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**Sport and Society in the  
Czech Republic**

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## **Sport and Society in the Czech Republic**

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### **Abstract**

We are living a time when society, culture and science have become increasingly aware of the great importance of sport not only as a part of mass culture, but broadly understood, for individual and social health and well-being. Physical activity of people plays increasingly more important role in scientific interest regarding way of life of contemporary society and it is very important factor in the process of officiating of the level of healthy and active life style, quality of life and health in general. Indispensable role of physical activity in the course of human life is permanently scientifically confirmed also in context of prevention of obesity.

The development of a sedentary life style is the result of a socialization process towards physical inactivity developed in youth and continued into adulthood. At the present we face in our cultural settings apparent tendency: People are more and more individualized, losing beneficial impacts of community activities, involved in passive way of life lacking proper level of physical activities and active sport. The phenomenon of physical activity has been considered from also from the perspective of the Project EURO-PREVOB accenting built environmental aspect of way of life. The Czech Republic is on the level of mass sport strongly influenced with the existence of new development of the city structure, including fitness centres, cyclo paths, roller skates stadiums, beach volleyball playing fields, golf courses. The national support of sport is, nowadays, divided into the support of top sports, performance sports and new waves in sports (e.g. sport s for everyone - for all), sports for school, which are then on the regional level (and by the various sport organizations) subsidized from other sources and, moreover, not co-ordinately.

**Keywords:** Physical activity, sport, obesity, society, socialization, built environment, nutrition.

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### General situation

The transformation from industrial to an information society since the 1960s and fueled big advances in computer technology cause “the great wave of change“. Significant changes in the composition of the workforce transferred the economic and the social roles of men and women, but also affected matters of health, attitudes to physical activities and sport (McElroy, 2002). As a result of political and economic changes which occurred in the Czech Republic two decades ago, all areas of society started to be *restructured*. Naturally, this process also included public administration having responsibilities for many areas of the people’s lives, including sport. This new way of “public matters provision” started at the beginning of the 1990s and culminated in the period of 2000-2002.

Together with this process, public administration at lower territorial levels started to constitute rapidly as a basis of democratic, and even more, civic society. The area of sport, in relation to the public sector, has gone through great changes both in structural and process terms. The relations between the sphere of sport and the public sector are naturally mutual undergoing gradual changes (Hobza, Cíkl, 2007). To try to contribute to increasing the knowledge of the present-day position of sport in the Czech Republic it is useful to search a relevant relations of municipalities and their policies to various levels of sport. The task is to explain how the situation has developed and which position sport has gained in the Czech public administration. And of course, to discuss the situation of sport, means to present position and role of sport activities in different societal and demographic parts of society too (Kovář, 2002).

With respect to the *development of the Czech administration and sport* during the past two decades, some ultimate facts must be stressed:

1. The year 1989 brought about the *disintegration* of a uniform voluntary sports organization.
2. The role of state supervision however, was not newly delegated to any other explicit body.
3. The territorial structure of the state had changed (by dissolving regions) adopting the structural model with strong positions of regions and local municipalities.
4. With respect to sport, the year 1989 marked the disintegration of a uniform sports organization: All sports associations, federations, and sports clubs, which had originally been its members controlled directly from the organization’s centre, gained *independence* and became legal entities.
5. Besides, large associations which had been dissolved after the Second World War (e. g. Sokol) and whose members had to merge with all their property with the Czechoslovak Sports Association at the end of the 1950s, renewed their activity.
6. The voluntary sector started to follow the path towards a status that had existed for many years in the West European countries or in the former Czechoslovakia before 1948. The bodies in this sector became non-government, non-profit making, independent voluntary organizations with the status of legal entities.

The emancipation process of sports bodies at the beginning of the 1990s,

however, also resulted in the necessity of tackling numerous problems related not only to these entities themselves, but to their relation to the all-society environment. Still, however, advisory bodies as well as professional sections gradually started to work there dealing with the national representation of sports, sport for all, research etc. Sport, as it was, was not regulated by any legal code, not even in relation to the municipalities. It was up to the municipalities themselves whether they would integrate the sport sector into their policies at all. The voluntary sector, which until then had stabilized and was looking for partnership and cooperation within its own ranks, also participated in these activities taking the role of a partner. But *continual deficiency of conceptual work* on the field of balanced position of leisure and top levels of sport is still typical for relevant politics in the Czech Republic (Slepičková, Staněk, 2007).

The Czech Republic is on the level of mass sport strongly influenced with the existence of new development of the city structure with plenty administrative buildings and shopping facilities, including fitness centres, cyclo paths, roller skates stadium, beach volleyball playing fields, golf courses. The authority for the implementation of the decisions with reference to sport policy and its evaluation is usually delegated onto municipal Department of Education and Culture with one specialized staff person responsible for sport, and onto the Department of the Environment, which is in charge of the reconstruction and maintenance of sports facilities owned by the municipality.

In some city districts in Czech cities *the strategy in relation to sports facilities* focuses mainly on the reconstructions of those situated by primary schools, which are considered as the major basis for the development of sport. The utilization of these facilities applies the same rules set by the local administration, preferring long-term hiring contracts by local sports organizations. The chief deficiency acutely felt by the local administrations in the Czech republic in general, is the *absence of a swimming pools* whose construction is planned usually within three years.

*Playgrounds* of the city districts are usually administered by the Department of the Environment through an authorized staff person, who monitors the condition of these playgrounds in terms of their physical condition and functionality. Outdoor facilities are all provided to the public for free. In indoor spaces, the schools must respect the local administration regulations concerning the calculation of the prices for hire – their costs and resulting prices for hire calculated on their basis are submitted for approval by the Council on a half-a-year basis.

