

Socialist Spaces
Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc

Edited by
David Crowley and Susan E. Reid



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Weekend Getaways: The *Chata*, the *Tramp*, and the Politics of Private Life in Post-1968 Czechoslovakia¹

Paulina Bren

In August 1968 the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia brought an end to the Prague Spring – and with it, to any hopes of reforming communism – and placed a pro-Moscow, politically orthodox regime in power. This post-Prague Spring communist leadership initiated what was officially referred to as ‘normalization’ – a programme for political consolidation, social conformity, and a return to ‘normal, socialist life’. But what exactly was ‘normal, socialist life’ to be in the aftermath of the political tumultuousness and experimentation that had been the Prague Spring?

The country’s future communist leader, Gustav Husák, offered an answer soon after the invasion. He explained: ‘[A] normal person wants to live quietly, without certain groups turning us into a jungle, and therefore we must appeal to people so that they condemn this. This party wants to safeguard the quiet life.’² If the reform communists of the 1960s had wrought havoc and brought disorder, now, under ‘normalization’, the quiet life would rule supreme: a quietness in large part dependent on a nationwide amnesia about the recent past as well as a wilted ambition for a socialist utopia. As such, the 1970s and 1980s would look radically different from the earlier two decades of postwar communism that had encompassed first Stalinism and then political liberalization.

This essay explores the ways in which the recreational use of the Czech countryside intersected with the ideologically motivated endorsement of the ‘quiet life’, intended by the Party as an antidote to the resurgence of any political activism reminiscent of the Prague Spring. I will focus on two opposing uses of the outdoors: *chata* culture and the *tramping* movement. *Chata* culture entailed the ever-expanding Czech pastime of long weekends spent at a private country cottage in the Czechoslovak countryside,

and while not always applauded by the regime, this activity became a part of public discourse during the 1970s and 1980s. In contrast, the far less publicized, and frequently censured, *tramping* movement involved young people gathering in groups and venturing into the countryside with little more than a small backpack of supplies. Both movements embodied distinctly different notions of community, citizenship and political resistance, and yet, with varying degrees, both contributed to the disruption of the sought-after 'quiet life'. By juxtaposing the *chata* movement and the *tramping* movement, I further wish to show how conflicts played out under communism were frequently layered with memories and experiences rooted in the pre-communist period and should not automatically be viewed as self-contained episodes of postwar history.

Chata Culture

In 1969, as the 'normalization' leadership acquired full control of the government, as the country's borders were once again sealed off for travel, and as a large-scale purge against reform communists was set in motion, the public, retreating into their homes, sought solace amongst friends and family. It was at this time that the Czech pastime of the weekend escape into the countryside also acquired a renewed popularity. The typical destination for this weekend getaway was a so-called *chata*: a simple, recreational cottage in the Czech countryside, either a newly built structure or else a renovated peasants' cottage. The *chata* and the weekend getaway had existed earlier, but its popularity exploded after 1969. The result was a large increase in the purchase of already existing cottages as well as the land on which to build new structures. According to an analysis made in the early 1980s by the Czech Institute of Interior Design, 31% of Prague households owned a *chata*, 25% of Prague households otherwise had access to one belonging to friends or relatives, and 5–10% of Prague households used *chaty* belonging to their workplace. On average people were spending 100 to 120 days a year at their country retreat.³

By the early 1970s, the official press was openly referring to the phenomenon as '*chata*-mania'.⁴ Curiously, this was a peculiarly Czech obsession, making far less headway in the Slovak part of the country.⁵ Very quickly, the *chata* became part of the physical and cultural landscape of the Czech republic, with cities emptying on Friday afternoons as everyone set out to the countryside for a long weekend. As one expert on Czechoslovakia noted in the 1980s, the timbre of the 'normalization' period resonated in the commonplace image of an 'early escape on Friday

afternoon in a private car laden with stacks of precooked Wiener schnitzel for a weekend away from it all at a private country cottage'.⁶ The epitome of this trend, frequently parodied in film and television, were the *chata* colonies – clusters of new, often aesthetically unattractive, recreation cottages, with rows of Trabant and Škoda cars parked out in front.⁷

Despite such ostentatious displays of materialism, the regime did not, by and large, rail against this self-contained, private activity, nor against the emphasis on consumerism that came with furnishing the insides of the *chata*. Although private property still remained for the most part unavailable and indeed taboo in the cities, as befitted Party ideology, restrictions on owning small-scale private property in the countryside had always been much looser and less likely to be investigated. Enthusiasm for the *chata*, therefore, also represented an unconcealed pleasure in the acquisition and use of otherwise 'forbidden' private property. That the regime did not discourage this weekend pastime and its use of the Czech countryside is suggested by the existence of an official monthly magazine dedicated to the interests of the *chata* enthusiast.

