influence began to spread throughout all spheres of life. At this point a forcible unification of sport and youth organisations took place and, in spite of the totalitarian approach, the democratic development of traditions was never completely restrained.

In this period, interesting facets of hiking, sports and outdoor activities were being incorporated into the school curriculum. A tradition developed of 'schools in nature', ski trips, and special summer courses involving elements of outdoor sports and turistika activities. A division of outdoor sports and outdoor education was started in 1954 at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport (FPES), Charles University Prague. The programme was in many ways original, as it associated sport and turistika activities with group experiences, activities in natural environments and learning about the landscape. A feature of the programme was the integrated approach to education, because from the beginning it included sports, games, creative activities, and learning about nature.

These first programmes, however, were more related to sport performance where students were tested and measured (1957-1963). Reviewing and evaluation was very limited. Learning activities/experiences involving preparing and leading tours and expeditions were then added (1964-68). Development of these concepts was slowed down by the political normalisation, as opinions

(which did not correspond with the socialistic views) were suppressed (1968-73). There was a need identified for reviewing and supporting the independent initiative of students. The first information about Outward Bound was obtained in 1974 and it was clear that there were similarities in the two concepts. The next stage of development involved the application of games and creative activities (1974-86).

Within the Socialist Youth Union organisation (the Communist Party arm for handling youth development) new experimental forms of outdoor education emerged, despite the tensions of the communist regime. This was not a voluntary choice of an umbrella organisation, but rather a necessity dictated by the socialist regime. In 1977, with considerable support of educators and volunteers, Vacation School Lipnice (VSL) was founded, as a result of long-term effort to establish a centre of educational value based in a natural environment. It began, together with the FPES, to form the groundwork for modern and creative approaches to outdoor education. This evolution also resulted in an International Conference, called 'Outdoor Education', in October 1989. A sharp criticism of the political system took place, and a strategy, concerning the future development of outdoor education in the Czech Republic was developed. VSL became an independent organisation in 1989 and became a member of Outward Bound in 1991. Both organisations

shared similar educational philosophies, and the international nature of Outward Bound provided the opportunity for further development.

### **After 1989**

The Velvet revolution (1989) changed the face of the whole society. Organisations tried to reconnect their activities with Czech traditions, which had been built until the year 1948, and also preserve positive phenomena, which had appeared in the course of the previous 40 years. Tramping and cycling are still very popular among youth, and many small informal groups spend weekends at campsites often co-operating with forest administration. Groups of adults and whole families continue to maintain ‘simple life’ traditions at log-cabin sites. VSL and the FPES of Charles University Prague have lead experiential programme development, and currently there are a number of other institutions where more formal facets of outdoor education can be found.

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