In general, the approaches of municipalities in the Czech Republic to sport show many differences. The causes of the identified *differences* and, in particular, of a totally different approach to policy making, therefore, must be sought elsewhere. In the different approaches to sport the political bias of elected and decision-making bodies of the municipality is reflected as well the degree of personal enthusiasm for sport of the persons who have decision-making authorities in the municipality. It is evident that in municipalities differing by their geographical position and appearance, the number of inhabitants and their socio-economic characteristics and economic

development: But the evident is: The sport policy making is not yet a common standard. (Slepičková, Staněk, 2007).

To summarize situation of *sport versus local authorities* in the Czech Republic the *financial limitations and political priorities* play very important role, as well as professional competence and personal preferences of particular councilors. The approach of the individual town areas to sport is very different and there are often original public policies in this field. A very diverse approach is also seen in the field of maintenance and development of the sports infrastructure and its utilization. In almost all of parts of the Czech Republic, the great importance is on renovation of school facilities. However, the access of the general public to the sport facilities often collides with the clearly commercial use of the facilities (Staněk, Flemr, 2007, 294-297).

### **Some research data on physical and sportive activity of Czech population**

The existing *whirlwind of changes* associated with way of life and standard of living regarding working activities, nutrition, housing, environment, transport, leisure, travelling etc. have with no doubt strong impact at a physically active lifestyle.

We live in the cultural setting adoring youth, beauty, healthy and sexy body and physical performance. Unfortunately, images of fit and healthy attractive personalities and widely circulated health messages have not translated effectively into increased physical activity for most Czech people. Findings from number of large- scale surveys point to the aversion or the inability of most Czech people to participate in regular amounts of physical activity. Sportive activities are more less rather the manifestation of „up to date“ style of life, then to be integral part of everyday life. It is for more and more financially prospering people in good social position the expression of the prosperity and the ability to freely spend and choose independently their leisure.

People prefer, in general, *passive form of leisure*, watching sport rather than doing sport. Overweight adults being deficient in good physical condition are putting themselves at risk for disease and disability. Medical expert predicted properly that the *declines in physical activity* the current generation of Czech children will grow into the most obese generation of adults in Czech history: The sedentary living beset contemporary Czech society, as identically U.S. and plenty of European societies too. In such situation we are more and more confronted with pressing questions: „ Why do people who know they should be more physically active still fail do so? What form the obstacles to achieving a more physically active lifestyle? And very pragmatic question is brought up to date: Is it in sedentary postmodern virtually oriented life possible to transform contemporary people into a more physical active society? What is the real prospect of our endeavour to create a social structure more conducive to a healthier society? Is it possible to overcome persistently questioned limitations found in many of the traditional approaches to promoting physical activity? Are we able to work effectively on the way of innovative strategy to increase physical activity at home, at school, and within the community (Sekot, 2008)?



Regarding systematic representative *sociological research of physical activity* – and consequently a social analysis of inactivity and patterns of sedentary living – in the Czech Republic we can *summarize*: Besides some partial surveys of leisure activities of young generation exists some representative researches of a position of sport and sportive activities of Czech population. One of the very representative with random sample of 952 respondents older 18 years of age organized Charles University in Prague. Research confirmed very high level of prestige of sport and sportive activities in Czech society (Slepička, Slepičková, 2002). But at the same time was confirmed generally known fact that the significant part of population its positive attitude to physical activities does not realize in practical personal everyday life in the form of regular sport activities. Only one third of respondents declared *regular sportive activity* at least one time during a week, irregularly and by chance is involved in sport one fifth of respondents. Seventy percent of Czech people is not associated in sport organizations. On the decline is also positive opinion accenting an importance of mass sportive activity. Presented research has not been interested only in an opinion of Czech population on the role of sport for contemporary people, but was also searching for existing interests in alternative sports, prevailing barriers of active sporting, accessibility to sport facilities, level of passive and active interests regarding sport. Fundamental topic, general *importance of sport and physical activities* for Czech population is in mentioned research reflected in answer reflecting very high level of positive importance of sport for individuals and the society. The highest importance is connected with positive contribution of sportive activities for the health, fitness, well-being, social prestige. Such attitude reflects also high value acknowledgement and a credit of health for all generations of population. At the same time the impact of sport as an indispensable factor of socialization is growing, notably as a form of meaningful way of leisure. The results reflect also existing discrepancy between positive attitudes to sport and the conviction to be *more intensively involved in active sport* (Slepička, Slepičková, 2002, p.15): Presented structure of attitudes to sport activities reflects given social and cultural situation in Czech post-reformation setting: People are not consistent enough to overcome their *laziness*, are too much busy, too much involved in everyday economic problems, not properly appreciated and enjoying refreshing impact of regular physical activities compensating many-sided stress of societal life. But we also take into account the fact, that people are prone to declare an absence of leisure as substitutional reason. Regarding future role of sport respondents declared prevailing widely *sceptical opinions* reflecting existing process of growing disparity between top elite professional sport and mass recreational sport. Such process also supports *consumerist nature of contemporary sport* in general. Most frequent reason for sportive activities of men is building up physical condition, body shape and societal prestige. Women are more sceptical in reference to their chance practise recreational sport regularly: They complain of absence of leisure, financial potentials and organisational obstacles.

Relatively positive perception of physical condition of respondents is reflected in declaration of *frequency of sport activities*: One third of

respondents declare active sport activities at least once a week (37% of men, 29% of women). Women are doing sport activities less regular (22, 7%) in relation to men (14, 6%). Women are also more frequently absolutely physically inactive than men.

Presented data reflect in Czech population growing tendency of passive attitudes to sport. *Physical inactivity* is justified with absence of leisure, absence of meaningful motivation and an existence of healthy problems. 40% of „programmatically physically inactive“ acknowledge substantial aversion to physical activity, 28, 5% declare healthy problem and 20% absence of leisure. Only marginally is declared absence of sport facilities and financial obstacles (Slepička, Slepičková, 2002, p. 19-21).