Chatař (The *Chata*-Owner) offered its readers a do-it-yourself paradise: the bulk of articles in the magazine were centred on home improvement, offering detailed explanations, including blueprints, on how to build a sturdier roof, a straighter staircase, thicker walls, etc. For the times when the precooked Wiener schnitzel had run out, each issue of *Chatař* provided recipes built around the canned meats one could easily transport to the *chata* in the family car, and even puzzles and games to entertain the children in case the weather turned inclement. Everything that *chata* owners might possibly need was inside the magazine's pages, just as everything they needed was also within the four walls of their weekend cottage. Occasionally, the Party did demand that people explore opportunities for more communal getaways, such as work-sponsored outings, but, despite the rhetoric, it took no consistent measures to constrain the blossoming *chata* culture.

There were, I would argue, two reasons for the regime's unspoken consent. First, burdened with an intransigent public after the 1968 invasion, and needing to seek some sort of consensus with them, the Party leadership was quick to promise an improved standard of living that could even duplicate the lifestyles spied by the Czech public during the 1960s when they were able to travel for the first time in large numbers to 'the West'.⁸ The weekend retreat into the Czechoslovak countryside – while not comparable to a trip to Italy – promised to deliver on a regular basis the sort of rewards that communism and the communists had been promising for so long. People were given the go-ahead to focus on satisfying their

material needs, especially within and around the home.⁹ In fact, the regime's acquiescence might have been best explained by William Levitt, creator of the history-making postwar American suburb of Levittown, when he claimed that, 'No man who owns his own house and lot can be a Communist. He has too much to do.'¹⁰ Because while the normalizers wanted their citizens to be communists, they did not want them to be politically active, only politically compliant. The demands of acquiring and maintaining a *chata* conveniently detracted from the practice of politics during this period of late communism when, as the cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek has said, the last thing any communist regime wished to see was for its citizens to actually act out communism.¹¹

The second reason I want to suggest for the 'normalization' government's collaboration in the burgeoning *chata* culture was the obvious political advantages to be gained if the cities emptied out during the weekends, splintering urban inhabitants amongst different country locales. As the regime had learned from the experience of the Prague Spring, political discontent translated into political resistance not in the villages but in the cities; dissatisfaction was transformed into political action not by agricultural workers but by the cities' intellectuals and intelligentsia. Thus, *chata* culture could ostensibly provide for a depoliticized, government-mediated escape into pastoral Bohemia and Moravia for those who sought solace from the trauma of 'normalization'. There the regime allowed its citizens a modicum of self-realization in the area of consumption as compensation for the lack of independence permitted in politics.

'Normalization' and Privatized Citizenship

Altogether, the 'normalization' government's support of the *chata* culture could be conceptualized as what Michel de Certeau referred to as 'strategy' – 'the imposition of power through the disciplining and organization of space'.¹² The 'normalization' regime and the official press never stated directly, yet implied constantly, that to own a *chata*, to spend weekends in the countryside, in the tamed outdoors, meant to participate in the current success of what was now called 'real socialism';¹³ to be a *chata*-owner was to be a good communist. A communist citizen who defined himself within the contours of his private life and not his public self was seen as preferable, as more likely to conform to what Party leader Husák had referred to early on as 'the quiet life'. Grand gestures – once portrayed poster-size by communists riding joyously atop combine harvesters, joined in a communal embrace – were now too politically inflammatory to contemplate.

The Prague Spring and its calls for reform communism had poisoned the notion of public politics, of street-level political argument, for the orthodox communists now in power. The political ideology that became the cornerstone of 'normalization' was, therefore, quite different: it aimed to define and locate communist citizenship within a publicly shared private world. Public life was cast out in favour of what Lauren Berlant, writing on 1980s Reagan America and the infantilization of citizenship, has called 'simultaneously lived private worlds'.¹⁴ The *chata* culture perfected just such a vision in that citizens were encouraged to define and locate themselves in a private world, one that was at the same time being replicated by others around them, thus offering the pretence of public life while avoiding its dangers.

Chata culture thrived on the fantasy of the weekend getaway as a private retreat where one was left to one's own devices, beyond the ideological radar range of the 'normalization' regime. This supposedly individual escape from ideological demands and political pressures was however being shared by millions of other citizens, while also being promoted by the government. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the *Chatař* magazine played to this very fantasy, always featuring on its front cover a photograph of a single, solitary, unpeopled *chata* surrounded only by trees and grass. It was an image that immediately suggested isolation, separateness and self-sufficiency.¹⁵ The weekend exodus to the country cottage has been read most often, by both its practitioners as well as by its commentators, as a defiant gesture: to get away to the *chata* was to act on the desire to escape into the depoliticized private sphere, into the embrace of family and friends where political jokes and anti-communist sentiments were freely voiced. For example, Czech sociologist Lenka Kalinová has argued that the *chata* culture was an expression of disillusionment with collective recreation.¹⁶ Yet it cannot be overlooked that the *chata* culture centred on a decidedly state-endorsed escape, whereby a person in fact participated in 'normalization' and the government's desire for 'the quiet life'. In this sense, the Czech countryside had ceased to be 'elsewhere', although the desire for it to be so remained.

