

Czech and Slovak Tramping Movement as a Shared Cultural Heritage

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/SN.2023.2.16> © Ústav etnológie a sociálnej antropológie SAV, v. v. i.
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The aim of this article is to contribute to a critical evaluation of the history and present of mutual relations between Czech and Slovak tramps, as well as the role of tramping in Czech and Slovak history, as this specific phenomenon significantly marked the activities of broad sections of the youth of both nations. At the same time, from the very beginning there were intensive informal and organized contacts between Czech and Slovak tramps, which still applies today. Especially after the division of Czechoslovakia, mutual friendly contacts turned into a political demonstration, completely unusual in the tramp movement, especially in the previous era of so-called normalization. The contribution pays particular attention to the Czech-Slovak and Slovak-Czech annual *potlach* (potlatch in English) as a manifestation of the mutuality of Czech and Slovak tramps and an expression of the cultural heritage of more than a century of existence of Czechoslovak tramping.

Keys words: tramping, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, festivities, cultural heritage

How to cite: Altman, K. (2023). Czech and Slovak Tramping Movement as a Shared Cultural Heritage. *Slovenský národopis*, 71(2), 165–179.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/SN.2023.2.16>

Spread of Tramping

“Tramping” (“tramping movement”, “tramping sub-culture”) must be seen as a specific, originally pure Czech and soon after also a Slovak phenomenon, which in the last one hundred years has significantly influenced the activities of a large number of members of both nations, Czechs and Slovaks, from relatively broad strata of society. It must be observed at the outset that from the very beginning of the tramping movement, Czech and Slovak tramps have maintained intensive informal and

organised contacts, which is still true today. My study therefore wants to contribute to the evaluation of the past and present of their mutual interethnic relations, and thus the role of tramping in Czech and Slovak history. The contribution pays particular attention to the Czech-Slovak and Slovak-Czech annual *potlach* (potlatch in English) as a manifestation of the mutuality of Czech and Slovak tramps and an expression of the cultural heritage of more than a century of existence of Czechoslovak tramping.¹ This essay wants to join my previous studies and articles published in professional periodicals, anthologies and monographs, which represent the outcomes of my ethnological research over the last thirty years (Altman 1997, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2010, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2020).

It can be stated that hardly anything is such a peculiar and at the same time not only essentially Czech, but also Slovak cultural phenomenon as tramping meaning independent wandering and camping in nature associated with unusual and typically tramps' entertainment and with the use of many characteristic attributes unparalleled elsewhere. Perhaps nowhere else in the world tramping could emerge at its right moment, broke through extremely fast and spread massively, and continued to develop for more than one century in a virtually identical form that only partially was subject to contemporary changes. It is not without significance that tramping came into being in the heart of the Czech lands, in Prague, whose close environs offered numerous, especially young people the right settings to cultivate a new way of spending their leisure and peculiar lifestyle (Altman, 2022b: 293–306).

With the time of its origin, tramping is almost symbolically associated with a historical milestone the formation of modern Czechoslovak state as a manifestation of the long-desired liberation after three hundred years of national dependence. Both milestones, the formation of Czechoslovakia and the spontaneous emergence of tramping fall within the period of late 1918, when World War I as well as the era of the Habsburg Empire ended to clear the way for the modern era of the independent republic. Tramping spread quite fast throughout the country. From Prague, which was a proverbial cradle of tramping, the new movement spread to Bohemia; first tramp settlements in Brno are reported in the mid-1920s, and the first settlement in Slovakia was founded in Bratislava in 1928 (*Waikiki*). In the Czech lands, tramps were hiking mostly in regions inhabited by Czechs, not in those inhabited by Germans (meaning mainly in the inland), in Slovakia in regions inhabited by Slovaks. This situation continued until 1945 when the national situation in the renewed common state of Czechs and Slovaks changed significantly, especially due to the expulsion of German residents from border areas, where tramps could wander from that time. Czech and Slovak tramping underwent a specific development in the forty-year-long