Relevant *recommendations* regarding physical activities in Czech context are accenting the need to prepare and to realize self-contained programs for active recreational sport for all groups of population and within school teaching of physical education contribute to long-life interest in active physical activities (Frömel, Bauman et al., 2006, p. 21). In addition it is necessary to mention that 2 hours of physical education per week for pupils and students is not resolutely enough. Also young people are recommended for active participation in tourism, recreation and sport, as the foundation of physical culture. Physical education in its humanistic version is understood as „an education of man for the care of the body“.

Another representative research of 5825 respondents monitoring physical and sportive activities „*Physical activity of men and women 18 to 55 years old in the Czech Republic*“ reveals that men in all age categories show more days of physical activity than women., also decrease in frequency of general physical activity with age. Only in walking the women of all age groups are more active than men, in general an apparent decrease of walking in the course of aging is evident. Sedentary way of life measured by time spent in sitting daily is more typical for women. It is concluded that Czech population is not engaged in vigorous physical activity that promotes the development and maintenance of proper physical shape. To be engaged, preferably daily, in moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes per day, is unfortunately only recommended imperative, not reality. As a consequence of such findings higher level of intensive and moderate physical activity for both men and women and lower average period of sedentary time is for general Czech population is strongly recommended (Frömel et al, 2004, p. 173). From the perspective of leisure time activities it is evident that in the Czech Republic physical activities are much more important in the life of children and young people than in adults: More boys than girls devote themselves to organized sports, even though in recent years the number of girls participating mainly in unorganized forms of physical activities has increased. 42% of the boys and 34 % of the girls are engaged in all the existing organized forms of sport. 30% of young people are interested in the subculture of „new sports“ including adventure activities, that are becoming more popular than the traditional ones. But the high percentage of young people who do not practise any sport is alarming because of the prognosis of the possible appearance of risk healthy factors.

Participation in sport and physical activities according to gender, age and forms of sports shows that the Czech boys in all the observed age categories (9-24 years) participate in intensive and moderately intensive physical activity more days in the week than girls. These differences continue with increasing years of both gender. The average daily time for intensive physical activity for boys is 51 minutes and 33 minutes for girls. But no remarkable differences in of so called „walking days“ between boys and girls were registered (Rychtecký, 2007, p. 205).

Frequency of participation of Czech males in competitive, organized, highly intensive sport is most evident in age group 9-11 years (27 %, strong enthusiasm regarding sport career), 12-13 years old boys are most involved in *intensive sports and physical activities*, 9-11 years old are also non-participants in physical activities (32 %). Girls are most involved in intensive sportive activities in age group 16-19 (32 %), most passive attitudes regarding physical activities are typical for 9-11 old girls (Rychtecký, 2007, p. 203-204) as a reflection of daily and weekly habitual order and social influences.

To participate in physical activity is a complex problem. One of the most important aspect of such phenomenon is problem of *motivation for a sport activity*. An investigation of 956 Czech young people of 15-24 years of age with regard to their attitude to physical activities was recently conducted. The research covers both young people doing sport and those who are not doing sport. Main reasons for going in sport for boys is sharing leisure with friends (28, 4 %), to look good and to improve health, for girls to look good (25 %), to share leisure with friends and to improve health (Sekot, 2006, pp. 156-158). It is in the logic of the problem that *aesthetic* and *healthy reasons for physical activities* are more typical for girls and in sport clubs unregistered respondents.

Parallel research of health behaviour revealed the *risk factors of young people's life style*. From the point of view of frequency of physical activities, only one third of Czech students spend 3 times a week with demanding physical activities, whilst on the contrary one fourth of respondents spend sitting 10-14 hours daily (28,6 % nursing school students) and the same number walks less than one hours a day (29,3 % grammar school students). „In general terms, the results confirm present way of spending free time of young people – with the lack of motion and with a number of syndromes of organism insufficiently loaded or overloaded in the wrong direction (pains in a back, joints etc.). Activities for healthy promotion have to be implemented informally that means to move from filling in forms at schools to concrete health supporting activities: “These activities mustn't be only single ones: they must have long term and continuous character“(Říhová, 2007, p. 137-138).

In Czech context *higher level of decentralization* and competence transmission on region autonomy is needed. To keep such task, we need to monitor of interest of physical activities in different age groups, evaluation of physical fitness level not only in children and youth, but also in adult population and elderly people. It means to improve chances for regular whole life physical activities, material outfit, preparation of specialists, realization of long-term education among coaches and instructors and fundament increasing of financial support for *mass sport* from the state. Sport for all must by integral

part of future relation of sport to health, education and socialization. *Recommendations to sport organizations* for the systematic promotion of physical activities needs full support of local, regional and national public authorities:

1. To develop a membership strategy to include physically passive persons to sportive activities.
2. To specify the profile target of sport clubs with accordance to focus on elite and competitive sport or recreational leisure sport activities.
3. To improve coach and trainer standards of an inclusive social and pedagogical climate.
4. To accent natural outdoor activities as grass roots centres for mass involvement in physical activities.
5. To ensure and to enable high educational and pedagogical standards of voluntary and (semi)professional staff in sport clubs.

Although prospects for revitalization of physically active society are questionable, we are obliged to change or modify *a long standing resistance to exercise among our contemporaries*. Post industrial (or) post-modern society characterized in involvement in momentary short term experience, refusing traditional and long term values, is not good place or cultural context for a transformation to physical activity both at the societal and individual level. Such transformation will be filled with false stars and obstacles, facing innumerable barriers. These barriers (except general one's inborn individual laziness and indolence) range from political and legislative opposition to struggle for limited resources with other health concerns and media indifference to social explanations for our physical activity problems. Public policy makers have *not sufficient attention to public and health preventive medicine and healthy lifestyles*. We live in situation when most people agree that healthy lifestyles are a fundamental good for individuals and society. But sedentary life style imposes many various another subjects, costs and negative impacts also on people not themselves directly engaged in risky health behaviours: Strong smoking and sedentary life style of one member of the family could induce emotional stress for rest of the family or may cause individual financial hardship related to loss of job or overwhelming medical costs. From strictly economical point of view, sedentary lifestyles costs billions of health care and lost wages are contributing to economic drain on society as a whole. Another problem is related to the question how far the national physical activity agenda can go in regulating personal behaviours: People do not want to be told what to eat, what to drink, and how much to exercise. Anyway, our chance to achieve a physical active society could be improved if we can overcome the challenges of truly healthy lifestyles available to all members of society, or at least for most part of society.

