

## Travelling within the Communist Period in the Awareness of Today's Youth<sup>1</sup>

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Bednářová, B. (2016). Travelling within the Socialist Period in the Awareness of Today's Youth. *Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal* 8/1, 108–118.

*I subjected to a content analysis six Polish and six Czech history textbooks designed especially for secondary school students. Based on the results of that analysis, I compiled a questionnaire that included 15 questions. Empirical research was attended by three Polish lyceums (Cieszyn, Pszczyna, Wista), three Czech grammar schools (Český Těšín, Havířov, Orlová) and the Polish language grammar school in Czech Republic (Český Těšín). The 499 students were engaged in that research, the ages of respondents ranged from 15 to 19 years. The main purpose of that empirical research was to determine the awareness among today's studying youth of the socialist period, specifically about the former daily life of population. The questions concerned issues such as store supplying, home furnishings, anti-regime opposition, etc. In this article I would like to approach the topic of travelling in the period of communism, first as presented in textbooks, and secondly what awareness have today's students of this issue.*

Key words: *period of socialism; travelling; students; education*

### Travelling on pages of Polish and Czech history textbooks<sup>2</sup>

On the pages of textbooks no special chapters or paragraphs deal with travelling, most of information is included in texts, in which their authors try

<sup>1</sup> The article has been written as a part of project of students grant competition on Ostrava University SGS19/FF/2015–2016.

<sup>2</sup> Bělina, P. (1995). *Dějiny země Koruny české II*. Praha: Litomyšl: Paseka; Brzozowski, A., Szczeptański, G. (2012). *Ku współczesności*. Warszawa: Stentor; Burda, B., Halczak, B., Józefiak, R. M., Szyczak, M. (2004). *Historia 3*. Gdynia: Operon; Harna, J., Fišer, R. (1998). *Dějiny českých zemí II*. Praha: Fortuna; Kuklík, J., Kuklík, J. (2002). *Dějepis 4*. Praha: SPN; Kvaček, R. (2002). *České dějiny II*. Praha: SPL – Práce; Kłaczek, J., Roszak, S. (2011). *Poznać przeszłość. Wiek XX*. Warszawa: Nowa era; Parkan, F., Mikeska, T., Parkanová, M. (2011). *Dějepis, učebnice pro základní školy a víceletá gymnázia*. Plzeň: Fraus; Sierpowski, S. (1998). *Historia najnowsza 1918–1997*. Kraków: Graf punkt; Śniegocki, R. (2004). *Historia burzliwy wiek XX*. Warszawa: Nowa era. WSIP;

to bring pupils to every lives of population. It is often only a reference related to another theme. For example, Válková mentioned spending holidays in connection with the Revolution Trade Union Movement (ROH) saying, it was a trade union, but for most people the ROH is identified with weekend houses, vouchers for holiday abroad and organizing various parties.<sup>3</sup> The SPN textbook (The State pedagogical publishing house) tried to characterize the changes occurred at the end of the fifties, and especially in the sixties, in the subchapter named Daily Life, in this context, the students learn about going on holiday to the eastern bloc countries, from which Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia were apparently the most popular, the phenomenon of weekend cottages was recorded in this textbook and also by authors of the Fraus series.<sup>4</sup> In Polish textbooks the development of sports and tourism, the fact that parents could choose from the camps for their children and from subsidized domestic holidays for themselves were emphasized.<sup>5</sup> Authors of these textbooks dealt with the travelling topic much more in the seventies. They wrote that the state borders were partly open at that time, textbooks pointed to the fact that it was more easier than ever before to get a passport and go abroad. But they specified that people could travel mainly to other socialist countries, although at that time trips to the West were not as impossible as in previous decades.<sup>6</sup> More specific information on travelling in the socialist period, however, was not included in textbooks. Pupils cannot learn what documents were needed for departure, what were the rules for obtaining the consent of departure, what restrictions were there, and so on. Because at present many young people cannot imagine life without almost unrestricted movements of persons, I included the topic of travelling in the empirical research to find out, what awareness has the youth of today of that issue under the previous regime.

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Szelągowska, G.: *Ludzie, społeczeństwa, cywilizacje*. Warszawa: WSIP; Válková, V. (2009). *Dějepis pro základní školy, nejnovější dějiny*. Praha: SPN.

