

SPORTS AND IDENTITY

Case study: Czech Republic and Ice Hockey

Pro Gradu – Master Thesis

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Februari 2010

Abstract

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1. INTRODUCTION

“It is actually interesting to talk about hockey, because one always carries these thoughts inside, the opinion, but one is never forced to express it exactly. However, subconsciously one senses it that way, thanks to the surrounding and what is going on here and the activities, but hockey has its pertinence in our city.” Mgr. Jiri Nepil

This study deals with the influence sports have on identities. When reading the title ‘Sports and Identity’ one might wonder how closely these two themes are interrelated with each other and how they relate to Intercultural Communication (ICC).

The concept of identity and how it contributes to intercultural communication situations is frequently discussed in the field of ICC (i.e Chen and Starosta, 1998; Petkova and Lehtonen, 2005). Whenever individuals communicate with each other, they bring their “self-image” or “identity” to that encounter and it influences that encounter (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Culture plays a primary role in shaping the view about ourselves and individuals acquire their identities through interaction with people from their culture (ibid.: 26).

Chen and Starosta define culture as, “a negotiated set of shared symbolic systems that guide individuals’ behaviours and incline them to function as a group”(1998: 26). One of the functions of culture is to provide structure, stability and security that are used by the group and members to maintain themselves as a healthy system. Chen and Starosta continue that culture as a holistic system can be broken down to several subsystems, such as a kinship system, an educational system, a political system, a religious system, an association system and so on, all being closely interrelated with each other (ibid.: 26). Culture is pervasive, it penetrates into every aspect of our life and influences the way we think, the way we talk, and the way we behave; it combines visible and invisible things around us (ibid.: 27), which people often sense only on a subconscious level. The quote in the beginning of this chapter is a perfect example of this case.

Sport can significantly shape not only the individual identity, but also the collective identity. Cultural studies implicitly include sport in the way culture is defined, nevertheless sport has traditionally been accorded low academic status in higher education and thus been neglected in the cultural studies, including ICC (Hargreaves, 1982: 1, 15; MacClancy, 1996: 1, 2). Sport is however culture. Hargreaves mentions

rightly that “the amount of time, energy and money devoted to sport in one form or another by all sections of society is undoubtedly greater than for any other aspect of culture” (Hargreaves, 1982: 15-16). Many lives might lack a degree of quality if sport was absent. As mentioned, sport is culture and for many people it is culture that helps giving meaning to life (Maguire et al, 2002: 139). Maguire et al. continue that sport and culture cannot be separated and that sport is structured by culture (2002:128).

In comparison with arts, sport might seem unimportant or mundane (Maguire et al 2002: xvii), maybe also because sport is one of the central components of popular culture (Hargreaves, 1982: 30). However, these are value judgements. In political, economic, cultural and social terms, sport worlds are highly significant and therefore it is important to discern the significance of these terms. (Maguire et al, 2002: xvii.) When people are passionately engaged in sport, they are committed and want to win and as a direct participant their core personal and social identities are at stake. However, one can also be involved as a spectator because one identifies with one of the individual performers or contending teams. In this case, identification with personal heroes as well as with teams representing collectives such as cities or nations can be involved. Questions of identity and identification are of crucial importance both for the routine functioning of sports and for some of the problems and “pathologies” recurrently generated in connection with them, like for example hooliganism. (Dunning, 2003: 9.)

Since the times of the ancient Greeks and Romans, throughout the Middle Ages and the Industrial Revolution, on to the globalized and capitalist world of today, sport has provided exercise, artistry, competition and entertainment. Some of sport’s other functions, such as, displaying national and ideological dominance or superiority, occupying, diverting and asserting a form of control on the masses, and bringing together an otherwise diverse group of people to display ‘sameness’ and thus helping to shape their collective identity, have been constant themes throughout the history of sport. (Maguire et al, 2002: 123.)

It is clear that sport helps to shape the identity of many people all over the world and thus it is justified to look within the field of ICC at the mechanisms and structures of sport worlds that shape those identities.

1.1 Motivation for the study

According to Maguire and Tuck, “it could be argued that sport forms one of the most significant arenas by which nations become more real. Particular sports often come to symbolise the nation”(2005:115). There are of course more acknowledged associations like between Brazil and football, Cuba and boxing or Canada and ice hockey. However, ice hockey and the Czech Republic can also be seen as having an exclusive connection, where the sport symbolises the nation to a certain extent; an extent that it is considered national symbol because its’ significant part in the culture.

The Czech Republic celebrated in 2008 the 100th anniversary of founding the Czech Ice Hockey Association (CSLH) and at the same time the Czech Republic is one of the founding members of the IIHF (International Ice Hockey Federation) which celebrated the same anniversary in the same year. However, technically seen it was Bohemia who was co-founder of the IIHF. The fact that it was Bohemia, the predecessor of Czechoslovakia, is interesting, since it was, at that point, part of the Habsburg Monarchy and not an independent nation. Thus, one can see that ice hockey was organized already before the country’s independence. As Caldwell (2003: 16) suggests, it is necessary to make more detailed historical and sociological analyses of the role of sport in a variety of countries with more breadth, and that is exactly what this thesis seeks to do.

One must keep in mind that the symbols involved in sport- national flags, ethnic and regional emblems, songs and anthems chanted, as well as the finance invested in it- are all evidence of the concretisation of identity within the sporting arena (Maguire et al, 2002: 144). In global sports contests people invest a great deal of themselves, of their communal, regional and national identities. Sport has a tremendous symbolic value. Live or at home, it provides a range of embodied emotions. (Maguire, 1999: 2.)

Remarkably, those studying global cultural processes, to which we can include the field of ICC, have paid very little attention to sport (Maguire et al, 2002: 7; Hargreaves, 1982: 32). Hence, this thesis contributes to the field of ICC and creates some awareness of the phenomenon of sport as a source for identification.

In this work, I do not only try to examine the level of nation, but I also want to examine what role it plays on regional level. When I moved to Kladno- a town known for its former heavy mining and steel industry but also for its hockey- in the Czech Republic in summer 2000, I was fascinated how much people cared about this sport. This passion for ice hockey, even when people did not play it actively, was something I came across during the entire four years that I lived in the Czech Republic. It usually peaked during the annual World Championships and especially the Winter Olympics, which take place every four years. This is also one of the personal reasons that motivated me to write about this topic. Furthermore, after leaving the Czech Republic to continue studying, I started to play ice hockey myself and I am passionate about this sport ever since.

1.2 Aim of the study

There are people who are indifferent to sports and others, who, for various reasons hate it. Yet, even the latter- the haters of sport- would find it difficult to deny its great, and growing, importance in the modern world (Dunning, 2003: 5). However, not all sports have the same importance or same function for a certain culture.

Lüschen claims that it is important to analyse for example the different meaning of baseball in the United States and Libya, which in one culture has ritualistic functions, while it has also economic functions in the other (2003: 122). Therefore I want to focus in my thesis on one case, namely the Czech Republic and ice hockey, since ice hockey has a cultural function in the Czech Republic and thus a deeper meaning than ‘just’ sport. There are many myths, wisdoms and stereotypes about ice hockey and Czechs from both, within and outside the Czech Republic. Some ‘common knowledge’ seems to be recognized by the majority, however without being thoroughly and scientifically examined. The aim of this study is to observe the relationship between this Czech national symbol and its country in a more profound way. As Norbert Elias suggests, the social scientist should be a “destroyer” or “hunter of myths” (*Mythenjäger*) (Elias 1978: 52 cited by Dunning, 2003: 2).

It is important to question how sporting practices get their meaning and characteristics through the power of structures and relationships to which they are connected. For

example, each political system bears its specific rules, which may have an impact on how sport is organized (Howell et al, 2002: 155). Since sport is a social product, it is important to take the social structures into account, which make it possible to express such creativity, because sport is not limited to the practical activity on the individual level, but the production, distribution and reception of sporting performances are very much social processes (Maguire et al, 2002: xiii-xv). The differences of the latter in former West- and East Germany are a practical illustration. East Germany gained its international recognition mainly through its achievements in sport. It was first accepted by the IOC (International Olympic Committee) and then by the United Nations. The state authorities knew that sport was the most accessible way of gaining acceptance of the regime and enhancing the image at home and abroad while other channels were closed and thus they invested huge efforts in producing athletes (Riordan, 1996: 96, 105-106).

In this thesis I will investigate how and why exactly Czech people tend to identify with ice hockey so much and what other sources they have for 'feeling Czech'. Furthermore, I will reveal the social structures and processes that helped to reach ice hockey's status in the Czech Republic. These social structures and processes have changed throughout history and political system. Therefore I want to check how these changes in our society might have influenced these structures and what the implications for the future might be.

1.3 Research questions

In the empirical part of my thesis I will combine two methods of data collection, i.e. interviews with Czech hockey experts and email based interviews with Czech students. With the data I expect to be able to answer the following two main research questions with sub-questions:

1. What is the relationship between ice hockey and the Czech national and regional identity, and how is it manifested?

1. a. What is the self-image and the perceived self-image of Czechs and do sports play any role in it?

1. b. How do Czechs identify with sports and particularly with ice hockey?
1. c. Are the mentalities' assets in some way reflected in the way ice hockey is performed? Is there a Czech style of playing hockey and if yes, how can it be described?
1. d. How is ice hockey supported financially?

2. How has the political and socio-economical transformation in the Czech Republic modified the relationship between ice hockey and the Czech national and regional identity?

2. a. How does change in the political system influence the sport policy in general and specifically for ice hockey?
2. b. How has the political change influenced the vital structures (i.e. financial support) for ice hockey?

The sub-questions will help me answer the main research questions. Furthermore, also the theory part should contribute to the understanding and answering of my research questions.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided in three main parts. Chapter two and three are theoretical, four and five are empirical, and the last two chapters are the discussion and conclusion.

In chapter two, I will deal with the concepts of identity and related topics such as national symbols and stereotypes. Furthermore, I will link it to the Czech Republic by explaining some historical, political and social background. It is important to examine the interconnected historical, political, economic, cultural and social patterns that shape modern sport; otherwise it is not possible to understand the sports world and to draw conclusions. (Maguire et al, 2002: 6; Howell et al, 2002: 154-155).

Chapter three positions sports and especially ice hockey in a global and Czech context. Additionally, the interconnectedness of economy, media and growing rationalisation will be discussed. The empirical part of my study will try to answer the research questions.

In addition to the written part, a CD with appendices is included in this thesis, which has three folders:

1. CVVM
2. Expert interviews
3. Student interviews

So it is easy to find the studies of The Public Opinion Research Centre, the audio and transcripts of the expert interviews and finally the email based Student interviews.

2. CONCEPTS OF IDENTITY

In this chapter I seek to answer basic ICC concepts around identity and related topics, such as national symbols and stereotypes. In addition to increase the readers' understanding of the Czech Republic, I will focus briefly on some key moments in the Czech history; Moments that may have influenced or still influence the Czech mentality and identity. Also, ice hockey and the Czech history are intervened in many occasions, which is already a sign of its importance as a part of culture.

The issue of identity is largely discussed in the social sciences. The term identity is often used in a compound form, and concepts such as national identity, ethnic identity, cultural identity, social identity, collective identity and numerous others are established in the Human Sciences. Identity is the cover term that deals with the 'self' of human beings. However, the difficulty with the concept of identity- building is relatively new and is of post-modern nature. With the many choices we have nowadays for our self-formation and the lack of determination in a globalized world, individuals start thinking and searching for their identity to a greater extent than they did ever before in history. Bauman states: "One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure where one belongs" (1996: 19). So identity is a matter not only of constructing, but also of belonging. Until the post- modern time the choices of where one belonged and who one was, were more predefined and thus the issue of identity remained below the surface.

In order to define oneself, one also needs to picture the 'Other'. Identities are constructed through the difference, through the relation to the 'Other', to the relation what it is and what it is not (Hall 1996: 4; Grossberg 1996: 93).

Brewer and Gardner say that "individuals seek to define themselves in terms of their immersion in relationships with others and with larger collectives and derive much of their self-evaluation from such social identities" (Brewer & Gardner 1996: 83).

Petkova suggests that "individual sense of *self* is formed not only on the basis who the individuals are and think they are, but also on the grounds of their belonging to different social groups or collectives." (Petkova 2005: 11-12). She divides identities into two major classes, the individual social/cultural identity and the collective social/cultural

identity both being closely interrelated but in no way similar. She justifies this division stating that the concepts of social and cultural identity overlap to a great extent. People can, for example, construct their identity based on social facts, such as age, gender, religion, work, social class, common interests, or based on more cultural traits such as tradition, customs, values, symbols or more material elements such as what people eat, how they build their houses and how they use their tools. (Petkova 2005: 14, 20.) However, the main difference between the two categories is that collective identity is single and there are as many collective identities as there are communities, but the individual identity is multiple, since every person has different and multiple options to choose from (Petkova 2005: 14, 20, 56.) The latter is what Bennett and Bennett call multi-layered identity. They agree that an individual can have several identities or matters he or she identifies with. Those identities and matters usually have a different meaning to the person, with some being more important than others. Hence, individuals choose what is important to their individual identity and what is not (Bennett and Bennett, 2001: 12). A man can for example build his identity through the fact that he is a parent, a football fan and an Egyptian. He might be a Muslim at the same time, which can be less important for this same person. To another person, let's say his neighbour, it might be quite different, thus identifying himself mainly through religion as being a Muslim and a person who hates football. So, each person has his priority list of identities. Thus individual identities are multiple, and collective identities are single; everyone in the group is equal to each other in the sense of: "We are all Europeans!" or "We are all students." Of course, being European is a collective identity, which could be narrowed down to, for instance, being a German, since Germany is part of Europe, however, Germany and Germans are a different collective identity than Europe and Europeans. Moreover, one and the same person might build his individual identity around being European and being German.

One must not forget that identities are an emotional construct, since they rarely appear in an objective or impartial way. Most individuals feel attachment, love or satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the object of identification (Tajfel 1978).

However, identities are changing constantly as Salo-Lee suggests:

“Identities are evasive. They change constantly across different contexts and relationships, and are challenged, negotiated, co-created and redefined again and again in various communicative situations.”(Salo-Lee 2003: 250)

Identities change just like cultures tend to change constantly over time and space, some being more resistant to change than others (Chen and Starosta, 1998: 27). It is obvious that if one’s culture changes, also the identity is likely to undergo some changes. Especially nowadays in our globalized world, where people, communities and cultures mix, and thus create a new intercultural context, identities need to be re-negotiated. In particular the concept of national identity, which was long time a basic and primary source of identification, is undergoing some sort of crisis, since it has become less important (Petkova & Lehtonen 2005: 7).

2.1 Cultural Identity

Whereas national identity is relatively specific, cultural identity is a broad concept; they can however overlap to great extents. Petkova claims that cultural identity can be divided into three main categories. These would be elements of material culture, spiritual or mental culture, and spacio-temporal elements. With elements of material culture she means that cultural identity can be based on the food eaten, clothes worn, houses built or tools used.

“Sometimes they are so closely connected to the image of a given cultural community that they become the basis of cultural stereotypes- the Italians are macaronis, the French are frogs and the Muslims are cloth-heads. These stereotypes are based on elements thought to be typical of a given material culture but at the same time they are perceived by the other cultural communities as more or less strange.” (Petkova 2005: 20-21)

Elements of the spiritual or mental culture are points such as symbols, traditions, customs, values, behaviour and attitude. Finally spacio-temporal elements are not time and space themselves, but the way they are perceived, understood and interpreted. Of course, all three categories can be object of stereotyping. (Petkova 2005: 20-21.) All individuals have a certain cultural identity, they can be more aware of it or not. Also, some people might construct their identity in a more active way than others. Since the cultural identity is broad it can count for all different collectives, depending how specific one gets. More general, somebody from outside Europe might say that all

Europeans have a similar cultural identity, whereas within Europe, we distinguish more, for example between countries, and within a country we differentiate between regions but also between subcultures. With other words, there are as many cultural identities as there are collectives.

2.2 National Identity

National identity is identity on the level of the nation. As mentioned before it tends to overlap to a great extent with the cultural identity, but also with the ethnical identity. The concept of national identity is nevertheless more specific. The idea is that everyone in the same nation shares and identifies with more or less the same ideals, uses the same language, belongs to the same ethnical group and so on. It is an idea of equality as expressed during the French Revolution. Hall (2002) states that a nation is not only a political unit, but also a symbolic community that produces meanings, a cultural system of representations that can arise a feeling of fidelity (Hall cited by Salo-Lee 2003: 251). In many cases, especially in Europe, the State is connected to nation and is the legitimate representation of the nation. The state has in the consciousness of most members the function of a survival unit, a protection unit on which depends their physical and social security in the conflicts of human groups and in cases of physical catastrophe.(Elias 1987, cited by Maguire 1999).