## Urbanisation versus sport facilities

Phenomenon of physical activity and sport is closely related to *urbanisation of sports facilities*. In such context it is useful to describe and analyse the most important milestones in the history of city-planning (urbanisation) in the area of sport facilities. Comparing with the development of sport facilities of ancient times the current comparable status seems to be rather negative. Further, it is the paradox that low quality of urban-planning nowadays is reflected particularly in the suburb areas of Prague, whereas the public infrastructure (sport facilities included) does not reach a sufficient level. The rapid housing and industrial development especially in these parts of the city has unfortunately overtaken the local development framework, which is resulting in numerous urban-architectural and moreover sociological issues. Sport facilities planning, creating, developing and managing should be considered to be one of the strategic points in public (administration) on both the local and state level (Flemlr, 2007, pp. 93-105).

The very beginning of the modern sport facilities – formerly the playgrounds – is illustrated from 18<sup>th</sup> century as a consequence of sport movement in England as well a philanthropy movement in Germany. The simple separate playgrounds had been in the context of growing spectator popularity of sport constructed also with respect of spectators, mostly for tennis and athletic and football stadiums. In Scandinavia also indoor facilities were constructed since the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century. In Czech background the first real gymnasium was launched in 1862 – Malypetr gymnasium, used with Gymnastic Association of Prague. The last decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century brought out strong practical incentives for school and public gymnasiums and subsequent sportive facilities. At beginning of the last decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century about 500 tennis courts were in operation in Czech countries. Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century improved public mass interest in football and biking. Strong incentives for mass sportive activities were connected with existence of Sokol movement and modern Olympic games 1896.

The formation of an independent Czech Republic in 1918 entailed strong impulse for building new sportive facilities, notably those for ice hockey, football and gymnastics. Advisory committee for physical education was established in 1920, coordinating a conception of building new sportive facilities, for youth in particular. Despite this endeavour, only 11, 3 % of elementary school had their own gymnasium, 45, 3 % exercising ground or courtyard. Better situation were in secondary and high school: 75 % of them possessed gymnasium (Flemlr, 2007, p. 95).

Socialist planning accented unified physical education and sport. During late 1940 in the Czech Republic was centrally operated 1250 gymnasiums, only four indoor 25 meters swimming pools and one indoor ice hockey stadium. Growing accent on mass physical educational activities and sport brought around building new sportive complexes, some of them of very low technological quality. Czech association of physical education since its launching in 1957 had been a chief agent for purposefulness of sportive facilities.

Up to early 1990<sup>th</sup> the theoretical urbanistic value of sportive site for one single inhabitant was 17 m<sup>2</sup>, nowadays exercise site for one inhabitant is 5, 09 m<sup>2</sup> (1, 99 m<sup>2</sup> for an organized sport, 1, 79 m<sup>2</sup> for a school physical education, 1, 31 for unorganized sport), usable exercise site for one inhabitant is 7, 24 m<sup>2</sup> (2, 88 m<sup>2</sup> for organized sport, 2, 22 for school physical education, 2, 14 for unorganized sport). Municipal sportive institutions are basically non profitable – no wonder that investors prefer to invest in commercial sportive facilities. It is reflected in rather neglected situation of mass recreational and leisure time sport activities in the Czech Republic.

It is generally accented, and in Czech context too, that the municipal policy must support active lifestyle of very colourful broad spectre of population. Such objective is strongly accented mostly after 1989 during the process of European Union integration. Within the European priorities health issues and active lifestyle of citizens are included. Sport and physical activities represent significant features of those priorities. In such context, the relevant terminology of this area is elucidated, the terms such active lifestyle, public policy are defined. In summarizing the current situation in the Czech cities is accented the imperative of an active way of municipal sport policy. But in fact unfortunately rather closely reactive policy has been implemented in Czech context: Mostly existing problems are solved, but future complex interventional programmes are rather ignored.

### **Socioeconomic indicators of physical activity**

Underlying health determinants of a socioeconomic nature play a major role in causing vulnerability to health risks, including obesity. Indeed, a social gradient in obesity has been demonstrated with individuals in lower socioeconomic groups (lower incomes or lower levels of education, or both) having a higher risk of being obese and thus of suffering from obesity-related diseases. The reasons why these inequalities have arisen and persist include the constraints imposed by low income and educational achievement on food choices, opportunities for recreational exercise, and differential absorption of health promotion messages.

People prefer, in general, passive form of leisure, *watching sport rather than doing sport*. Overweight adults being deficient in good physical condition are putting themselves at risk for disease and disability.

Hlúbik et al, carried out an investigation on obesity in the Czech Republic in the year 2000. The study monitored 933 volunteers, both sexes and with an age ranges of 19-60 years. Anthropometric parameters such as weight, height, skin fold thickness and abdomen circumference were measured. BMI and fat tissue percentage were calculated on the basis of gathered data. The authors detected overweight in 67.5 % of monitored men, obesity in 17.0 % of them. 50.0 % of women were overweight while obesity was detected in 18.9 % of them. Waist circumference exceeding 102 cm was measured in 41.2% of men and waist circumference exceeding 88 cm in 41.7 % of monitored women. (Hlúbik 2000).

