

BEER PATRIOTISM IN THE CZECH SOCIETY

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The relationship of the Czechs towards beer is not a trivial one. Even though we can ostentatiously simplify it to “beer drinkers’ nation,” “pub culture” and so on, relations between the Czechs, beer and pubs are really far more complex and differentiated. The last issue of the Bulletin focused in detail on the institute of pub in the Czech society. This time we will try to focus on beer and primarily on the phenomenon of Czech beer patriotism.

The significance of beer and pubs in modern Czech society certainly originates from their long-lasting history. The depth of their relationship arises from their interconnection throughout the years of common development. We cannot focus on the history of beer cult in the Czech lands without paying attention to the development of pubs. We cannot study pubs without taking into consideration the beer issue. Both phenomena are remarkably interconnected in the historical context. The aim of the research (which stands in the background of both articles) was set up in view of this fact. Apart from my own experience, I rely on the data from a sociological research Pubs and Beer in the Czech Society, which was executed by the Centre for Public Opinion Research of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in September 2004.¹

Beer in Czech history

Hop cultivation and beer production in Bohemia have successfully developed since the beginning of the second millennium. Thanks to the foundations of Middle Ages religious culture, primarily the Christian theory about trans-substantiation of the Christ’s blood, the Lord’s vineyard and so on, wine was regarded for a long time as a more noble drink, both practically and symbolically.² Nevertheless, the climate conditions and very early laid scientific foundations of

¹ It was a non-commercial research, executed within the regular CVVM public opinion surveys. A group of more than 1000 respondents represented population of the Czech Republic of the age of 15 and more.

² Vágner, P. 1997. „Kdyby Platon a Galenus znali...“. In: Novotný, V. (ed.): *Hospody a pivo v české společnosti*. Praha: Academia, p.168

the art of brewery³ caused that beer gradually gained dominant position in the Czech environment and in the end became the “national drink.” Already in the 15th and 16th century the quality Czech beer became a national symbol, as we can read in the writings of Tadeáš Hájek z Hájku and Bohuslav Balbín.⁴ At the same time, we note voices condemning wine as an alien drink and urging beer consumption because of nationality reasons.

Alongside with the expansion of beer there already appear first reflections of the tavern milieu. For example the dispute *Podkoní a žák* (A Groom and a Scholar), written on the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, elucidates the important social function of the tavern in the following way:

“...ktož do krčmy chodí,
častokrát se jemu přihodí,
že zvie příhody někaké
a k tomu noviny také.”⁵

(Who goes to the pub often learns various stories and news...)

The historian Petr Čornej adds: “Beer drinking in the tavern supplied to a large degree the role of the pulpit, the non-existing mass media and ... scientific symposiums.”⁶

Even though we can find the seed of the future Czech beer and pub cult already in these times, alcohol and taverns still remained a socially condemned phenomenon. The development of this attitude is obvious in the higgling songs: their way of portraying alcohol consumption reflects the general attitudes of the society at that time. This image, alongside with the social attitudes, have changed from the 16th and the 20th century: it started as a threatening baroque

³ They were founded by Tadeáš Hájek z Hájku in his treatise “O pivu, způsobech jeho přípravy, jeho podstatě, silách a účincích” (About beer, its production, its basis, strengths and effects) from 1585. (Published by Kvas magazine, Rakovník, 1878)

⁴ Balbín, B.A. 1986. *Krásy a bohatství české země*. Praha: Panorama, p.144

⁵ Podkoní a Žák. In Hrabák, J. (ed.) *Staročeské satiry Hradeckého rukopisu a Smilovy školy*. Praha 1962, p. 128

⁶ Čornej, P. 1997. „Pivovar „v pekle“ a dějinné souvislosti jeho osudů.“ In Novotný, V. (ed.). *Hospody a pivo v české společnosti*. Praha: Academia, p.152

morality and ended with humour and parody.⁷ At first, the reasons for condemning drunkenness, beer and taverns were primarily religious: alcohol was portrayed as a tool of abhorrent sins, which were inevitably and deservedly followed by a punishment. With a gradual commercialisation of market poetry and its separation from religious motives, it stressed more prosaic reasons for harmfulness of alcohol and pubs. Especially in songs with family and marital life themes the motives of beer and pubs appear as negative elements causing the break-up and poverty of the family. The destructive effect of alcohol and social danger of drinkers were also emphasized. However, the way of portraying beer in folk literature gradually transformed towards more favourable picture.