National culture and identity are also represented by an emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness. Sport sociologist Joseph Maguire points out that sport is well placed to this process of identity-formation and invention of traditions (Maguire, 1999: 178), which as we will see has had at least some implications for the Czech Republic, with its sport and specifically ice hockey tradition. As Maguire et al. write:

“The intensification of national sentiment, the emergence of ethnic nation-states and the inventions of traditions; Sport played a crucial role in this connection. The last three decades of the 19th century marked a decisive transformation in the spread of the old, the invention of the new and the institutionalisation of most sports on a national and even international stage. In this way, sport became a medium for and a barometer of national identification and community struggle.” (2002: 10)

The rise of the nations and nation building is closely connected to colonial expansion and hegemony in some countries, whereas in others it is related to the democratisation of the institutions, while again in some others it was the fight for liberation and independence. The formation and affirmation of national identity takes often place against a given *enemy*, *aggressor* or *oppressor*. Economic, political and cultural pressures of this *enemy* stimulate and fuel the formation and confirmation of national identity. (Petkova 2005: 24, 25.) The latter was definitely the case for the Czech people. The raise of nationalism started at the end of the 18th century when some intellectuals like Josef Dobrovsky and later Josef Jungmann tried to revive the Czech language that nearly vanished from public life. The next century Czechs fought for their own cultural existence in what was known as the ‘Czech National Revival’. In the case of the Czech National Revival the *oppressors* were the German speaking Habsburg oppressors that gained power in the Czech lands 1526 after Ferdinand I was elected as Bohemian King. (Hora-Horejš 1997.) Nevertheless, the relationship with the German neighbours had been already problematic and fragile ever since the Slavic tribes came from the east and started to form their civilization in the Czech lands at around 900 A.D. (Seibt 1996). To understand the Czech identity and mentality, it is important to dive back in history and remember the most important facts that resulted in the Czech National Revival, and later on in the creation of the own nation until the split of Czechoslovakia into two independent republics. This will, however, be done later in this chapter.

Now, we first take a look at national symbols and stereotypes, which are a vital source for the identification on the nation level, as we will see.

2.2.1 National Symbols

To understand what a national symbol is, it is important to first explain how symbols actually work. The word symbol comes from the Greek noun *sýmbolon* (σύμβολον), which means *a sign, a mark, or an indication*. The verb *sýmbaloo* (συμβάλλειν) means *to throw together, to gather or to assemble* (Wiggers et al, 1974). The word *symbol* can be and is in English often used as a synonym for the word *sign*. A symbol expresses

something in an abstract way. However, the connection between the symbol and what it expresses is arbitrary and has to be agreed on by the people who are using it. Communication is based on symbols. Letters and words, no matter if written or spoken, are expressed by signs and symbols. Symbols only have a sense in communication, if at least two people agree on the meaning of what these symbols express. The latter point is crucial. Language is a system of signs and symbols, which has been agreed upon by the community. (Saussure, 1990.) Saussure says, “the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary.” (1990: 58) There is no natural link between a word (or a symbol) and the natural object. Symbols shape our everyday life, be it in language or in another form, and make it possible for us to communicate with each other (Saussure 1990). A symbol expresses something, it stands for something and it is an abstract concept, which is based on a written and/or unwritten consensus.

National symbols are, as the word indicates, symbols that represent a nation. National symbols can be important carriers of the national identification. The national symbols stand for something, they express something, and often there is a history behind why a certain object is a national symbol whereas the other one is not. Naturally, there are many different national symbols and they can be more official or less official. Official symbols would be for example the national flag, the national anthem, the coat of arms and the national colours to mention a few. These official national symbols are articulated by the State or state officials; often they have their place in the constitution. Less official national symbols can be the national dishes, historical figures, monuments, national heroes, national music, myths basically anything that represents the nation and with which people on the level of nation identify themselves with. Obviously, every nation has different national symbols, depending on what is important to a nation and what not and it is usually historically determined. It seems that individuals need these familiar symbols in order to feel reassured and to give shape to their existence. (Cameron 1999.) Cameron says:

“From an individual point of view national identity seems to be a conscious and often unconscious identification with a symbol, be it language, political system, gastronomic activity, religion, etc., which is within that person’s perception common to the small or large community to which he or she belongs.” (Cameron 1999: 5)

National sports can also be considered to be national symbols and thus an important source of identification. However it is not always the case. In Finland for example the

official national sport is *pesäpallo* (Finnish baseball), though ice hockey is the *de facto* national sport with far more support and public interest.

In many sports, there is a national team that represents the country on the international stage. According to Maguire and Tuck:

“The individuals representing their countries become highly visible embodiments of these nations- they are patriots at play. These patriots at play are significant actors who both define and reflect the special charisma of nation’s writ large and, through their practices; sport becomes one of the fantasy shields whereby imagined (and real) charisma is both fuelled and protected.” (2005: 114)

It is important to see the nationalistic intention of modern national teams, which are ‘state athletes’ mandated by their governments to represent their political regime or to be agents of its cultural, industrial or economic influence in a similar way as were novelists, artists or successful chiefs of the automobile industry (Arnaud, 1998: 6). However, the main difference is the fact that they have that mandate, which makes it official and gives it an intention much stronger than with those artists. Whereas the latter probably never intended to become national symbols, the former are by definition representatives of their country and in sports that are popular in a country, they become national symbols. How strong the feelings are towards the national team will most likely depend on the success in both, short term and long term.

National symbols, no matter whether official or unofficial ones, are often subject of national stereotypes, since they represent and express the collective identity and can therefore be easily ascribed to all members of that collective. In other words they can work as some sort of generalization (Petkova and Lehtonen 2005). An example might explain this better: Some products can also be considered as national symbols, if these fulfil certain criteria. These criteria would for example be invention, tradition, special expertise or anything that somehow connects a certain product to a certain country or nation like Italian pasta, French wine, German cars, Czech beer etc. One can already see the stereotypes in there: “All Italians eat pasta”, “All French are wine drinkers” or “If there is something Germans know it is how to build cars”. Marketers often use these stereotypes (as they do in general) to promote and sell products better.

2.2.2 National Stereotypes

Social psychologists believe that people have the need to simplify the complex world. The human brain needs to process a lot of information every day, so it is normal that we use a system of categorization, also if it is not always accurate and often based on only a few indications or characteristics. Stereotyping is a process of narrowing down information and of generalizing certain clues to some sort of oversimplified, mental picture. The danger lies in the fact that these images we have, these stereotypes influence our attitude and thus our behaviour towards certain persons or groups. Stereotypes are very rigid and individuals often subconsciously grant attention only to actions or signals that confirm the mental picture that they had formed already. Thus it is very difficult to change or even erase stereotypes. (Nuttin 1999.)

A stereotype can be an individual's beliefs about a certain group or it can be characteristics ascribed to a group by a collective. They are used mainly in situations of uncertainty. Thus, the less somebody knows about a certain group, the more likely he is to use these stereotypes. Stereotypes, however, are not only about the other, but some collectives have also stereotypes about themselves. This self-concept is very important for the identity-building of a group. (Lehtonen 2005: 63.) Lehtonen states:

“Stereotypes of the self and the other are essential constitutions of collective identity, what we are and what we are not.”(2005: 82)

The more an individual is emotionally committed to a group, the more he accepts the values and beliefs of the group and also the stereotypes that the group has about self and other. Of course, some collective or nations have a more positive image of their own than others, some are more conscious about their cultural characteristics than others whereas some might be more sensitive towards these issues than others. (Lehtonen 2005: 61, 79.) Nevertheless, the word stereotype often has a negative connotation, because it tends to have an evaluative character instead of being just descriptive (Gannon 1994:15). With other words it is not objective and influences our judgement of a certain group or individual since we tend to ascribe an individual the same attributes

that we ascribe to his collective: “(All) Finns drink too much and go to sauna”, “Italians eat only Pizza and Pasta”. According to Lehtonen “such stereotypes are not abstract generalizations, but rather particular, concrete exemplars associated with the group in question.” (Lehtonen 2005: 64). One can see from the examples that often not only values and beliefs are involved in the process of stereotyping, but also the symbols of a certain groups are frequently used. National stereotypes often include (unofficial) national symbols.

2.2.3 Czech Stereotypes

The Czech Republic is a relatively small country and thus when going abroad one rarely hears any sophisticated stereotypes about Czechs in my own experiences. Quite often the Czech Republic gets mixed up or thrown in the same corner as the post-Soviet republics, namely the ‘East Europe Corner’. People who follow sports might have noticed that the country is not Czechoslovakia anymore; people who actually visited Czech mostly remember the beauty of Prague, the excellent beer and the mafia methods of the taxi drivers. More educated people might know Vaclav Havel and Jaroslav Hašek’s novel about the good soldier Švejk. Usually the stereotypes from foreigners about the Czechs are based on the little information they have. There are two main stereotypes about Czechs that I encountered when going abroad, one was about the beer and the other about ice hockey. People that had heard about the sport would ask me if I play ice hockey, since I am (half) Czech. Or if they would ask about my hobbies and I would answer ice hockey, they said something in the sense of: “Of course, all Czechs play ice hockey I guess.” The survey of players held by the International Ice Hockey Federation however reveal, that only about 0,7% of all Czechs play ice hockey other than recreational level (www.iihf.com). It is of course hard to estimate, how many people play recreationally at least a few times a year in an ice rink or in winter on the frozen lakes.

Czechs of course do have self-stereotypes, which will be shown in the practical part of this thesis. However, most of these stereotypes naturally have a historical background, therefore the next part is devoted to some historical facts that need to be at least briefly described, so that the reader can draw and understand some connections and

conclusions. The next part is relevant for this thesis, as it will explain the difficult and sometimes painful Czech history and furthermore the reasons why religion has almost vanished from Czech society. It can partly explain the importance of sport and mainly sport successes as some kind of surrogate for historical failures and as a surrogate religion.

2.3 Czech History and Identity

Till Habsburg monarch Ferdinand I took over the power in the Czech lands in 1526, the country had its destiny more or less in its own hands. The kingdom of Bohemia was one of the most powerful in Europe at that time. However, with the power switching to the Habsburg monarchy, the Czechs have been ruled by others with exception of the interwar period and shortly after, and in the past 20 years. Therefore the history part of my thesis starts with Ferdinand I. The large and important part of Czech history, which happened before this event is seen by many Czechs as some sort of ‘golden age’, some nostalgic period that will never come back. The fact that it got lost and what followed due to that, resulted in what I would call the ‘Czech national trauma’. It still plays a role in the Czech identity, which proves that history and present cannot be divided.

2.3.1 Brief Czech History

Ferdinand I absolutist style of reigning was not popular in the Bohemian kingdom and soon many of the Bohemian Estates expressed their disloyalty towards the king, who persecuted opposition in the country. He tried to re-establish the strong catholic position in the country, though the Bohemian kingdom was mostly Protestant/Lutheran. The next kings, Maximilian II and Rudolf II allowed again more religionist freedom. Rudolf’s younger brother, Matthias, gained the Bohemian crown, after the former passed away. Matthias and also the next king Ferdinand II once more tried to restore Catholic order in Bohemia, which again resulted in strong opposition of the Bohemian Estates with the 2nd Prague Defenestration as the peak. After the defeat of the protestant Bohemian Estates in the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620, Protestantism was strongly oppressed in the Czech lands. Holy Roman Emperor and Bohemian king Ferdinand II started the Anti-Protestant Counter Reformation and thus many estates left the country

or were persecuted. The next decades were also due to the Thirty Years War, the beginning of strong stagnation in Bohemia, and thus Bohemia lost its once strong cultural and influential position in Central Europe. Due to the Habsburg reign the position of the Czech language got weakened in the next centuries. All public communication was in German at the end of the 18th century. German was also the major language in the cities. Czech survived mainly on the countryside. (Hora-Horejš 1998.)

What is important to keep in mind is that besides the detested German speaking Habsburg monarchy also the Catholic Church did not enjoy popularity with the Czech people, since it was more or less always forced upon them. Many Czech historians and sociologists believe that this is one of the core reasons why atheism is so spread in the Czech Republic nowadays. Also, some sport sociologists believe, that sport can function as a surrogate religion.

2.3.2 Czech National Revival

Hence, in the period of nationalisation, the Czech intelligentsia tried to gain back territory for the Czech language but what happened was that the fight for language rights and equality seemed to be strongly connected to a fight for more cultural freedom and more autonomy of Bohemia in the multicultural and multiethnic Monarchy (Hora-Horejš 1997). Milestones in this effort were the building of the National Theatre and National Museum in Prague. It demonstrates how strong language and national identity are connected with each other (Williams 1999).

Connected with the National Revival was the establishing of the Czech gymnastics association called Sokol movement (the translation of sokol is falcon). It was co founded by Miroslav Tyrš and it was at the beginning similar to the principal of the German Turnvereine that were founded following the ideas of Prussian Nationalist and gymnast Friedrich Ludwig Jahn. Sokol gained popularity all over the country and was a mighty instrument to spread the national message to the broad masses, not only in the cities, but also on the countryside. The Czech National Revival helped the people to

realize their common heritage and their different culture. It had several phases with different peaks, however, it strived for a more autonomous, if possible independent, Bohemia (Kořalka 1996). The Sokol movement provided Bohemia quite soon already with the necessary infrastructure for sports. Many sport clubs in the Czech Republic still have Sokol in their name.

2.3.3 Independence

World War I was the chance to reach independence, since the Habsburg Monarchy was shattered in its foundations. Though Czechs and Slovaks had to serve the Austrian-Hungarian army many soldiers fled to the opponent side (Russia, France and Italy) and formed later on the Czechoslovak Legions. Due to this fact Czechoslovakia was counted to the Entente, which enhanced negotiation for an own state. The Legions also formed the central backbone of the later Czechoslovakian army.

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (T.G.M.) was the most devoted in trying to advocate the independence of Czechoslovakia. He succeeded in convincing the Entente Powers to support the cause and later on became the first Czechoslovak president. In the interwar period, Czechoslovakia also established itself in many sports, which helped to form and strengthen the national identity. It won several European Championship titles in ice hockey and almost won the World Championship in football in 1934 which was hosted by fascist Italy.

Czechoslovakia inherited one main problem from the Monarchy: it was a multiethnic state. The German speaking population was still the second strongest ethnical group. That is why Masaryk combined the Czech and the Slovak ethnicity into one, the Czechoslovak, in order to avoid minority/majority issues in the parliament, government and the country. Masaryk was never very fond of Czech nationalism since according to him it was based mainly on hatred versus the German speaking population. Masaryk tried to build a civic identity instead of a national identity.

He passed away in 1937 and Edvard Beneš (he was together with T.G.M. one of advocates of an independent Czechoslovakia and fought for that cause in France) followed him in his office.

However, not for long as in 1938 (30th September) the darkest chapter of Czech history is written. In the Munich Agreement (in Czech also called the Munich betrayal) France, Britain, Italy and Germany decided without the presence of Czechoslovakia, that the Sudetenland should be surrendered to Germany. The Sudetenland was strategically vital for Czechoslovakia. After Hitler gained power in 1933 he supported the Sudeten-Germans in their struggle to become part of the Third Reich. The NSDAP gained large popularity with the Sudeten-Germans and after the agreement of Munich they were incorporated in the Reich. The Czechs were expelled or persecuted. Without the support of France and Britain Czechoslovakia saw itself forced to surrender these parts. Masaryk's experiment of a democratic, liberal and multiethnic Czechoslovakia had failed. Not long after these events (15th March 1939) Germany invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia and established the protectorate Bohemia and Moravia on the one side, and established on the other an independent Slovakia with puppet government. Beneš fled the country and later led the Czechoslovakian Exile Government till 1945 till he became once more president of Czechoslovakia. During these exile years he negotiated several times with Stalin (since he did not trust the western powers anymore), which brought Czechoslovakia more and more into the sphere of the Soviet Union. After the war Czechoslovakia got rid of the Sudeten Germans, who had to leave the country and their property was being confiscated (Beneš decrees), since Czechoslovakia with the Germans was not an option for many politicians and also citizens. Thus, after this action of ethnic cleansing, Czechoslovakia became more homogenised.

After World War II there was a small interlude of 3 years, till the communist party took over the power in the coup of 1948. What followed were years of Stalinism in which many innocent people got persecuted and had to serve in labour camps. With Dubček becoming the leader of the communist party in 1968, reformation and democratisation started but they were stopped abruptly by the invasion of Warsaw pact troops led by the Soviet Union in August of the same year. What followed were years of "normalization", which meant again hard line communism till the Velvet Revolution led by Václav Havel

in 1989. By 1.1.1993 Czechoslovakia ended to exist and was peacefully split up in the Czech and Slovakian Republics.

