THE 'PUB' INSTITUTION IN CZECH SOCIETY

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The pub is a notion under which anybody who spent at least some time in the Czech Republic is able to imagine something specific. Of course, it actually covers diverse types of catering facilities. Other facilities, on the other hand, do not acknowledge this name even if they could. Similarly, individual people's ideas as to what exactly Czech pub stands for differ to a greater or lesser degree. Nonetheless, one might say that the phenomenon brings out a surprisingly consistent picture in the minds of the general public.

For Czech society, the pub represents, above all, a place where beer is draught. It is a popular establishment and an establishment for people. It is quite far from the image of a noble venue. Typical of the pub is unrefined environment with tablecloths weighed down by last night, toilets that do not exactly smell of a meadow in bloom and an eternal cloud of a bluish smoke lazily rolling about over the heads of guests. In Czech pub, minor interior imperfections are compensated for by informal and serene environment, where friends and acquaintances meet, where entertainment is good, where one can chatter and chat just about anything as well as negotiate cash jobs and assistance of most diverse types. It does not require the visitor to show extensive familiarity with social *bon ton*, it rather lures him/her with relaxed entertainment and unique titbits such as a pub goulash, sausage with onion or beer cheese. The general public sees such a facility as a kind of cultural monument to which Czech population has ties for many reasons and which it considers its family silver.[1]

Although the outlined picture must necessarily be simplified, it is possible to use it as an ideal type to analyse the position of the pub in Czech society and the roles it discharges for it and its individual members.

It is possible to analyse at least three aspects of almost any social institution: the point of society as a whole, the point of various social groups and the point of an individual. Within this framework, it is then possible to assess the roles the

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[1] For a more detailed description of the picture of the Czech pub in the eyes of Czech general public, see Vinopal [2004]

specific institution plays for the entire society, for social groups most affected by it and, finally, the roles that it represents for individuals who get in contact with it. Of course, this is an analytical division designed, in particular, for a more specific and comprehensive interpretation. In reality, such levels are hardly possible to be clearly distinguished as the individual roles and features operate in various forms at several levels, are in mutual interconnections and affect one other. This is also the case of the institution of the pub.

At the level of society

At social level, it is necessary to note, first of all, the role pubs have played in Czech history and, especially, the important roles that they have discharged in certain historical stages. (76% of the population of the Czech Republic is convinced that pubs are an important part of Czech culture and traditions.)[2]

The history of the institution of catering business goes back perhaps to the very beginnings of trading. Predecessors of today's pub may be traced back to the Early Middle Ages, the period of the emergence of beer brewing in licensed houses – the "*mázhauz*" (maser houses). It was these maser houses that most likely were the first establishments in which neighbours would gather over their favourite jug (or, more precisely, maser) of beer and give themselves to a tavern sit-down. As maser houses (originally mainly serving the self-subsistence role) gradually turned into permanent pubs, various taprooms, bars, "*herberks*" or inns emerged.[3]

Although these facilities were, no doubt, welcome social achievements and although, in certain instances, they were almost indispensable (such as, for example, the mentioned inns, taverns near marketplaces, where deals would be negotiated and toasted to etc.), they did not enjoy good reputation and social prestige in the Middle Ages. Like alcohol drinking in general (with the exception of wine), pubs were, for a long time, also coined as being sinful. Moreover, following the religiously-exalted Baroque age, these were supplemented with and replaced by more prosaic references to destructive consequences of bibbery and tavern sittings, such as family destruction, poverty, destructive impact to personality as well as danger drunkards presented to society [Ryšavá 1997]. Despite the stigma accompanying the pub practically from its beginnings throughout the entire period of the Middle Ages, it finally managed to enter the minds of Czech public in a more favourable light. Efforts to define beer as Czech national drink have been apparent

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[2] This as well as other information included in the text resulted from a non-commercial research titled Pubs and Beer in Czech society conducted as part of the regular public opinion research of the Centre for Public Opinion Research of the Sociological Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (CVVM SOÚ AV ČR) titled Our Society in September 2004. A set of more than 1,000 respondents represented the population of the Czech Republic older than 15 years.
[3] For a more detailed description of the beginnings of Czech hostelry, see Karel Altman [2003].

as early as the boom of its brewing in the 15th and 16th centuries[4]; but pubs had to wait for their moment of glory until the National Revival period as, during those times, they became, along with beer, important components of patriotic efforts; beer, mainly at the symbolic level, as a constitutive element of patriotic ideology [Rak 1997], pubs, at the practical level, as a platform for its development and transmission [Macura 1997].

