

# THE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS OF THE GUARD'S WORLD CONCEPT IN THE ANALYSIS OF THE CZECH PRISON SYSTEM\*

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**Abstract:** *The sphere of prison environment is currently one of the most undiscovered topics in the social research in the context of the Czech Republic. This article attempts partially fill out this gap. Based on ethnographic study of prison guards working in the Czech prison system, the text 1) compares situation of prison guards in USA in 1975 and current context of the Czech Republic, 2) assess relevancy of use of this concept in social research in prison total institution, and 3) analyzes the roles and meanings of sport for prison guards in connection with job in prison environment. The objective of this article is to reveal the parity or disparity in prison guard's subcultures in USA (1975) and the Czech Republic (2014) with emphasis put on the topic of sport in Guard's world in the Czech prisons.*

**Key words:** *prison, prison guards, the guard's world, ethnography, sport.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Who among us would not know terms like prison, prison service, prison guards, prisoners, etc.? Probably everyone has ever encountered those words. They are often discussed in media, but also in ordinary conversations in society. However, another question is who among us really knows what exactly these terms mean in practice? How is the situation inside the prison, what is a common practice and everyday life in prison? These questions are very difficult to answer because the prison environment is relatively inaccessible space. Although it is an integral part of our society, it rather lives a life of its own, in the sense that the majority society does not have an opportunity to peek inside.

“A white space on the map of social science research”, with some exaggeration, this is also a way we could call the sphere of prison system. In today’s society, it has become a very interesting field of research creating space for a new perspective on the issue of the impact of the prison environment on individuals, who really spend their time there. However, this type of research, or research topic, has taken a back seat in the Czech context so far. In a sense, Kateřina Nedbálková can be considered a pioneer in the field, as she has addressed the issue of prison system in our country. In her papers, she emphasizes especially a gender aspect of this institution that creates and then reproduces gendered identities. Her research focuses on prison inmate subcultures in female prisons, where specific gendered roles within homosexual relationships are being created (Nedbálková 2003; Nedbálková 2006). The theme of constitution of identity within the prison environment from the inmates’ perspective is also analyzed by Jones and Schmid, who introduced the concept of suspended identity, which is an important strategy in coping with the rigors of life in prison (Jones and Schmid 2000; Schmid and Jones 1991).

Social roles performed by actors within the prison world have unquestionably an impact on life in prison. A significant aspect, which is reflected in these social interactions, is power and power positions of individual participants within the prison structure / hierarchy. The phenomenon of power and its influence on behavior and conduct of prison actors was analyzed by Philip Zimbardo, in his famous, now classic, Stanford prison experiment, the results of which he then comprehensively introduced and developed in the concept of The Lucifer Effect (Zimbardo 2005 and 2007). The issue of power in prison system, or methods of punishment in general, were also addressed by Michel Foucault, who described power techniques in prison institution on a more general level. In his view, the power of a penal institution is the most illustrative in an individual panoptical acting in the context of the 18th and 19th century (the principle of panopticism) (Foucault 2000).

In his brief paper, Gilles Deleuze expressed an idea that we should take into account a social transformation in progress since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rather than to view the power through the lens of disciplinary societies, it is necessary to involve an alternative view, which is a concept of societies of control. Here, it is not a fixed disciplination anymore, but it is primarily a fluctuating control across the societal spectrum (transition from disciplinary societies to societies of control<sup>1</sup>) (Deleuze

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<sup>1</sup>For a more detailed description of the society of control, see the work *The Culture of Control* (Garland 2001) or text by Tim Owen (2007).

1992, 3–4). Fred Alford applied the idea of society of control to the sphere of prison system and detected an analogous transition from the concept of *Panopticon* to the concept of *Non-Opticon*. What is characteristic is the principle *Hold the Body*, where there is no emphasis on individual work with inmates, but primarily it is all about guarding the exit, so that no one could escape. In this system, the major objective is not to individually discipline those inmates, but it is important to set aside a certain mass of individuals who have been identified as dangerous by society (Alford 2000, 127–132).

Most of the above concepts and research have focused either on the general level of prison system, or on the perspective of one particular group, the inmates. The social world of prison, however, is not consisted of only this one group, but also it is necessary to turn attention to the guards. In a sense, the prison environment affects all its participants (Zimbardo 2005, 131; Goffman 1961), not only prisoners, but also the group of individuals tasked to guard them. This group consists of prison guards who are in daily contact with inmates and experience the reality of prison firsthand. The value of their perspective on the issue of prison system lies in their unique position and in conditions they experience (especially a lot of stress and huge responsibility). Through the analysis of the impact of this specific environment on a group of prison guards we will get a view on the institution from the perspective of those whose opinions are very often neglected.<sup>2</sup> This allows us to contribute to a closer and deeper insight into the functioning of prison institution. Lombardo was already aware of this fact and emphasized the need to go straight to the guards and let them talk about themselves. It is necessary to realize that we cannot approach prison only through public policy and be interested only in the ideal of rehabilitation, but it needs to be seen as a world where people live and work (Lombardo 1989).