2.3.4 Czech Identity and Mentality

The Czech Republic underwent some drastic socio-economical changes after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, which had also impact on the identity of the Czech people. People were forced to re-orientate as in general in Central and Eastern Europe (Czyzewski, 1997; Krzysztofek, 1997). As Petkova describes:

“The quest for cultural identity can be painful especially in a situation where the cultural community itself is undergoing a crisis. In such a case identification with it does not provide individuals with a feeling of comfort but generates anxiety and uncertainty.” (Petkova 2005: 54)

One should not forget, that besides socio-economic changes, which were the result of switching to market economy, the country also submit itself to a geographic division. So many transformations in such a short period meant that the Czech people had to partly renegotiate also their cultural and national identity (Svob-Dokic, 1997). By the 1st of January in 1993 Czechoslovakia no longer existed, the country was, as mentioned before, split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Many people on both sides did not agree with the division, no referendum was held, but it was the result of a political deal between Václav Klaus and Vladimír Mečiar and thus became reality (CVVM- The Public Opinion Research Centre 2008). What followed in the next years was the attempt to bring the Czech Republic more into the Western hemisphere. Highlights of these attempts were joining the NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004. Currently, it is discussed when to join the Euro-zone. Thus, the Czech Republic completely changed in 15 years its orientation from socialist East to capitalist West, which went hand in hand with growing globalisation. Petkova points out that “in conditions of globalisation and transnational cooperation the factors that act against the nation cannot longer be classified as colonizers, oppressors or political and ideological rivals.” (2005: 25). The Czechs moved in the last 20 years from totalitarian, socialist multi-ethnic state, to democratic, capitalist and single-ethnic state that is integrated in international Western organizations such as the EU and NATO. And thus Czechs had to renegotiate their

identity after these turbulent times, since most of the changes came quite abrupt and carried lots of uncertainty for the future.

Besides identifying with the nation, people in the Czech Republic identify strongly with the region / town they are from or live in; with other words they have a strong regional identity (CVVM- The Public Opinion Research Centre, 2003). This multiplication of cultural communities and identities is a common threat and weakens the traditional position of national identity as a primary and basic source of belonging, which becomes nowadays only one of many identities (Petkova 2005: 31). The post-Velvet Revolution period was an insecure and a turbulent time for the Czechs. The corruption, vulgar political climate and the gaps in the law system are issues Czechs are not proud of and thus help to form a negative self-image (CVVM 2007). In combination with the history where Czechs fought the last official war in 1620 (Battle of the White Mountain) it spreads a feeling of some sort of minority complex towards more powerful nations, especially Germans (Seibt 1996).

Part of the Czech mentality can also be evaluated through the analogy of the literature figure Švejk, created by Jaroslav Hašek (1921-1923). Švejk is a Czech soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army before and during the First World War who manages to subvert the system by carrying out orders in a literate way until it works absurd. Švejk is a typical example of Czech passive resistance, a personality that tries to survive at all costs and does not respect any form of authority, though on the outside he does not do anything against the rules. This strategy has become a verb in Czech language, *švejkovat* (= to švejk). The relationship between Švejk and the Czechs is nevertheless controversial, dual and paradox according to Jedlička (1992). It is a successful surviving strategy when living in a totalitarian system only at first. In the long run it is actually preferable for the ones in power since people, for whom nothing is holy anymore, nothing is worth fighting for or worth taking a risk, are people that are easy to control. (Jedlička 1992.)

Švejk is often seen and interpreted as a hero and though people relate to him, he and especially his mentality are at the same time also a curse, because it is blocking any

form of progress. This 'švejkism' of course has developed throughout the Czech history, since Czechs spend the majority of the last 500 years under oppression.

Another relevant feature about Czech culture is the strong increase of atheism in the last decades. Whereas in 1991 still 43,9% felt some kind of connection to any religious conviction this number decreased to 32,2% in 2001 with 59% of the population being openly atheistic (Čsú 2003). This is interesting conducting this research, considering that "for certain spectators, sport now provides the excitement which in the past resided in religious effervescence"(Goodger and Goodger, 2003: 259). Thus, sport could also function as some sort of surrogate for religion (Loy and Booth, 2002: 52, 56). People need some source of collective identification and things they feel proud of (such as national symbols) in order to identify with the nation and their fellow citizens. Hargreaves writes that:

"Probably more than any other area of social life, with the exception of religion, sports are replete with ritual activity and powerful symbolism- which is, no doubt, why the idea that sport has replaced religion as the opium of the people is appealing to some theorists" (2003: 170)

As mentioned, the Czech Republic underwent many changes in the last 20 years and with its difficult history in general, it left its trace on its people. Especially older people find it difficult to orientate nowadays. It is a typical trait not only for the Czech Republic, but for Central European countries in general (Cvjeticanin, 1997; Krzysztofek, 1997) National sports and sports happenings in general can help to create or maintain feelings of pride towards the own nation or in the extremer case be a source of identification. Sport as a symbol of the imagined community, can be considered one of the most significant expressions and manifestations of identity today. (Maguire et al. 2002: 135; Blain et al.1993: 12.)

In a survey in 2007 only half of the Czechs claimed to be proud on their nationality (whereas two fifth did not care). When asked what they felt proud about, nine out of ten mentioned sport successes as a reason (CVVM 2006; 2007). Thus, the successes of several sportsmen help to create a source of identification for the very young Czech Republic and some of its inhabitants. On the other hand, there are historians and sport journalists who point out the short-term effect of these sport happenings, with

nationalism raising a few days before and falling a few days afterwards. They claim that sport nowadays is just entertaining and enjoyment (<http://www.ct24.cz>). The empirical part of this thesis will try to answer the question of how and why sport is important for the Czech people.

3. SITUATING SPORTS IN THE GLOBALIZED WORLD AND IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Sports became truly international only after the First World War in a time where politicians started to recognise its potential as a vehicle for national values and policies. Further on it was used for demonstrating and advertising the potential of a political ideology and in countries where the State had direct control over sport- mostly authoritarian states like the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy and Spain- sport grew up to be an adjunct of foreign policy. (Riordan, 1998: 1). In the interwar period the internationalisation of sport and its audience began to attract the interest of politicians and to destroy the myth of sport as a peacemaker. The raise of sport as a universal phenomenon was initiated by growing press coverage. (Arnaud, 1998: 3, 5).

One century later sports still are politicized and gain vast media attention, as we could see during the 2008 Olympic Games in Peking. The World Cup of football and the Olympics offer a platform to all nations, most of all to small nations, that is unequalled by any other cultural or political body, even the United Nations (Tomlinson and Young, 2006: 2). The ‘new’ nations of Europe such as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia but also Czech Republic and Slovakia or former ex-Yugoslavian countries are all anxious to secure a place in the international sporting arena, and thus compete as separate nations before the televisual audiences of the world (Blain et al., 1993: 13-14). However, all participating states regard the Olympics as an opportunity to enhance their national prestige (Hargreaves, 1992:129) nevertheless, for newer, weaker and poorer states, with problems of development and of building national identity, the Games provide the opportunity to compensate for their deficiencies. In less developed countries the state is often the only institution capable of organizing the necessary resources and coordinating the national sporting efforts and is very interested in doing so, to enhance the national identity (Hargreaves, 1992: 131). Some scholars and sport sociologists are convinced that sport often acts as a surrogate for religion (reference), passionate nationalism (Sugden and Tomlinson, 1998: 303-304) and war (Hargreaves, 1992:122). George Orwell even claimed “sport is war minus the shooting”. However, the sport world nowadays is much more than just an international forum where minority complexes and other national issues can be cured. Sport has grown into a major business area that often

uses the nation versus nation format to generate more profit. Nonetheless, sport could have never grown into a major business if its economical potential would not have been recognised by the media. It thus is important to look at the connections that have made it so big and important, so that we can understand why specifically ice hockey is important to the Czech Republic. We will see that also history plays again an important part.

3.1 The Global Media-Sport Complex

The term globalisation can nowadays be found everywhere, especially in the media. Many people use it without really knowing what it actually means, it has become just like the terms culture and identity ‘a commonplace’. A commonplace means that a word has lost its meaning or it can be used for any meaning (Korhonen, 2008).

There are several definitions of the word globalisation. Often, it is used to refer particularly to economic globalisation, which integrates national economies into an international economy through trade, capital flows, migration, and the spread of technology (Bhagwati 2004). However, other authors argue that the concept of globalisation should be seen broader, since it also has international socio-cultural and political implications (Beck 1997; Byung-Chul 2005). Maguire et al (2002: 5) divide global flows in five dimensions, which are all applicable to the world of sports in the 21st century:

- 1) Media dimension (flow of information-newspapers, magazines, radio, film, TV, video, satellite, cable and internet)
- 2) Economic dimension (rapid flow of money in the world)
- 3) Migrant dimension (tourists, workers, exiles)
- 4) Ideological dimension (linked to the flow of values centrally associated with state)
- 5) Technology dimension (machinery and equipment)

I will discuss the first three dimensions more in detail, since they are most relevant in this research on sports and identity.

It is important to keep in mind that the media-sport complex operates as an industry (Maguire 1999: 148) in which three key groups are involved: the international sports organizations (i.e. IOC, FIFA, IIHF) and the national sport organizations including the clubs, media/marketing organizations and personnel and trans- or multinational corporations. The nature of interdependency between these key groups has varied over time and continents and as a result we find now for example in the USA more cross-ownership than in Europe (Maguire, 1999: 149).

3.1.1 Media Dimension

Media have completely changed the world of sports. There is a direct correlation between the introduction of new media and growing professionalism and interest in sports. The interest of the media in sports can be mainly explained through two factors, which are low production costs combined with potentially high viewer ratings (Maguire, 1999: 154). As Scambler points out, “watching football on TV is ‘efficient’: the fan does not have to travel, queue, pay for a seat or endure discomfort, time and space have ‘imploded’ in fans’ media-bound consumption” (2005: 130).

Many fans never bother to attend live matches, and even those who do, engage regularly in extensive TV consumption. There is a growing divide between unmediated and mediated sport; at a game no two people see the same event, because no two people can occupy exactly the same place, whereas the game on TV is exactly what the camera saw. Spectators see this wherever they sit and thus TV replaces the spectator. It is exactly this passive television fandom that lies on the roots of this change in excessive system rationalization giving rise to further colonization of the lifeworld (Scambler, 2005: 130-131.)

The media, however, are not only aiming at fans, they are also seeking to attract casual audience, which intensifies the need to package sport in an exciting and entertaining manner (Maguire et al 2002: 53). After all, sport is seen as a pleasurable search for emotional arousal, a quest for excitement (Dunning, 2003: 8). The media tries to gratify these needs to the passive audience. Nevertheless, due to the logic of the market, media are selecting only sports that make good entertainment and within a particular event for

those moments, which make the maximum viewer interest: the dramatic, the theatrical and the spectacular (Sewart, 1987: 179). According to Maguire this is one of the reasons why female sport is marginalized by the media. The media try to broadcast the highest possible quality (1999: 154), women are usually shown only if they can be portrayed as sexual objects, that is when being in a swimming suite, a tennis mini-skirt or in tight beach volleyball outfit. However, one rarely sees women ice hockey on TV, because it is slower and less spectacular than men ice hockey (IIHF rules for women hockey do not allow using checks and hits) and due to the equipment and helmets it does not allow stressing the female body.

As mentioned, what is shown on TV is always the result of a complex process of selection and besides that the directors decide what items to report and what to leave out, what to replay and what to downplay (Gruneau, 2003: 216). The media focuses on the thrills and spills, the knockout punch, the winning hit, the brawls in the stands and so on (Sewart 1987: 179). Clarke and Clarke claim, “what we see is not the event, but something transformed into something else - a media event.” (1982: 70-71) This transformation is not arbitrary, but governed by criteria of selection, which contain besides spectacle, immediacy -live, but with commentary- and drama also the growing personalisation (think for example of players’ names on shirts). Personalisation means concentrating on particular individuals, which thanks to the media become stars or sometimes even achieve hero-status. Thus, we can never see the whole event. We see those parts that are filtered through this process of presentation to us. The media use conventional presentation styles, one can think for instance of the clichéd language of sports journalism (Clarke and Clarke, 1982: 74) often using war metaphors (shooting, fight, battlefield, conquer). The media provide us with definitions, they interpret events for us, provides us with framework of meanings in which to make sense of events, to put it simple it involves a commentary on the pictures which explains us what we are seeing (Clarke and Clarke, 1982: 69). Brohm states in this regard:

“The spectacle of sport treats the masses as morons. Most of the mass media are saturated with trivial stories and futile sporting incidents.” (2003: 153)

The media re-dramatize and re-present what already are potent dramatic spectacles within the framework of interpretation or as Hargreaves puts it: “In modern capitalist

societies it is the media who are primarily responsible for the dramatization and construction of sports as a species of political ritual and for its transmission to the population at large.” According to Hargreaves the working practices, type of commentary, use of verbal and visual imagery, are preferred ways of seeing sport and society. (Hargreaves, 2003: 174.) The media however also help form the ‘Us’ vs. ‘Them’ image or as Maguire states “media discourse can be understood as part of an active construction of ‘fantasy group charisma’, that is based on both, the ‘invention of traditions’ and, at a deeper and more enduring level, the habitus codes that underpin the ‘national characters of nations’” (1999: 183). Thus, since the media influence our opinions, they are at least partly responsible for forming our national identities.

A part of the clichéd language of sport journalism is the extensive use of stereotypes. The media are responsible for the imagery of national, ethnic and quite often also racial divisions. Athletes and sometimes also the spectators become the living, breathing representatives of national or racial characteristics, which explain their behaviour. The catalogue of stereotypes being used is endless and ranges from the ‘suspect’ Latin temperament (sly, but unstable) and the ‘natural sense of rhythm’ of blacks over the ‘fiery’ determination of the Welsh and the ‘inscrutable’ faces of the Chinese table tennis players, to the devil-may-care-casualness of Brazilian footballers, not to mention the samba rhythms of their passing. Here sporting competition is invested with, and helps to keep circulation, a whole repertoire of national and racial mythologies- myths of ‘their’ strangeness, difference, peculiarity, which help to reinforce the ethnocentrism of our own culture. (Clarke and Clarke, 1982: 66.) Nevertheless, as Maguire et al. indicate “it is relevant to observe that while individuals inherit specific genetic qualities, ethnic groups do not” (2002: 19).

Associated with the symbioses between sports, media and business are processes of professionalisation and commercialisation and a shift from fair play sport to achievement sport (Dunning, 2003: 5-6). Many criticize the crass commercialisation and sensationalisation and refer to it as the ‘corruption’ of sport by the media and business world, because they are importing undesirable elements from outside like advertising, commercialism and the dictates of media coverage changing the character of sports and sport ideals. These sport ideals would be for instance practice and learn of fair play;

justice, conflict and dispute resolution; subliming egoistic desires to group needs as well as generating sociability, solidarity and communal effort. Modern sport has become debauched as it is subsumed to the logic of the marketplace. (Sewart, 1987: 171-172.) Some broadcasters try to secure sole rights for certain important sport events (Maguire, 1999: 152) and several governments started to put attention to this kind of practices. In Finland the semi-finals and finals of the ice hockey league cannot be broadcasted solely by pay-TV channels. In other countries there are several laws concerning media control, which directly or indirectly have an impact on sports. Also, some sport organizations that are more successful than others usually negotiate separately with the media but they have the dependent role and thus little or no control over the nature and form in which 'their' sport is televised, reported or covered. (Maguire, 1999: 150.) Nevertheless, European sport coverage increases constantly (Maguire, 1999: 144). In the Czech Republic ice hockey has been traditionally broadcasted by CT2, the public channel. To increase the sport coverage CT introduced also a new sports channel, CT4 sport, after switching from analogue to digital broadcasting.

3.1.2 Economic Dimension

There are several ways to make money in sports. Ticket sales, merchandising, sponsoring, television rights and marketing, league expansion and mergers (buying yourself into the league), tax shelters (write off large part of franchise fees in many countries, thus tax haven), increase in franchise value (selling the team after a while), revenue through the sale of stocks are the most essential ones. (Beamish 2003.)

Organizing an event such as the Olympics or World Championships generates besides publicity also income mainly through tourism. There is a large number of people who are directly or indirectly dependent on sport for their livelihoods, these include sport professionals, sport journalists, sport administrators and bureaucrats, those who are engaged in the manufacture and maintain sport facilities and equipment, those connected with sports gambling, and those who provide food and drink in sporting to mention a few (Dunning, 2003: 5).

As described before, commodification means that an area that previously has not been infiltrated by the market turns into a business and gets ruled by market logic. The commodification of sport is evidenced in several arenas, i.e. changes in rules are made to enhance the attractiveness of the game for the TV, format and scheduling are adjusted to gain larger advertising revenues by scheduling absurdly long seasons and more playoff games. Also, the abandonment of ethic skill democracy becomes more and more evident. The ethic of skill democracy means that the individual's status is objectively measured in terms of performance or merit according to an agreed set of norms, however, commercialisation and commodification have steadily eroded the ethic of skill democracy. TV needs stardom to sell better, stars regardless of their performance. As mentioned before, due to market logic, the media select only those sports that make good entertainment. The process of commodification is of course not limited to sports. No social practice is immune from the corrosive impact of commodification. (Sewart, 1987: 173, 177-179, 184.)