As Macura explains, the beginnings of National Revival were tied to the pub environment very closely. The Jungmann's project of Czech culture was, at the beginning, only an artificial language creation; German discharged all of the more important and prestigious cultural roles in those times. The use of Czech as language in public faced issues of etiquette and was associated with the notion of "lowered", informal conversation. Addressing a stranger in Czech in the street or another public area could be considered a gross insult or at least a signal of no culture, of the speaker's social subordination. In order to be able to serve as the foundation of the future existence of Czech culture, it had to get into practical use somehow and pubs and establishments of similar type presented an excellent opportunity for this. Because of Czech society's economic weakness, these facilities served as almost the only Czech social centres in which not only poor people met and entered reciprocal influencing but also where contacts with Czech artists, authors, intellectuals, burghers, national revivalists etc. were struck[5]. Pubs were of the few public places that offered room for communication in Czech, for dissemination of the emerging Czech culture and national sentiments and for campaigning of outsiders. That is why they also became main centres for meetings of patriots and revivalists. (Of which, by the way, the authors of an advertising campaign of an unnamed "Czech" brewery have recently been well aware, no doubt.)

Pubs played a role of no lesser importance in the subsequent development of the patriotic movement in the second half of the 19th century. At that moment in time, they became centres for the emerging clubbing activities. "Pubs did not serve

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[4] See, for example, the founding document of Czech expert brewing industry by Tadeáš z Hájku [1878] or Balbín's [1986] description of the beauties and wealth of Czech lands.
[5] An example (a rich list of persons and establishments where they gathered) is also included in Macura [1997:30]

clubs as places of origin only; associations as well as clubs were tied to them by their all of their activities. Most importantly, they used to rent their clubrooms in pubs. These were assembly places for club members, for regular meetings of the committees as well as for general meetings but, above all, for regular member meetings on agreed weekdays, when the members could read newspapers and magazines available there, borrow books from the club library and always find someone to chat with. Pubs were also places where clubs organised various events such as entertainment, parties, balls, theatre performances, forums, lectures, etc." [Altman 1997: 186 to 187]. In addition, collections for patriotic purposes or collections for funds of various national-awareness institutions took place in pubs. Back then, pubs were significant centres for the development of Czech social and cultural life.

Perhaps this also stood behind the gradual major turn in the perception of pub environment. It was no longer discarded by majority as a place of trashy entertainment, socially dangerous phenomena or heavy sins. Step by step, pub started to be perceived as an important and meaningful institution in which fight for common cause is fought and which is beneficiary to all, in a way or another. That is why the period pictures and descriptions of pub environment frequently resorted to idealization, camouflaging and improving its image as any naturalist picturing would not stand up to the importance of affairs being handled there.

However, each rise must once come to its climax. Following a short surge in the course of the 19th century, the fame of beer and pubs as well slowly began to sag. As early as the mid-19th century but especially towards its very end, voices started to be heard more and more clearly that condemned the praising of beer and pub as expressions of Czech weakness, underdevelopment and pettiness. What served as means to develop national pride at the beginning has now become a source of shame for the fact that the Czechs haven't any developed culture other than pub culture and that they have nothing else to stand up for except for their beer. Already from the original camouflaging of pub life and institutions, one might feel certain shame for the environment in which Czech culture was produced. Towards the end of the century, however, pubs and beer directly became targets of attacks and ridicule from Czech journalism, literature and caricature. As Macura

[1997:35] concludes, the commonplace topic was the reflection of Czech lands as a country where activity has dissolved in beer. Pub and beer "are beginning to be treated by Czech journalism as a phenomenon in which we should not pride ourselves too much. Beer drinking is no longer an attribute of a patriot but of a Mr Brouček or a Mr Kondelík" [Rak 1997:175].