The prison system has been currently one of the most acceptable and sought systems of social security and criminal control. However, this obsession with the pursuit of a higher level of safety and a certain “divinization” of prison as an effective tool for its achieving is not without problems. Deborah Drake (2012) said that it is necessary to look at prison system with a critical eye and see the areas in which it fails, why it is so, what does make it legitimate and how to remove barriers to critical reflection. In order to be able adequately describe the sphere of prison, it is necessary to look behind the scenes to see what has been covered.

In this study, I deal with the analysis of prison social world from the perspective of prison guards.<sup>3</sup> I try to emphasize the possibility of applying the concept of guard's world from American context of the 70s (*The Guard's World*) to the environment of contemporary Czech prison system,<sup>4</sup> and the importance of these

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<sup>2</sup>There are exceptions in the works of foreign authors Jacobs and Retsky (1975) and Lucien X. Lombardo (1989) and others, or paper by Lukáš Dirga and Jaroslava Hasmanová Marhánková (2014) concerning the current Czech environment.

<sup>3</sup>The use of the term prison guard may be problematic due to a certain degree of vagueness of the term, however I decided to use it even for description of the Czech prison system to maintain the text fluency. The term prison guard in Czech prison system refers to members of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic.

<sup>4</sup>The context of American and Czech prison system is significantly different in the way of imprisonment, the number of inmates, prison privatization, etc. Despite this, it is possible to compare prisons at an institutional level and from the perspective of mutual social interactions

prison guards' sport activities in relation to their job. Research methodology involves a qualitative ethnographic method based on interviews with selected actors of prison world and observation inside a prison. In the first part of the paper I introduce the concept of the guard's world and possible applications of this concept to the contemporary Czech prison system. In the second part I turn attention to the importance of sport for a group of prison guards within their job and its impact on the current form of everyday experience of the guard's world in the context of the Czech Republic.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

The presented data are derived from an empirical study based on ethnographic research that focus on a prison guards population working in Czech prisons of type C in the Czech Republic. This type of correctional facility is the second strictest in terms of the internal rules of prisons (the Czech prison system currently distinguishes four levels of prisons: A type prison – minimum security, B type prison – medium security, C type prison – high security, D type prison – maximum security), so it can be defined as a prison that satisfies the conditions of the ideal-type total institution. Currently there has been also the largest proportion of inmates from all types of Czech prisons housed in security prisons.<sup>5</sup> Selecting the certain type of prison also had a pragmatic reason, because I managed to gain access to the interior of selected prisons and I knew key informants who helped me get to this inaccessible place.

The data were collected in two phases. The first phase took place in 2012 involving 17 in-depth unstructured interviews with prison guards working in four different security prisons in the Czech Republic.<sup>6</sup> To get participants for my research I used the snowball sampling method (Hendl 2005), when I tried to get contacts to prison guards from my first respondents that I had found on my own social networks. I chose this method because of difficult access to the prison guards' population, which is only enhanced by the difficult access to the inner area of prisons (it has been prohibited for most studies due to the internal security of prison). I am aware of the limits of the snowball sampling method especially in terms of reducing the heterogeneity of the research sample, but I tried to compensate this deficiency by the diversity of respondents from age (21–47 years), seniority (2–16 years) and especially their place of employment (they have worked in four different prisons) perspectives. For these reasons I consider my research sample heterogeneous.

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among actors participating in the daily practice of prison. This type of comparison is the subject of the paper.

<sup>5</sup>The Prison Service of the Czech Republic: <http://vscr.cz/generalni-reditelstvi-19/informacni-servis/rychla-fakta>, 9<sup>th</sup> of April, 2015.

<sup>6</sup>The interviews took place mostly in an informal environment (cafés, etc.). It always depended on the respondents where they wanted to be interviewed. In a few cases, the respondents wished to be interviewed in their own apartments. Interviews were informal due to the environment and the fact that most of the respondents were contacted through my own social networks (my friends). The average length was approximately one hour. The structure of the interviews resulted from the context and the situation, but I always tried to touch the main areas of research that I had prepared.

The second phase of data collection took place in 2014. 17 original interviews with prison guards were supplemented with additional 14, where I again used the snowball sampling method to contact respondents (I used contacts from the previous research phase). The interviewed guards have worked in the same prisons as those interviewed in the previous phase, but they were not the same ones. In addition, in this case, I tried to maintain the heterogeneity of the research sample both from the age (21–48 years), and from the seniority (3–18 years) perspectives. In this part of the research, I also managed to get permission to access to the interior of the two selected type C prisons (out of 4 prisons where interviews were conducted), where I performed a total of 70 hours of observation.

