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Thema: „Mitteleuropäische Nachbarschaften - Kennen wir uns wirklich?“

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A beautiful-weird country: Trempování, hermelín, hospody - it sounded all so Czech to me. Once again, nobody in town. Plzeň seems empty. My student friends who like to practise their German, and teach me some Czech are not in town and even in my panelák (concrete towerblock) the usual noise of children's music and people's voices is gone. Most of the stores, boutiques and shops are closed, too. Come on guys, it is Saturday noon, where are you? How am I supposed to get to know the Czech ways and lifestyle if nobody is here? I decide to find out where the Czech people have gone for the weekend.

A few weeks later, I am also leaving town, it's my first time "trempování": The small train – with only one wagon – slowly wiggles downhill into the next valley. It reminds me of the tram in Plzeň or Prague; it also has only two wagons. The rails slope parallelly to the river, and beautiful scenery with rocks and old forest trees passes by the window. The tiny dots in the countryside, which look like toy houses, are "chatas" (weekend cottages) built from wood, with very steep roofs. Passing through a small train station, a woman waves out of her living room window towards the train, although nobody got in. Also the people in the wagon seem to know each other and make jokes which I don't understand. Probably they talk about trempování. I asked some of my co-workers, who explained to me, that spending the weekend outside of town, under the sky in nature and in the weekend houses is very popular. People go working in the garden, collect mushrooms, go rafting, fishing, canoeing, climbing or hiking through the forest and the mountains... Most people are also really attached to the place where they grew up, so it's no surprise that most of the students go back home for the weekend.

After the next slope I see bigger weekend cottages, and I understand that "chata, chalupa", although it literally means hut, is often used to refer to a complete little holiday house. With a big garden, a chimney to sit in front of after cross-country skiing in winter, a bicycle shed or a place for the fishing equipment. Trempování sounds like summer, it sounds like birds and rustling leaves, like a guitar and singing. It feels like calmness and peace far from traffic and noise after a long day of walking, hiking or other sports activities and it smells like camp fire.

But besides in nature, Czechs also like to spend time and feel "v pohode" in a hospoda (pub, bar) having a beer. A hospoda is an "institution" which isn't missing in any single village ...and it is the typical place to have beer.

To get the next Czech experience, I go with a friend to a hospoda on Americká in Pilsen. It is below ground, hot air, the smell of beer and old cellar hit my nose, when I walk downstairs. The place is cramped with people, young and old, having beers and lively talks. There is beer on all the tables, and on some also small snacks like "nakládaný hermelín" („pickled camembert"). The long tradition of beer (Pilsener Urquell, Budvar; Staropramen and Krušovice) in the Czech Republic makes Czech beer really delicious and there are unbelievably many different brands. Czech people follow the tradition and can usually have quite some beers without the beer having any effects on them. But soon I found out that going out to a hospoda doesn't mean going out for a party, no Spanish fiesta -going to the hospoda is not about dancing but about socialising. You might go to the disco afterwards, but when you have a beer you don't necessarily need to dance.

After walking down to the end of the cellar we have to realise, there is no free table. No problem, in the Czech Republic it's common to sit with other people, if there is no other table free. "Je tu volno?" "Ano" and there we are, sharing a table with some Czech people. Time to get into some interesting talks with Czech people? Well, I don't expect them to start talking to me as for Czechs it is completely normal to sit with strangers for hours at the same table, each group only talking among themselves. The only thing to say always is "Nashledanou" when leaving. But if they don't talk to us why don't we talk to them? I have to admit, I like this mentality of going out for beers and having good talks.

As most Czech people live in a panelák, I share the experience. It has been quite okay, most of my neighbours are quiet, and when I thought someone had stolen my bike it turned out they had just put it into the common bike shed fearing someone might steal it. Eventually I got my bike back, though and with it also a key for the bike shed.

Across the street, a concrete block is painted in orange - uh, not my favourite colour but why do they also add green, yellow, and blue? That is just too much! Three painters with their work clothes full of color stains cross the street. They are on break and go for svačina (snack) to the small potraviny at the corner and get rohlíky which they eat without cutting them open, they just put their cheese and ham on top of it, when I see that, it looks like another piece of the puzzle the Czech Republic is too me.

But don't think, the Czech Republik is only a country of beer drinkers, nature freaks, and other crazy people. Although,... I once saw a group of seniors having a shot of "slivovice" in the cinema. They took their silver bottle and small cups out of their pockets just before the film started. However, the Czech Republic is a lot more. For me, the Czech Republic is also the land of puppets and marionettes and theater. Maybe I am biased because I stayed in even lived in a street named after the famous puppeteer, Josef Skupa, who created Spejbl and Hurvínek. But there is also the famous playwright, Václav Havel, who used his absurdist plays to protest against the communist regime and to talk about human identity, and who then became the first president of the Republic. Actually he became a president with many many fans and supporters, one people talk about a lot. At a students party, one boy, for example, couldn't stop talking about Havel and claimed that he had written the book of liberty. And if the Czech Republic is not the country of puppeteers and theaters, then it is for sure the country of fairy tales! Just look at the high number of fairy tale movies that have been produced, and just recently there was "Dešť'ova Víla" (Rain fairy) in the cinemas. What is the Czech Republic for you? Well it is our neighbour, so why don't you go there to get to know that fascinating country?