The beginnings of national revival were closely connected with the atmosphere of pubs. Jungmann's project of Czech culture was at first an artificial language product. All the important and prestigious cultural functions were carried out in German. The pub was one of a few public places, which offered space for communicating in Czech, for disseminating Czech culture and national feelings and for agitation of those, who had not been christened yet. For this reason, pubs became the main centres for the meetings of patriots and revivalists. In the second half of the 19th century, they also became the centres of the emerging patriotic and other societies. Pubs were significant centres of development of the Czech social and cultural life. It is perhaps for this reason (among others) that their perception started to change significantly: The pub ceased to be condemned as a place of low entertainment, socially dangerous elements or serious sins. The pub started to be perceived as a significant and meaningful institution, in which people fight for the same reason and which, in a certain way, brings benefit to everybody.

Alongside with the change in the perception of pubs, beer started to be perceived differently as well. Even though beer had been praised as a Czech drink already many centuries earlier and previously served as a source of national pride, now it became the very constitutive element of patriotic ideology (apart from language, historical reminiscences and other manifestations that are usually analysed in specialized literature).⁸ In patriotic song books there appear songs praising beer, but also agitating songs using beer for patriotic aims. Jiří Rak

⁷ Ryšavá, E. 1997. „Pivo a pijáctví v českých kramářských písních.“ In: Novotný, V. (ed.) *Hospody a pivo v české společnosti*, Praha: Academia

⁸ Rak, J. 1997. „Pivo jako konstitutivní prvek vlastenecké ideologie.“ In: Novotný, V. (ed.) *Hospody a pivo v české společnosti*, Praha: Academia, p.171 f.

mentions examples from the seventh issue of the songbook of the Czech gymnastic organisation Sokol by František Urbánek:⁹

„Naši slavní předkové
dobří staří Čechové
dobré pivo milovali
(...)
My jsme také Čechové
slavných dědů vnukové
važme činů jejich sobě
ctěme to, co oni pili
ctěme tak své dědy v hrobě.
Pivo píme, pivo vychvalujme
píme ho a dokazujme
že jsme jejich vnukové
že jsme také Čechové!“

(Our famous forefathers, good old Czechs, loved good beer... We are also Czechs, the grandsons of our famous grandfathers. We respect their deeds and honour their drinks. This way, we honour our grandfathers in graves. Let us drink beer, let us praise beer and show that we are their grandsons; that we too are Czechs!)

Already in the beginning of the 19th century, but especially towards its end, there appear voices condemning praise of beer and pub as a Czech weakness, as a lack of development and as low manners. What served as a tool for development of national pride became the source of shame – the Czechs had no other culture but the pub culture and did not have anything to be proud for but for the beer. The typical theme of Czech journalism, literature and caricature is representing Bohemia as a country, where any activity dissolves in beer.¹⁰ Pub and beer started to

⁹ Ibid. p.175

¹⁰ Macura, V. 1997. „Hospoda v české vlastenecké kultuře.“ In: Novotný, V. (ed.) *Hospody a pivo v české společnosti*, Praha: Academia, p.35

be perceived as something that we should not be proud for. Drinking beer seized to be the attribute of a patriot, but of Mister Brouček or Mister Kondelík.¹¹

In the following era, the relationship towards beer generally cooled down. It became a common beverage, which brings about both positive and negative emotions, especially as a result of social life (drinking in a pub with friends – alcoholism as a result of sitting in pubs). Nevertheless, it managed to keep all the attributes (for example reminiscence of a national drink) and modern perception of beer is therefore very varied.