The Tramping Movement

The regime's acceptance – even if grudging – of *chata* culture can be surmised from the way in which this pastime figured vividly in the public discourse. In contrast, the so-called *tramping* movement – an alternative and less politically agreeable use of the Czech countryside – remained

shrouded in secrecy and silence. Unlike the *chata* culture, the *tramping* movement had been founded on preserving the notion of the countryside as 'elsewhere', as beyond the reach of state control. Furthermore, the movement strove to retain its history at a time when the preservation of 'history' and 'memory' had come to be seen as a defiant gesture by a regime intent on forgetting the past: as Milan Kundera would write in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, '[I]t is 1971 . . . The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.'¹⁷

According to the chroniclers of the movement, *tramping* had first taken root after the First World War in the newly founded, democratic Czechoslovak Republic. It began as a Saturday afternoon ritual among Czech working-class youth, particularly those living and working in Prague. With their working week done, these young men and women would pack a small rucksack and head into the Czech countryside, spending the remainder of their free weekend together in the outdoors. Their intention was to unshackle themselves from the restrictions imposed on them in the city by their employers and their circumstances; for a short while, at least, to leave the reality of their lives behind and to live instead according to their own rules in the outdoors. More clearly than in the case of the later *chata* culture, the *tramping* movement represented an unmitigated escape into the Czech countryside as a form of resistance against the dominant political ideology of capitalist, conservative, bourgeois values.

The history of the *tramping* movement should have been an attractive piece of propaganda for the Communist Party, which was keen to demonstrate that class-based cleavages and political radicalism had been a central component of the independent, 'democratic' interwar republic for which many citizens continued to feel a deep nostalgia. Yet references to the movement were almost non-existent in the official histories of twentieth-century Czechoslovakia. This interwar youth movement was largely absent from the annals of the reimagined past, at most reduced to a memory of the songs once sung by the *trampové* around their campfires. Stanislav Motl, a member of the interwar *trampové*, confirmed this historiographical absence. In the preface to the 1990 reprinting of Josef Peterka's 1940 chronicle of the movement, *A History of Tramping*, Motl wrote that silence closed down around the movement after the 1948 communist takeover of Czechoslovakia, was temporarily lifted during the liberal Prague Spring period, and then reinstated under 'normalization'. It only became possible to discuss *tramping* openly after the 1989 'velvet revolution'.¹⁸

Not surprisingly, this policy of censure was never directly explained by the communist regime, but one can guess at the reasons for it, especially as the details of this movement emerge. During the interwar years, the *tramping* movement became closely intertwined with a fascination for American Wild West lore. In the early 1920s, as young, urban Czechs began to congregate in the countryside at weekends, they called themselves 'wild scouts' to distinguish between their pastime and the institutionalized scouting movement that was then also taking root. Over time, these wild scouts began to assemble at specific points along the rivers and the valleys of Bohemia and Moravia, setting up camp settlements which they named, in admiration of the American Wild West, 'Rawhide', 'Hiawatha', 'Yukon', 'Utah', 'Uragan', (*sic!*) 'Liberty', and 'Kansas'. The wild scouts' surroundings were similarly renamed so that the Vltava river, which runs through Prague under the Charles Bridge, was now 'Big River', while smaller tributaries took on names such as 'Old River', 'Gold River' and 'Snake River'.¹⁹ And just as these young men and women sought to carve out new identities in the 'wilderness' of the Czech countryside, so they also renamed themselves. In his 1940 chronicle of the movement, Josef Peterka (aka 'Bob Hurikán') recalled: 'Overnight, Anička, Manička and Boženka became Annie, Mary, Bobina or Daisy, Betsy, Virginia; and with the men it was even worse: Jarda became Harry, Pepík became Bob, Ota became Brandy, Zdeněk Iron Fist or Winthrop, Edie and sometimes even Swenny, Grizzly . . . Bill, Old Shatterhand, Farnum, Dawson, Jack, etc.'²⁰ In the late 1920s, the 'wild scouts' permanently adopted the epithet 'tramps' (*trampové*), and began to refer to their outings as 'going on the tramp', or going 'tramping'. The word 'tramping' was apparently taken from the literary work of Jack London who used the term to describe a way of life practised by the American 'hobo'.²¹

The Czech *tramping* movement was thus an eclectic appropriation and reimagination of the North American pioneering days and ways. With the end of the First World War, Europe was flooded with American Wild West films. *Red Ace* was one of the first to be shown in Czechoslovakia and, according to Bob Hurikán, it 'shook the souls' of the wild scouts.²² The American-style hero and the romanticism of the Wild West projected onto the film screen – and further supplemented by the popular novels of the American writer J. F. Cooper and the German writer Karl May – instantly spoke to these young men and women. Trapped in the repetitiveness of factory work and everyday life, these workers and students carved out their freedoms in the landscape of the Czech countryside, using the images of a romantic pioneering America to live on their own terms during the weekends before returning to the aesthetic greyness and the social restrictions that awaited them in the city.²³