<sup>3</sup> Válková, V. (2009). *Dějepis 9 pro základní školy, nejnovější dějiny*. Praha: SPN, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Parkan, F., Mikeska, T., Parkanová, M. (2011). *Dějepis, učebnice pro základní školy a víceletá gymnázia*. Plzeň: Fraus, p. 124; Válková, V. (2009). *Dějepis 9 pro základní školy, nejnovější dějiny*. Praha: SPN, p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> Śniegocki, R. (2004). *Historia burzliwy wiek XX*. Warszawa: Nowa era, p. 253; Sierpowski, S. (1998). *Historia najnowsza 1918–1997*. Kraków: Graf punkt, pp. 253–254; Brzozowski, A., Szczepański, G. (2012). *Ku współczesności*. Warszawa: Stentor, pp. 238–239.

<sup>6</sup> Śniegocki, R. (2004). *Historia burzliwy wiek XX*. Warszawa: Nowa era, pp. 284–286; Szelągowska, G. (2003). *Ludzie, społeczeństwa, cywilizacje*. Warszawa: WSIP; Brzozowski, A., Szczepański, G. (2012). *Ku współczesności*. Warszawa: Stentor, pp. 242, 250.

## Awareness of today's students of travelling during the socialist period

Today, people of the region under study (Těšín region) are citizens of countries that both joined the European Union on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004. That fact was also associated with the entry into the Schengen area in the year 2007. Border checks among all Member States were called off, passenger cars and freight car trucks have not been already waiting in long queues for several hours and days, and we can meet custom officers only in very exceptional cases. Nowadays we do not need any special documents for transit or departure to many other countries, even at airports our identity card or passport are sufficient for departure to some countries.

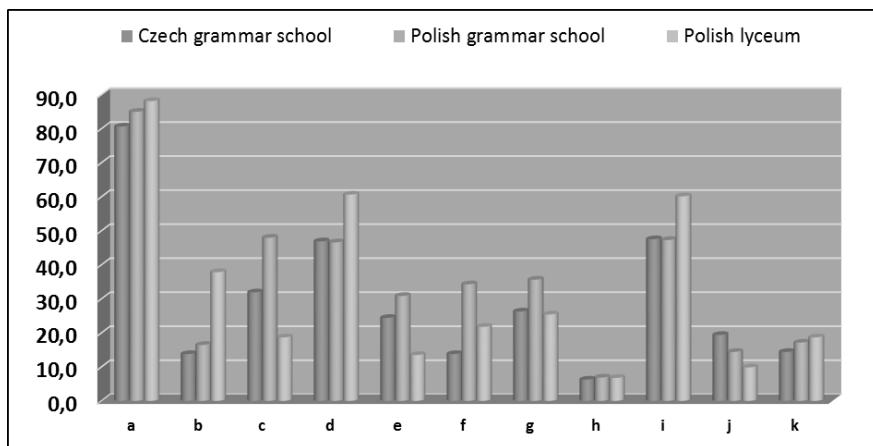
During the communist period, it was completely different. Travelling to western countries was very limited, and in those cases when it was possible, it was necessary to undergo a series of procedures, errands, completing countless forms before departure and after returning home, gaining all necessary documents and dealt with many other tasks still waiting for you. Also travelling to other communist countries was not as simple, as some people might suppose. People could leave for so-called friendly countries only under certain conditions, as well. On the border, there were barbed wires and border guards guarded single sections of the frontier zone.

The school youth of today cannot remember that situation, these children may only vaguely remember from their early childhood the existing customs and checks on the border after the fall of the communist regime. When entering the Schengen area, respondents were aged from eight to twelve years. But at that time checks of cars on the borders, particularly on the closest border, that is between Cieszyn and Český Těšín, became a mere formality. So if those pupils did not travel to more remote regions, and also in this case today's travelling to such remote regions is much easier than in that time, I may suppose, that they have none or only vicarious experience with complicated errands of vacations and travelling.

Because today's children grew up in entirely different conditions than their parents, grandparents and other family friends, I wondered if they could imagine what was travelling like in the days before their birth. Therefore, I compiled a set of three closed questions in which students chose among the options offered. In the first question I focused on problems with travelling to Western countries in the communist period. By means of the second question I tried to find out whether the today's pupils could know where their family members travelled most frequently or how they spent their vacations. The last task then should examine whether the youth realizes that even travelling within the Eastern Bloc had some limitations.

**What was needed to enable you to visit your own family living  
in Western Europe, e.g. in West Germany?**

- a) valid passport
- b) as for men: a confirmation of their military identity cards handing-over
- c) obtaining a written consent from ROH/Związków Zawodowych
- d) exit visa permit
- e) obtaining a written consent from the employer
- f) official invitation certified by a notary
- g) stamp customs and currency declaration
- h) bank certificate about allotment of foreign currency
- i) valid visa
- j) consent of the military administration
- k) copy of your criminal record



In the first question, which is related to travelling, I focused on visits to Western countries. Its aim was to find out whether students could know, e.g. through story-telling, what was needed to enable a person to travel legally to the West. I modified the question to a form of an exemplary situation that should help students to imagine better the task. So I asked what was needed to enable you to visit your relatives to the West, I mentioned West Germany as a concrete example. I offered eleven options to students. All items were correct and you really needed all those papers, documents and certificates to traveling to the West.