1 Other important activities of tramps that document mutual relations between Czech and Slovak tramps in the past and present also include: tramp song and literature (organization of music festivals of tramp songs, for example in Horní Jelení), publication of literary contributions by Czech and Slovak authors in the Trapsavec literary competition, and also Czech authors in Slovak tramping magazines, participation of Czech and Slovak tramps in the competition "Trasa", dedicated to graphic and photographic creation).

period of “building Socialism” when it was restrained on the one hand, but experienced a proverbial golden age on the other, especially in the period of “normalisation”. In our country, tramping has continued to date, practically uninterrupted (albeit with occasional lulls), which indicates that tramping has a respectable tradition; it celebrated a round anniversary in 2018, namely one hundred years of its existence.²

Let us remark that the history of Czech and Slovak tramping was quite well treated mainly by tramps themselves. The book *Dějiny trampingu* [The History of Tramping] by Bob Hurikán (Josef Peterka by his own name) was first published in 1940; the author not only thoroughly describes the development of tramping in Bohemia, but also briefly in Moravia, and he also mentions the situation in Slovakia. This icon work has been gradually supplemented by quite numerous treatises which map the history of tramping in various partial regions (“tramp territories”) of the Czech lands and which were usually written by local tramp chroniclers. The work *Údolia nestíchli* [The Valleys Did Not Fall Silent], with an explaining sub-title *Dejiny trampingu na Slovensku* [The History of Tramping in Slovakia], was written by Zdeno Dočkal who published it under his tramp nickname Brčko in 1991.

Tramping in its authentic form has always existed solely in the territory of original Czechoslovakia, meaning also Slovakia, with which the Czech lands shared a common state for many decades until both nations decided for their own way. In Slovakia, tramping spread a little bit later than in the Czech lands, but it did not lag behind in any significant issues. As Czech tramps, especially the elderly experts in tramp history and the present, admit to this day, Slovak tramping “was identical in its essence”.³ Yet as already pointed out from the very beginning there were intensive informal and organised contacts between Czech and Slovak tramps, and this is still true today. This was and is a consequence of the specific features of tramping as such. The tramp community, strongly ideologically influenced by woodcraft and scouting, usually adhered to democratic relations based on equality between its members. This has always been the case in general even among different “generations” of tramping bearers, meaning among tramps of different age.

Friendship

One of the hallmarks of Czech and Slovak tramping is undoubtedly the fact that both nationally and territorially coexisting streams have never competed with each other in any noticeably way. On the contrary, they established mutual contacts, and created

2 The origin of Czech tramping is generally, but not exclusively, linked to 1918 when the first authentic tramp settlement *Ztracená naděje* [Lost Hope] near Svatojánské proudy on the Vltava River was founded.

3 Jiří Procházka, nicknamed Cancák, says on the subject: “It is true that tramping in Slovakia came into being later than in Bohemia and Moravia. But I think it was identical in its essence. It was logically concentrated in Bratislava and its environs with trips heading for the Little Carpathians and Danube area.” Jiří Procházka’s statement, 25 September 2022, authorised by the respondent.

and maintained mutual bonds based on informal relations between individual tramps and their small, more or less informal collectives, especially tramp settlements as basic segments of tramp culture. “Already from the beginning of the ‘tramping’ phenomenon tramps felt their need to meet..., to visit each other in their settlements and at campfire gatherings”, remembered a tramp chronicler nicknamed Ďáblík (2003). These mutual contacts and ties were possible due to the observance of one of the basic principles of tramping, which was entering into friendly relations between individuals and collectives; these relations were then transformed into an obvious cult of friendship, proclaimed and demonstrated on different occasions. For many tramps, friendship had an almost magical meaning; the word “friend” had a symbolic value in their perception. The principle of friendship has always been and still is demonstrated among tramps at their ordinary personal contact because tramps very often addressed, and still address, each other using the vocative form of the word friend (in Czech *kamaráde*).