Through the emergence of global media communication channels, such as the Internet and global sport channels, the consumption of global media-sport products is raising constantly. Especially American sports are packaged, marketed and franchised for a global audience, sporting heroes such as Michael Jordan become through media marketing global figures promoting specific brands such as Nike. (Maguire, 1999: 145.) The global success of American sports has had an impact on European sports such as football or rugby, which had to take the same road to avoid failing in the global media marketplace. So they adapted to the American model and have been in economical terms successfully. The trend towards establishing global media sports such as American football, basketball, baseball and ice hockey leads to a situation, where many people are fans of a club to which they virtually have no connection to, except the fact that they are following them through the media and consuming their products. There are also people on the other hand, cheering for clubs they have a connection to, however, almost none of those in 'their' team has that connection to the club or the town/region the club is situated in. (Maguire, 1999: 148, 152.) It is also interesting to observe, that on many sports in the USA there is a monopoly - for example the NHL (National Hockey League), which means that only the people in charge have the power to

determine membership. This form of legal monopoly clearly aids the owners' goal of generating the most possible income (Beamish, 2003: 137).

The commodification of sport can be also reflected upon Max Weber's concept of rationalization, where there are four ideal types: instrumentally rational, the value rational, the traditional and the emotional (Cantelon and Ingham, 2002: 67). The instrumentally rational concept is widely employed by those who control the careers of the athlete. They count the performance value or gate value of the athlete and try to improve the value for their money with the help of exercise scientists, bio-technicians, sport medical personnel, sport psychologists and so on. The latter all try to construct knowledge, which not only enhances the performance of athletes, but which also brings them prestige in the globalized scientific community of sport. The Olympics used to have a value rational ideal. However, with the introduction of modern marketing strategies, an instrumental rational example, the Games started to make profit since 1984 and thus ever since have corrupted the value rational Olympic ideal. (Cantelon and Ingham, 2002: 68-69.) Max Weber distinguished three types of authority: traditional, charismatic and rational-legal. Imperative control is charismatic if it rests upon personal devotion "to exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him" (Cantelon and Ingham, 2002: 71). The concept of charisma might also apply to sport. Once more, it is instrumental rationality that subverts the form. Cantelon and Ingman state in this regard the following:

"Celebrities are turned into hero/ines and corporate capitalist sign vehicles. Few athletes are heroic in the sense of the real political drama of history. However, as celebrities, the media turns their performance accomplishments into quasi-heroic deeds, i.e. media-manufactured fame. This we call "pseudo-charisma". But pseudo-charisma is a form of imperative control in that it is linked with the consumption of goods. And so, manufactured fame contours the consumer demands and buying habits of millions." (2002: 71)

A Czech study found out, that the two most successful Czech ice hockey players, Jaromír Jágr and Dominik Hašek, were considered by the Czech public to be amongst the 20 most important historical Czech personalities (CVVM, 2007). Needless to say, that both have lent their name to several companies for marketing and advertisement purposes.

Also, several Marxist theorists critique the commodification of sport. According to Marxist theory, the loss of control of the produced product, the artefact, can have devastating consequences for the creative potential of physical activity. Rather than the athlete, who is primarily pursuing sport as a means of self-expression or self-exploration, the marketplace shapes sporting activities. Rather than realising the full productive potential of the athlete, sport stands against the athlete and builds the power of the market's influence over sport while restricting the expressive potential of the athletes themselves. (Beamish, 2002: 37.)

3.1.3 Migration Dimension

The commodification of sport also means that the value of sportsmen is nowadays expressed in monetary terms. Brohm states:

“The competitive sportsman is a new type of worker who sells his labour power-that is to say his ability to produce a spectacle that draws the crowds- to an employer. The exchange value of his labour power, governed by the law of supply and demand on the market, is determined by the labour time socially necessary for its production. Amateurism ceased to exist a long time ago. All top-level sportsmen are professional performers in the muscle show. They are also very often advertising ‘sandwich-board’ men.” (2003: 150).

According to Rigauer there is the following social relationship: the athlete achieves, while the spectators view the competition and thus satisfy their own needs. The athlete is the producer and the spectators the consumers. The athlete's worth is expressed in a certain amount in the playermarket, which means that there are certain transfer or compensation sums, which express the ability of the athlete in monetary terms (Rigauer, 1981). Beamish however points out that “the players are the show; they are the real producers, and the owners, with minimal risks, profit from the efforts of the players who risk their careers on every single play of the game” (2003: 148). A major feature of the new global cultural economy is migration. Sportsmen are no exception in this regard (Maguire 1999: 97).

Migration of sports personnel of any kind is a pronounced feature of late 20th century / 21st century sport (Maguire et al., 2002: 19). Many players aim at playing for the clubs

that pay them the highest possible wage. Playing for the national team can help them to achieve this goal, since “national teams are for some migrants ‘flags of convenience’ to ensure they are able to display their talents to a worldwide audience on a global stage.” (Maguire et al 2002: 38). There are nonetheless several categories of sport migrants such as pioneers, whose goal it mainly is to promote a sport in a different place; nomads, who use their sport career to travel; settlers, who settle down after a while in their new destination; mercenaries, who are the most famous type of migrants, they go wherever they get most money and finally returnees, who return home to finish their career in their home club or country. It is of course possible that some players are a mixture of several of these categories. (Maguire, 1999: 105; Maguire et al., 2002: 33). Maguire says about migration:

“Debates of this kind also involve questions concerning national identity and identity politics. Issues of attachment to place, notions of self-identity and allegiance to a specific country are significant in this connection.” (1999: 103)

In ice hockey the best European talent is lured to the NHL, offering wages that clubs in Europe cannot equal, with recent exception of the newly formed KHL. However, since the NHL operates as an independent league, the owners of clubs do not pay transfer sums to the European teams, which train the hockey players since they are little children, which especially in ice hockey a very costly matter. The behaviour of the NHL is criticized by all major European hockey leagues and also the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) tries to take steps to reach some sort of agreement between the disputed parties, however, with very little success so far (www.hokej.cz ; www.iihf.com).

The problem in the recent years is mainly the exodus of young junior players that go overseas into the North American junior hockey leagues, often encouraged by their NHL agents, to increase their chance of making it in the NHL. However, the quality in their domestic junior leagues drops, with an overall decrease of quality in ice hockey in the national team on all levels as a result. Especially Slovakia and the Czech Republic are threatened by this latest trend, influenced by this ‘short-term-money-making-philosophy’, as the IIHF study about young players going to North America indicates (www.iihf.com).

There are according to Maguire et al. (2002: 39) three main areas of conflict concerning migration that can be applied to sports in general:

- 1) Between promoters of the commercial success of the clubs and the promoters of the prestige associated with the national team
- 2) Between entrepreneurs striving for short-term viability and officials concerned with long-term development
- 3) Between marketers of a spectacle that can be sold to the media and advocates of local identity and player development

In summary, there is a conflict between those who see sport as something value rational and those who see it as instrumentally rational, the latter caring mainly about profit, and the former valuing certain ideals.

3.2 Ice Hockey on a Global Scale

Since this research is a case study of ice hockey in the Czech Republic, it is vital to enlighten the main structures of ice hockey in general. It is important to know what are the main leagues and tournaments and who is in charge of the sport.

The international governing organ of ice hockey is the IIHF (International Ice Hockey Federation, founded in 1908). Currently there are 50 full members, 14 associate members and 4 affiliate members. The IIHF tries, similarly as the FIFA in football, to develop and to promote the sport throughout the world. It also organizes all World Championships and sets the rules for many aspects such as marketing and transfers. The IIHF tries to control ice hockey and in-line hockey also via the national associations. However, the NHL (National Hockey League), which is the most prestigious and powerful league in the world, tries to operate on a more independent level. This has caused many arguments between the IIHF and the NHL.

It should be clear that ice hockey as a sport, though steadily increasing its popularity, is not as large a sport as for example football or athletics. However, it is one of the top rated team sports. It is played in at least one country of each continent although it is

questionable how far it will develop in South America and Africa. Nevertheless, there are only a few countries in the world, where ice hockey is the most important sport or national sport. The next section gives a brief overview of the most important leagues and events. (www.iihf.com; www.hokej.cz).

3.2.1 International Ice hockey

The most prestigious prize that can be won in ice hockey actually is the Olympic Winter Tournament, which takes place only every four years. Till 1998 this tournament was without participation of the NHL players, thus the best players of the world were missing. The 1998 tournament in Nagano was therefore a breaking point, since the NHL made a break during the season and thus each country had its best players at disposal (IIHF Top 100 story). The second most prestigious international event is the former Canada Cup, now called World Cup of Hockey. This tournament is not organized by the IIHF but by the NHL and it does not take place on a regular basis. It was last time played in 2004 and it is unclear when the next one will take place, some speculate that it will be in 2011. The Olympics and World Cup of Hockey are also one of the clash points between the IIHF and the NHL.

The World Cup of Hockey should not be mixed up with the annually held World Championships. These however take place during the NHL playoffs (all other leagues are already finished by that time), and thus from the NHL only those players come, who dropped out in the first rounds of the playoffs or did not even qualify for them. The IIHF also organizes the Euro Hockey Tour (EHT), which takes place four times a year and is played by Russia, Sweden, Finland and the Czech Republic. It serves as preparation for the World Championships and is not regarded very important. Due to the fact that only a few countries play ice hockey on a high level, the IIHF organizes World Championships at different levels and there is a promotion/relegation system between the levels. Furthermore the IIHF organizes also tournaments and World Championships for junior hockey players, the Under 20 (U 20) and U18. These tournaments are very carefully watched by agents and scouts to discover future prospects. (www.iihf.com; www.hokej.cz).

3.2.2 National Ice hockey

Ice hockey club competitions are played in most European countries. However, the most prestigious club competition is the transnational NHL, covering teams from USA and Canada. The NHL is the richest league and therefore attracts the best players from all over the world (besides North America mainly from Europe). In 2008 two projects emerged in Europe that try to compete with the NHL. The first project is the beginning of the KHL (Kontinental Hockey League), which is basically the former Russian Superliga joined by teams from Latvia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. It however plans to extend and include teams also from the other European countries. The other project is the Champions League Hockey, organized by the IIHF and which basically copies the commercially very successful UEFA Champions League (football). Besides these new projects the Swedish, Finnish, Swiss, Czech and German leagues are considered to be the top leagues in Europe. (www.iihf.com; www.hokej.cz)

3.2.3 Sports in the Czech Republic

As mentioned in chapter two, the Sokol movement was more than just a gymnastics association. It was the pedagogical and political instrument for constructing a national identity. The idea to learn to put one's body at the service of one's country stems from a strategy of acculturation and nationalization of the masses in the same way as was the learning of the language and national culture. Nevertheless, this nationalism began to merge with patriotism that was significant primarily on an internal level. The reason why it was only internal is simply because of the lack of national teams. There was no international competition. The 'sportization' of gymnastics began later, in the 1930's, and thus it could not have a bearing on foreign policy or national prestige. (Arnaud, 1998: 4). Besides spreading the national message the Sokol movement had also another function. It was the first form of organized sport in the Czech Republic (Maguire 1999: 81), both setting an example and lending infrastructure to other sports. Thus many sports in the Czech Republic - including the most important, football, athletics and ice hockey - were organized quite early, which made it possible to compete at the highest level from the very beginning of the internationalisation of sports. As mentioned in chapter two, the independence of Czechoslovakia came only after the First World War,

with many Sokol members fighting in the Czechoslovak legions. Sokol gymnastics were banned in Czechoslovakia after 1948, which was imposed by Stalin himself and replaced by the unpopular Spartakiads (Riordan, 1996: 109).

3.2.4 Ice Hockey in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has two sports that are considered to be national sports, one being football and the other ice hockey, both being similarly popular. However, ice hockey is strongly connected with the dramatic moments of the Czech history, which is also one of the reasons why I choose to analyse ice hockey and not football or sports in general for this thesis. Ice hockey was played in Bohemia already around the end of the 19th century, which means it was amongst the first nations in Europe to do so. In 1908 Bohemia joined the newly found IIHF and is considered to be one of the founding members. However, the rulers in Vienna heard about it *ex post* and were of course strongly opposed to this idea. Earlier in the same year they managed to force the FIFA to scratch out Bohemia as a member, due to the fact it was not an independent state, but part of the Habsburg monarchy. Vienna knew that it was dangerous to allow Czechs to be in any international sport federation, because it would strengthen their separatist idea. In 1914 the Habsburg rulers also managed to get Bohemia out of the IOC (International Olympic Committee). However, they never managed to get Bohemia out of the IIHF. Thus Bohemia participated under its own flag in several international tournaments, strengthening nationalism at home and recognition abroad.

In the interwar period, Czechoslovakia soon developed to be one of the top teams in Europe and in the world. Even in that period, the young sport was politicized. In 1938 Czechoslovakia played the bronze medal game against Nazi-Germany. It was the same day just a few hours after Hitler had made his '*Drang nach Osten*'- speech, in which he basically announced his desire to conquer Eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia included. The atmosphere of the game was intense, The Czechoslovaks being greeted with the '*Hitler Gruß*' before the match and with many people in Czechoslovakia already knowing what would follow in the next years. Czechoslovakia won the match and also won in 1940 in Prague against Nazi-Germany, with the crowd going crazy. It turned out to be the last Hockey match between Nazi-Germany and Czechs.

After World War II Czechoslovakia won its first World Championship in 1947 and this in front of home crowd. The successful team at that time ended second in 1948 and won again in 1949. Meanwhile the Communists gained power in Czechoslovakia in the coup d'état of February 1948. In 1950 the darkest chapter of Czech ice hockey history was written, when the Communists send most of the team members to prison and forced labour camps, some of them for 15 years, many of them dying due to the harsh conditions. It was one of the first massive show-trials Czechoslovakia and the players were convicted for conspiracy and treason. It remains unclear why and mainly who initiated the trial. The most comprehensive version is that the communists were scared that the players could follow the many other sportsmen and women who tried to emigrate, some of them successfully. In the next decade the national team was weakened, since the best players served in prison, and a new European hockey power emerged, the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had never played ice hockey before until the 1950's. The first Soviet players and teams were trained by LTC Praha, which was the most successful team at that point in Czechoslovakia. The Soviets participated at the World Championships for the first time in 1954 and won it straight away. From that point the Soviets were not only a dominating hockey power in Europe, but worldwide with virtually only Canada being able to beat them.

After the Soviet led the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, international sport games between both nations were one of the most intense in sport history, often with political after-play. The next confrontation in ice hockey between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union was at the World Championships in Sweden in March 1969. Both games were won by Czechoslovakia and immediately after that people were celebrating in Prague and all over the country. There was the famous incident where some fans destroyed an Aeroflot (Soviet national air carrier at that time) office. However, there is serious evidence that the incident was prepared by the Communists who needed an excuse to start stronger repressions. What followed were the years of so-called "Normalization"-a period of repression. Whenever Czechoslovakia won the Soviets it was more than just winning a game, it was an opportunity to beat the suppressor, with equal weapons. (<http://historie.hokej.cz> ; <http://www.ct24.cz> ; Clarke and Clarke, 1982: 66 .)

In 1989 Communism failed in Czechoslovakia and in 1993 the country ceased to exist and thus a new chapter of Czech history was opened. And again ice hockey played a certain role. However, as many publicists and historians say, ice hockey was finally again only about the sport. The new found Czech Republic won its first World Championship title as separate nation in 1996. In the same year the Czech national football team won silver at the European Championships and Jan Železný and other Czech athletes took gold at the Olympics in Atlanta. Though these were just 'mere' sport accomplishments it gave the country a self-esteem boost, it gave people in this new country something to be proud of and international recognition.

3.2.5 IIHF top 100 stories

At the 100th anniversary of the IIHF, a book was published with 100 stories about ice hockey. The stories were ranked from #1 - #100, with #1 being the story that had biggest impact on international ice hockey followed by the other 99 stories. These were the criteria for inclusion in the book (www.iihf.com):

“First, the story has to have had a considerable influence on international hockey. Second, it has to have had either a major immediate impact or a long-lasting significance on the game. Third, although it doesn't necessarily have to be about top players, the story does have to pertain to the highest level of play, notably Olympics, World Championships, and the like. The story can be about a single moment — a goal, a great save, a referee's call — or about an historic event of longer duration — a game, series, tournament, or rule change.”

Several stories have been devoted to Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic. Most of them are about clashes between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, proving the major importance and impact of those matches on an international scale (story #5, #18, #67 and #81). The second frequent topic was the win of the first 'open' Olympics, - which meant that the NHL would make a break during the Games allowing its players to participate- won by the Czech national team (story #7, #10 and #12). At least five more stories included Czechoslovakia or the Czech Republic in a direct way (#42, #48, #64, #77 and #85) and many others via an indirect way, like for example via Slovakia. Stories like these construct according to Maguire “identities by producing meanings about ‘the nation’ with which people can identify, stories that are told about the nation”

(1999: 177). They are part of the process of identity formation and invention of traditions and are often accompanied by phrases that involve the ‘golden political and/or sporting age’ of the past (Maguire, 1999: 179).