A second likely reason for censure of the movement's history under communism was related to the movement's politicization, which came as a response to the sort of government-initiated harassment that was now reminiscent of the communist regime's own tussles with dissidents. In April 1931, Hugo Kubát, the Czech regional administrator, had declared that persons of the opposite sex could not share a tent or hut if they did not possess a marriage certificate. This government decree was the last in a series of ongoing attempts to control the unfettered wanderings of the cities' working-class youth and, in this case, further to shape their morality. Every Saturday following the declaration of this infamous 'Kubát decree', police descended onto the countryside, chasing the *trampové* from their makeshift accommodations. The *trampové* recognized the political implications of this morality campaign, and pointed to the contradictions in the government's sanctioning of middle- and upper-class immorality while punishing the *trampové's* way of life. As an article in the leftist magazine, *Tramp*, explained to its readers:

Without a marriage certificate, you're prohibited from going into the woods with a girl! That, however, does not apply for those made-up girls in the automobiles because the decree does not affect countryside hotels. Let's not even talk about the massage parlours and bar rooms. Because there the gentlemen employers are paying to be 'refreshed', with money that you earned for them.²⁴

Over the next few years the *trampové* continued to defend their rights under the movement's increasingly radical leadership, and eventually the decrees were rescinded in May 1935.²⁵ With their political consciousness shaped during these struggles with local authorities, many of the movement's members went on to fight against Franco in the Spanish Civil War and as partisans against the Nazis during the Second World War.²⁶

There was also a third reason why the 'normalization' regime had no desire to publicize the interwar *tramping* movement: while gesturing toward leftist radicalism, it, like so many of Eastern Europe's communist parties during this period, was more at ease with the political passivity that bourgeois lifestyles established. Ironically, by promoting *chata* culture, the communists were not building a proletarian society, as they might claim, but creating the sort of middle-class 'settlements' that, during the 1930s, the left-wing second-generation of *trampové* had regarded as the sorry sign of the *embourgeoisement* of a once self-consciously working-class movement. Deriding the increasingly petit-bourgeois habits of ageing first-generation *trampové*, as well as the ways in which

the middle classes had taken to imitating the weekend *tramping* life, a 1930 article in *Tramp* sardonically described the current state of affairs:

Just ten years ago the valley had thundered with volleys of revolver bullets, metal sheathed sombreros shone in the sun, harmonicas ran rampant and nowhere were there signs of a thought about having a roof over one's head. Until there appeared the first cabin made from brushwood. And then a tent. And, well, that was the end . . . And then came Father Time, who sucked out the brains from the boys' skulls and spat them back into their palms; and looking about themselves they said: 'Ha! We're men? Far from it! Are our women girls? Far from it! We are professors and engineers, our girls have become madams and chaste young women – we are ladies and gentlemen!²⁷

This 1930 description paralleled the very sort of leisure time and use of the outdoors that the communist authorities in the 1970s and 1980s were endorsing because, unlike *tramping*, it did not detract from political compliance but bolstered it.

In short, the *tramping* movement's association of personal freedom with American lifestyles and symbols (no matter how layered with misconceptions and misidentifications) was none too welcome to the communist regime. Nor did the 'normalization' leadership wish to publicize the fact that the conservatism practised by the Czech regional chief Kubát during the 1930s 'bourgeois-democracy' was troublingly similar to the Communist Party's own prurient demands for wholesome socialist citizens. Furthermore, while political left-oriented activism was, in theory, the mainstay of the Communist Party, the communist movement was intolerant of competition from other leftist ideologies, as its 1950s programmatic destruction of social democracy and its supporters showed. It was for all of these reasons that the *tramping* movement went largely unmentioned during communism.

One further explanation, however, can be offered for the communist-imposed silence on this otherwise verdant episode of interwar political radicalism. The *tramping* movement clearly represented a different definition of citizenship and its relationship to space from that promoted by 'normalization'. From the outset, the very essence of *tramping* lay in its emphasis on community. It was both a fluid and yet a tightly-knit community that, during the 1930s, was further transformed into a politically conscious body, becoming, when necessary, a vehicle for resistance. In contrast, the success of the *chata* culture rested on an entirely opposite set of premises; here the goal – for both its participants as well as the regime – was a private, atomized citizenry. It was for this reason that *chata*

culture, while sometimes derided by the normalizers for its distasteful displays of materialism, remained acceptable. At the same time, not only the memory of the interwar *tramping* movement but the contemporary *tramping* movement itself remained off-limits to the public.