Especially after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, mutual friendly contacts between Czech and Slovak tramps took on a political demonstration. This was rather unusual in the tramping movement in the previous era of Socialism; especially the twenty-year-long period of “normalisation”, when most tramps more or less ostentatiously ignored political events, contributed and still contributes to the conviction of many tramps about the general apolitical nature of the tramping movement.⁴ Just as in the previous two decades of Socialism (in the 1950s and 1960s), also in the era of “normalisation” the tramp community kept their more or less apolitical attitude; tramp collectives did not get too involved in dissent, and a possible noticeable participation of tramps in resistance activities was usually based on individual decisions. Even the strict onset of normalisation did not have despite all restrictions any destroying consequences for the sub-sequent development of tramping, which could have led to resistance and radicalisation of tramps. Several tramp settlements even experienced the heyday of their activities and the peak of their own tramp activity at that time, which admit their members even today. For example, the chronicler of the *Cassiopea* settlement in Senožaty literally wrote: “From 1967 until 1973 our settlement experienced the most beautiful period” (Anonymous 1, 2019). Several tramps, including respected authorities, admit that the era of normalisation was a period when tramping flourished, despite the surviving sanctions from the regime. One of them, Michael Antony, for example declared his attitude to that period of tramping with the following conciliatory words: “With the benefit of hindsight it can be said that despite the troubles with the ruling powers of that time, it was a kind of golden age of tramping...” (*Stručná historie trampingu* [A Brief History of Tramping] 2021). It can be concluded that at least for some tramps tramping in that era offered an escape from their sometimes traumatic feelings arising from the realities of day-to-day life, which a significant part of society experienced

4 This does not take into account the wave of political upsurge of tramping movement in the era of the Great Depression at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s.

at the time; tramping could thus be a manifestation of a resistant mode of existence, generally known as ‘internal emigration’.

Long Wandering Journeys

Tramps chose their own way to reply to numerous restrictions that affected the entire society with the onset of normalisation they intensified their tramp activities. An important role in this was played by sanctions imposed by state authorities, which led to restrictions of other leisure activities, by the prohibition of other institutions that took part in organizing these activities (Junák, Scout) as well as by renewed restrictions on travelling abroad, meaning “the border closure”. “However, there was a time when the whole world shrunk to our basin plus Slovakia,” remembered the tramp Moura from the tramp settlement *Mexická trojčata* [Mexican Triplets] (Moura, 2015) the era of Socialism. This made the young people, and not only them, all the more travel around their homeland. It should be noted that tramps going out into nature did not always head for their regular camp but they made longer journeys to other regions. These expeditions were and still are called a “velký vandr [long wandering journey]”. They were of explanatory nature, but often led to friendly tramp settlements in various locations and regions. It was in the era of Socialism that these long trips to distant places became a common and extremely popular custom among tramps. They took place regularly, mostly once a year. This was also the case in the 1950s, unfavourable for tramping. As the tramp coryphaeus Jiří Procházka, nicknamed Cancák, remembers: “At that time, it was usual for tramps from Bohemia and Moravia to go on their long wandering journeys to Slovakia, and on the contrary, Slovak friends used to come to Bohemia. New friendships were established between settlements and these were then invited for campfire gatherings, where these Czech and Slovak friends met again. As an example from that time, we can mention the Bratislava settlements *Manila*, *Florida* and *Utah*, in Brno then the settlements *Lutna-Stop*, *Vyžraný kotel*, *Pavouk*, settlements from the Club of Brno Tramp Settlements, then the settlement *Canada* from the Forgotten Valley in Sázava, and the settlement *Zelený kruh* from Prague; and for sure many other settlements and tramp solitaires” (Cancák, 1997). This trend continued throughout the era of normalisation, and it continues to the present day.