3.3 Sports and Regional Identity, Ice hockey in Kladno

As said in the introduction, this research will also deal with sports as a source of regional or local identity because also sport clubs can provide people with an important identity prop (Dunning, 2003: 11). It has been suggested that sport contributes to the community in at least two ways. First, there is the notion of a distinct sports community in its own right and, second, the notion that sport itself contributes to the regeneration of, for example, urban communities. Sport is viewed as contributing to civic, as opposed to ethnic pride. It is also believed that it helps to reduce crime rates and facilitates community integration and social inclusion. (Maguire et al., 2002: 103.) Dunning says:

“In other words, sport provides a context in countries all over the world, particularly in urban settings, where people can meet and bond, if sometimes only fleetingly, and though this likely to depend *inter alia* on the degree of organizational stability of the sports and clubs in question- it can help to give people a sense of meaning, purpose and continuity in contexts which are highly impersonal and beset by what many experience as a bewildering pace of change.” (2003:12)

One must not forget that local or regional clubs and their games usually are more accessible than national team games, due to infrastructure and geographical reasons.

If for example the Czech national team plays at home and the arena has a maximum capacity of 18000 people, only roughly 0,17% of the population can watch it live. Whereas in a game in Kladno where the capacity of the stadium is 8000 people, almost roughly 10% of the city can go and attend the game. Not to mention if the national team plays abroad, only limited part of the tickets are available and there is the necessity of travelling, sometimes quite far. In some cases, the already strong regional identity might get strengthened through sport clubs, like it is the case with clubs and regions in Spain, such as FC Barcelona in Catalonia and Athletic Bilbao in the Basque region. Both areas fiercely preserve their language and customs and both see football as an ideal vehicle through which to press their nationalistic sentiments (Maguire et al., 2002: 106, 140, 149.150). As explained in chapter two, identity is an emotional construct and sport has

the potential to move emotionally. Dunning points out, that “through their identification with a sports team, people can express their identification with the city that it represents or perhaps with a particular subgroup within such as a class or ethnic group” (Dunning, 2003: 11). It is ‘our’ town, ‘our’ team- no matter what the real patterns of ownership are, it is the managers and businessmen versus the working class, nevertheless sport clubs can establish local cross-class loyalties (Clarke and Clarke, 1982: 64).

The city of Kladno is known in the Czech Republic for its steel industry, mining and ice hockey. The former two have nearly vanished, but the latter one is still alive. Though many hockey players leave Kladno quite soon to teams with more financial funds, it is still considered to be one of the most traditional hockey teams in the Czech Republic, a team that raised many players who have made it in the national team and abroad. The all time best Czech hockey player, Jaromír Jágr, is from Kladno, and many other world class players have learned to skate and play in Kladno. In 2004 HC Kladno celebrated its 80th anniversary. During this period Kladno has won six national championship titles and on time the Cup of European Champions, the predecessor of the CHL. (Jágr and Oliverius, 2004.) The importance of the club for the city will be discussed in the empirical part of this thesis and will serve as an example for how regional identity is connected with ice hockey in the Czech Republic.

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The empirical part of the study will investigate in a more concrete way, what the implications of the theories in chapter two and three are.

4.1 Aims and Research questions

This study investigates which sources Czech people have for identity forming and also the perceived identity of Czechs. Furthermore, the study focuses on the role of ice hockey, as a national symbol, as a social and cultural phenomenon in this process of identity forming. Aim of the study is to create a more holistic and complete picture of this sport and examine what place it takes in everyday life. As mentioned in the introduction, sports as a source of identity and culture is neglected in the ICC theories.

I also want to find out what the structures of ice hockey are and how the change of 1989 has influenced them. I personally follow ice hockey since many years every day, which means not only watching it in TV or playing it myself, but I also read expert articles or literature on the matter. Furthermore, I attend live matches and I like, besides watching the game, also to observe what is going around in the arena. I have watched live matches not only in several different arenas in the Czech Republic, but all over Europe, including countries which do not belong to the top, such as Belgium and Estonia. It is interesting to observe differences and similarities of the social structures of the game. Ice hockey is organized in different ways, may it be due to tradition, law or some other reasons. Therefore, I understand myself and my research style as a bricoleur, who tries to connect all different parts into the whole, stressing the meaningful relationships that operate in the situations and social worlds studied (Denzin and Lincoln 1994).

The research will answer following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between ice hockey and the Czech national and regional identity, and how is it manifested?

More specifically I will investigate what the self-image and perceived self-image of the Czechs is and investigate whether sports play any role in it. Thus, I will look at how Czechs identify with sports, and with ice hockey in particular. Furthermore, I will examine if the mentalities' assets are reflected in the way ice hockey is performed in Czech, in other words is there a Czech style of playing hockey and if yes, how can it be described? It is also important to look at how ice hockey is supported financially, since it can reveal its position in society and, since funds are usually only spent on things that carry some intrinsic value. To conclude, my sub research questions are:

1. a. What is the self-image and the perceived self-image of Czechs and do sports play any role in it?
1. b. How do Czechs identify with sports and particularly with ice hockey?
1. c. Are the mentalities' assets in some way reflected in the way ice hockey is performed? Is there a Czech style of playing hockey and if yes, how can it be described?
1. d. How is ice hockey supported financially?

2. How has the political and socio-economical transformation in the Czech Republic modified the relationship between ice hockey and the Czech national and regional identity?

Changes in the political system influence sport policy, thus I will investigate what it means for sports in the Czech Republic in general and more specifically for ice hockey. Consequently, I will explore how these changes in the Czech Republic influence the vital structures for ice hockey, such as financing, government support and socio-demographic conditions. The sub research questions are:

2. a. How does change in the political system influence the sport policy in general and specifically for ice hockey?
2. b. How has the political change influenced the vital structures (i.e. financial support) for ice hockey?

4.2 A Qualitative Research Strategy

This research is qualitative. However, the quantitative studies of the CVVM (Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění- The Public Opinion Research Centre) that were briefly lighted at the end of chapter two should be bared in mind as well in order to understand the matter deeper. These studies indicated that sports indeed are a major source of pride and thus are also important for identification for most of the Czech people. However, these studies do not answer the questions of how and why this is the case. They also do not include the historical view. Thus, to answer the “how and why” questions and get a more profound knowledge, I opted for a qualitative research. Also Krippendorff states:

“Methodology is not a value in itself. The purpose of methodology is to enable the researchers to plan and examine critically the logic, composition, and protocols of research methods...and to evaluate the likelihood of particular research designs to contribute to knowledge “(2004: xxi)

Good qualitative research can offer people a new perspective on issues that they usually take for granted; its greatest strength is its ability to analyse what actually happens in naturally occurring settings. Furthermore, qualitative research is valuable due to its relative flexibility, the possibility of studying processes as well as outcomes, meanings as well as causes (Silverman, 2006: 349-351).

The world of sports is a complex one, besides the practical activity of the athlete on individual level stands the production, distribution and reception of sporting performances, which are social processes including a network of performers, suppliers, agents, scouts, managers, critics and consumers (Maguire et al., 2002: xv).

To understand all the facets that clarify how a certain social and cultural phenomenon works, it is important to ask the ‘producers’. Therefore I decided to interview experts: people that deal with ice hockey their entire life. These experts carry the largest knowledge and they are naturally very connected to and passionate about this sport. Consequently, to show a more holistic view on the study, I decided to combine two different data collection methods. Besides the expert panel, another segment of the population, namely students, has been consulted via email-based interviews.

The experts will answer the interview questions concerning structures and relationships of ice hockey in the Czech Republic. The students will give insight about what it means to be a Czech at home and abroad, and be able to critically reflect upon that. Furthermore, one could expect that the role ice hockey plays in their life is somewhat moderate, since sports has been traditionally accorded low status by academics, and has been neglected as an aspect of culture (Hargreaves 1982, p.1, p.5). It is questionable if highly educated people identify themselves through collective sport successes since it is considered to be low culture. Nonetheless, the interviews will reveal to what extent this can be confirmed and to what not.

4.3 Data Collection

Next, I describe how I acquired, respectively both, the expert data and the student data, since this is also the chronological order of my data collection.

4.3.1 Expert panel

An expert is an authority in his field, someone who is active in a certain field for many years, and thus is a carrier of knowledge and expertise, which is hardly replaceable or acquirable by just studying theory about that field (Shanteau et al., 2002). An expert is also someone who is recognised by the public as such (Shanteau et al., 2002); and his opinion about his field must be considered as a valuable judgment on the matter (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2005). Thus, when deciding who is an expert and who not, Goldman notes:

“Let us begin by defining what it means for someone to be an authority in a subject. Someone is an authority in a subject if he or she has *more* knowledge in that subject than almost anybody else. Thus, we might define an authority in roughly the following terms: Person *A* is an authority in subject *S* if and only if *A* knows more propositions in *S*, than almost anybody else.” (1999: 268)

Furthermore, when requiring expert knowledge, it is important to select several experts to avoid threats of neutrality (Goldman, 1999: 400). Thus I selected several experts that

work somewhere in the field of ice hockey. Next, I explain the sampling, its validity, and then I introduce the actual expert panel.

4.3.1.1 Sampling

In the Czech Republic it is often faster and more efficient to contact people in an unofficial way. Unofficial means to contact a person via another person who knows both. As a result a relationship is created, some basic form of trust since one has a straight reference. It is basically the same as what is known in the academic world as snowball sampling (Billiet and Waege, 2003).

I chose the snowball method by asking people I know personally to ask them about experts they might know. During the first interviews then, I asked the experts to ask other experts they knew. It turned out to be a very fruitful method as I managed to interview all people I originally intended to, except one.

4.3.1.2 Validity of Sampling

Evidence on sampling validity concerns the degree to which a sample accurately represents the population of phenomena in whose place it is analysed. Ideally, content analysts actively sample a population, using sampling plans that ensure the representativeness (Krippendorff, 2004: 319). Both populations I had in mind for my research were quite specific and their inclusion are both theoretically grounded. My aim is to create an overall picture and to balance two groups, each on the other side of the continuum, one side being the experts and the others being the students.

4.3.1.3 The Experts

I will now briefly introduce my panel, in chronological order as the interviews went.

Petr Fiala: Hockey player since childhood, grew up in Kladno; after a successful professional hockey career he became a professional trainer (A-license, highest possible trainer license in ice hockey); currently training HC Olomouc.

Ivo Kyndl: Hockey player since childhood, grew up in Kladno; after a successful professional hockey career he became youth hockey trainer (A-license); wrote a thesis analyzing attack systems in ice hockey ('Analyses of the organization of attack in the Czech Extraleague in the season 2006/2007'); member of the board of sports in the city council of Kladno and trainer of the youth team PZ Kladno.

Mgr. Milan Volf: Son of one of the best Czech hockey defenders of his time, Jaroslav Volf (HC Kladno and national team) and successful youth trainer (A-license), grandson of committed Sokol member; played ice hockey for more than ten years, had to retire due to injury; many years major of Kladno, famous for supporting sports and especially ice hockey in Kladno, initiator and godfather of the book '*Kladno hokejové*'.

Pavel Patera: Hockey player since childhood, grew up in Kladno; four times World Champion, one time Olympic Champion; several national titles in Sweden, Russia and Czech Republic; Played in NHL, Swedish Elitserien, Russian Superliga and Czech Extraliga; one of the best Czech strikers, known mainly also with his striker partner Martin Prochazka for playing and using typical elements of the Czech Hockey School; currently playing as captain for HC Kladno, in terms of migration (chapter three) he was a mercenary and now a returnee.

Otakar Cerny Jr.: Hockey player in childhood, retired due to injury; son of Otakar Cerny Sr, who is in charge of the sport section in the Czech television (CT); currently manager of HC Kladno.

The next experts are somehow different; they actually are not experts in the strict sense of the word. They are 'experts of Kladno', the interviews with them are more like a testimony of contemporaries. They also form somehow a bridge to the students, since some of the questions were the same as the students' questions and besides that both have university diplomas.

Mudr. Jarmila Nepilova: Medical doctor; niece of famous international football player of the 1920's and 1930's Josef Kratochvil; born and living in Kladno for more than 80 years.

Mgr. Jiri Nepil: pharmacist; born and living in Kladno nearly 50 years; spent most of his childhood playing ice hockey on the lakes or hockey ball on the newly asphalted streets, however, never played hockey in an organized association as most boys of his generation.

4.3.1.4 Preparation phase

The interviews were semi-structured, allowing me greater flexibility. This was necessary, because I had to adjust myself to the interviewees. Some of them did not have much time because they were in the preparation phase of the new season.

The questions for the experts were mostly derived from the theories presented in chapter three. Some of the questions were basic and some were specially formulated according to what function the expert has or had in ice hockey. Thus, all experts had a different set of questions, though some were the similar. After contacting the experts, we met in a quiet bar, at home or in the office. All of the experts also received a small present to express them my appreciation for their time. Some of the interviews situations came, however, spontaneously. For instance, thanks to one of the experts, Ivo Kyndl, I was introduced to Pavel Patera and Otakar Cerny Jr. Therefore, it was good that I always had all interview material with me.

4.3.1.5 The interviews

The interviews with the experts were face-to-face, except the two with the contemporaries, which were phone interviews. These were not recorded and also one of the experts did not want me to record the interview. All other interviews are audio-recorded and can be found on the appendix CD. During the interviews, I tried to incorporate the tips given by Rubin and Rubin on qualitative interviewing (1995), such as being a patient listener and not interrupting. The expert interviews took place in August 2008 in Kladno. The interviews with the contemporaries took place in February 2009. The interviews and the transcripts are included in the Appendix CD.

4.3.2 Student Email questionnaires

The student interviews were structured email questionnaires that covered mainly questions about 'being Czech' at home and abroad. In total nine questions were asked, only the last two were about sports, to avoid any kind of suspicion about my topic. I did not want the students to know my topic, because I wanted to avoid getting answers that are influenced by knowing the topic. All the questions were open questions. The data collection took place in arch 2009.

4.3.2.1 Sampling

As mentioned, the students had to fulfil certain criteria: first of all they had to be studying or studying until recently, second they had to be Czech and they had to have spent at least three months living abroad. This was important because I wanted to pulse their experiences about how they thought the Czech Republic was perceived abroad. I contacted all the students via email and asked them to answer the questionnaire for my thesis and assured them confidentiality. I have met all these students at one point or another in the past, which made it easier to contact them. However, although I knew some of the students personally, I never mentioned my topic to them and neither of them knew what my thesis was about. I contacted 14 students and at first I got poor response. After I sent a second email reminding of them the questionnaire I received most of the other answers. In total I obtained eleven inquiries, which is a response rate of 78.5%. Seven of the respondents were male (64.6%), four were female (36.4%).

4.3.2.2 Sampling validity

It is again justified to ask whether or not the sample is valid. The problem was that my target group was quite specific and thus it would not have been easy to find those students. Mainly it would have been costly and time consuming to find matching respondents. Nevertheless, the students that I contacted were a very heterogeneous group; most of them had spent the time abroad in different countries and were enrolled in different faculties and studies. They also came from all parts of the Czech Republic. The main goal was to get a sample of Czech students that had studied and lived abroad

in the past five years, moreover, I wanted to have enough students to see how Czech students with international experience think about certain topics.

4.4 Data Analyses

All of the data obtained was read several times, to increase the familiarity with the texts (Billiet and Waege, 2003). The answers from the experts were analysed by dividing in themes (Krippendorff 2004), which were based on some of the sub research questions. For example, to answer the question how ice hockey is financially supported, I sorted all comments on this topic and reported them, so that they reveal the overall picture. The next excerpts signify that it is difficult to find finances, and that there are many aspects that play a role, such as geographic position of the city, tradition, goals of the club, fan base etc.:

Mgr. Otakar Cerny Jr.: I don't think it's all about business, that's nonsense. [Our club] **is financed 70-80% of sponsorship and the rest we get from the tickets we sell and subsidies from the city.** Our goal definitely isn't to try to make profit for the simple reason that we don't make any profit here. But we have to find funds for our budget, which is increasing constantly because everything is getting more expensive.

Petr Fiala: Nowadays we take over many things from abroad, such as fan articles etc, and the fans do not just come, but they come with their scarves, jerseys and heads of their club...today it are fans and not just spectators. **Also for sponsors it is important and they look of course if a club has supporters and what kind of supporters.**...thanks to internet it is also easier for fans to communicate and to organize trips to away games...if somebody has to call 100 people by phone it of course doesn't work

Ivo Kyndl: **The city supports ice hockey financially.** It gives subsidies to the club and it runs the ice rink...If the city wouldn't support hockey then it wouldn't be played on such a level. But it works de facto everywhere in the Czech Republic like this, that the towns fund the hockey and sports in general...The city can control or influence the club through the supervision board, which is mandatory by law. Since it is through public finances, there must be people from the city in the supervision board.