Nowadays, it is common that different family members leave abroad for work or a temporary job or for studies. During the socialist period,

however, visiting relatives living behind the “iron curtain” was considerably more difficult. Often, if you received all necessary permits and you were allowed to leaving for the given country, that permit was given to only one member of the family. Other family members, for example, your wife and children were not allowed to leave the homeland giving a guarantee for your return. Thus the departure of people of working age was particularly restricted. If you already got to a senior age, obtaining necessary documents and subsequent going abroad was a little easier.

Only three students chose all the answers offered and estimated that obtaining all eleven documents offered was needed for a departure. As for items circled by most students, according to the results, it seems that most of respondents were sure of their answers. As for other alternatives is considered, it seems that students merely guessed and they were not sure of their answers. Actually, the pupils chose e.g .pasport or visa, and a few other options. But those options were not repeated periodically, so the most likely explanation is that some of those young people estimated that even some more of the offered answers must be correct. Most pupils chose most often among three to six answers. Three of options that were marked by most students in all groups, seemed to be clear for all respondents. Most students probably know that for a departure to western countries it was necessary to hold a passport, and to obtain a valid visa and the exit visa permit.

On the basis of individual results of this question, it can be stated that the students are well informed that the passport was necessary for a departure. In all groups, more than 80 % of respondents knew it. The need of obtaining a valid visa and a valid exit permit are other facts about which it is possible to say that they are very well known.

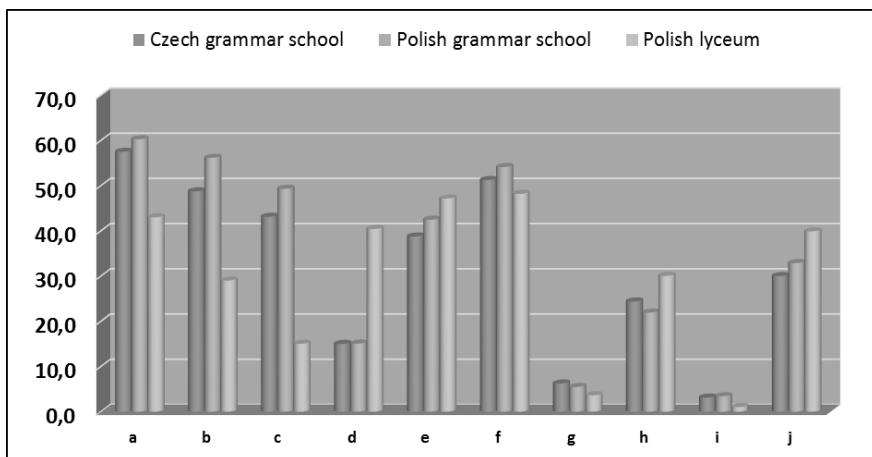
Students of the Polish language grammar school have the greatest awareness of the necessity of obtaining a written consent of the Czechoslovak Trade Union, because nearly half of them marked that answer, while only 32 % of students of the Czech grammar school answered like that. The need to obtain the consent of the Polish Trade Union was chosen by the fifth of the lyceum students. The Polish language grammar students had also the greatest awareness of the need to obtain a written consent of the employer. In the questionnaires from the Polish language grammar school there are two more entries in which they surpass students of other secondary schools with number of well responses marked. They know that an official invitation certified by a notary and a stamp customs and currency declaration were needed for a departure to the West. The third of the Polish language grammar school students compared to one fifth of the Czech grammar students and

a quarter of Polish lyceum students were aware of those facts. And vice versa, most of the lyceum students understood the requirement to handing-over military identity cards before a departure. The third of them circled that possibility in comparison with 15 % of grammar school students.

Approximately 15 % of pupils knew the fact that it was also necessary to obtain the consent of the military administration and the copy of criminal record. Students had the slightest awareness of the fact that it was also necessary to gain the certificate about allotment of foreign currency in the bank.

**Do you remember parents or grandparents tellings, where they spent their holidays in the socialism era?**

- a) in their own cottage or vacation home / house in the village
- b) they travelled around Czechoslovakia / Poland
- c) they travelled to other socialist countries
- d) they used advantages of package tours offering by the ROH / wczasny pracownicze
- e) camped
- f) at pioneer / harcnerski camps
- g) they travelled to western countries
- h) they hiked (tramped)
- i) they travelled with travel agencies
- j) they stayed at home, did not travel



The aim of that question was to determine whether the youth suspects, where or how their parents, grandparents or other relatives spent their holiday or summer vacation. In many families in the so-called family stories recall various moments of the holidays, trips and tours. We assumed that it was the same in homes of our respondents.