The Present of Tramping

Events in November 1989 and their consequences brought about many social changes that also affected Czech tramping. For example, the chronicler of the tramp settlement *Šalom* from Heřmanův Městec formulated it laconically in his note in the settlement chronicle: “the November Revolution of 1989 changed many things. Including us” (quoted in Moidlovi-Smlsal, 2008: 34). However, soon a time came when more or

less temporarily material conditions of life relatively deteriorated, especially for those social classes whose members had traditionally belonged to the core of the tramping movement, and included not only young apprentices and students, but also middle-aged workers and employees (Altman, 2022b). In particular the lower social classes of society were sensitive to the rapid end of the advantages that the previous regime offered to buy their neutral attitudes and goodwill, especially the aforementioned quite low prices of basic foodstuffs, alcohol, cigarettes, fares, fuel, etc. The tramp chronicler Jiří Skurovec, nicknamed Lucan, an elderly eyewitness of several last decades of tramping, expressed it with the following terse sentences in the mid-1990s: “The season of 1990 welcomes us in a free and independent country. Nothing changes on wandering. Just the prices. Prices of canned goods, food, beer, gasoline and other goods. A lot of people have to worry about their livelihood. People are being laid off, businesses are being liquidated” (Lucan, 1996). The general atmosphere in society has changed among other things also as a result of the rapid economic transformation of the early 1990s, which several tramps blamed for the then beginning decrease in the number of tramps. This is probably why tramping was somewhat critical of the ongoing situation in the 1990s.

The dissolution of Czechoslovakia contributed to important changes as well. In 1992, a large number of tramps, like a significant number of Czechoslovak citizens, was not too enthusiastic about the political decision taken by the top representatives of the former common state of Czechs and Slovaks to divide the country into two separate state units, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic but accepted it as an irreversible fact. “From that moment on, Czech and Slovak tramping began to develop independently”, describe Olga and Zdeněk Moidls, chroniclers of East Bohemian tramping, this historical turning point laconically (Moidlovi, 2010: 15). But they continue: “The dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the formation the Czech and the Slovak Republics (January 1993) separated the two states by a borderline, but friendships survived” (Ibid.). Zdeno Dočkal, the aforementioned historian of Slovak tramping, nicknamed Brčko, reacts with similar words: “The dissolution of the common state became an impulse to make it clear that no matter how the situation has changed, tramps of both republics will not stop being friends.” And he quotes the tramp nicknamed Datel from the Kozárov settlement *Lesný Skriatki*: “There is no fence that a tramp cannot climb.”

Not only in the early 1990s, when the political atmosphere was quite turbulent, but even in the follow-up decades, many Czech and Slovak tramp demonstrated, on various occasions and in response to various stimuli, the inseparability of their movement. The announcement about an opportunity to order “Moravian patches”, published in the *Oslavské boudy* journal (No. 2), encouraged Jiří Procházka, nicknamed Jura Cancák, to write a declaration addressing tramps “from the former Czechoslovak Republic”. He writes in the declaration: “Decades ago, and I can afford to write this because of my age, it did not occur to us, tramps, to distinguish between Czech, Moravian and Slovak friends. Wherever we went on our wanderings, we were just tramps everywhere. Wherever we came from. Whether we spoke ‘Prague’, ‘Brno’,

‘Ostrava’ or Slovakian languages. We were all friends and any distinction of ‘nationality’ was out of the question... Distinguishing nationality in something that was created as a world unique matter in the Czechoslovak Republic is not appropriate in my opinion” (Cancák, 2015).

Czech-Slovak, Slovak-Czech Campfire Gatherings

For this reason, many Czech bearers of the tramping movement reacted to the new political situation in their own way – by making their informal friendly contacts with Slovak tramps even more intensive. This trend developed on both sides, and the organization of annual great manifestative common campfire gatherings, called a *potlach*, was one of them.⁵ As a tramp chronicler, nicknamed Antony, expressed tersely: “Czechoslovakia is being dissolved and in response to that Czech-Slovak campfire gatherings come into being” (Historie černého trampingu [The History of Black Tramping], 2019). There gatherings should substantiate the unity of the tramping movement, which was divided into two state units, as Jura Cancák, cited above, remembered many years later: “After all, this was also the original idea of Czech-Slovak campfire gatherings twenty-one years ago, when tramps decided that they didn’t want any national distinction to apply to them” (Cancák, 2015).