Mgr. Milan Volf: **Kladno has a small budget and compared to other teams in Central Bohemia, it's difficult to find money.** Here it's not about which place we have at the end of the season, but about how many players we produce...and even though we don't have the money to play in the top, we still produce world class players...I would say that Kladno is the cradle of Czech hockey. This is often used this term [when talking about Kladno].

Although the analysis method might be similar to content analyses, where texts and answers are sorted according to themes, I did not quantify the data by counting certain words, because it will not increase the insight of my topic. However, it is content analysis in the sense that the content of data is verbally described (Krippendorff 2004). The experts' answers are statements that carry the value and the information itself (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2005). They answer certain parts of the puzzle, which is meant to form the overall picture. Therefore, the relevant parts and answers of the interviews will be presented in the next chapter.

The student interviews underwent content analyses. Some of the answers and concepts were not quantified, since the answers were so different, due to the open questions. I interpreted the answers and sort them by themes (Krippendorff 2004), which answered the sub research questions. In some questions, the students had five answer possibilities, for example:

What are you as a Czech proud of?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Which were answered for example this way:

What are you as a Czech proud of?

1. The beauty of our country
2. The successes of Czech sportsmen
3. The inventiveness of people
4. Successes in science
5. Our national dish vepřo-knedlo-zelo

Other questions were open questions, for example:

How would you describe the Czech mentality?

The answers will be presented in the next chapter. Thus, most of my data was analysed by reading, understanding, interpreting and sorting the texts or answers by content. The content represents the opinions and/or feelings of my interviewees. Their statements are very valuable and in combination with the quantitative researches done by the CVVM they give a profound overall picture of the phenomenon of ice hockey in the Czech Republic, which is the goal of this thesis.

All the interview questions and transcripts can be found in the appendix and are in Czech language. The translations of the relevant parts have been made by me and will be presented in the results of the next chapter.

5. RESULTS

In the following chapter the results will be presented. The structure of reporting follows the pattern of the research questions and sub questions of this study. Furthermore, the answers of the students were used to answer the first two questions, whereas the experts' answers were used to answer all questions. Since there is a considerable difference in how male and the female students answered the questions, they will be always marked with MS (male student) and FS (female student). I interviewed in total eleven students, so they will also be marked from 1-11. Male students thus are MS1-MS7 and the female students are FS8-FS11. The experts will be mentioned by their names, since they allowed me to do so, the students remain anonymous.

5.1 Czech mentality described by the respondents

First, we take a look at how the Czechs and the Czech mentality were described. The answers on this topic were very different, which made it challenging to form themes. This shows that there was not really a consensus. Only some phrases or concepts were repeated more than once and even when they were, they were never repeated more than four times by all correspondents together. However, certain patterns could be found. Czechs were described as flexible, versatile, handy, creative and inventive. Here are some of the answers that included this most mentioned aspect:

FS11: Individualistic, practical, phlegmatic, creative, don't deal or solve with details too much, generous, adventurous.

MS3: Inventive, versatile, capable and cheerful, proud about any little accomplishment of a small nation. At the same time enviously, a bit closed in the basins, unable to move (where one is born, one dies as well). Czechs are a bit know-it-alls.

Mgr. Jiri Nepil: We are a bit irresponsible, a bit undisciplined. Flexible, but we are not embeddable. Otherwise handy. Lack of a stronger character.

Pragmatism was mentioned, as well as phlegmatic and generous. The second most mentioned characteristic was the lack of pride, cohesion and national feeling. Three students mentioned these characteristics and stated that only during certain, rare occasions these might be found:

MS2: Absence of national feeling (except for sport and culture). Furthermore, affection to sport, trips in the nature and consuming beer.

MS6: It seems to me, that as a nation, due to whatever reasons (for example political reasons), we are not very proud on our past, on our roots etc...we are not very proud on what we have here and we are not able to appreciate important values...we are very oriented on finances...

MS7: People who are proud of themselves, they think of themselves as a collective and help each other unfortunately only in times of international success or national catastrophes, which isn't that often. Otherwise they don't have much self-esteem and everyone acts for himself. 'Czech smallness' is also projected in people's minds. Czech mentality is also marked by ca. 40 years of communism-this influence didn't wear off and won't wear off for some time.

The latter, the "Czech smallness" or limited view was also mentioned several times. It means that people in Czech think they know everything best and they do not look further than the border of the country.

Another aspect mentioned was that Czechs are know-it-alls, which can to a certain extent be explained by the creativity and handiness that were mentioned most. Furthermore, dissatisfaction and scepticism were also mentioned three times. The first answer below combines the latter three:

Mudr. Jarmila Nepilova: We're always sceptical and unhappy. We understand everything even if don't have a clue about it.

MS2: Eternal dissatisfaction with everything, low friendliness in first encounter.

MS4: Hard-working, travelling, self-conceited, dissatisfied, critical, self-centred.

MS1: We know everything best and how to do it and we don't allow anyone to correct us.

Sometimes, there are issues that are described from both sides of the medal. The fact that Czechs rarely fought was described twice and from an opposite viewpoint, one being more negative, the other more positive:

MS1: The next aspect of the Czech mentality is not to fight. The last battle was the battle of the White Mountain.

MS5: The Czech nature is pacific and without conflict.

Two respondents described the Czech mentality as distant and closed:

MS5: I think, we are rather closed and we like to observe from the distance, evaluate and comment

FS8: Friendly and companionable, but often with a certain distance.

And as last, two respondents mentioned the sense of humour, which is also according to world class ice hockey player Pavel Patera quite important:

Pavel Patera: The atmosphere and humour in the team is very important in Czech. It is more relaxed than anywhere else I've played and everyone is making fun of everyone.

Mudr. Jarmila Nepilova: We have 'our' sense of humour and good humour in general. We can make fun out of everything, even when times are bad, for example during the protectorate there were many great jokes, even when the time was so bad.

FS9: I think, I would say we are phlegmatic. We don't deal much with problems and often we don't care about stuff. We also have the same kind of humour- we are able to laugh about ourselves...we are 'pisspoors' [in Czech- vyčůraný, slang way to say sly or sleazy]. We can deal with almost anything- we can sail around laws and where we can we try to save money.

In summary, there was an overall small consensus about how the respondents perceived Czech mentality. However, according to the respondents, Czechs have a versatile character, they can deal with most of the problems though they often do not care about solving details. Czechs tend to be phlegmatic on the one side, but eternally dissatisfied on the other. Czechs tend to be close and distant, at least at first, which may be due to their sceptical character. Furthermore, Czechs sometimes overestimate themselves and think they can tackle issues, which are not part of their repertoire. Also, Czechs are likely to have small national feeling and pride with the exception of the successes of their sportsmen, which may be explained by the fact that in history they mostly avoided wars and battles. It is important to see the results in a broader perspective, which I have described in chapter two. These findings make sense from a historical point of view and do not contradict the findings of the CVVM.

5.2 The perceived self-image of Czechs, and the role of sports

I asked the respondents how they thought, based on their own experiences, foreigners think about Czechs and the Czech Republic. It corresponds with what Lehtonen (2005) calls 'projected stereotype'. It is different in the sense that here it was asked what foreigners think of Czechs in general, not necessarily which stereotypes they have. The

overall perception of the respondents was that most foreigners do not know much, if anything at all, about the Czech Republic:

Mudr. Jarmila Nepilova: I think we have to be modest, because they don't know much about us [abroad]. The year 68, communism and the tanks that came, that was known even abroad. Beer for sure, Czech glass...most famous is probably Jaroslav Hasek and Svejek and also Franz Kafka and hockey thanks to Jagr.

MS1: From my Estonian experience: ...Our country wasn't seen neither negative nor positive. My experience from England: Czechoslovakia. That tells everything... In general people connect our country to Prague (they don't know anything else in Czech, with few exceptions). They know the beer, destination for cheap entertainment, the more intelligent ones know Vaclav Havel and Vaclav Klaus. Our country isn't connected to nay central idea (like USA being the biggest democracy)...and of course that we are form 'Eastern Europe'.

MS2: Abroad they see us as a small, unimportant country somewhere between Russia and Yugoslavia. The overall perspective of foreigners towards our country and our citizens is from my own experience slightly negative, because the Czech Republic is practically always lined between Easter Europe (the term Central Europe is only used by a informed foreigner with a diplomatic soul and only in the moment where he wants to make Czechs happy-basically some sort of compliment) and thus terms like 'gastarbeiter', 'prostitution' or 'Wild East' are automatically connected to us. Most of all amongst older foreign generations there is significant small knowledge about the division of our state into Czech and Slovakia.

MS7: Very often they don't know about us (or they think we are a part of ex-Yugoslavia, or part of another big neighbour country). As a nation they perceive us perhaps only in big international successes. Perhaps we are recognized as good sportsmen.

FS9: I think for most of the other nations (mainly those from the West) we are 'the ones of the East'. A poor state, in which there is already democracy, but where people still behave like during communism.

Some respondents however pointed out that it depends where one is:

MS3: I think it depends a lot on the personal experiences of the people from abroad, thus if they have ever been in Czech, or if they follow the international events, or sport. The behaviour of Czech public personas has an influence on that (for example sportsmen or politicians. I hope, they perceive us well abroad.

MS4: Hard-working, travelling, for the Western world inferior and underdeveloped, for the Eastern the other way round.

MS5: I think it depends pretty much in which region, country or continent you are. I want to believe, we are perceived positively. It would be interesting to compare the opinion about Czechs between our western and our eastern neighbours. I think, we are most of all perceived as good and reliable business partners.

MS6: It depends where you are I guess. I think in most of the world they don't know anything about a small Czech country in Central Europe. In the USA they still think we are Czechoslovakia.

In the next section I will present the respondents' answers concerning the image of the Czech Republic abroad. Here the focus lies on what Czechs are famous for. The questions asked were again open and the students could each time choose up to five answers. I will not present the hierarchy of the answers, that is, what they choose first and what second, for the reason that the sample is too small. In the tables I will also not show the differences between male and female respondents, however, if an interesting pattern occurred, I will mention it. Only answers that occurred more than one time are included, because if already two out of eleven people respond the same way, it means that there is a consensus.

What is in your opinion the Czech Republic famous for abroad?

Ice hockey	5
Football	4
Other sports	2
Sport in general	3
Sport mentioned totally	14
Czech beer	9
Prague	6
Attractive/ beautiful women/ girls	5
Vaclav Havel	4

Table 1 N=11; only if an answer occurred more than once, it is mentioned here

All male students named sport in general or a sport specifically as something the Czech Republic is famous for abroad. Only half of the female respondents did the same thing. Sports were, in one way or another mentioned 14 times.

Who are in your opinion the most famous Czech persons abroad?

Jaromir Jagr (ice hockey)	10
Vaclav Havel	10
Pavel Nedved (football)	4
Vaclav Klaus	3
Petr Cech (football)	2
Dominik Hasek (ice hockey)	2
Franz Kafka	2
Milos Forman	2
Madeleine Albright	2

Table 2 N=11; only if an answer occurred more than once, it is mentioned here

All of the respondents choose at least once a sportsman. Jaromir Jagr was the most chosen sportsman and together with former president Vaclav Havel the most chosen personality. This is what one of the experts said about the persona Jaromir Jagr:

Mgr. Milan Volf: Jagr is for all young players a god here...If you go somewhere abroad and people don't know much about Czech they start with Nedved, Poborsky [football players from the 'golden generation'] and this guys or they name Jagr and other elite hockey players. Ice hockey is, without doubt, a national symbol, because we celebrate the biggest international successes in it...Czech hockey players are national heroes for sure, often they are more famous than politicians. Jagr could candidate for president here and he would win.

Jagr is without doubt considered to be one of the greatest personalities in the Czech Republic, though he is a sportsman. Also, the Czechs probably overrate his international fame, since many tend to forget that ice hockey is only in a few countries of this world really popular. The next question pulsed what the respondents were proud of.

What are you as a Czech proud of?

Czech nature/ beauty of the Czech Republic in general	8
Sports or sportsmen	7
Czech Beer	5
Cultural sights /architecture	5
Prague	4
Nature of the Czech people (character, mentality, abilities)	4
People who break through internationally	3
Czech Language	3
Czech History	2
Humour	2

Table 3 N=11; only if an answer occurred more than once, it is mentioned here

All of the male respondents choose sport or sportsmen who break through internationally as something they were proud of, three of them specifically mentioned ice hockey or an ice hockey event (gold in 1998 Olympics), and none of them mentioned football. None of the female students mentioned sports as something they felt proud of.

What are you not proud of as a Czech?

Politicians, Political culture, Political scene	8
Specific characteristics of Czech mentality or behaviour (such as envy)	7
Corruption, financial fraud	4
Disorder, mess	3
Capitulation, not fighting in wars when it mattered	2
Racism, xenophobia	2

Table 4 N=11; only if an answer occurred more than once, it is mentioned here

How often do you watch ice hockey?

Regularly (national team and league)	6
Not regularly	4
Never or by coincidence	1

Table 5 N=11; only if an answer occurred more than once, it is mentioned here

Again there was a difference between female and male respondents. Only one male student did not follow ice hockey on a regular basis. All the other male respondents mentioned to follow ice hockey at least once in a while, two of them said that they also at least once a year attend a live match:

MS3: I watch in TV usually the national team at the highlight events, NHL and some times the Extraleague. I also go to watch Trinec in the Extraleague live, but less and less, because our guys play s***. I also went to watch live matches of the Czech national team on the Olympics in Torino and Finnish and Swedish league matches.

Except one student (female), all the other revealed to watch at least some of the crucial matches of the national team on the World championships or Olympics:

FS9: I almost don't follow it. If I do, it's a coincidence because I am in a bar where they project a hockey match.

FS11: Only the crucial matches of the Olympics or the World Championships.

In summary, all the students thought that the Czech Republic is relatively unknown internationally. We could also see that sportsmen were considered as important ambassadors of the country and that all the male students were proud on the Czech Republic as a sports nation, in vast contrast with their female colleagues.

5.3 A Czech style of playing hockey

Sport journalists often refer to different nations using a different playing style. However, sport sociologists point out that journalists like to use a clichéd language and the use of stereotypes (Maguire et al. 2002; Clarke and Clarke 1982). We will see what the experts think on the matter:

Ivo Kyndl: A Czech hockey style exists for sure! ...The Czech hockey style is not always easy to understand and to read. Its playful and creative and the basics for that is the ability to improvise.

Petr Fiala: I think the Czech style can be characterized through great creativity, the players are able to react according to what is going on the ice. Often they add some unusual elements, unexpected things, which are not easy to read for the opponent. Opposed to for example the Nordic Hockey School, where the players mainly use what they have learned in practice.

Mgr. Jiri Nepil: I don't know so much the other styles, but I know for example that in the NHL they play much harder and one can also perceive it as more individualistic. Here it is more about team play and it is, how shall I say, more intuitive. It's not such a drill, which is something that doesn't suit us; we prefer to improvise, as a nation but also as hockey players. It is like our 'Czech handiness' skill.

Thus, the skill or characteristic most mentioned by the respondents in 5.1 is clearly found in how the experts describe the Czech playing style. The style being described mainly as creative, flexible with the ability to improvise. However, the experts point out that that is due to practice and the stress of the Czech Hockey School. Nevertheless, the styles are not so clear anymore as they might have been in the past, for two reasons. First of all it is the migration of players and second of all it is the fact that hockey develops constantly and in this process nations learn from each other and try to implement successful strategies of the opponent:

Petr Fiala: Every national team has its own style ... but through the migration of players the styles get more similar... though the basics of what they learn at home when they are young has still an influence on their style

Mgr. Milan Volf: Czech hockey style. I wouldn't call it that way...we have learned a lot from Canada and hockey developed and everyone has learned something from everyone...but in Czech hockey there is this eye for beauty and combination, this joy from the play, so it has this touch, but its not like we play a different style.

Petr Fiala: ...but its not like you could say when you see them [Czech players] you could say: "Ow, they must have been born in Czech...", nevertheless, our Hockey School is less physical play and more technical, its more about 'being clever' on the ice

Furthermore, another parallel could be found with 5.1, where one student pointed out that the Czechs do not fight when it matters, while another called it pacific. Historically seen we know that in many cases it did not make sense for the Czechs to fight, as mentioned in chapter two, however it has left its traces. It is a far throw to say that this also influences the playing style of the Czechs, but there could be at least a small influence of that in the background:

Ivo Kyndl: There is also a difference in mentality. Czechs try to win a game with cleverness, Canadians with fortitude and strength. If a Canadian loses 20 seconds before the end of the game with three goals difference he keeps on working for 100%. A Czech doesn't fight in this situation anymore, because he knows that there is nothing he can do with it no more. They are like bulldogs and we are not. We want to entertain ourselves when we play and outsmart the opponent.

However, this does not mean that Czech players are mentally weak. If an almost unchanged team wins three World Championship titles in a row, it surely requires nerves:

Pavel Patera: I think Czechs can play also in difficult situations in comparison with the Finns for example, it is known that as soon as they get a goal they stop functioning but we continue to play 'our' game. It doesn't influence us so much when we make or if we get a goal.