Physical activity is a complex behaviour. Any activity can be described in terms such as intensity, frequency and duration, and these dimensions must be considered. An assessment methodology should also consider inactivity, such as time spent sitting. *Physical activity can be related to work, transportation, home and leisure time.* The activities at either of these domains may have specific health consequences, and advanced monitoring should also consider these. To present most important results of existing research data it is possible to conclude (Frömel K., Bauman S. et al., 2006):

1. Growing age of population (men and women too) decreases number of week days and volume of time devoted to physical activity.
2. Men in general are more involved in physical activities comparing with women.
3. Growing age decreases existing differences in intensity of physical activity between men and women.
4. Medium level of physical activity and walking is distributed in age groups and gender groups relatively evenly.
5. Walking is most frequent form of physical activity in Czech population.
6. Regular monitoring of level and tendencies of physical activity of population is integral part of monitoring of health situation and life style of population.

The phenomenon of obesity in the context of physical activity is strongly connected with the area of teaching of physical education on given *level of school*. One of the most important role for acquiring proper habits and patterns regarding regular lifelong physical sportive activity play primary and secondary schools. Research sample of 153 11-15 years old Czech rural pupils exposed 20.0 % overweighted boys and 9,6 % overweighted girl and 2.9 % obese boys and 1.2 % obese girls. Contrariwise 14.3 % boys and 21.7 % girls were under commensurate weight (Rýgl 2006). Most respondents are interested in collective sportive activities (e. g. ski training, biking, boating). Most popular sportive game for 12 years old girls are ball game pig-in-the middle, rugby, floorball, volleyball and basketball. The same age boys prefer floorball, football, rugby, handball, basketball. Overall results refer to high level of popularity of physical education comprehended mostly as a explicitly attractive activity. Research in such context accents a necessity to improve attractive and emotively experienced aspects of physical education to improve high competence of kinetic physical activities for lifelong body and healthy care. At that time the importace of strict „marking“ of sportive performance is not recommended – more attention is concentrated for to support of individual ability to be regularly involved in physical/sportive activities.

### **Physical activity versus obesity with perspective of PREVOB Project**

*The situation* in the Czech Republic regarding *obesity* is reported as alarming: 21 % of men and 31 % of women are obese (obesity and overweight = 68 % of women and 72 % of men)., 66 % of men and 54 % of women in the age group 20-65 are overweight or obese, while „only“ obese 17 % men and 21 % of

women. In children the overweight rates 7-8 % and obesity 6-7 % (overweight and obesity in total 13-15 %). A specific phenomenon of Czech population is the obesity occurrence in all social groups with no strong differences in some social strata (Šeráková, 2007, p. 814-815, Fořt, 2004). Whatever results on obesity in the Czech Republic are given by the authors, all of them agree on fact that the obesity prevalence grows enormously, despite the fact that situation need not to be as critical as it is often presented in media and press (Sekot, Brázdová, 2008).

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Health researchers, physical activity managers, and decision-makers in order to assess the extent of development and implementation of selected policy areas on dietary intake, physical activity level and obesity throughout Europe, are searching a common methodology. Between the Autumn of 2008 and the Spring of 2009, thanks to support of WHO Pilot project was tested in five European countries chosen to represent five sub-regions of Europe, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, France, Latvia and Turkey. Moreover, sub-regional working groups made up of stakeholders and experts have been organised to review the results of the pilot tests and discuss the relevance and applicability of the Policy Analysis tool within their sub-region Project no. 044291 „*Prevention of Obesity in Europe - Consortium of the prevention of obesity through effective nutrition and physical activity actions - EURO-PREVOB* (Derflerová-Brázdová, at al. 2010)

First conclusion regarding general *results* of pilot test in terms of policy in reference to complex documents on obesity, nutrition and physical activity reflecting situation in the Czech Republic in general is that they ignore in some respects the phenomenon of inequality. *Physical activity policy documents* (national and state ones) abstract away from problems of obesity and only marginally refer to phenomenon of inequality to participate in regular physical/sportive activities. As a strategy government/ministry documents promote general education of health life style in schools and support construction and maintenance of sporting facilities in the Czech Republic in order to enable regular physical activity for *handicapped* too.

Representative documents retrieved on *national and school policies* reflect mutually depended and interconnected topical issues like nutrition policy, physical activity policy, compulsory nutrition education, free or subsidised school meals, fruit or vegetables, marketing restrictions with regards to foods high in fat, sugar, or salt, restrictions on what items can be sold from vending machina in schools, free available drinking water in schools, compulsory physical activity education, special physical education for disadvantaged groups or girls, promoting safe ‘walk to school’ routes.

*Applicability*, relevance and usefulness of the tool for the Central Europe is from the perspective of Policy checklist partly limited with the fact that there



are only narrow occasions free to obtain and thereafter to analyze relevant documents that are mostly very formal and absent criteria of personal or institutional responsibility for realization of declared intentions. Official documents on physical/sport activity are not complex ones: They are rather declarative with no effective means for monitoring and effective realization main objectives and not directly supporting mass form of generally accessible physical/sportive activities.

*Recommendations* for changes are derived from existing prevailing formal nature of processed documents and information. Policy analysis needs in some specific situations also individual interview with relevant persons responsible for supervision and inspection of fundamental intentions and time limited tasks of constituent parts of policy tools regards to nutrition and physical activity.