These joint events with Czech and Slovak tramps are held alternately in the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic and their names alternate as well, depending on the organizing country: they are officially called “Czech-Slovak Campfire Gathering”, or “Slovak-Czech Campfire Gathering”. The gatherings are continuously numbered. The first Czech-Slovak Campfire Gathering was held on the Velká Javorina Mountain in 1994, the last 28th Slovak-Czech Campfire Gathering took place near the village of Čičava in eastern Slovakia in the previous year. The campfire gathering has always been held annually, with the only exception in 2020, when it was not organized due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent centrally ordered measures, which significantly restricted legal gathering opportunities.

The campfire gatherings were originally supposed to take place near the Czech-Slovak border (either in eastern Moravia or western Slovakia), but this proved unfeasible from an organisational point of view. The organisation of these gatherings in both countries had to be gradually taken over by agile and skilled tramps from

5 The information that allowed me to write this treatise was gradually gathered from various sources. First of all, through my informal communication with many tramps and consultations with some of the important persons of the movement (Igor Kučera-Drobek, Jiří Procházka-Cancák), and then through studying various tramp materials in their possession, invitations, plaques, etc. I obtained further information from books and brochures describing the history of individual tramp regions, and from other writings of tramp provenance. I paid special attention to the study of tramp periodicals, regularly reporting on campfire gatherings, of which the *Oslavské boudy* journal, published by the tramp settlement *Podkova* from Padochov, should be highlighted. My direct experience is based on the participation in the 26th Czech-Slovak Campfire Gathering in Čebín in 2019.

regions other than the border ones. It was also not always possible to keep the originally planned date, the first weekend in September. In recent years, however, this has been the case.

Especially in the early days of the Czech-Slovak and Slovak-Czech campfire gatherings, those gatherings held in the Czech Republic (but not the ones held in Slovakia) were officially called the “Bohemian-Moravian-Slovak Campfire Gathering”, which undoubtedly reflected the then political atmosphere, when even some tramps from Moravia accentuated the so-called Moravianism, which had a certain relevance at that time. This practice was later abandoned and lasted only until the end of the 1990s. Let us add that the idea of organising Czech-Slovak and Slovak-Czech campfire gatherings was not new in the 1990s. There used to be several similar gatherings in the past they were called *nationwide campfire gatherings*, had a similar course and were attended by tramps from all over Czechoslovakia. Probably the first nationwide campfire gathering was the one organized by the settlement *Waikiki* from Bratislava in 1929. One year later, another nationwide campfire gathering was held near Dalskábaty near Olomouc (1930), and the next year in Ohrada (1931), where it was organised by Brno tramps. In the sub-sequent year, a nationwide campfire gathering was organized near Hodonín and one year later on the Radhošť Mountain. During World War II, there were no such big campfire gatherings, but tramps from Brno and Bratislava revived the tradition between the end of the war and the year 1948 (Ďáblík, 2003). Nationwide campfire gatherings were also held in the 1950s, always in August and exclusively in Slovakia, specifically in the Slovak Paradise (Cancák, 1997). Between 1962 and 1966, these campfire gatherings were held as part of the *Pentecost Festival* on the Radhošť Mountain, and some experts consider the *Setkání v lesích* [Meeting in the Forests] below Křemešník, held under the patronage of F. A. Elstner in 1966 (cf. Ďáblík, 2003), to be part of these events.

Programme at Campfire Gatherings

The programme of current international Czech-Slovak and Slovak-Czech campfire gatherings is in principle identical with that at a festive settlement campfire gathering organised by each tramp settlement once a year (usually to celebrate the anniversary of the settlement foundation), especially on the occasion of round anniversaries of this collective. This is also the case of Slovak-Czech and Czech-Slovak campfire gatherings, when their participants started to arrive at a reported place on Friday afternoon for registration. On Saturday morning and afternoon, tramp contests and games take place, and in the evening a ceremonial campfire is lit with corresponding rituals as the highlight of the whole event; after that an entertainment programme, especially a competition in playing and singing tramp songs, and then free entertainment follow. On Sunday morning are announced winners of the previous competitions and usually at 10 a.m. the event is officially closed by the organisers.