Furthermore, one of the experts also pointed out that not only between countries there are differences in playing styles, but also within the country:

Petr Fiala: Not only between the countries, but also within our country there are different playing styles...again according to what is stressed during practice...there are different philosophies that show on the ice...Kladno always had a more 'hard-working' and 'target oriented' style than for example Litvinov or Pardubice with their toys, their potential often was bigger.

In summary, we could see that the mentalities' assets are partly reflected in the Czech playing style. However, the migration of players and the global character of the game have reduced the pure character of that style, which is logical, since national teams face each other very often, and thus the successful teams influence the less successful ones. The origin of different playing styles lies in the first place in the different Hockey Schools. These on the other hand are defined by locals, which mean that of course they include certain preferred elements. It is important to keep in mind that the styles thus might be culturally determined, but definitely not genetically, as some journalists sometimes tend to claim.

5.4 Financial support of ice hockey

This section is about how ice hockey is supported in the Czech Republic, or more specifically, in Kladno. Municipal governments, companies and also private persons

have only limited funds and thus they must carefully evaluate on what to spend it on. It is important to look at who finances ice hockey in order to understand how important it is to a specific society. The economical issue is part of the social structures that are a vital indicator for sports as a part of culture.

HC Kladno is a local club, a club with long tradition. The Czech Republic has a market economy, thus clubs should finance themselves and try to increase profit, at least according to many sport sociologists sports has become purely business. Though money of course plays a huge role, profit is definitely not the priority of the Czech clubs, who more or less try to survive, however, thanks to many factors such as support from the municipal governments and sponsors, clubs are able to survive, even after the social changes in the Czech Republic:

Mgr. Otakar Cerny Jr.: I don't think it's all about business, that's nonsense. [Our club] is financed 70-80% of sponsorship and the rest we get from the tickets we sell and subsidies from the city. Our goal definitely isn't to try to make profit for the simple reason that we don't make any profit here. But we have to find funds for our budget, which is increasing constantly because everything is getting more expensive.

Petr Fiala: Nowadays we take over many things from abroad, such as fan articles etc, and the fans do not just come, but they come with their scarves, jerseys and heads of their club...today it are fans and not just spectators. Also for sponsors it is important and they look of course if a club has supporters and what kind of supporters...thanks to internet it is also easier for fans to communicate and to organize trips to away games...if somebody has to call 100 people by phone it of course doesn't work

Ivo Kyndl: The city supports ice hockey financially. It gives subsidies to the club and it runs the ice rink...If the city wouldn't support hockey then it wouldn't be played on such a level. But it works de facto everywhere in the Czech Republic like this, that the towns fund the hockey and sports in general...The city can control or influence the club through the supervision board, which is mandatory by law. Since it is through public finances, there must be people from the city in the supervision board.

Mgr. Milan Volf: Kladno has a small budget and compared to other teams in Central Bohemia, it's difficult to find money. Here it's not about which place we have at the end of the season, but about how many players we produce...and even though we don't have the money to play in the top, we still produce world class players...I would say that Kladno is the cradle of Czech hockey. This is often used this term [when talking about Kladno].

Thus, in Kladno the club is dependent on the city, which is a common phenomenon in Czech. Also, the ice hockey team of Plzen had to be saved by the city after the 2008/2009 season, where it lost its main sponsor. If the city would take over the funding though a company that it owned, Plzen would disappear from the Extraleague. HC

Kladno however has since the long time main sponsor Poldi SONP went bankrupt, regularly financial issues, therefore it tries to raise as many as good players as possible, to save money:

Mgr. Milan Volf: If you don't bring up players you don't have anything to choose from and you have to buy players, we have to invest in our youth here [in Kladno] that's our only chance... When I was major of the town, only teams that had a youth section got subsidies.

Ivo Kyndl: Ice hockey gets the most finances in Kladno for the simple reason that it is the most traditional sport in our town and it gives us the most advertisement. It is called: Active propagation of the city.

Mgr. Milan Volf: If the city wouldn't support hockey I am afraid it wouldn't be here anymore.

Czechs have a strong feeling for regional identity and sports are important to them, thus one can expect that the citizens in the city agree with the support of ice hockey, though the contemporaries definitely are not a representative sample and above that they are related to each other, they both seemed to agree with the fact that the town supported sports and that ice hockey was the sport that received most funds:

Mudr. Jarmila Nepilova: There is a good sport activity here. There are many sport areas and they look well. I think the city must support sport financially. Otherwise it wouldn't be on such a high level...It is clear that if a sport is more successful than another, it should get more funds, however it is not right to push away the other sports...like smaller sports.

Mgr. Jiri Nepil: I agree that the city supports hockey... I would also support if they would reconstruct the ice arena.

To conclude, Ice hockey depends on the funding of the city. This counts for teams that play in the Extraleague as much as for small clubs in smaller towns, to whom ice hockey is even more expensive since they can hardly find sponsoring. Nevertheless, ice hockey still finds finances in Czech society, which proves that it is an important aspect of social and also cultural life.

5.5 The political system's influence on sport policy

This question is directly related to the previous question and also by the next one (5.6). As mentioned, the Czech Republic switched after 1989 to market economy, which influenced the financing of ice hockey. In the Communist time players were not professional, but amateur. They officially went to work, though in fact they were practicing also during work time. With other words, the system was more flexible towards them. Hockey players and other sportsmen however were not allowed to go to play abroad, where they could have earned much more money of course. Only if a player had played a certain amount of games for the national team he could in rare cases go and play his last few seasons, when he was already past his horizon, abroad. In other words, the system tried to keep all its quality players, some of them nevertheless defected. There is the famous case where the three Stastny brothers defected during a tournament played abroad. Also, what was the case for the hockey players counted of course as well for the football players. In the following section I analyse what the experts had to say about the change and how it influenced sport policies:

Petr Fiala: The state is still supporting sport, but definitely not to the same extend as before 1989. We all have to earn our own money now... Thanks to the fact that ice hockey and football are so visible in the media, there are only few clubs who have to quit due to financial problems...Of course, now the state can't intervene that much as it could before, since it provides little funds now.

Ivo Kyndl: Nowadays hockey is business as everywhere in the world... The state doesn't pay anything, it is a communal matter. The ministry of Education however gives the Czech Ice Hockey Association (CSLH) some funds for the tutoring of the youth. The CSLH divides the money according to the achievements of the youth teams.

Mgr. Milan Volf: The state should support youth sport more...so that the quality of training is better, so that children don't have any negative consequences on their health...good trainers are expensive...the senior team is commerce, but the children are not...the state doesn't do enough to support them.

Ivo Kyndl: In the past, a hockey player didn't make more money than a normal person. Today there are huge differences not only between a player and an average person but also between the players themselves.

Petr Fiala: Nowadays there is more money in the sport, so there are more players who can make a living from it...from economical point of view, player have more option, they can for example go easily abroad etc. The status of a hockey player hasn't changed according to me.

As mentioned, in Communism ice hockey did not have to fear a lack of funds, neither the clubs, nor the national team. From the smallest categories till the senior teams, as much as in small towns and in the big ones, money was not an issue. All the players earned about the same as each other and compared to a normal person. Furthermore, the system worked the same all over the country. Now the teams have to find the funds individually, some being more successful than others. However, they usually end up in the hands of the city.

As stated in chapter three, politics and sports used to be connected, especially in Communism. Communist used as means for propaganda:

Ivo Kyndl: The communist used ice hockey in the sense that they said: “We make better hockey than the West.”

Petr Fiala: If there were people during communism who were trying to warm up themselves on the success of hockey then there are people now as well who are trying to do it. Whenever there is success, there are politicians trying to get a piece of the cake.

Summarizing, the landscape of ice hockey in the Czech Republic has changed by 180 degrees. The teams have to try hard to finance themselves and the state does not pursue a strong doctrine anymore. It is interesting to see how the matter of sports has become a communal matter, which will be explained deeper later on. We have seen, however, only a part of how the change influenced the landscape. It was more the outside of the matter, the form. The next question will go deeper into the subject.

5.6 The political changes’ influence on the vital structures for ice hockey

This question is one of the core questions, since it will permit to attempt the anticipation or prediction of the future of Czech ice hockey. Vital structures are for example, the political system, the socio-economical situation and demographic factors. We know that hockey is important in Czech and thus that it functions as a source for identity. But the landscape has changed and nothing lasts forever. Many of the experts expressed their concern for the future of Czech ice hockey. Certain trends undermine the quality of the new hockey generation, as described also in the IIHF study (The IIHF study can be

found in the appendices or on the official WebPages of the IIHF). Again, it seems that financial matters gain the upper hand:

Ivo Kyndl: The main problem is that hockey is so costly... In the past every player got all the equipment from the club and that already from the smallest age onwards. Later on one maybe had to buy skates but at that time they were very cheap. So everyone who wanted could come and play hockey...if he was good enough.

Petr Fiala: Hockey is financially very demanding and the clubs aren't able anymore to pay for everything, so it's the parents who have to pay most now. So there aren't that many kids coming anymore, so the team accepts anyone who wants to play. In communist times the trainer could choose the children according to predisposition and talent and send the other kids home.

Ivo Kyndl: The differences are very diametrical. Prior, there were enormous amounts of youth players and thus there was huge competition. Everyone gave its 100%. When I came into the older category the trainer picked a team and two whole other teams he sent home. The difference between those who made it to the team and those who didn't were sometimes millimetres. It was also about luck but one always knew that one had to give everything.

The first part of the chain is the fact that ice hockey is an expensive sport, and that on junior level as much as on senior level. Therefore, fewer children go to play ice hockey nowadays since the parents have to pay most of the costs. As a result, the natural competition decreases which has an influence on the overall quality of players. Furthermore, many young players leave to North America in junior age, to increase their chance of making it to the NHL, the most prestigious league in the world. This of course makes the situation only worse:

Ivo Kyndl: It is a catastrophe! It's all about money. We know the IIHF studies...but those players leave for many reasons. First of all there are scouts and agents now. That's something that didn't exist here before [1989]. They get provisions from every player that they can get there. The parents of the players see it differently. Their boy doesn't play maybe that good but at least he goes there and learns the language...but those guys are lacking here and the competition gets smaller than it already is...Czech hockey must fear for its future.

Mgr. Otakar Cerny Jr.: The [Velvet] Revolution brought us freedom for which we are all happy here and so of course the young players can go play wherever they want and many of them go to North America...this isn't a good period for hockey with all those young guys leaving...but I hope it will get better when our economy will grow, so that one day we will be able to offer them more money.

Mgr. Milan Volf: If you invest in your [youth] players, they will return it some day. The problem are the agents. They take an unready player and put him somewhere else under false promises...such a player doesn't return the investment...but the agent buys them

skates and they get crazy and they don't believe the study of the IIHF. Maybe when everything will be better here [economically] the situation might improve.

Mgr. Otakar Cerny Jr.: It would be better for those young players to play in the Extraleague than in a junior hockey league somewhere in America. But there is a lot of pressure on them from the [NHL] clubs and their agents, who get money from that that they bring them there.

Petr Fiala: I think the worse politics is made by those agents who want to have the boys in sight, so they try to get them as early as possible into the American or Canadian junior hockey leagues. So these 16 or 17 year old kids don't finish learning the hockey that is taught to them here and start to learn a different style that is not familiar to them, because a player takes time to grow till he is 19 or 20 at least. So they drag those kids out of their natural surrounding and put them in another one what quite often doesn't work for them...it is also maybe due to our mentality. The Russians more trust their own system and the Fins and Swedes have a great system themselves and they all speak English. Here they often try to use the argument that the player will learn English there... it is often very short-term thinking and actually proved be a disadvantage [to go so early to North America] and it basically is impatience, nothing else.

Petr Fiala: Now there are many scouts who are watching the guys already from when they are lets say 12 or 13, and when they see that they are talented, they take over the costs from the parents, but of course, they want them to sign a contract with them...so there is a general shift in how things around the sport are managed

Furthermore, there are some general changes in society:

Ivo Kyndl: Nowadays also the demography has changed. There is an overall decline in birth rate. Ice hockey has become a very expensive sport so many talents from the poorer social layers disappear, because they don't even come to the recruitment. There is also the competition of the other sports like football or floorball, where it is enough to buy one stick and the kid can play. Now a trainer can be happy if he pulls together three lines and the players know that very well, so they are not trying so hard. The natural competition has vanished.

Mgr. Jiri Nepil: There is a fierce difference with the young generations now and my generation. Back then hockey- in the winter on the lake and otherwise on the asphalted street with stick and ball- was played in every city quarter or part and boys came together and mainly quite regularly and we would play matches against boys from other quarters. But it all was informal. Hockey was for us a measure. Who knew how to play had respect in the children's collective. Who wasn't handy wasn't regarded fully-fledged.

Ivo Kyndl: Today they are spoiled and they sit at home, play computer and they don't have to care about anything. They don't need to decide anything anymore. When I was a kid we went to play after school on the streets with a stick and a ball or we were jumping around in the trees. The fact that children nowadays don't have to make any decisions anymore, transforms also on the ice, where the ability to decide is very important.

Petr Fiala: The newer generations of children have many more options than the older ones, which means that they are often distracted and less devoted to the sport they choose.

Ivo Kyndl: It is not a good time for [youth] hockey. The problem is also in the schools. They don't have good sport teachers anymore who teach them the basic stuff like a flip over so they have worse coordination skills and that can be seen then also on the ice.

In conclusion, we can see that it is impossible to look at the changes only from one perspective, there are many reasons that inflict them, often one change leads to another and they turn out to have some sort of synergetic effect. The change in hockey is not visible to most of the public, nonetheless the experts are aware of the fact that if nothing will change and the trend continues, the Czech Republic will not belong to the top anymore, which of course will have an impact on its popularity. That will again set off certain effects, probably even fewer boys will want to start playing ice hockey and it will be harder to get funds from sponsors or from the city. Changes do not show their impact until after many years. The Czech Republic celebrated its biggest results in the decade after the fall of communism; it was however still living of the fruits of that very same system. The changes it brought and the problems for the sport are visible only until recently, the last five or six years, when the junior hockey has steadily declined, with as peak the relegation of the U18 team in 2007 to lower division, though it promoted the year after that again to Top division, hockey experts all over the Czech Republic are disillusioned about the future.

5.7 Ice hockey and its position in the Czech Republic

The male students revealed that sport is important to them, that it is something that they are proud of. Also the female respondents acknowledged that sports are important in our image abroad and that sportsmen are significant ambassadors of our country. Lets have a look now what the contemporaries and the experts said:

Mudr. Jarmila Nepilova: I think it [hockey] is a symbol for the reason that it has long tradition here and was played already before the Second World War. And we are good at it, we had success, so it's very popular here. The whole country lives with it. Whenever the football players are successful then the nation also lives with it, but that doesn't happen so often.

Mgr. Jiri Nepil: When I was a kid I followed the national team a lot. Back then already I understood that it was more than just sport. When we won for example against the

Soviets it was a national explosion here, it was almost a revolution. That I mainly sensed through the grown ups.

Petr Fiala: Hockey has such a strong tradition here, it had always some results so that goes hand in hand with the popularity. From a global point of view it is not so popular, but for us its with football the most popular, and due to the fact that hockey has the better results is the reason that it sticks out a bit

Ivo Kyndl: Hockey is here the number one sport. Football is also popular but in hockey we always had successes. It's a traditional Czech sport. And Kladno is the bastion of hockey in the Czech Republic. What Wimbledon is for tennis in England that is Kladno for ice hockey in the Czech Republic. Hockey functions here continuously already more than 70 years, which is something incredible.

In summary, the words tradition and success are central here. And from the last answer we can see the strong regional identification that Czechs traditionally have. The national team is important, but people will also look from where the players and lines are. This again has a strong tradition in Czech ice hockey. In the 1990's, the probably best line in the national team was the 'Blue line', covering Martin Prochazka, Pavel Patera and Otakar Vejvoda Jr. Blue is the club colour of HC Kladno and it was transformed to those players who also in the national team played in the same line.

5.8 Kladno as an example of ice hockey and regional identity

Regional identity continues or starts where national identity ends. Thus I continue where we ended in the previous subchapter, with Pavel Patera commenting on his first victory in the World Championships:

Pavel Patera: The fact that it was our Kladno line that decided the final match against Canada [at the World Championships in 1996] was something very pleasant...

Mgr. Milan Volf: If you go in the Czech Republic, then towns are known for something, one for this the other for that...Kladno always had two things: the Poldi factory [steel producer, went bankrupt in the 90's under doubtful circumstances] ...and one phenomenon that that has survived here all the time which is hockey.

Mudr. Jarmila Nepilova: It [hockey] is definitely a symbol of Kladno. Even in the communist time, when things got a bit more calmer here, then players from Kladno were the first pioneers in the NHL amongst the Czech players, like for example Standa Bacilek, Milan Novy, Jaroslav Jirik and another one, but I cant recall his name now...