Beer patriotism

Without regard to the bends of historical development, we can say that there still exists something like a beer cult in the Czech society. Many people from various social levels turn their attention to beer. Many signs from real life and many results of sociological researches give evidence about the existence of such cult.

The cult is reflected in the high consumption of the foamy beverage in the Czech lands, in the frequent conversations about beer or in the attention, which the Czech public generally pays to beer. Beer fans are founding and renewing small breweries or restaurant breweries and many other people are interested in home brewing. Another aspect of the beer cult is present in beer advertisements, especially in their form (especially in using beer as a symbol for advertising different products): the golden beverage is not pictured only as “something good to drink.” It is obviously linked to the aspects of national pride, history or friendship. Exaggeration and humour, which is typical for these advertisements, demonstrate that we are able to have a detached view. The cult is evident in the picturing of beer in pieces of art, songs or folk literature.¹² People support the cult by debating about the tastes of individual marks, organising private and public surveys or organising official or unofficial competitions such as Beer of the year, Beer of the month or Beer of Prague.

¹¹ Rak, J. 1997. „Pivo jako konstitutivní prvek vlastenecké ideologie.“ In: Novotný, V. (ed.) *Hospody a pivo v české společnosti*, Praha: Academia, p.175 -176

¹² No one will probably suspect that Svěrák and Uhlíř tried to corrupt children by singing: “Beautiful Bohemia, Our Bohemia, cold beer and hot mash...” (Čechy krásné, Čechy vaše, 1997) On the contrary, it illustrates the nature of the cult of Czech beer, which is automatically and guilelessly connected with Czech national feelings even in a children’s song.

For these reasons (among others), the inhabitants of the Czech lands are often credited with beer patriotism, or, to put it differently, with abnormally strong emotional relationship to beer. This relationship unquestionably comes from the rich historical and cultural tradition: The Czechs are convinced that beer is the Czech national drink and that the Czech beer is the best beer in the world.

Still, beer patriotism is not a simple issue. It has many dimensions that are not always in accord with each other. To analyse this phenomenon, we first have to distinguish between its two basic types: general Czech beer patriotism and local beer patriotism. Their fundamental difference is the object, to which they are related: general Czech patriotism relates to the Czech beer as such (to be more specific, to the Pilsner type of beer made in the Czech Republic) and local patriotism is related to a specific beer mark or to beer produced in the region of residence. Apart from the basic division between general and local patriotism we can also notice different dimension within each of these types.

General beer patriotism

Let us start on the higher level of the general Czech beer patriotism. If we define it simply as an attitude towards Czech beer, we can successfully use the three-dimensional psychological conception of attitude, which defines its emotional, cognitive and conative factors.

On the emotional level we deal primarily with stereotypes and clichés, for example that beer is a typical drink in the Czech environment or that it is exclusive on the global scale (see Table 1).

Table 1. General relationship towards Czech beer. (Presents percentage of people, who expressed their agreement with the following statements.)

Beer can be regarded as the Czech national drink.	93
Beer is one of the things we can be proud of abroad.	90
Beer is a significant part of Czech culture.	88
Czech beer is the best in the world.	75

Source: Our Society 09/2004

With regard to the presented results we can conclude that the Czechs are beer-patriots par excellence, no matter whether they drink it or not. The reasons for so strongly rooted idealistic views of Czech beer can be seen mainly in history and traditions that I have mentioned in the beginning. As it is evident, stereotypes of such kind are very inert.

Cognitive part of the analysis deals with attitudes to specific facts. Here, the results are not so convincing: even in case of critical statements about the attitudes of the Czechs to beer we gained dominant agreement.