Tramping as Resistance

In 1978 an article about *tramping* appeared in an issue of the newsletter of the dissident organization Charter 77, regularly sent out to its members to keep them abreast of the government's violations of human rights. The article was written by Vladimír Oborský, a young participant in the ongoing, contemporary *tramping* movement. Oborský used the opportunity to relate the recent experiences of the *trampové*. According to his account, following the onset of 'normalization' in 1969, the communist authorities, anxious not to alienate youth outright, did not immediately eliminate *tramping*. They tried, in the first instance, to bring it under the control of the official Socialist Youth Union, which itself had recently been purged of any cravings for the sort of institutional independence that it had begun to enjoy in the 1960s. By the mid-1970s, it had become evident to the Party that this policy of 'co-option' was failing, and that the *trampové* were remaining free from government control, their movement further bolstered by the influence of the 'Western' hippie movement. The official policy of accommodation was therefore replaced with one of repression.

Oborský argued that the latest course of repression, which intersected with the government's actions against the recently founded Charter 77 dissident group, even outdid the infamous 1931 Kubát decree which had allowed police to hound the *trampové* under the pretext of upholding morality laws. In February 1977, for example, just a month after the official founding of Charter 77, the police had burned one *tramp* campsite to the ground. The destroyed structures included historically significant huts from the early *tramping* movement. This physical destruction was then followed by a press campaign, which charged that, among other things, the *trampové* were organizing orgies in their camps. Interestingly, it was not just the repression that was familiar; the accusation of immorality in 1977 was remarkably reminiscent of the 1931 Kubát decrees that had made it legally possible to arrest *trampové* for sharing lodgings with members of the opposite sex. In addition to the press campaign, Oborský continued, a more covert campaign against the present day *trampové* was also being waged: its young members were being brought in for random

police questioning and threatened with the removal of what the police referred to as 'privileges' – including high school matriculation, university enrolment, and career options.²⁸ *Tramping* evidently continued to play on the same anxieties as it had in the 1920s and 1930s; it stirred fears that young people were taking weekends off from their assigned roles and identities to congregate as a community with its own rules in the unregulated expanse of the Czech countryside.²⁹ *Tramping* was seen by the authorities as subterfuge disguised as leisure.

Tramping seemed all the more intolerable to the normalizers because, with working-class grievances theoretically resolved, there should have been no need for such activity. And the physical evidence of that resolution was to be found in the existence of the ubiquitous *chata*. A 1974 article in *Tribuna* (The Tribune), the weekly newspaper of the Communist Party's Central Committee, smarted at the unwillingness of the *trampové* to be tamed by the material benefits ostensibly offered to them by communism. The author of the article related her experiences and observations during a recent train ride into the countryside. Sharing the train compartment with her was a group of young *trampové* who, she wrote, pleasantly surprised her with their exemplary behaviour: 'They were not rude or rough, they addressed each other with romantic names, as if picked from some Western.'³⁰ Even though their manner was not intimidating, the author's sense of order was nevertheless threatened by their appearance: she could not understand why, even if their families were unable to afford a *chata*, these otherwise reasonable young men and women could not keep themselves clean and well groomed. This seemingly innocent remark took on a much larger significance with the author's conclusion of the incident: why, she asked, had the communist government spent so much time and energy ridding the gypsies of their former lifestyles only now to have these children 'from respectable families' adopt the gypsies' lifestyle? As anyone in Eastern Europe well knew, 'gypsy' was the catch-all word for a disregard of political rules, social order, spatial boundaries and modern hygiene. Further, by referring to the *trampové* as children of 'respectable families', the author implied that, in her view, they did indeed have access to a *chata* but were consciously choosing not to make use of it. The point was that so long as they were unable to tame the *trampové*, who insisted on sleeping under the communal stars rather than under the private roof of a *chata*, the communist authorities would never be able to bring the countryside entirely under their jurisdiction, to police its expanse, and to break up the sort of community-building to which *tramping* aspired.

The *Chata* Culture as ‘Ruse’

Contrasted with the *tramping* movement, the regime’s acceptance of the *chata* phenomenon becomes clearer. In fact, it is only against the background of the anti-state opposition potentially percolating through the *tramping* settlements that the government’s endorsement of the atomizing *chata* experience can be situated. I would argue that *chata* culture could only be considered ‘acceptable’ by the ‘normalization’ regime if judged solely by the benefits gained from the political passivity it encouraged. If judged by any other criteria, *chata* culture repeatedly fell short because it brought with it more problems than it solved. For example, the infestation of *chaty* and, even more so, of *chata*-owners, into the Czech countryside was soon producing damaging effects on the environment; *chata*-owners tossed their garbage on the ground, and washed their cars outdoors, letting the soapy water drain into the rivers.³¹ In addition, as more people increasingly had more money but less to spend it on, *chata* expansion also became a necessary pastime, and included the addition of consumer luxuries such as television antennas, swimming pools, and saunas, also often acquired on the black market.³² And yet the regime’s criticism of the environmental damage, aesthetic vulgarity and blatant materialism associated with *chata* culture remained muted or, at most, gently admonishing, even as it came provocatively close to resembling the much-feared ‘petit-bourgeois’ mentality seen as typical to ‘the West’.³³