These campfire gatherings are considered to be excellent events and they are given complimentary names, for example an “international gala-event” (Básník, 1999). The reason is that these gatherings are often attended not only by Czech and Slovak tramps, but also by those who once emigrated abroad, to Germany, Canada or the United States of America.

Initially, these events were often rather modest and organised in the spirit of the settlement campfire gatherings in the previous period of normalisation. For example, in 1997, when the 4th Czech-Slovak Campfire Gathering near Ledeč nad Sázavou, close to Stvořidla, was organised, the organizers published brief instructions with explicit information: “There will be no refreshment stands at the gathering site (pubs are open in the surrounding villages), and tea will be made for free during the day. After the sheriff’s circle opens, beer and lemonade will be served at people’s prices” (Drobek, 1997). Later on, but quite soon, positive consequences of the new economic system began to manifest themselves, in particular the gradual rise in living standards of general population, including tramps. The form of the Czech-Slovak and Slovak-Czech campfire gatherings, especially their hinterland, changed quite significantly over almost three decades. This is evident, for example, in the instructions of organisers, issued in advance and explained on the invitation cards, as well as in tramp periodicals, where new conveniences are announced as quite common, although previously unsuspected in the tramp community. With the time, tramps require more and more comfort, which is undoubtedly influenced by the fact that the core of the tramp community as a whole, i.e. also the participants of the campfire gatherings, is constantly getting older (the average age of a tramp has noticeably increased compared to the normalization), but also richer. Today’s tramps often use not only public means, but more and more often their own cars or rented buses, and they do no longer sleep in the open air or in tents at gathering camps, but they rent cottages and hostels, or they sleep in their own transport means.

It can be generalized that the venue of a campfire gathering must consist of three main sectors, which seem to be absolutely necessary: a parking lot for motor vehicles that most tramps use to come to the gathering; a special designated area for camping, i.e. setting up tents, with necessary facilities (public toilets, refreshments, etc.); and the gathering site itself, i.e. a place where the ceremonial fire is lit and where the official part of the event takes place. In particular gathering sites tend to be specially (and costly) adapted to leave an impression on the sensitive souls of tramps. The organizers of the 26th Czech-Slovak Campfire Gathering, held in Čebín in 2019, succeeded in doing this, as evidenced by the narration of an unnamed tramp reporter: “What we saw took our breath away. Nicely lit rocks, a natural stone amphitheatre, wooden buffets around it, candles interspersed with red carnations and lit around the log-cabin style campfire” (Anonymous 2, 2019). At the gathering site, the organizers prepare a ceremonial campfire, a “flag area” (poles to which the participating settlements attach their settlement flags), and often a new totem made for the occasion.

The number of those attending the campfire gatherings has always been considerably high; the number of participants soon increased, after a few years, from

the initial few hundreds to two thousand, and has more or less stabilized at this level. For example, the 7th Slovak-Czech Potlach, held in the Malý Slavín campsite in 2000, was appreciated in this respect by the Prague forester Drak, who was quoted: “The participation was admirable over 1600 friends. Incredible 130 flags of settlements and loners flew on the bars behind the parking lot. A plethora of cars and several buses corresponded to that!!! The parking lot looked like the Strahov Stadium” (Drak, 2000). The campfire gatherings are attended by tramps of various ages, but usually (as at other current tramp events) the middle-aged and older generations predominate. Tramp veterans take part as well, for example at the 27th Slovak-Czech Campfire Gathering in Dubová the oldest participant was a tramp nicknamed Šperhák, who was 92 years old (Čochtan, 2021).