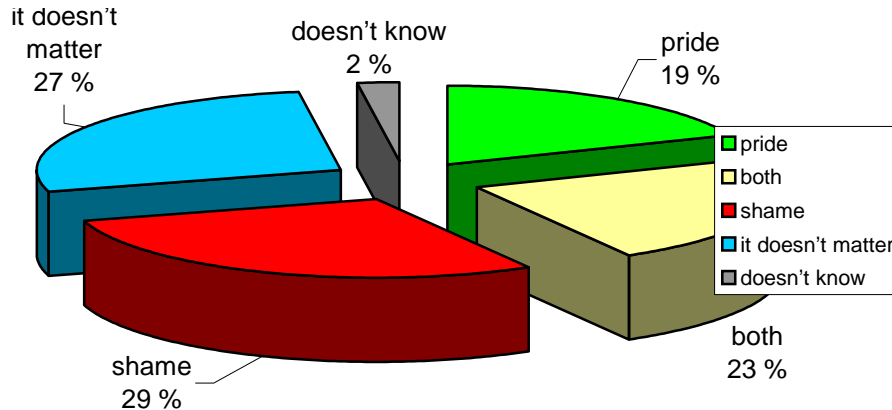
Table 2. Attitudes to specific facts. (Presents percentage of people, who expressed their agreement with the following statements.)

Excessive beer drinking is a demerit of the inhabitants of the Czech Republic.	67
In the Czech Republic we attach excessive importance to beer.	63

Source: Our Society 09/2004

As it comes out, people perceive beer as the Czech national drink, but at the same time they think that Czechs consume it excessively and attach too much importance to it. In a nation, which is so proud of its beer and is so convinced about its connection with beer, we would not expect such reservations against its excessive consumption. Nevertheless, the opposite is right: almost one third of people is ashamed of excessive consumption and only less than one fifth is proud of it.

Diagram 1. Opinions on the Czech primacy in beer consumption¹³

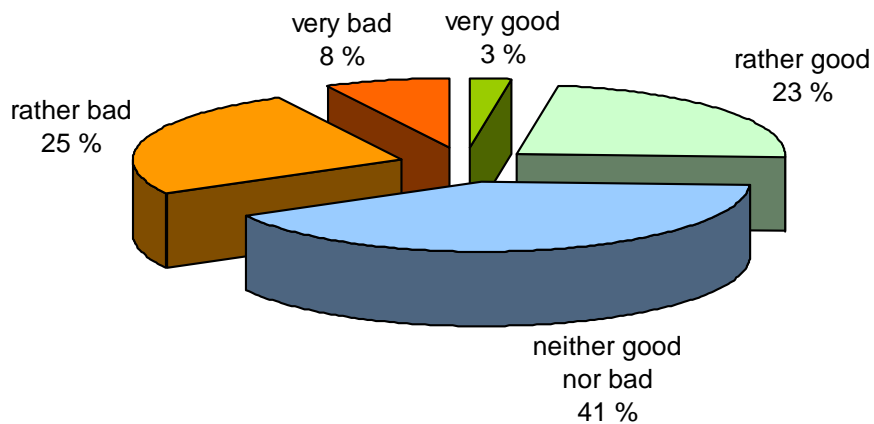


Source: Our Society 09/2004

Another example of a specific attitude is the issue of infiltration of foreign beer marks in the Czech market. Again, the public opinion is not as rejecting as we could expect in connection with the strong beer patriotism on the level of general assessments. The largest group of people are indifferent to this question, one third of respondents regard it as positive and one fourth as negative. There is no dominant rejection.

¹³ “Are you ashamed or proud that the highest consumption of beer per capita is in the Czech Republic? Do you feel definitely proud, rather proud, sort of both, rather ashamed, definitely ashamed, you don’t care or do you feel something else?”

Diagram 2. Opinions on the importing of foreign beer marks on the Czech market.¹⁴



Source: Our society 09/2004

The third part of general beer patriotism is specific behaviour, which is logically reflected in the consumption behaviour. Its analysis would provide interesting information about the way beer patriotism is demonstrated in reality. However, since this aspect was not among the aims of this research, we cannot present specific conclusions. We suspect that in such a beer-unified environment (which understands the word beer solely as the low fermented beer of the Pilsner type) we could hardly find any substantial evidence that could disrupt the image of the Czechs as strong traditional beer patriots.