Chata culture further overlapped with the already pressing problem of labour discipline. On Friday afternoons, Czechoslovakia’s roads were congested with traffic as everyone made their way to their *chata*. So as to avoid the inevitable traffic jams, people began packing up for the weekend after only a couple of hours of work on Friday. Similarly, they were arriving late to work on Mondays. The working week shrank to little more than three full days of work. Furthermore, plumbers, electricians, builders and other trained craftsmen were not to be found during the four-day weekends because they were off moonlighting on other people’s *chaty*, making a sizeable secondary income outside of official state structures.³⁴ Many people, however, decided to forego hiring professional labour and took on the necessary do-it-yourself tasks themselves, using the instructions and blueprints in *Chatař* as their guide. Through the media, the government thus further implored the public not to treat their workplace as an opportunity to rest after a weekend of hard work fixing up their *chata*.³⁵ As if labour issues were not enough, *chata* culture further tested the boundaries of the strict morality that the Party ideologues insisted upon: it was common knowledge that *chaty* were popular sites for sexual trysts and extra-marital affairs.

The equally troubling issue of state property theft further intersected with *chata* politics. As rural land for recreational purposes became more scarce, the government insisted that those first in line for purchasing a *chata* should be the politically active members of socialist society, those who ‘give more to society’.³⁶ Such threats were of no use, however; the reality was that those with money, and not ideological dedication, had the means to ‘buy’ themselves some land, thus further encouraging bribery and corruption. It also became a national joke that *chaty* were being built from stolen state property. One popular film by the director Petr Schulhoff – whose comedies poked fun at the money-grubbing, petit-bourgeois habits of socialist citizens – showed a middle-aged, married couple in their car on the way to their *chata*. They pass by a state construction site where a pile of bricks sits out in the open. As wife and husband scamper out to gather the bricks and toss them quickly into the back of their car, the husband exclaims: ‘I can’t believe no one’s guarding these!’ The wife responds happily: ‘A few more and we’ve got ourselves a garage.’³⁷ In their eyes, it would have been criminal *not* to have taken the bricks to improve their *chata*.

In the process of building, renovating, decorating and enjoying their *chata*, most *chata*-owners, whether consciously or not, stole time and goods from the communist state, and transgressed its rules. It would be overstating the case to suggest that these were acts of outright anti-communist resistance, although the justifications heard most often – that communist property was by definition public property or that theft and truancy damaged only ‘them’ and not ‘us’ – sometimes seemed to suggest so. Instead, the actions of so many of the participants in the post-Prague Spring *chata* culture could be understood as what de Certeau called ‘tactics’, the counterpoint to ‘strategy’, ‘the “ruses” that take the predisposition of the world and make it over, that convert it to the purposes of ordinary people’.³⁸ Such ‘tactics’ are the means used by those without power to erode or else subvert the creations of the powerful: to make space (‘tactics’) within place (‘strategy’). As de Certeau noted, ‘In these combatants’ stratagems, there is a certain art in placing one’s blows, a pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining space . . . Even in the field of manipulation and enjoyment.’³⁹

The ‘tactics’ employed in the 1970s and 1980s by Czech *chata* enthusiasts resembled those of the interwar *trampové* in that both aimed to create a world of make-believe in their outdoor ‘settlements’, to construct a temporary refuge where at least the illusions of freedom could be entertained. On the one hand, the communist regime repressed remnants of the *tramping* movement, seeing in it the seeds of genuine opposition and

dissent. On the other hand, it stood by as the popularity of the *chata* grew. *Chata* culture was tolerated and even encouraged because, in many ways, it exemplified the sort of relationship between the state and the 'ordinary citizen' that the post-Prague Spring regime wished to endorse. By the 1970s, official communist culture no longer promoted a nation of eager, publicly active communists. Instead, it sought to create a nation of private persons joined together in their mutual quest for the good life, which, the regime insisted, could best be had under communism. It was the vision of a deeply conservative communist regime that had 'convinced a citizenry that the core context of politics should be the sphere of private life'.⁴⁰ In contrast, the *tramp* harked back to the kind of leftist radicalism and public community spirit that the regime now considered dangerous for its own survival.

Thus, the post-1968 Czechoslovak regime tolerated, in the name of 'normalization', the excesses of the *chata* culture and allowed these excesses to continue even as they further chipped away at the country's already declining economy, exacerbating labour shortages and corruption. Ironically, the rise of state-sponsored private citizenship had decidedly public consequences: although *chata*-owners were not consciously using their weekend activities to resist the regime, they were acting as creative 'users' of state-sponsored cultural products. By taking advantage of what was on offer, and the regime's reluctance to disallow it, the Czech *chata* enthusiasts were affecting their political environment. Consequently, the use of the outdoors, which the 'normalization' regime set out to control, had, to a certain extent, become uncontrollable.