In the first half of the twentieth century, the loss of social prestige and importance of pubs has become apparent also thanks to certain objective circumstances. It is symptomatic that pubs ceased to discharge the role of the cornerstone of club activities, an example of which might be the Sokol movement. Although originally not far from pub environment (pubs, restaurants or bars were often parts of the Sokol Halls and it had close links to pub environment at the national revival level), gradually it has become exceedingly independent and self-determining. In a situation when Czechs have already built up other cultural, economic or political environments, in which they could speak Czech freely, meet publicly and form interest groups, the importance of pubs diminished quite naturally. With a great degree of a hyperbole, we might say that after pubs and beer had performed their appreciable part on the scene of Czech history in the 19th century, they have returned to the position of ordinary components of the population's every-day lives in the era of the First Republic.

Seen from the aspect of amount of political freedom and rights of individuals, the period of the Totalitarian regime resembled, in a certain sense, the period of the nineteenth century. That is why one might have expected that the pub environment could play a role of a certain resistance platform, the same one the pub discharged successfully one hundred years ago, also during the fifty years of frozen quiet and stagnation. Differences between these periods and the roles pubs played during them are, however, extremely great. While in the beginnings of the fight for Czech state, pubs were almost the only places where it was possible to scheme against the monarchy and from where the first impulses of the emerging Czech state came, in the period of real socialism, they no longer held such an exclusive position and the pub environment did not form or hide any major resistance movement. Ideals of a change of the Communist regime have not emerged from meetings over beer, the anti-regime activities were not promoted by clubs established at regulars' tables,

the meetings with citizens were not organised in the halls with the beer tap in sight. Society has already put in place other institutional components to hold up the change. Even if the actors of the post-November changes might have liked beer as much as they did and even if they could have been the most regular visitors to pub establishments, pub environment in itself did not contribute and could not contribute to the *coup d'état*.

Rather, contrary opinion might be considered, i.e. that pubs were involved in making the changes more complicated and in postponing them. The possibility to forget the outside world in the comfort of a pub class IV with Formica tables holding a soiled beer mug in one's hand was certainly more than alluring when compared to the image of lay-offs, running away from cops' truncheons or trips to the Bartolomějská street. As Peřina [1997:82] notes in a critical voice: "How many Czechs were exchanging their conscience and conviction for the comfort of their beer or material world in those days, for non-committal chatter substituting action?" With material security and life "without problems", pub chatter over cheap beer was a pain-free and quite safe means of psychological hygiene, venting of accumulated frustration and chasing away feelings of disillusionment.

The image of the pub in the eyes of Czech public now is different from the picture in the era of one-party rule when pubs represented practically the only possibility of escape from unpleasant reality for most people, different from the picture in the period of their adoration during the national revival and different from their picture under the wings of mediaeval religious morality. However, one might say that each of these stages has left a trace in the minds of the people. Therefore, the typical sign of the present relationship of the Czechs towards pubs (as well as beer) is the capturing of their differentiated form. People are capable of viewing the institution of the pub from various angles as well as with a certain degree of detachment; it is perceived as an establishment with both positive and negative aspects for everyday life. Viewed from distance it is considered to be a cultural monument.

From the social perspective, the position of the pub is not very strong nowadays. The roles played by it at social level, are clearly not principal. In the Middle Ages, the pub played a symbolic role as an image of sin…; in the period of

the national revival, it discharged an important role at cultural level, when it was an important centre for the development of Czech culture and, at symbolic level, however, already as a part of patriotic ideology…; in the period of real socialism, it retained many of its cultural roles, complemented by an important role of a catalyst and a "blunter" of social tension… But it is hard to find any similar distinct role at present. The pub even ceases to be (probably for the first time over the centuries of its existence) the dominant type of catering facility and, automatically, it loses its universal position. Besides the prosaic acceptance of pubs as one of the many parts of our everyday lives (once praised for its positive aspects, once condemned for the negative ones[6]), its last stake at society-wide level, perhaps, is the status of a cultural monument, family silver, which might be worth protecting and considerate treatment to a certain degree.

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[6] In more detail, see Vinopal [2004]

At the level of group

From micro-sociological perspective, the pub environment may be monitored at two levels taking into account (a) the role the pub plays at local community level and (b) with regard to social environment of the pub establishment itself, that is the group comprising the visitors and the staff.