Other examples of real behaviour are explicit expressions of relationship to beer: depiction of beer or position, which is attributed to beer in different situation, etc. This issue was not included in the research either. It could be a topic for some deeper sociological researches or cultural studies. Still, we can point out some moments, which prove that the relationship of the Czechs to beer on the level of real behaviour is different that we might expect with regard to the strong beer patriotism declared in the general stereotypes. For example, beer is still not accepted as a suitable drink for festive occasions. Celebrations of all kinds are accompanied by champagne or wine. In a beer country we rarely celebrate with beer, or toast with beer. Beer does not belong

¹⁴ Wording of the question: “What is your attitude to importing foreign beer marks to the Czech market? Do you think that importing foreign beer is very good, rather good, neither good, nor bad, rather bad or very bad?”

to exceptional occasions and to better society. In general view it still preserves the signs of plebeian drink, smallness and rough beer-drinking.

Advancement of the foamy drink to the higher levels of social prestige is restrained by the tradition of beer as “daily bread.” We often register embarrassment in the moments, when beer gets into such a situation, and that certainly undermines the idealistic views of Czech beer patriotism.¹⁵

The frame analysis of the factors of general attitude of the Czechs to beer (summarized under the title of general Czech beer patriotism) shows that the individual factors are not in accord. On the level of general assessments (which are closely connected with the position of beer in the Czech history, culture and traditions), the Czechs are definitely unique beer patriots. In case of traditional stereotypes and social clichés the opinion is clear: beer is regarded as the Czech national drink and Czech beer is regarded as the best in the world. The attitudes to specific facts are not so unanimous. Majority of the respondents, for example, don't have a definite opinion on the infiltration of foreign marks in the Czech market or negative stand to the Czech primacy in beer consumption. As far as real behaviour is concerned, the situation is similarly unambiguous. The consumption corresponds with the general stereotypes, whereas explicit demonstrations of relationship to beer fluctuate between adoration and contempt, exaggeration and embarrassment.

When the three-dimensional theory is applied on human attitudes, similar incongruities are quite common. Individual elements are often in disagreement even in case of one person, let alone the whole society. It remains a question whether an agreement of all aspects is desirable at

¹⁵ Czech beer lovers are probably jealous when they see pictures from other beer-oriented regions on the other side of our Western border, which prove that our Bavarian neighbours appreciate their beer even in reality, that they are not ashamed of it and ascribe it the highest social prestige. It was evident for example when Bayern Munchen celebrated their victory: captain Ballack doused the coach with beer right on the field, immediately after the referee's final whistle (Czech hockey players drink Champagne...). In the interview with Dieter Hamman taken immediately after the winning game of Liverpool in the semi-final of the Champion's League, there is a beer on the table in front of the sweaty player and some viewers may not be sure, who is the star on the screen.... (After all, Czech players at least admit that they celebrated their victory with beer. They do not forget to add, however, that it contributes to regeneration...)

all. In any case, their analysis brings about interesting facts about individual as well as public attitudes to beer.

Local beer patriotism

Second dimension of beer patriotism is local patriotism. Within its frame we can see the relationship to some specific beer brand and relationship to beer brewed in the region of residence. Results of the research show that this level of beer patriotism is very different from the general one and both of them are not much (if at all) connected.

It is evident, for example, that two fifths of people do not care, what beer brand they drink and only three out of five consumers chose a specific product or a few specific products. This can be interpreted in two different ways: either the Czechs are not such beer connoisseurs as they claim to be, when two out of five do not care, what they drink, or Czech beers have such a balanced and mutually similar taste, that people do not feel the need to distinguish between specific brands. In any case it is obvious that this general statement is to a large degree affected by differences between women and men. Even though women like beer and they like to drink it, they generally have a colder relationship to it.