Notes

1. Research for this article was generously funded by the Fulbright-Hays Program and the Social Science Research Council.
2. As quoted in Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its aftermath. Czechoslovak politics, 1968–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 175.
3. *Práce*, 5 January 1984, p. 3.
4. Open Society Archives, Budapest: *RFE Czechoslovak Situation Report*, 11 July 1973.
5. Official statistics from the 1970s and 1980s revealed that the number of *chaty* built in Slovakia were only 10% of the number built in the Czech lands. Similarly, *chaty* were found not to be as prevalent in

- other East European countries. *Chata* culture was, therefore, an especially Czech phenomenon. As to the discrepancy between Slovakia and the Czech lands, I would add that since Slovakia had been largely agricultural until then, most Slovaks living in cities still had family in the countryside whom they could visit.
6. Vladimír Kusin, 'Husak's Czechoslovakia and Economic Stagnation', *Problems of Communism*, May–June 1982, p. 28.
7. For example, the front page of the satirical cartoon magazine, *Dikobraz*, no. 26, 26 June 1973.
8. The notion of a 'social contract' is frequently evoked in the existing literature on post-1968 Czechoslovakia. See, for example, Timothy Garton Ash, *The Uses of Adversity* (Cambridge: Granta Books, 1989); Grzegorz Ekiert, *The State Against Society: Political Crises and their Aftermath in East Central Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Vladimír Kusin, *From Dubček to Charter 77: a study of 'normalization' in Czechoslovakia, 1968–1978* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1978); and Milan Simečka, *The Restoration of Order: The Normalization of Czechoslovakia* (London: Verso, 1984).
9. See Milan Otáhal, *Opozice, Moc, Společnost 1969/1989* [Opposition, Power, Society 1969/1989] (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR, 1994), pp. 31–3.
10. As quoted in Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 253.
11. Robert S. Boynton, 'Enjoy Your Žižek!', *Linguafranca*, October 1998, pp. 44–5.
12. Mike Craig, 'Relics, places and unwritten geographies in the work of Michel de Certeau (1925–86)', in Mike Craig and Nigel Thrift, eds, *Thinking Space* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 137.
13. In answer to a 1976 query from a distraught policeman from the Czech town of Terezín, state television responded with an explanation of the new term 'real socialism' (*reálný socialismus*): 'In today's real world, in the world in which we live, there exist many opinions about socialism, even within the international workers' movement. So as to differentiate from utopian expectations, it is stated that in the countries of the socialist camp, where socialism is being built, the emphasis is not on a socialism fashioned out of expectations or speculations, but based on reality, on the fact that we're dealing here with the reality of developing socialist life and society.' (Czech Television Archives, Prague: Ve Fond; k. #120; ev.j. 811; sign. Zelenka: 'Dopisy diváků 1976–77': Letter from Ing. Jaroslav Bažant, ČsT, to Miroslav Bock, Útvar SNB, Terezín, 28 June 1976.)