To start, let us take the first-mentioned level. In its context, the cultural role of Czech pubs should be noted. The role was discharged to the fullest already in the period of the national revival but, in certain forms and to a certain extent, it remained preserved until now. Of course, this role is apparent especially in village community where catering facilities are ones of the few and, often, the only places where whatever may be organised. Pubs in small villages (but not only there) continue to be centres of cultural life, events, balls, theatricals, meetings, lectures, appointments and celebrations of most diverse kinds are organised in them. (The opinion that pubs are frequent organisers of cultural events meets with the approval of 65% population, more frequently in villages.)

In addition, pubs operate as a kind of contact centres within the community for making contacts, assistance and exchange of information of all kinds. Again, especially in smaller settlements, it still holds that if a person needs to borrow a concrete mixer for Saturday, help with laying the roof tiles, or simply to know what time the match of the local junior soccer team starts, it is just as well to stop by in the pub for one on a Friday evening… (85% of Czech population agree that often neighbour assistance, exchanges, sales, cash jobs etc. are negotiated in pubs; 74% agree that one can learn a lot of information and news in the pub that otherwise one would not have access to.) In certain situations and for certain groups of population, the pub is as important or, right away as irreplaceable as the institution of a hairdresser, doctor or phone book.

Perhaps needless to add that these social roles of Czech pubs are the ones that directly affect the form of local community for which they represent one of important communication channels. The absence of the institution of the pub is quite legible in social relations of inhabitants. Everyone in whose village the last pub was cancelled knows this very well. One may even suppose that a response, not quite infrequent, in the form of private beer tapping in fire stations, town council

rooms or even in the garage of an enthusiast is not just consequence of alcoholism but an effort to preserve certain level of social relations primarily associated with the environment of pubs and bars.

The micro-sociological aspect, however, may also focus on the internal aspects of the pub environment. These need to be first characterised more closely. For a person who only visited pub couple of times in her/his life and that rather by accident, it may seem a bit surprising that the pub is a fixedly spatially structured and socially hierarchical environment.

The area of a pub often physically divided to parts: one predominantly for permanent and regular guests – the regulars and the other for less frequent and random guests. (In addition, some pubs offer private lounges, "stand-up" bar for passers-by or other special rooms.) Each of these "sites" has its internal rules of social contact and, moreover, communication among the "sites" also follows strict rules. If the room is not partitioned by a kind of screen or unless the bar with the regulars' table is right away in a different part of the pub, the places for the regulars' tend to at least be situated close to the bar. Places for extremely valued guests tend to be reserved with no exception and respected by other co-visitors and the staff.[7] It is not entirely unusual that regulars have their name carved out on their chairs, their photo on the wall above their head, sitting order indicated on a poster etc.[8]

In a pub, it is often possible to find more regulars' circles, depending predominantly on the size and the location of the pub (in a small village, small number of people may perhaps create just one group, while in an urban housing complex pub, a number of mutually relatively independent groups may gather throughout the week). Various table groups change in a pub also depending on the time of the day, and, often, it is not a total replacement but gradual exchange of guests. Most core members have a number of other acquaintances that may join in by the regulars' table (the "*štamtyš*") although their attendance is not so regular.

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[7] While, it is necessary to note that the dearest guests need not necessarily always be the most frequent…

[8] The fact that the structuring of space based on regularity and long-term of visits need not, however, be a rule is witnessed by village pubs where nobody has his/her permanent place although the person had been a visitor to the pub for a number of years. The tradition goes that those who start sitting at the same chair in the pub will die soon.

Often, it happens that these less frequent visitors create their own core groups that meet up only now and then, for example once a week, a month, etc. As individual members have mutual contacts (made in the pub as well as outside it), all groups have ties of varying strengths among them. The stable structure subsequently attracts other visitors only visiting seldom although with a contact of a kind to one of the members of the standard team or directly to the entire core. The "wandering Ahasuerus" belong among these guests very frequently (a term coined by Karel Altman[9]). They do not have just a single favourite pub but they go pub hopping from an establishment to another based on where or, possibly, with whom, they intend to spend the evening. Thanks to these people, social circuits expand permanently and these people also act as mediators of contacts with other potential visitors as well as news-providers on happenings outside individual venues.