Pupils had ten options from which they chose. The answers were differed on the language variants in the first item. For the Czech questionnaires, we chose a typical Czech holiday phenomenon of the second houses, very much popular in communist times. In Poland, there was the same phenomenon of spending holidays in the villages, while staying at cottages was not usual.

Many students marked more than one answer. The fact that some of students circled also the item that their family members did not travel and stayed at home together with other options was an interesting phenomenon. This fact can be explained that students had in mind for example that grandparents went to the cottage one year, then they did not travel for two following years anywhere and stayed at home and went to Bulgaria in the fourth year. It follows that those students circled also the item "did not travel", because they dealt with that question concretely not generally.

59% of students from the Czech Republic, in accordance with our assumption, responded that most family members rest in weekend houses or cottages. In the Polish version that possibility was replaced with a departure to a village, which was chosen by 43 % of respondents. Also travelling around their own country was apparently very popular, too. In the opinion of the students, the beauties of their homeland admired about a half of the family members of the grammar school students and the third of lyceum students.

The item, in which the responses of all groups approached most of all, became a possibility of spending free time at pioneer camps, or *harcerski* camps in the Polish version. A half of all students agreed that their close relatives spent their holidays very often there. According to the respondents a very popular way of spending holiday was also camping that was even more popular in Poland than in Czechoslovakia, by the results. More than two-thirds of the families of pupils had extensive experience in this. Also hiking (tramping) was very popular, a fourth of families were engaged in it in total.

The results of the questionnaires of both grammar school groups are almost identical in all entries, differing only by a few percent. In contrast, the response of the Polish lyceum students diverge considerably at some points. I recorded the biggest differences in two items between pupils

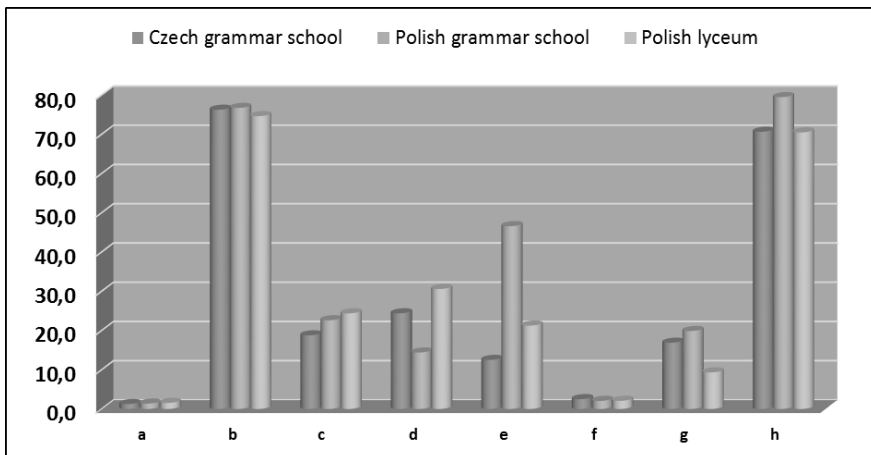
from the Czech Republic and Poland. The family members of the grammar school students liked going on holiday to other communist countries, some students written that the most popular holiday destinations were Bulgaria or Yugoslavia. That option was indicated by approximately 45% of the grammar school students. In contrast, only 15 % of family members of the Polish lyceum students travel to other countries of the Eastern Bloc on vacation. A similar difference was recorded with the possibility of departures organized by individual workplaces. Both groups of the grammar school pupils responded that 15 % of their close relatives used the opportunity of going to trips offering by the Czechoslovak Trade Union, which many students may also know from movies. In Poland the possibility to spend their free time on the so-called. "wczasy pracownicze" was used by 40 % of the family members of the lyceum students.

The least number of families went on holidays with a travel agency, because that answer was chosen by only 3% of the grammar school students and by only 1 % of students from Poland. Only a very small number of people succeeded in going on holiday to Western countries. According to the answers of respondents only 6 % relatives of the grammar school students and 4% of relatives of lyceum students could travel to western countries. A third of pupils indicated that their family members did not travelled and spent their vacation at home. As I mentioned above, most of the respondents chose that option in conjunction with another option.