14. Lauren Berlant. *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 5.
15. It was finally after the 1989 'velvet revolution' that for the first time issues of *Chatař* had photographs of people partaking together in social activity on the front cover. See, for example, *Chatař*, 6/1990.
16. Lenka Kalinová. *Sociální vývoj Československa 1969-1989* [The Social Development of Czechoslovakia 1969–1989] (Prague: ÚSD AV ČR, 1998), p. 52.
17. Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. Aaron Asher (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999), p. 4.
18. Stanislav Motl, preface to Bob Hurikán. *Dějiny trampingu* [The History of Tramping] (Prague: Novinář, 1940; 1990), p. 6.
19. *Chatař*, 8/1989, pp. 6–7.
20. Hurikán. *Dějiny trampingu*, pp. 16–17.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 16. The interwar *tramping* movement passed through several 'thematic' phases, including the wild scouts era, the cowboy era and the Canadian era. Each was accompanied by its own costumes, slang and fireside songs.
23. Marek Waic and Jiří Kössl. *Český tramping 1918–1945* (Prague: Ruch, 1992), pp. 12–13. While Hurikán's history of tramping is based on his own recollections, Waic and Kössl's study is archival-based.
24. Waic and Kössl. *Český tramping*, p. 56.
25. For different accounts of and opinions about the responses to the Kubát decrees, see František Mores. *Trampské hnutí ve středních Čechách (Příspěvek k poznání jeho pokrokové orientace)* [The Tramping Movement in the Central Czech Lands (A contribution toward exploring its avant-garde orientation)], *Středočeský sborník historický*, no. 12 (1977) (one of the rare official articles on *tramping* during the communist period); Hurikán, *Dějiny trampingu*, pp. 246–50; and Waic and Kössl. *Český tramping*, pp. 50–60.
26. In his account of the movement, Bob Hurikán claims to have led an effective partisan group, operating out of his former 'settlement' in the Czech countryside. The archives, according to Waic and Kössl, reveal a less effective Hurikán who was, nevertheless, arrested in the spring of 1945 when the Gestapo began to fear a large-scale *tramp* offensive. Waic and Kössl. *Český tramping*, pp. 91–8.
27. *Tramp*, 12 September 1930; as quoted in Mores, *Trampské hnutí*, p. 58.
28. Libri Prohibiti Archives, Prague: Vladimír Oborský, 'O trampingu' [sic!], *Info o Chartě* 77, no. 10, July–August 1978.
29. The Czechoslovak Communist Party often fretted over the ability of young people to assemble informally, and to pledge their loyalty to these self-created groups. In the mid-1960s, for example, a government report about contemporary youth saw warning signs in this younger generation's tendency to ignore party-organized activities and instead to assemble in informal groups whose members 'create their own norms for behavior which they then strictly hold to and enforce'. (State Central Archives, Prague: fond 10/5; sv. 6; aj. 23; *Problematika současné mladé generace* [Issues Surrounding Today's Young Generation] (Materials for the 17th meeting of the Central Committee's Ideological Commission), 7 October 1965, p. 38.
30. 'Tremповé', *Tribuna*, no. 13/74, 27 March 1974, p. 6.
31. Special government ordinances were issued in 1971 that allowed for the construction of private recreation facilities only within the framework of district land development plans. But individuals nevertheless had no problem in making private deals with local agricultural co-operatives that sold off land to anyone willing to pay under the table for it. In 1972, Radio Prague criticized the vast profiteering taking place between sellers of land, buyers of land, and corrupt regional government committees – all for the purposes of building *chaty*. (Open Society Archives, Budapest: *Radio Prague*, 10 July 1972, 07:10).
32. Some of the newly built or expanded *chaty* were such a blot on the landscape that the Prague Research Institute for Building and Architecture compiled an illustrated handbook of the aesthetic dos and don'ts of *chata* construction. The handbook was sent to all regional government committees as a guide to the sort of *chaty* considered an aesthetic eyesore. If judged to be aesthetically unacceptable, the owner would theoretically be forced to make improvements. (Open Society Archives, Budapest: *RFE Special Report*, 27 April 1973; based on *The Economist*, 27 April 1973.) At the same time, the monthly *Chatař* magazine instituted a section called 'Architecture in Practice' where photographs of real *chaty* were printed and then critiqued.
33. For more on representations of 'the West' during late socialism in Czechoslovakia, see Paulina Bren. 'Looking West: Popular Culture and the Generation Gap in communist Czechoslovakia, 1969–1989', in Luisa Passerini, ed., *Representations and Cultural Exchanges Across the Atlantic: Europe and the United States 1800–2000* (Brussels: PIE Lang, 2000).

14. Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 5.
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34. In the 1980s, moonlighting income was estimated at 6 billion crowns a year, with three billion crowns coming from jobs related to the construction of family houses and *chaty*. (Kalinová, *Sociální vývoj*, p. 51.)
35. *Vlasta*, no. 12, 16 March 1984, p. 28.
36. *Tribuna*, 31 May 1973.
37. Petr Schulhoff, director, *Co je doma, to se počítá pánové . . .* [Gentlemen, what's at home counts . . .] (Prague: Barrandov Film Studios, 1980).
38. Craig, 'Relics, places', p. 137.
39. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; 1988), p. 18.
40. Berlant, *Queen of America*, p. 3.

Khrushchev's Children's Paradise: The Pioneer Palace, Moscow, 1958–1962

Susan E. Reid

In this house the walls will teach.

Komsomol'skaia pravda, 2 June 1962

Stepping out in the party's footsteps,
Defending peace and truth,
Keep to the path, knowing no bounds
Into the distance of the radiant years –
Be prepared!

Pioneer Oath, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 19 May 1962

Should you ever be in Moscow, take a trip across the river to the green and pleasant area in the south-west of the city known today by its picturesque, traditional name, the Sparrow Hills (*Vorob'evye gory*), but for much of the Soviet era as the Lenin Hills (*Leninskie gory*). There, you cannot miss the triumphal tower of Stalin's 'Palace of Science', Moscow State University, which commands a splendid panorama over the city and a privileged sightline to the Kremlin towers. But only if you take time to wander down towards the River Moskva will you come upon, nestling unostentatiously in a hollow beneath its shadow, another monument to the ideals of communism – the Moscow Pioneer Palace. Or rather, an anti-monument. You might be forgiven for failing to notice this modest and informal complex, or for dismissing it as a Soviet version of the generic, postwar modernist school building so familiar and, hence, unremarkable in Britain and America.¹ The upbringing of children was, indeed, its purpose. But this was no ordinary educational establishment; it was a special zone for the incubation of the future communist society, at once a built embodiment of the promised radiant future, and a means to bring it about.

The Moscow Pioneer Palace was built to house the after-school activities of the Communist Party's children's organization – the Pioneers.