With the typology of pub visitors and organisation of their places in the lounge captured in this way, it is not very difficult to disclose principles of hierarchy and power and authority structures. The power centre of an establishment is, undoubtedly, the person of the headwaiter, from whom the fibres of lower staff positions derive. Within the social group of the guests of the establishment, however, the position of the headwaiter is somewhat non-standard as his power position is predominantly established on formal basis. In this, it significantly differs from the position of regulars, who keep the highest ranks in the authority hierarchy based on informal processes and usually also remaining informal.[10] The most regular guests group is, no doubt, the peak of this hierarchy. Below that, based on the level of frequency and regularity of visits but also perhaps on personal relations with the regulars' group, other groups and guests are placed.

The specific positions of the regulars' groups as well as individual guests on the scale of individual establishments are, however, also determined by the depth of their relationship to the headwaiter. This again follows from the regularity of visits but the overall credibility and solvency of a guest is as important. An objective

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[9] …who, among other things, presents an excellent typology of pub visitors in his book devoted to the "regulars" phenomenon. [Altman 2003]

[10] An exception might be the transformation of a guest into "sub-personnel", i.e. assistant to the bar tender, which may occur in emergencies, for example when the headwaiter fails to manage the service [Brouček 1997] as well as it is not uncommon that the person of the headwaiter or owner often enjoys natural authority of informal character [Altman 2003].

expression of a guest's position is, for example, the form of communication between the guest and the staff (informal/formal form of you, formal/familiar etc.), the existence of a permanently reserved table or place or, for example, his own beer mug exclusively for him/her. An important manner of circumventing the slow promotion by individual grades of the hierarchy is personal contact with a regular or the headwaiter and, in particular, in the existence of family relations.

Opinion leaders enjoy a special kind of authority in the pub environment, different from the authority of regulars and the headwaiter as it is based on different principles. Very frequently, such a role is discharged by guests who only come to the pub from time to time and who enjoy close relations to the core group thanks to their qualifications in a certain field, such as decision-making at the town council, situation in Czech soccer, partner relationships, or international politics. This causes the pub life not to be so uniform, as might seem at first sight. It is common that irregular guests rotate during the week regularly and the opinions of the regular as well as random guests are influenced on a continuous basis and from various sources.

When we remain, having introduced the topic in this manner, at the micro-sociological level of the pub environment, it is necessary to note, first of all, that its visitors create social groups in the true sense of the word; that they are not mere random aggregates of atomised individuals, couples or small groups, as is the case in other types of restaurant establishments. The phenomenon of "pub regular guest" bears more than clear evidence to this.

Not just results of the mentioned research show that the pub regular guest phenomenon has survived until the present days. In general, it is possible to summarise that each type of restaurant establishment has its own permanent guests. Even today, a regular is characterised by regular visits to a certain establishment, which it changes only with minimum frequency or not at all; as a consequence, he knows most of the local guests as well as the service staff and he has his favourite place here. The form or the regular guest phenomenon, however, varies significantly in various social demographic groups[11] and, especially, in individual types of establishments. No doubt, pubs, beer houses and beer bars

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[11] In more detail, see Horáková and Vinopal [2005]

are its strongest stronghold boasting the largest numbers of and the strongest regulars. Bars, wine houses and restaurants are worse off – here, the strength of the regular guest phenomenon is somewhat lesser (there are fewer regulars and they are not so strong), and, the end of the imaginary ladder hosts catering facilities such as pizzerias or Chinese restaurants; these do have their group of regulars but it is not so distinct.

High fidelity of visitors is primarily characteristic of pubs (but, in this case, also of bars and wine bars): if a person has a favourite establishment of his own, it is indeed very unlikely that such a person would attend other establishments on a regular basis. For pubs, moreover, the frequency of visits of their regular guests is clearly the highest: if such a place is a favourite spot for a person, such a person visits the pub two times a week on average (three out of five of its visitors do so) while guests visit other venues only once every fortnight on average.

It is the high frequency of visits of regulars that is the cause behind other differences in quality that distinctly distinguish the social character of the pub from other types of establishments. In simplified terms, the difference mainly consists in that everybody knows everybody here: two out of five people who prefer visiting pubs or beer houses, know actually all other guests in their favourite establishment, another one third knows about fifty percent of the visitors. To illustrate the situation, if we, by accident, arrive in an unknown pub, we can be almost sure that at least half of the present visitors know one another and the rest know most of the others or at least someone. But it is not only familiarity with other guests but also the relationships with the staff that are involved in creating the unique atmosphere of the pub environment. In this respect, the present pubs (and bars and wine houses) preserve the spirit of the regular guest phenomenon in an extremely fixed form as four out of five of their guests know someone from the staff or the owner of the establishment.