Perspective of applicability of community questionnaire of EURO-PREVOB Project reflects the fact that *most hypotheses on physical activity versus building environment in this context were not confirmed*. As a consequence we conclude:

1. To respect the fact that the number (and respectively the quality) of neighbourhoods is reflected on concentration of cycle lines *only indirectly* or vicariously: *Cycle paths* are intended and constructed primary with respect to suitable natural and terrain preconditions with no direct and verifiable relation to cultural and economical nature of given neighbourhoods: As a practical consequence the existence of cycle lanes not vary by social setting and it is not suppose “visibly and tangibly” higher quality of cycle lines passing through wealthier neighbourhoods.
2. With reference to the existence and quality of public *open spaces and playgrounds*, in context of rejected reasonably sounding hypothesis on higher quality in wealthier neighbourhoods, it is to remind the existing general high level of vandalism and culturally non-conclusive distinctions in the context of different social and economical strata in most “post-communist countries”.
3. Existence and quality of public transport stops reflects the quality of *public transport* in general and the relevant local social, cultural and economic situations too. But it is to say that the Czech Republic (as well as in sub-region of Central Europe) is very traditionally oriented for efficient public transport system outfitted with up-to date transport vehicles and compactly distributed network of public transport stops. But in general, quality of transport stops is first and foremost given by nature of passengers (mostly lower social strata) with no direct relations to nature of the relevant neighbourhoods.
4. Frequency of *traffic volume* is an outcome of few factors or agents: The phenomenon of traffic volume is multi dimensional one and as such is not linearly shaped with immediate social a cultural setting.
5. *Pavements* are public property determined from the perspective of existence and quality with plurality of economic, technological, social and cultural circumstances having not always exact qualitative and quantitative outcomes.
6. It is useful to respect the fact that in territory of “post-communist country” (countries) *the built environment* is not socially and culturally structured enough to reflect visible and tangible attributes of sociologically structured levels of neighbourhoods.

Starting point of Czech participation in EURO-PREVOB project was fundamental information on obesity in Czech population: 52 % of the Czech population are above accepted parameters. There appears to be a north-south gradient in the prevalence of obesity, with higher BMI reported in towns of the north (mostly inhabited with socially disadvantaged population) of the Czech Republic. Previous epidemiologic studies showed that at least 52 % of the Czech population would like to maintain their weight under normal limits and 42 % would like to reduce it, of those 50 % women. Twenty-three percent of population affected by obesity are completely satisfied with their own weight. (Czech Society for the Study of Obesity).

### **PREVOB - physical activity versus built environment**

Above mentioned EURO-PREVOB Project summarized some important data regarding built environment in context of chances and limitations for mass physical/sport activities. So we can conclude (Sekot, 2010):

1. Active participants and practical users of *cycle lines*. Most of them are recruited from social strata characterized with interest in healthy and active life style incorporating regular leisure physical / sport activities. It would be very useful to identify more detailed structure of cycle lines with respect to intensity of physical/sportive activities. It is supposed that at least two fundamental categories of cycle lines users exist:

a) regular users involved in periodical physical/sportive activities as a part of leisure in the context of everyday life.

b) occasional or provisionally “would sportsmen” involved in cycling mostly as a part of personal image practicing cycling predominantly as a social activity without deeper rooting in value orientation containing regular physical/sportive activities as an integral part of everyday life.

Specific feature of “cycle lines scene” in the Czech Republic calls attention to growing presence of roller skaters - sometimes and in some routes - exceed half of given participants. It reflects on the one hand high dynamics of popularity of roller-skating (in-line) and on the other hand poor level of official and legal regulation or conception of “game rules” of cycle lines. Unfortunately - with all respective negative impacts for participants - collisions, injuries, interpersonal conflicts.

Another typical aspect of monitored cycle paths is rather their “leisure” nature. Cycle paths are mostly located in suburban or outskirts areas connecting rather recreational points than location of everyday practical activities. As a consequence it is not in practice possible to use cycle paths for to travel to work, to deal with civic affairs or with shopping. Cycle paths are mostly used for one-sided way of leisure activities. Good physical and psychical shape, well-being or personal image are most frequent reasons for to be part of cycle lanes scene; practical way of everyday *active transport* is only marginal motive of mass cycling in Czech Republic.

2. *Public open spaces* as a part of built environment are - from the perspective of their quantity as well from the point of view of their quality - depended on the fundamental character of given settings: Social, cultural and economical features of selected areas play very important role and is also significant precondition of appearance of public parks and public playgrounds. Wealthier neighbourhoods prove more parks and playgrounds than socially, culturally and economically less booming, poor, disadvantaged or neglected boroughs (or even ghettos). Most striking dividing lines or contrasts are visible and tangible between ethnical ghetto (gypsy ones) on the one side and prestigious borough on the other side. In reference to public parks their occurrence as well their quality (maintenance, neatness, service, safety) is incomparably higher in healthy boroughs than the analogous situation in poor neighbourhoods. In given situation exists also another feature: In top prestigious „high society“ neighbourhoods, inhabited with people living in private family houses, villas or residences, the existing public parks are not so much visited and popular – local people prefer to stay in luxury of their houses and gardens or to visit “specific” leisure and public recreational facilities in different or distant places. Most popular are public parks in good sustentative „middle class“ neighbourhoods provided in most cases with playgrounds for children. On the contrary, public parks in socially neglected parts of the city are rather small, badly maintained, dirty and insecure. Common problem of most public parks in all neighbourhoods are dog’s excrements and vandalism.

3. *Playgrounds* - form the side of their existence and their quality - vary as a matter of the principle - in accordance with above mentioned situation in public parks: higher quality exists in wealthier neighbourhoods; neglected and miserably provided in poor neighbourhoods. Specific aspect of the later mentioned ones is high level of vandalism. In some public playgrounds interested people are allowed enter and use public playgrounds only in presence of commissioned person delegated by local municipality! Another negative aspect of monitored public playgrounds is absence of publicly available sportive and fitness equipments and facilities: presumably as a consequence of apprehension of *vandalism*. Public playgrounds are in fact in defence to growing incidence of commercial fitness centres. Such situation reflects deepening gap between different social strata (and quintiles) with negative impacts on quality of life and structure of leisure of socially lower categories. Striking existence of vandalism as well as diffusion of lower social strata into higher quality public parks and playgrounds result in generally poor quality public open spaces in searched localities - public parks and public playgrounds

4. Existence and quality of *public transport stops* reflects the quality of public transport in general and the relevant local social, cultural and economic situations too. It is not primarily the very existence of public transport stops, but their quality, reflecting the nature of given neighbourhoods. Quality, ergo the comfort, cosiness, neatness, non-desolated, and safeness of public transport stops are supposed to be higher in healthier, better sustentative and more secure neighbourhoods: Transport stops are secure shelters for passengers waiting for their bus, trolley bus or tram. Smoking is strongly forbidden on the

tram platforms and transport stops. Sometimes, and mostly in the centre of the city, the welcomed appeal for to care health and fight against obesity is placed in the transport stops: “Presently the best way to improve your shape is to go to the next transport stop by walking”.