Table 3. Choice of specific beer brand¹⁶ (data in %)

	Men	Women	Total
They do not care what brand they drink	28	60	41
They chose only brands of some breweries	72	40	59
Total	100	100	100

Source: Our Society 09/2004

Only one fourth of beer consumers prefer beer from the region of their residence. Another quarter is not interested at all in the beer's place of origin. The remaining half does not prefer local brands. We cannot say, however, that they do not care at all about the beer's origin.

¹⁶ Wording of the question: "Let us now focus on the beer brand, that is, the brewery in which it was made. Would you say that you rather do not care about the brand of beer you drink or that you choose only beer from certain breweries?"

Table 4. Choice of brand from the region of the respondent's place of residence¹⁷ (data in %)

	Men	Women	Total
Prefers regional brand	30	19	26
Does not prefer regional brand	46	45	46
Does not think about it	24	36	28
Total	100	100	100

Source: Our Society 09/2004

Differences between men and women are not that significant but we can still identify the repetition of the previous model.

We get a more complex view on both aspects of beer patriotism when we combine them. In this way we can create a typology of local beer patriotism, in which all respondents are precisely classified according to their answers.

Table 5. Typology of local beer patriotism (data in %)

	Men	Women	Total
Chooses brand, prefers region	26	13	21
Chooses brand, does not prefer region	34	18	28
Chooses brand, does not think about region	13	9	11
Does not choose brand, prefers region	4	6	5
Does not choose brand, does not prefer region	12	27	18
Does not choose brand, does not think about region	11	27	17
Total	100	100	100

Source: Our Society 09/2004

As we can see, the largest group among beer consumers constitutes of those, who choose only some beer brands, but who do not automatically prefer the brands from the region of their residence (more than one fourth of respondents.) The second largest group are those, who choose only some brands and prefer those from their region. On the contrary, the smallest groups are

¹⁷ Wording of the question: "Do you prefer the brand/s, which is/are produced in the region, where you live? Yes, no, I don't think about it."

formed by those, who prefer regional brands, but otherwise do not choose that much, and those, who choose a brand but do not care about the regional origin of the beer.

Brewing industry is a theme closely connected with local beer patriotism. It is also affected by different perception of “general” and “local” aspect of Czech beer. On the general level, people regard the future of Czech brewing industry in a positive way: they are not afraid that Czech beer could be driven away from the market by foreign brands (only 8 % of the Czechs express such worries). On the contrary, they believe that Czech breweries will infiltrate the foreign markets (three quarters of Czech inhabitants over 14 years of age believe this). The future of smaller breweries is regarded less favourably: more than two fifths of people (44 %) expect their extinction in the following ten years.

Table 6. Opinions on the future of the Czech brewing industry. Agreement with the statements. (data in %)

	Yes	No	Doesn't know
Czech beer will be driven out of the market by foreign brands.	8	76	16
Some Czech breweries will break into foreign markets.	77	7	16
Majority of smaller breweries will disappear.	44	27	29

Source: Our society 09/2004

Conclusion

The presented analyses confirm that Czech beer patriotism is much weaker on the local level than on the general level. Furthermore, there is no direct connection between general Czech beer patriotism and local beer patriotism. Strong belief in the importance and significance of Czech beer for Czech society does not mean stronger relationship to a certain brand or to local brewery. It is evident that we should therefore distinguish two types of patriotism and regard them as two separate phenomena. To summarize it: in the general sense of the word, almost all the Czechs are beer patriots. In case of specific choice of beer according to brand, roughly one half of the Czech beer consumers are patriots. In case of preference of beer from the region of residence, only one fourth of the Czechs are patriots.

It was not difficult to prove that beer patriotism is not a simple issue. The statement that the Czechs are strong beer patriots holds true only in certain aspects. In some ways, it is only partially true or not true at all. The relationship of the Czechs to beer is ambiguous and fluctuates according to the selected aspects between non-critical adoration of the type “Czech beer is the best in the world” to the disdain of the “beer-drinker’s nation” and excessive beer consumption. This more or less entertaining example confirms (similarly to other social phenomena) that its true nature is not a trivial one and we have to distinguish among its many aspects.