**Were there any restrictions when travelling on holiday to other socialist countries?**

- a) no, there were no restrictions
- b) it was necessary to have a valid passport
- c) for travelling to some areas it was necessary to have a special gray passport
- d) for travelling to socialist countries the valid visas were necessary
- e) if you wanted to go privately e.g. to Poland / Czechoslovakia, you had to receive written invitations
- f) only identity cards were required for ensuring holiday services by travel agencies
- g) bank certificate about allotment of foreign currency was needed
- h) it was necessary to pass through customs passenger and luggage checks





In that question I focused on possibilities of travelling to other countries belonging to the Eastern Bloc. I wondered how students imagine cooperation between those countries in the field of tourism. Whether they believe that a sort of duty-free area without any borders was created among them or whether they consider that the rules for the departure for communist countries were identical to those for western countries. I put again a closed question, to which I created a menu of eight possible answers from which students could select any number.

Students correctly evaluated that two of the options offered there were improbable, and therefore they were chosen by a tiny minority of respondents. Pupils in all groups came to a conclusion that the least real statement was, that the movement of people among the socialist countries was not restricted and regulated. They found somewhat more likely the alternative, that a trip organized by a travel agency was possible only upon presentation of the identity card

Conversely, most students were aware of the fact that it was possible to travel to other socialist countries only with a valid passport. Three quarters of those questioned in all groups, answered correctly. About 20% of students were also familiar with the fact that travelling to certain countries was possible only with a special gray passport. Thus people travelled mainly to Yugoslavia. Approximately three quarters of the students are of the opinion that at customs people went through a personal and luggage control. Thus we may conclude that most of the pupils were able to recognize two essential features that characterized the passage from one state to another one (not only among communist countries).

A quarter of Czech grammar school students, 14% of the Polish language grammar school students and 31% of lyceum students believes that visas were required even for travelling to other socialist countries. However, citizens of communist countries needed visas to almost all countries, except those belonging to the Eastern Bloc. Thus it can be stated that many of the students were wrong as for that point is considered. Their ancestors did not need visas for travelling to other communist countries. Of course, the citizens of communist countries who wanted to travel to the Western countries and the citizens of Western countries, who in turn wanted to visit the countries of the Eastern Bloc had to travel with valid visa. Also the bank certificate about allotment of foreign currency was required only for travelling to the West, for a trip to allied countries it was possible to exchange foreign currency in the bank. The State Bank of Czechoslovakia possessed a certain amount of cash currencies of other socialist countries, e.g. Hungarian forint and Polish zloty, as well as the Polish bank did. Although the exchange of foreign currency was not always easily, it was possible to obtain the necessary amount of foreign currency when travelling to other socialist countries, which was mostly declared at the customs declaration, the bank certificate about allotment of foreign currency was not therefore required. However, a fifth of the Polish language grammar school students, 17% of the Czech grammar school students and 9% of lyceum students were sure, that their families needed the bank certificate about allotment of foreign currency for their travelling to other communist country.

The last offered answer of the questionnaire concerned the relationship between both countries and the possibility of Czechoslovak citizens to visit Poland privately in the eighties, and the possibility of Poles to visit privately the Czechoslovakia. Due to fears of shopping tourism of Poles, and of spreading liberal ideas and influence of the Polish independent trade union "Solidarity" to the Czechoslovak citizens, the Czechoslovak government introduced some restrictive measures. These Regulations restricted travelling between those two countries in December 1981. Since then Czechoslovak citizens could travel to Poland only on the basis of a verified written invitation of their close relatives. That regulation also concerned the Polish citizens who wanted to come to Czechoslovakia, they had to submit a written invitation, too. Since the year 1985, that regulation was abated, but not canceled.<sup>7</sup> Students'

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<sup>7</sup> Rychlík, J. (2012). *Devizové přísliby a cestování do zahraničí v období normalizace*. Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, pp. 44–45.

responses to that question varied in different groups of schools. Almost 47% of Polish language grammar school students were aware of that limitation. I suppose that that knowledge comes from the fact that these students come from families of the Polish minority in the Czech Republic and many of them have close relatives in Poland. Therefore, it is likely that those families visited each other in the period of communism, and that the measure affected them deeply and today's students know about the limitations thanks to colourful narratives. But even one fifth of Polish pupils and 13% of Czech pupils also knew about the necessity to have a written invitation for a private visit.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, I tried to show awareness of the today's youth of traveling within the socialist period. As it is evident from the results of empirical research, the family members talk most frequently about spending their holiday in own country, about travelling to western countries and about any trips to other countries of the Eastern Bloc they are talking less. Students have a basic knowledge of what had to be arranged for such a journey, but they were not provided with more detailed information, whether by their families or through textbooks that deal with travelling only marginally.