Ivo Kyndl: In Kladno there are four sports on the highest level [hockey, football, volleyball and athletics]...hockey is probably the main source of identification here.

Mgr. Jiri Nepil: If there was no hockey in this town anymore I would feel odd, something would be missing in our town

Mgr. Milan Volf: If you go to watch an Extraleague match here you will see its full of people who are excited, they live for it and of course they are proud [of the team].

Ivo Kyndl: Ice hockey is a great PR for our city...When Jagr came to play in the United States they were forced to look on the map and see where the Czech Republic and Kladno is. It gives us PR everywhere in the world where they play ice hockey.

Mgr. Otakar Cerny Jr.: Hockey is very traditional in Kladno so I do feel a responsibility [towards the citizens]

Pavel Patera: Of course, here in Kladno where I grew up, my parents and my friends go to watch all the games, I live through the matches more emotionally than when I played somewhere abroad. And of course playing for the national team was my dream since I was small so it is similar like when playing for Kladno. I don't want to say that somewhere else I didn't play with heart, but here it simply is stronger also after the matches than abroad...Kladno is the team of my heart, that's also why I returned here.

Mgr. Milan Volf: [The city] has to support and organise sport and culture, because no one else will do it. And I think it's an obligation. It is an obligation.

Also, the experts working in the city, in the city council and the former major, pointed out how it has also other positive effects, such as connecting social classes, creating jobs and long term prevention of criminality:

Ivo Kyndl: Ice hockey, as sports in general, unite the different social classes. Definitely!

Mgr. Milan Volf: Hockey connects the social classes in many ways. For example, a young player from a lower social status comes in contact with people from a higher one. And so he creates a contact which may serve him also in life...it is one of the ways, non violent ways, that provides someone from the weaker social layer to prove that he is at something better than the other and thus that he isn't weak.

Ivo Kyndl: It is business so it creates jobs. At the same time it is Active propagation of the city. Furthermore it is done so that the people can do something in their free time.

Mgr. Milan Volf: If a child goes to play hockey and he has only one free day a week, those children have a program, they go to school and then to hockey and they live for that...sport in general of course, sport and culture give the children an opportunity and a program, so with that you distract them of course from living on the streets, bothering people or doing some stupid stuff...so of course, in the long run you prevent criminality. But it's important that kids even when they play hockey go to school.

Ice hockey is a phenomenon in Kladno; it is a symbol and a part of the town's identity. Therefore the town supports ice hockey financially, since the people working town hall consider it an obligation. Both managers and players feel a personal responsibility

towards their fellow citizens in trying to get the best possible results for the team and thus for the town.

I presented the main findings of my study here, in the next chapter the results will be discussed and linked to the theory.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Findings

The results reveal that ice hockey indeed has its place in Czech culture and society. The two central words that often came up were tradition and success. As a result hockey is embedded in the Czech culture and can be considered a national sport, even in the globalized age, where according to Maguire “national identities- and the sport forms of cultures as a whole- are undergoing a pluralisation process, it is also increasingly difficult to sustain the notion that a single sport represents the nation.” (1999: 88). So far this is not the case. Traditionally, football and ice hockey are considered to be equally popular in the Czech Republic. The advantage of ice hockey is that the World Championships are held annually, with the necessary media attention. Also, the Czech Republic as one of the top nations is always automatically qualified, which is not the case on football, where the ‘big’ tournaments –the FIFA World Championships and UEFA European Championships are played every four years- are played only every two years. During the break programme the Czech Television often dives back into the past, reminding great victories and hockey personalities. According to Blain t al. we should not forget that:

“In modern societies much cultural experience is gained through the mass media. Sport provides us with a sense of belonging to a nation, however irrational that may be.” (1993: 15)

Furthermore, the Czech Republic also sometimes hosts those World Championships, the last time in 2004. It has however never staged a European or World Championship in football, which will not change any soon since the Czech Republic lack the facilities and infrastructure.

As mentioned in chapter two, the Czech Republic is a relatively new country that went through many significant changes in the past 20 years. Caldwell points out that:

“New or different political, economic or social systems have used sporting successes in international sport as an internal or external validation of the system’s worth; the drive for international sporting success may be a testament to the insecurity of a country’s identity. The index of a country’s growing maturity (or declining insecurity) may well

rest upon drawing identity from a variety of sources in addition to sport: for example, the arts, political diplomacy or the manifestation of virtues in the world of work, such as inventiveness, progressiveness, entrepreneurial capacity, imagination and so on” (2003:16).

We have seen from the results that the students had many sources for national or cultural pride. Sport, however was one of them. Dunning points out that sport can also be a source of frustration, especially when a sport is popular somewhere, but success are lacking:

“It follows of course, that feelings of dejection and inferiority are often generated when a team or individual with whom people identify...loses, particularly if it does regularly” (2003: 11).

The question is, whether ice hockey is more part of Czech cultural identity or national identity. Though it might seem similar it is not. Sport is frequently asserted to be a useful tool for cultivating national pride and a sense of national identity, as also I did several times in this study, however, according to Chalip (1996: x) “there is no evidence that it is either a necessary or sufficient instrument for those purposes.” Though there is substantial evidence that international sport successes can trigger momentary nationalistic celebrations, there is no evidence of any long-term residual benefit (ibid.: x). This is an interesting thought. Ice hockey is definitely part of the Czech culture and it is also a source of pride, but it is questionable if it necessarily is national pride. I would argue that ice hockey in the Czech Republic is also part of what Petkova (2005) calls spiritual or mental culture. As a result it is probably a source for national *and* cultural identity.

The study has shown that it also is an important source for regional identification, as demonstrated in the case of Kladno. HC Kladno however, has been doing in sporty terms quite bad in the past 15 years, which has not stopped the support for the club by its fans or the city and its inhabitants. HC Kladno is one of the most traditional clubs in the Czech Republic, raising many world-class hockey players. The towns identity is defined by ice hockey, after al of its former famous trademarks have vanished.

In the past, ice hockey in Czech was mainly supported and planned centrally by the state. As Chalip points out:

“ The national pride associated with successful international sport performances by national athletes and teams has, in fact, been one of the most potent driving forces for sports policy development” (1996: x).

After communism fell, the state provides only minimal funds and leaves this matter to the communes, which means the sports landscape gets more diversified. In towns like Teplice for example, traditionally football is supported. Some towns prefer to support basketball, volleyball or athletics, since those sports are cheaper and the competition is not so hard as in football or ice hockey. Furthermore, a new sport similar but much cheaper than ice hockey has emerged, namely floorball. It is the fastest growing sport in the Czech Republic in the past ten years. Thus Maguire’s thesis of pluralisation is reality or at least will become soon.

Sport success depends on quite a few elements. Maguire et al. list several:

“The availability and identification of human resources, the methods of coaching and training, the efficiency of the sports organisation and the depth of knowledge of sports medicine and sport sciences. These national sport systems mechanisms are a necessary but not sufficient explanation of international sport success. In addition to these elements, sport development within a particular society also depends on the status of that nation in the sports international rank order. Less developed nations tend to under utilise their talent and performers or lose them to more powerful nations” (2002: 19).

The migration of players, especially the young ones, are a threat to the overall quality of Czech ice hockey, and thus also a threat to future performances. Maguire claims “migration is often a threat to national team performances and the under-development of indigenous talent (1999: 102). If this trend continues in the long term, it is questionable that Czech Republic will remain a hockey super power and thus its tradition as such could be undermined. The short term thinking and the influence of American sports, the commodification of sports and ice hockey in particular, are destabilizing the established culture of European, but especially Czech and also Slovakian hockey (www.iihf.com ; Maguire 1999: 123). Mainly Slovakia’s fall in hockey was fast and drastic and has been commented by many international hockey experts. As a main reason they name the short term thinking and impatience of young players who are lured to the North American junior hockey leagues by their agents. Many experts warn that what happened in Slovakia could also happen in Czech, though it will show slower and less drastic than in Slovakia.

The most committed people in sport are called fans, a derivation of the word fanatic. For them sport arguably functions as a 'surrogate religion', fans celebrate and worship their 'iconic' players. They buy jerseys with their favourite players' name and they hang their posters on the walls of their homes. Sport can be said to possess some of the characteristics of a religion in Durkheim's sense of 'God being society', feelings of excitement and communal celebration that constitute a peak experience in the context of playing or watching a modern sport. It may even be the case that part of the explanation for the growing significance of sport in the world today lies in the fact that it has come to perform some of the functions performed earlier by religion. (Dunning, 2003: 12.) Sport as a surrogate religion has been already mentioned very briefly in chapter 2, however, it has not been really a focus in this thesis. It would have been interesting to elaborate this thought further and try to find connections. Also, it would have been interesting in this sense to explore the fan culture as such, because the effervescence derives from being part of a large, expectant crowd and from the 'performances', which spectators and not just players and athletes put on. Singing, chanting, use of face-paints, fancy dresses and execution of manoeuvres such as 'Mexican waves' all contribute to this excitement (Dunning, 2003: 5). Nevertheless, I regard it as a shortcoming of this thesis that fans and fan culture have been neglected.

At last, this research has shown that there is a fundamental difference in how sport is perceived by women and men. This of course did not come as a surprise. As Brohm points out in regard with female sports, "women are enslaved by the patriarchal structure of capitalist society" (2003:154). Girls and women even now have unequal opportunities to participate in sport (Hargreaves, 1982: 38). So if we say that sport is important to society and it contributes to identity building it are mainly male sports that do so. It is usually the male national team that is regarded as a national symbol. Throughout the whole thesis I wrote about whether or not ice hockey has an impact on society, but what has been neglected is the automatic focus on men's ice hockey, as if women's ice hockey would not exist. According to Hargreaves, "sport itself often appears intrinsically and naturally male"(Hargreaves, 1982: 38). The sport forum reproduces the myths of masculinity-reaffirming that men are active, aggressive, competitive, strong, challenging, forceful, courageous and so on. And it is in sport that men can find validation for their masculine identities- by competing, striving and

succeeding. Women are consequently allowed only subordinate positions. The involvement of women playing traditionally male dominated sports is usually greeted in one or two ways: one is total neglect; the other is object of fun and patronising humour. In other sports such as tennis, women are depicted as 'pin-ups' or sex objects (Clarke and Clarke, 1982: 67). It is clear that the media help to keep that picture alive. Male sport sells better than female sport, female sport sells only if the famous 'sex sells' rule can be applied.

The media like to pick up on stereotypes, and sports are no exception. Journalists often ascribe talent and capacity according to genetic traits of an ethnical group, as if they were inherited. Fact is that they are not, however, culture can have an influence on how a sport is generally interpreted. In some culture certain characteristics are preferred towards other, which means that they are more easily implemented and stressed during practice. Hence, some of the stereotypes might carry at least some part of truth in them.

The study revealed and explained the main differences that have had an implication for sports attributable to the change of political system in Czechoslovakia at first, and later in the Czech Republic. The national sport policy has completely changed, which mainly influenced the financing of the sport. The state supports sport nowadays only to a very limited extent, which also means that it does not have almost any control over the sport anymore. Sport is not planned on a big scale anymore, but it is a communal matter, nevertheless Maguire reminds that "the relative status and reputation of a sport in different countries are defined by international playing success, quality and styles of play, characteristics of players, and the economic prowess of clubs and leagues" (Maguire et al., 2002: 34). So far the Czech Republic is still doing fine on international stage, and it is normal that there are better and worse periods in sport, periods of successes and periods without. Hence, the changes in the Czech Republic, and with changes I mean also other than political, could have a more far-reaching impact than many people are willing to admit at the moment.

6.2 Evaluation of the method

In all research, and thus also in qualitative studies, there is the issue of ‘value neutrality’. Sage mentions:

“Even those who press for a ‘value free’ approach recognize that humans are valuing creatures, and selection of a research problem and ways of addressing it involves decisions based on values. But the value-neutral adherent usually means that the theory, empirical observations, and data interpretation should be as unbiased as possible.” (1981: 5)

Krippendorff (2004) says, that a text can have more than one meaning, which means that everyone reading this study can interpret it in a different way. Another researcher might have sorted answers into different themes etc. Nonetheless I have done it based on my research questions that were formulated long before the interviews were even conducted.

The trustworthiness of this qualitative study can also be depicted in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). According to Erlandson et al. (1993), credibility is defined as the degree of ‘truth’ that the findings of a particular research have for the participants with whom the research was carried out. The procedure of my thesis, including the data collection, was relevant and convenient for this thesis, as discussed in chapter four. The statements of the experts were contrasted and compared to the answers of the students, where possible and necessary. However, the main aim was to get an overall holistic picture. It turned out that especially the choice of interviewing experts was a good one, since it was very fruitful and helped to answer many of my questions.

This study is transferable, since the procedure of gaining data is described and the questionnaires are provided in the appendix. Thus whoever wants, can conduct the same interviews. The expert panel can be also replaced by another manager, another major and another professional player etc. The answers will be different but I am convinced that the outcome of the study would be the same, because the results from those interviews are in the same line as the results of the IIHF studies on certain matters, or generally similar to the topics widely discussed on the official hockey server of the

CSLH, where other experts than the ones interviewed by me, contribute. Theoretically it would have been possible and wise to use those articles from www.hokej.cz to proof the transferability. As mentioned, I understand myself as a bricoleur, who puts the bits and pieces together to form the picture. This study succeeded in that sense that for a Master's thesis it provided and included a wide range of different opinions and angles. Fact is, that due to a small and non-random sample, the study does not allow to make generalizations, which is a certain limitation that was only partly reduced by the CVVM studies.

All the documentation of the study, such as questionnaires, interview recordings, etc. are included in the appendix CD. Thus the study is dependable; according to Erlandson et al. (1993: 33) dependability is reached, if the inquiry can be replicated with the same or similar respondents, in the same context and its findings would be repeated. As mentioned, I am convinced this would be the case.

At last, the confirmability of the study or “the degree to which its findings are the product of the focus of its inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher” (Erlandson et al., 1993: 34). As mentioned before, I am aware that my personal interest in the topic can cause the notion for bias, therefore I tried to act as objective as possible, nevertheless, the subjectivity of course could never be completely eliminated, since I as a researcher had to make certain choices.

7. CONCLUSION

The study shows that ice hockey in the Czech Republic is indeed a source of identification, especially for men. However, also the female students acknowledged it as part of Czech culture. Sport and ice hockey in particular, were seen as something that represents the Czech Republic successfully abroad. Yet, whenever talking about ice hockey it can be narrowed down to men's ice hockey. Women's ice hockey is totally marginalized.

Hockey as a part of Czech culture is maybe something subconscious, just as many elements of culture are, and many people in Czech maybe do not really think about it, they take it for granted. The hockey tradition in the Czech Republic is old; it is even older than the country itself. It is one of the few traditions that has survived all political changes, wars and invasions from 1918 till now and celebrates successes on a regular basis, compared to football. Ice hockey is closely intervened with modern Czech history and at some points even influenced the Czech history, like it did in 1969. The research reveals that ice hockey, as a national symbol, is part of the Czech national identity and furthermore thanks to its tradition and value in Czech culture, also part of the cultural identity.

Hockey is not only important for the country as such, but also for many regions and towns, who get a name in the Czech Republic and in the world. Some towns strongly identify with this sport, like Kladno. Again it is thanks to the long tradition and history that it has written in the town and the many great players it has provided not only for the national team, but also for many top teams all over the world including the NHL.

There are of course some limitations to this study. Though I am personally very interested in the matter of this research, I tried to remain neutral. Therefore I implemented the interviews with the students and the results of the CVVM, besides my expert interviews, to increase the value neutrality. The size of this thesis and the lack of finances did not allow me to make a quantitative study. A representative quantitative study would have allowed me to draw stronger conclusions and pulse how all strata in the Czech population think about ice hockey. Though, as the CVVM studies indicate,

the overall interest is considerable, it is clear that age, gender, social-economical status, education etc. play a role.

Another limitation of this study was that fan culture was not analysed nor investigated. It would have been interesting to include at least the leader of the fanclub of HC Kladno in the expert interviews. Furthermore it would have been interesting to investigate, whether there is any connection between ice hockey as a functioning surrogate religion. Further research should also focus stronger on gender differences. It would be also relevant, to compare the position and function of ice hockey with other countries and/or other sports in other countries.

Ice hockey has a strong tradition in the Czech Republic. The question is whether ice hockey as a tradition will survive and if it will, to what extent. The change of political system is something that without doubt was welcomed by most people in the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, these changes have influenced the society in a certain way and direction, and in combination with other elements, such as a lower birth rate and the emergence of other sports and possibilities, it has a negative impact on ice hockey. If the trend continues then the Czech Republic could struggle in the long term in producing players able to play at the very top. Societies and cultures change. The Czech identity will not change if its ice hockey ceases to exist at international top level, nevertheless it might lose one of its traditions, one of its symbols that so far has represented the Czech Republic always successfully.

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