The quality (but not directly the existence) of public transport stops in socially disadvantaged city districts is mostly decreased in quality and regards to comfort and security as a consequence of vandalism, deficient maintenance and destructive presence of local youth gangs and socially non-adaptable individuals. Local youth also use (disuse) public indoor or roofed transport stops as a place for to coming together or as a shelter in situation of bad weather. But in general, quality of transport stops is first and foremost given by nature of passengers (mostly lower social strata) with no direct relations to nature of the relevant neighbourhoods.

5. Frequency of *traffic volume* above all reflects dynamic factor of general possession of private and business cars in the Czech Republic and relative mass use of cars for everyday transport to work and for shopping. Suburban areas are strongly affected with truck transport and commute workers, housing estates are affected with mass lodging typical for block of council houses are mostly in vicinity of busy highways and supermarkets. On the contrary, housing estates of higher social class are mostly far - and prevented - from busy and noisy roads, factories, business points and hypermarkets. Sparse population in private family houses neighbourhoods benefit in many respect low and quiet traffic volume, whilst high concentration of population using the cars and traffic transport in socially low housing estates and in the centre of the city is affected with busy noisy and polluting transport and traffic volume. But it must be taken in account that the phenomenon of traffic volume is multi dimensional one and as such is not linearly shaped with immediate social cultural settings.

6. The quality, durability and the very existence of *marked road crossing* reflect in complexity the nature of relevant built environment. The quality of road crossing reflects the quality of neighbourhoods: in general maintenance of all public places and buildings, the roads and their marking - so much important for transport security - in particular. Road marking is in disadvantaged housing estates also mostly emasculated via bad road maintenance of dirty shattered and potholed roads.

7. *Pavements* are integral part of built environment and as such they reflect quality of relevant neighbourhoods. Pavements play important role not only as a reflection of general quality of given public place, but they are also important for personal security of local inhabitants and walkers too. Pavements reflect quality, aesthetics and security of built environment: Pavements are visible and tangible demonstration of level of built environment and relevant quality of life, including „appetence“ to walk. Perfectly privately and municipally maintained pavements in family houses and mansions areas are strongly dissimilar to neglected, shabby and broken pavements engaged and occupied with parking cars and soiled with litters, cigarette butts and aged dirt. But simultaneously pavements are public property determined from the perspective of existence and quality with plurality of economic, technological, social and

cultural circumstances having not always exact qualitative and quantitative outcomes.

8. It is evident that built environment plays very important and growing role in *quality and attractiveness of neighbourhoods*, including chances and limitations for regular and open to public accessible healthy sportive/physical activities. To have or not to have “good neighbourhood” is the fact gaining strength in the post communist Czech Republic too: Growing social and economic difference of Czech society increases aspect of social inclusion and exclusion and “good address or bad address” are important attributes for attractiveness/unattractiveness of built environment and plays mostly more attention personal decision making processes than sole quality and aesthetic attractiveness of given apartment or house. It works in level of prestige of „private address as well in “business address”. Despite of the last decade of „unrestrained capitalism“, the more attention and more emphasis is at the time being oriented not only on level of attractiveness of new house but just on quality of more general built environment - living conditions, quality of urbanism, stillness, transport accessibility, security, social structure, existence of schools, public facilities, shopping opportunities, level of air pollution, contact with green nature and existence of sportive facilities. But it is to remind the built environment in given territory is not socially and culturally structured enough to reflect visible and tangible attributes of sociologically structured levels of neighbourhoods.

The most critical policy area on physical/sportive activity is the sole fact of *sedentary nature* of contemporary society. It is evidently openly bitterly accented that the development of a sedentary life style as the result of a socialization process towards the physical inactivity developed in youth and continued into adulthood. Social analysis of inactivity and patterns of sedentary living conclude that in the Czech Republic summarize very high level of prestige of sport and sportive activities in Czech society. But at the same time it was confirmed generally known fact that the significant part of population its positive attitude to physical sportive activities does not realize in practical personal everyday life in the form of regular physical or sport activities. People in the Czech Republic, are in many respects permeated with „busy capitalist rhythm of “post-transformed society” oriented one-sidedly at performance, success, popularity, money, societal admiration. In such milieu endangered and problematic groups of population are busy, stressed, feel the lack of leisure and long car driving and high technology involved top businessman, managers and “workaholics”, as well as socially deprived groups as jobless people or ethnic minorities (mostly Gypsies) lacking proper value orientation accenting healthy and sustainable style of life absorbing healthy dietary habits, regular intentional physical exercising, sportive and outdoor activities (Slepičková, Flemr eds, 2007).

It is a priority to develop and pilot suitable flexible tools that will enable public health researchers and decision-makers to assess the potential impacts of proposed policies on dietary intake, physical activity level and obesity throughout Europe using a common methodology, and to assess the potential

effects on the distribution of those impacts within the population (that is, issues of equity and impact on specific vulnerable groups).

### **General conclusions: What Czech society expects from sport?**

*Mutual relations of sport and society* are mostly and visibly reflected in mediated television top sport events. In this context we face typical reflection of passive consumerism of sport as an important part of mass culture: people (society) expect from sport top performance, exciting show compensating monotonic course of everyday life. Society also found in top sport refreshing source of patriotism and medial celebrities, icons and heroes as a target of mass admiration in situation of their absence in the rest of society (mostly in politics). The existence of sedentary way of life detracts general level of physical/sportce activities in everyday life of mass of people; growing importace of active way of life and human health improve phenomenon of individual responsibility for human wellbeing. People responsible for his or her physical and psychical good shape expect from sport an indispensable source of wellbeing, respect of their surroundings, and – the last and not least – his or her self-respect.