Preparation of Campfire Gathering

At the end of a particular campfire gathering it is usually agreed upon who will organize the Czech-Slovak or the Slovak-Czech Campfire Gathering in the follow-up year. It has always been demanding to organise a campfire gathering, not only in terms of the organisation itself, but such an event has always been a costly venture with costs only increasing. For this reason usually several tramp settlements join together to fund the event, and the financial return is not guaranteed, even if some of the conveniences are charged for; to ensure a sufficient number of attendants is a significant precondition in this respect. The preparation of the gathering thus requires promotion, which some of the organisers accompany with their personal agitation, mostly with a positive impact. While evaluating the 26th Czech-Slovak Campfire Gathering held in Čebín in 2019, an unnamed tramp reporter praised this event with the following heartfelt words: “Sheriff Zlůta announced the event a year in advance, and visited campfire gatherings and events in Bohemia and Slovakia several months in advance, distributing leaflets and inviting people to this tramp gathering. We had decided in advance about our participation” (Anonymous 2).

It can be never taken for granted that the organisation of each Czech-Slovak campfire gathering will be successful. Considerable difficulties involved in organising the campfire gatherings are then expressed in the unwillingness of tramps to accept such a responsibility. However, as evident from a number of documents, the difficulties occur almost exclusively on the Czech side, where the tramp elite has to make every effort to convince organisers from among tramp settlements and agile individuals. This was the case, for example, when organizers of the 18th Czech-Slovak Campfire Gathering, which was to take place in 2011, were needed. At that time, concern was expressed that the gathering would simply not take place: “They say there’s no money. There are no people. There is no willingness. No Czech settlement is interested” (Pavel-Vlk, 2010). An analogous situation emerged in 2021, when at the end of the 27th Slovak-Czech Campfire Gathering in Dubová, no Czech settlements came forward to organize the 28th Czech-Slovak Campfire Gathering. The reporting tramp

correspondent, nicknamed Čochtan, expressed in his report his belief that “we will hear from someone by the end of the year”, and in order to support his appeal, he ended his essay with a terse threat: “If this does not happen, the campfire will be prepared by our friends from eastern Slovakia near Čičava” (Čochtan, 2021). And so it was, the 28th Slovak-Czech Campfire Gathering was organized by the tramp settlements *Zlatý orol* and *Biely topol* at the first weekend in September. This gives eloquent proof Slovak tramps have almost no problems like that. Slovak tramp settlements even apply for organizing Slovak-Czech campfire gatherings several years in advance, while on the Czech side similar activists have to be convinced, for example, through appeals and fiery words published in their press (Pavel-Vlk, 2010).

Most of these big gatherings were arranged to everyone’s satisfaction. If organizational problems occurred, they were subjected to fierce criticism. This was the case, for example, at the 6th Czech-Moravian-Slovak Campfire Gathering held in the Mohelnice quarries near Křemačov in 1999. The main organizer Ladislav Urbánek, nicknamed Dědek, was reproached for many things directly during the event. “Poor Dědek! He got his. Rightly and wrongly. It’s true he probably shouldn’t have been drinking, but it’s also true that his friends left him in the lurch.” He was blamed especially for not marking out the parking lot (so cars were allowed to enter the area where tents were being set up), but also for other offences. “There were more shortcomings: no competitions and games, few commemorative plaques and commemorative sheets. Many friends cursed on the spot, and I, though tolerant enough, have to agree with them,” stated the referring tramp nicknamed Básník. Yet general satisfaction with the event predominated. “In the end, true tramp friendship prevailed with singing, playing, talking, remembering, eating, drinking beer... The nice weather and also quite nice refreshment were positive things” (Básník, 1999).

Due to the nature of these events, which mostly take place in natural surrounding and feature the open-air programme, the weather plays a significant role in their success. In bad weather, usually forecasted in advance, the number of attendants significantly decreases. This is why an unnamed tramp reporter, when evaluating the 26th Czech-Slovak Campfire Gathering, could not but reflect this fact already upon his arrival at the venue: “We were surprised by few cars and tents, but bad weather forecasted by meteorologists discouraged many people, or they came just for one day” (Anonymous 2, 2019). Bad weather significantly affects the whole gathering and has a negative impact on the programme. The quoted reporter continues to describe the situation on Saturday morning: “In the morning we woke up to a bad reality as it was heavily raining all night, some friends got soaked to the skin ... The gathering ground turned into a mud arena and small groups of friends were standing at buffets. As there were rain showers all day and there were no shelters, many gathering attendants and musicians spent the time in the tent camp, in the village pub or in the Tramp Museum” (Anonymous 2, 2019).