In idealised terms, a regular of a pub or a beer bar looks approximately as follows: he is an elderly man, likely to be a pensioner, who most likely has a vocational school education and his vocation is or has been manual work. He has been sitting down at his favourite place in his venue for a number of years already and it is possible to meet him there at least every other day. He visits this and no

other pub mainly because it is close to his home, he knows everyone here for the years that passed, he addresses the headwaiter in familiar terms and he likes the house beer. He does not pause over tablecloth smeared by accident and he is able to be generous and forgive the cook for lukewarm soup because, after all, all he wants to is to talk to his friends here, play cards or just spend time and drink.

At the level of individual

By drafting the appearance of a pub regular, we gradually get to the third of possible analytical levels, the level of individual. Now we already know how the pub space tends to be arranged in physical terms and what relationships among visitors and staff and among guests themselves rule here; what space does a person enter from personal point of view, how does the local situation affect him, what does it allow him and by what does it, to the contrary, limit him?

The pub offers its visitors many services and options. The characteristics by Stanislav Brouček [1997:237], aptly summarising the mission of pubs, may serve well to introduce these: "The pub is something between the pharmacy for tranquillizers and stimulants, the university, the Parliament and the church."

Most likely, the most important role of the pub is to create and maintain relationships among people. Results of the above research also clearly confirm this. (73% of respondents agreed with the statement that the pub is an important place for meetings of friends, acquaintances, colleagues etc.; 63% of respondents agreed with the statement that pubs are important places for meetings of people, forming acquaintances and social contacts.)

Apart from several friends around a table, the social circuits of individual visitor groups mutually overlap heavily, expanding the interaction field and forming an extensive network of relationships, actual as well as potential contacts within and without the catering facility. Being a member of a clearly defined and at the same time large social group provides a man with feelings of certainty and solidarity and with the conviction that he belongs somewhere. If an individual becomes a member of a group linked to a specific establishment, the possibility of creating many contacts that would otherwise be very labour demanding for him to create, opens up for him. A group a part of which a man becomes in the pub, at the same time, is approximately at the same level of importance and influence as a group of friends, working collective, or co-players from the Thursday volleyball might be. Its member identifies with it to a certain degree and the group, in turn, is involved in creating his social identity and certainty.

But the existence of a social group, determination and relative stability of a certain social context has more implications affecting individual perception. One of them, related mainly to the feeling of life certainty, is the nature of the order.

For a calm life and easy orientation in it, people need to permanently confirm the existence and specific form of order. In common life, this practically occurs constantly (each conversation in the street again convinces us that principles of contacts among people have not changed in any dramatic way, that it is meaningful to rely on internalised rules) and the pub environment has also something to offer in this respect. The existence of a firm and stable social structure is one of significant means in this respect as the structure itself implies the existence of an order. The pub visitor at least at subconscious level feels this and also usually preserves it in his behaviour.

In specific terms, the above physical arrangement of space, power and authority structures of staff and guests, attributing various prestige to individual places, tables and chairs, etc., or the existence of a taboo in the form of space behind the bar counter are all specific examples of the representation of order in the pub. Also, order is very clearly represented in the system of personal relationships and links: various guests enjoy various prestige based on closeness of their relationship with the staff or affiliation to individual table communities. The affiliation reflects very clearly in ordinary communication as well: a regular is allowed to approach the headwaiter on certain terms, a not-so-regular visitor on other terms and a random tourist yet on other terms. In addition, order is obviously confirmed by routinely performing certain things: regular visits to the favourite establishment, contact with permanent acquaintances and unchanging spending of evenings make a man acquire the impression that life has its internal order, that something stable exists which might be held onto in need. Rituals, for example, in the form of service without order, when the favourite twelve-degree beer is placed on the table immediately after the regular sits down, convivial compliments to the headwaiter as to how the beer nicely foams or the common complaints over the performance of the referee in yesterday's match also help create the subjective perception of order.