The general frame of our discussion on mutual relations of sport and *society* postulates for the governmental institutions to *search* in the field of sport *the real opportunities for active sportive activities* for older population, to test relevant situation in self-contained programs for active recreational sport for all groups of population. The real chances of school teaching of physical education is to contribute to long-life interest in active physical activities. High level of political will and leadership are required to achieve a decrease in obesity prevalence. All relevant state sectors and levels should play a role in support of sport as a form of *active way of life*: the new horizons for civil society are here outlined. In mass society just the media have an important responsibility in propagation and dissemination of health life-styles.

To discuss a phenomenon of physical activity means in such perspective to accent changing nature of lifestyles and leisure time activities that have adopted new forms, contents and meanings. The world of sport and physical activities is also changing all the time in numerous new sport disciplines and activities which are be chosen by growing proportion of people. It could be expected that these changes would affect also the socialisation situations and environments of physical activity:

1. The Czech situation must be prepad for *specific situation of ethnical minorities* (mostly Romany populations) reflected on the level of their attitude to physical and sportive activity too. In traditional Romany culture the positive attitude to sport is derived from relevant value attitudes of majority society. Mostly young generation of this minority appreciate sport in positive way, thanks to peers and school education. Despite such positive tendency only 14 per cent of gypsy youth are involved in regular sportive activities - mostly in football, jogging, biking, swimming and dancing (Hastrmanová, Houdek, 2007). Also the 9-11 old pupils of practical elementary schools are not properly and proportionally involved in extracurricular movement activities. Just 19 per

cent of them participate in organized physical activities, compared with 55 per cent of children from ordinary elementary schools.

2. Presented structure of *attitudes to sport activities* reflects given social and cultural situation in Czech post-reformation setting: People are not consistent enough to overcome their laziness, are too much busy, too much involved in everyday economic problems, not properly appreciated and enjoying refreshing impact of regular physical activities compensating many-sided stress of societal life. But we also take into account the fact, that people are prone to declare an absence of leisure as substitutional reason. Relevant data reflects in Czech population *growing tendency of passive attitudes to sport*. Physical inactivity is justified with absence of leisure, absence of meaningful motivation and an existence of healthy problems. 40 % of “programmatically physically inactive” acknowledge substantial aversion to physical activity, 28.5 % declare healthy problem and 20 % an absence of leisure. Only marginally is declared absence of sport facilities and financial obstacles (Slepička, Slepičková 2002).

3. To present most important results and informations on tendencies in the field of physical activities means to conclude that *growing age of population* (men and women too) decreases number of week days and volume of time devoted to physical activity. Men in general are more involved in physical activities and active transport (cycling, walking) comparing with women.

4. Nowadays *physical education* is defined as the process aiming at preparation of children and young people for participation in physical culture (tourism, recreation, sport). It is also understood as the foundation of physical culture. Physical education in its humanistic version is understood as “an education of man for the care of the body”. Humanistic aspects relating to physical education accent intentional activity aiming at forming positive attitudes towards the body, familiarizing a person with the world of physical culture consisting in shaping attitudes towards the body and the values of physical culture, an education for the values of the healthy body, an education of the personality for the care of the body., preparing children and young people for taking responsibility for health, fitness and the beauty of the body after competing education.

5. *Social environments* consists of the nonphysical products of human interaction, which include the ideas and values shared by members of a particular group as well as they come together to participate. The synergistic roles of physical and social environments affect *participation in physical activity*. Resulting behavioural settings can promote physical activity when they provide the physical space (e.g. sports facilities, health clubs, bicycle paths, swimming pools) along with the social resources that we draw upon to interact with others community-policing programs.

6. Phenomenon of physical/sportive activity is many-sided phenomenon connected with the concept of a *healthy life style*. Life style behaviours in general are significantly determined by social status, by professional position, by amounts of money and the quantity of property. Those who have the means may choose to be physically active; those lacking the financial resources cannot freely to choose to be involved in regular sportive activities. Unhealthy

behaviours, including sedentary lifestyles, are influenced by people's position within social groups and broad social forces in the general society. But decision about whether to adopt a healthy lifestyle reflects personal attitudes and value preference and thereby includes an aspect of *personal choice*. But factual personal choice has many preconditions with social position and cultural quality of people and with the access to resources of full range of choices regarding sportive activities.

We can conclude: *Healthy lifestyles* are patterns of voluntary behaviours based on choices from options that are available to people according to their life situations. In developed post industrial countries the members of upper and middle class by way of active lifestyle mostly reflect their value self identity accenting balanced share of an intellectual and a physical activities. It is a tendency to evaluate good health as a *personal value* to be sought and cultivated for one's own benefit, such as experiencing increased vitality and enjoyment of life. Lower-class individuals, with reference to the nature of their work activities and income, are less optimistic to avoid poor health and thus are less apt to participate in systematic health promoting activity. Anyway, members people in lower socioeconomic position experience poorer health and higher disease rates when compared with more privileged social groups.

7. Phenomenon of physical activity and sport is closely related to *urbanisation of sports facilities*. In such context it is useful to describe and analyse the most important milestones in the history of city-planning (urbanisation) in the area of sport facilities. The rapid housing and industrial development is resulting in numerous urban-architectural and moreover sociological issues. Sport facilities planning, creating, developing and managing should be considered to be one of the strategic points in public (administration) on both the local and state level (Flemer 2007).

Even the preliminary results of presented research data and pilot studies imply that the individual municipal authorities in the pertinent town areas attach a diametrically *different importance to sport and sporting activities*. A large difference is already visible in the managing of sport and sporting activities within the organizational structures of the municipal authority. The most critical policy area on physical/sportive activity is the sole fact of *sedentary nature* of contemporary society: Very high level of prestige of sport and sportive activities in Czech society is incompatible with very low level of practical regular physical or sport activities.

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