Conclusion

Joint Czech-Slovak and Slovak-Czech campfire gatherings, especially the extremely successful ones, are acknowledged by the tramp community with satisfaction and thanks to all those who are instrumental in the smooth course of a demanding event. The organisation was welcomed mainly by numerous tramps who had many friends in the other half of the former common state, meaning mostly elderly practicing tramps, at the very beginning of the 1990s, when they could not have anticipated what tradition would await these events. For example, the quoted Jiří Procházka wrote already in 1997, when he evaluated the 4th Czech-Slovak Campfire Gathering: "It is a good thing that Bohemian, Moravian and Slovak friends meet again at their joint campfire gathering for the fourth year. It is nice so, as nobody has succeeded in destroying or dividing tramps, although many false prophets, even among the tramps, tried to do so" (Cancák, 1997).

It is in association with these events that many tramps become aware of the general importance of their sub-culture. Tramp Špricek, the main organizer of the 7th Slovak-Czech Campfire Gathering held in Malý Slavín near Bratislava in 2001, expressed that with succinct but all the more apt words: "We have found out what strength is in tramps and friendship. All of them, young, elderly, and those whose health is not very good, came to see us and preferred us to other events" (Špricek, 2001).

As resulting from the history of tramping, tramps expressed their disagreement with the division of the republic especially in the 1990s, i.e. soon after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia; simultaneously they were confident about the friendship of tramps from both nations but rather indirectly, as a Prague tramp nicknamed Drak expressed in 2000: "It is possible to divide the territory, but not the minds and hearts of people!!! There are still many who regret and condemn this rash act and remember the old days!!! All the more so when it comes to tramps" (Drak, 2000). It is obvious, however, that the sad reproaches of tramps to those who participated in the division of the common state of Czechs and Slovaks are gradually diminishing, as are their fiery condemnations of the act. This is undoubtedly the result of the realisation that the dissolution of Czechoslovakia has had mostly positive consequences, and has greatly supported relations between Czechs and Slovaks. Czech and Slovak tramps have gradually become reconciled to this fact, as evidenced by the absence of the former numerous emotional effusions about this matter from the turn of the millennium. This is also evident from many annual references and reports on these campfire gatherings, which describe their course and assess their level. With the gradual but significant increase in broad population's standard of living, radical sentiments have ebbed away, and both Czechs and Slovaks have more or less got used to the new state of affairs and have come to terms with it. This is undoubtedly related to the significant change in the nature of the tramp community, especially its significant ageing that in general blunts the edge of social and political criticism in some respects. Czech-Slovak and Slovak-Czech campfire gatherings as a legacy of

the previous development of Czechoslovak tramping thus become primarily a social affair, which demonstrates a simple, informal, but all the more sincere mutual Czech-Slovak friendship. This certainly does not diminish their importance. The Brno tramp Pavel (he did not give his surname), nicknamed Vlk, was confident about this when evaluating the 17th Slovak-Czech Campfire Gathering in Lozorno in 2010: “Fabulous atmosphere. Participation of more than 2500 tramps from all possible corners of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. And all those settlement flags!!! And how many old and new friends from everywhere met there! The importance of this tradition, the importance of getting to know each other, of intermingling and strengthening the cohesion of the tramping movement, of tramps from everywhere, need not even be mentioned” (Pavel-Vlk, 2010). He could not have given his conviction a better expression than by endorsing a magical vision, shared by many long-time tramp friends of him: “We should not be surprised at the tramps who imagine the afterlife as an endless Czech-Slovak campfire gathering” (ibid.).

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