A bit paradoxically, however, confirmation of order is not the only need. Psychological well being also entails standing up against the restraining order from time to time, put it to doubt, loosen one's hands. For this, as well, the catering establishment provides suitable opportunities, in particular thanks to differences in the rules of social behaviour and power as well as symbolic arrangement in comparison with other spheres of life. Oftentimes, a man often enters a quite different social situation: an assistant worker, who performs one of the lowest positions at work most of the day, suddenly enters, symbolically and at the power level, a higher position in the pub (if he is a regular there) than a clerk or a teacher who come to the pub to have three beers once a week. To the contrary, they may feel that in their "pub position" they fall among "ordinary folks". From their point that also represents a principal change in social hierarchy. Thanks to these differences in pub rules, their visitors often quite justly gain the feeling that they are outside the control of the ever-present order of outer world, that it is cancelled. (Taken to the consequences, however, they obviously only become part of another order, in essence totally identical to the order from which they wanted to get away.)

Another role that pubs discharge for their visitors is the possibility of repose and relax in an intimately familiar environment, among familiar folk. (83% of the population of the Czech Republic agree that people go to pubs to relax from everyday worries.) At interpersonal level, negative (sometimes, however, unfortunately, also positive) social inhibitions, shyness, feelings of shame etc. melt here. Usually, this has a positive integrating impact. In psychological terms, beer drinking in pubs "melts down the too hard, self-inflicting super ego, gives courage to the shy ones, loosens up stiffened fantasies and, in many cases, contributes to the ease of creative work" [Černoušek 1997:219]. In certain cases, the pub even makes possible radical escape from everyday world. For example, the haste, speed and assertiveness of the present life dissolves into a slow, quiet course of an evening with a pint of beer, the worries of everyday living are left outside and one enters the environment of quiet and well-being. And if problems do come up to the table, they tend not to be perceived in their sharp contours.

In this connection, Jiroušek's description of the [1997] "phenomenon of faith in deferral of definitiveness" is worth mentioning. In his specification, it is the

feeling that a guest gains through beer consummation in a pub, allowing him a pleasant sit-down and entertainment not disturbed by thoughts of the "outside world". It is the feeling of the existence of an autonomous time and space in which the logical and natural determinants no longer apply, to which everything necessary and usurping, inevitable and unsettling remains ever external, where the time sort of stops. "The validity of the necessary is deferred to an indefinite future and until we get up from the table, we do not even have to prove the law of gravity," is Jiroušek's characteristics of the faith in the deferral of definitiveness [1997:140].

Analogously, pub environment operates towards the venting and lowering of psychological tension as well. The option to talk out one's worries, to open one's heart, or to brag about personal, political and any other possible problems is very important for many people in various life situations. Pub environment provides suitable opportunity for such psychological hygiene and this mostly has clearly positive consequences at the level of individual psychology. However, this example shows very clearly the interconnection of analytical levels in reality because the social consequences of such blunting of tension need not necessarily be so positive. In the real socialism era, this showed quite openly – pub escape from reality was used by the regime as an easy way of manipulation and to preserve order in society. Tension, stored up in the situation of permanent lack and political as well as economic freedom, was easily blunted and vented in pubs and over a cheap beer, people were forced into isolation and were kept practically kept in inactivity and apathy. The fact that alcohol consumption contributed to this is beyond doubt as is impossible to dispute the fact that the regime did actually nothing in order to limit this.

This way, we are gradually getting to the dark side of the pub environment that is also necessary to note. Like vast majority of other social institutions, pub also has its negative sides in addition to the positive ones. One and the same thing may, in addition, acquire both modalities depending on whom it concerns, in what environments and periods it appears, what consequences it brings etc. Apparently, the possibility of a painless escape from reality (if we omit the morning headache) is quite undoubtedly positive in certain life situations for an individual. At social-wide

level, however, it is a dysfunctional phenomenon and it may also be harmful in many individual cases when a certain pressing real life situation requires a solution.

Many negative phenomena linked to pub going relate to its gender aspect. Men still make up vast majority of pub goers. This simply means that they are often missed by their partners and, possibly, children. (The statement that pubs take away parents from their families finds agreement of 57% of the population of the Czech Republic, obviously more frequently women). If women started going to pubs with their partners, it might harmonise their common life but, most likely, it would only be a step from bad to worse because alcoholism is another negative phenomenon closely linked to the pub environment. (53% of the population of the Czech Republic agrees that pub going is one of the main causes of alcoholism.) Among other things, it is typical of a pub that one goes there to have beer; and not each of its visitors follows expert medical recommendations of the two health care… Briefly, the pub environment is exceptional even in this respect and it is frequently quite justly considered to contribute to this type of negative phenomenon.

Although alcoholism and disintegration of family environment obviously have much wider social connections and deeper causes than those that might be looked for in pub environment, it would be incorrect not to at least mention them in this connection. As a matter of fact, the same applies to them as for positive roles and phenomena: it is possible to find them in pubs, pubs do discharge and satisfy them, however, they are not their only and usually not even most important bearers.

Conclusion: position of the pub in today's Czech society

The negative aspects of the pub institution very clearly document, among other things, the overlap among and the actually only analytical nature of dividing them into three spheres of its roles. It is quite clear, for example, that alcoholism and disintegration of family environment are phenomena passing across the entire chart. In other words, although these are still the same things all the time in principle, both negatively affect the individual, his social group, as well as the society whose part he is.

Despite that, the analysis demonstrated that the position of pubs in today's Czech society might make up an interesting topic of ordinary conversation over beer as well as for sociological analysis. Its results showed that the institution of pub has discharged and still discharges many different roles in society, ranging from social-wide dimension to individual level. In more specific terms, these include symbolic, cultural, economic (which were not discussed in the context of this article), social, communication, information and psychological aspects. Although it is not possible to say that some of them would significantly dominate at present measured by social-wide standards, they become important for at least certain groups of population, certain localities and in certain situations.

Rather, we may say that the importance of the pub institution in Czech society decreases. Results of research as well as objective events show that pubs lose their universal position within the spectrum of catering facilities, diminishing that way the importance in the lives of people is diminishing. To a certain degree, the situation from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries when certain important cultural, symbolic and social roles of pubs were taken over in part by newly established institutions repeats itself.

We may summarise that pubs, inns and beer houses enjoy a long-lasting tradition in the Czech Republic and, so far, have been considered as something imminent to the Czechs. In its form of a not very noble place with wooden tables and benches, beer, goulash and pickled sausage ("*utopenec*"), Czech pub is perceived as cultural heritage. Based on numerous indices, it is even possible to trace its cult manifested in actual behaviour, folk literature imagery as well as in

opinions and attitudes of people. Despite that, the relationship of the Czechs the restaurant establishment of this type is not completely free of criticism and it is certainly good that they are also able to perceive in it certain negative aspects.

At a more specific level, it is clear that Czech pub is an exceptional kind of catering facility also from social point of view. The character of relationships among people, formation of groups and identification with them, as well as a number of specific roles that pubs perform at the level of individual psychology, lends the traditional pub environment the hallmark of an unforgettable and unique phenomenon.

It is very likely that with the gradual reduction in the number of traditional Czech pubs and with their inner transformations, these characteristic aspects will gradually disappear as well. However, the development is open and hopefully there need not be fear of an end to the Czech pub. So far, its tradition, especially in villages, seems to be very strong so far like the traditional set-up of certain groups of population is strong. The Czech pub will not disappear; it will only cease to be (and, most likely, it has already ceased to be) dominant restaurant facility in Czech lands. It will be preserved as one of the many possibilities of tavern sit-down in addition to the more and more numerous wine bars, cafés, bars, clubs, restaurants etc. and, only a specific group of visitors with a closer relationship to the pub (for various reasons) will keep attending it.

SCHEDULE

Table: Current role of pubs (States the percentage of people who expressed agreement with the below statements.)

Neighbour assistance, exchanges, sales, cash jobs etc. are often negotiated in pubs	85
People come to pubs to relax from everyday worries	83
Pubs are significant part of Czech culture and traditions	76
One gets to know a lot of news and information in the pub to which one would otherwise not gain access	74
Pubs are important places for meeting of friends, acquaintances, colleagues etc.	73
Pubs are frequent organisers of cultural events – parties, balls, meetings, lectures etc.	65
Pubs are important places for meeting of people, forming acquaintances and social contacts	63
Pubs lead parents away from their families	57
One of the many causes of alcoholism is pub going	53
People go to pubs to get drunk, to forget what happens around them	47
Pubs are one of the few places where politics can be discussed	42
Pub going is virtually the only entertainment for people	33

Source: CVVM, Naše společnost 2004 (Our Society 2004) survey, 04-09 investigation

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