In the context of the research it is important to note that the data obtained from the interviews show the perspective of prison guards themselves on the prison environment. This is not a generalized description, but presenting the point of view of one specific group of participants in the certain social world. It can be assumed that other actors (the inmates or prison management) could have a different opinion on the issue. The objective of this paper is to present the prison guards' perspective to a specific type of relationships they have with their colleagues within the prison world and to assess the importance of sport for them in relation to their employment.

### **3. PRISON AS A SOCIAL (TOTAL) INSTITUTION**

Theoretically it is possible to view the prison environment in several ways starting through bureaucratic lens, through militaristic lens or from the sociological perspective, which is represented mainly by dramaturgical approach of Ervin Goffman and his concept of total institution. All of these perspectives are relevant and in certain aspects of prison life can be used to describe not only general contextual conditions, but also to analyze social interactions within the world behind bars. The bureaucratic approach sees prison as a formal institution having characteristics of a bureaucratic apparatus such as strict hierarchy, clearly defined scope and responsibility for individual acts, division of labor, mobilization and coordination of its members. In addition to the bureaucratic nature of detention facilities we must also take into account the militarization of this environment. Historically, the development of prison system is closely related to the military component, because in the past there was no prison service, as we know it today. The military guarded the prison and inmates. Military principles most often refer to the rules of behavior of individual actors, as the inmates and guards are required to follow strict rules, absolute discipline and obedience to an order (Mařádek 2003, 133–137).

My research is primarily based on the sociological perspective, which is represented by the thoughts of the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman, especially his concepts of dramaturgical approach and total institution. His work *Asylums* (1961) describes prisons, in addition to monasteries, barracks, homes for the mentally ill, or for disabled individuals, as types of total institution. This concept helped me with theoretical description of contextual conditions that affect the operation of the entire institution. Strict separation of this world's actors from the rest of society is characteristic of it. The prison environment is characterized by a clear definition of

space that is being inhabited by certain individuals at a certain moment, which is symbolized by many obstacles, such as bars, locks, barbed wire, etc. Limitation of physical space is then reflected in social interactions taking place within it. Based on general conditions and system of rules two main groups of actors are being profiled here, which are the convicted and prison guards (generally the group of inmates and staff). A daily interaction among them is structured and determined by the system of normative rules (Goffman 1961, 3–7).

To understand these relationships among guards and inmates I used the Goffman's concept of dramaturgical approach. It is based on the metaphor of social interaction and theatrical performance. Goffman works with several key concepts that describe the various aspects of actions among individuals. It involves *impression management* (for description of creating an impression, which an individual gives or tries to give to his environment), two kinds of actors, who are performers (those who show off their performances), and viewers (those who watch the performances) and many others. Therefore, each participant of prison theatrical performance must play his/her role, which is determined by the social context and consequently affects a form of interaction among certain individuals. This interaction may take place at the level of individuals, when only certain individuals interact, but it may also take place at the group level. To describe a group interaction Goffman uses the term team. A team is understood as a group of individuals who seek to achieve a common goal (Goffman 1999, 83). In the prison world these teams are especially a group of inmates and a group of guards. A common goal of guards is determined by organizational rules of the entire institution (to maintain order in the inner area of the prison and to ensure security).

In my paper I focus on a group (or a team, if we use Goffman's terminology) of prison guards who in the course of their employment are exposed to three main types of actors: inmates, colleagues and prison management. The kinds of relationships I am primarily interested in are the mutual relationships among guards. By creating of two main groups, which are in contradictory position (guards and inmates), two prison subcultures are being created as well – inmates' subculture and prison guards' subculture.<sup>7</sup> This leads to the creation of some guard's world (The Guard's World), which is described by Jacobs and Retsky (1975) in their ethnographic study "Prison Guard" from 1975.

#### 4. THE GUARD'S WORLD IN THE USA IN 1975

The situation of prison guards in terms of job description is that they have to guard a group of inmates, who are being held within a defined and enclosed place, and who, in most cases, consider the prison rules and restrictions unjustified, they do not want to stay in the territory and there is a potential risk of their escape. Therefore, guards' duty is to prevent them from escaping and to maintain order and security in areas of the prison facility. In addition to these organizational tasks the environment of total institution produces also minor requirements for guards

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<sup>7</sup>Prison subculture can be defined as a social group of actors inhabiting a certain social space of the prison, where there are specific norms, values and behavior patterns created by the subculture (Nedbálková 2006).

that in particular relate to dealing with people – supervising inmates in their cells, at work, during leisure activities, etc. Therefore, in order to do their assignments, prison guards have to work together and create a compact unit that can effectively perform tasks according to prescribed rules (Jacobs and Retsky 1975, 8).

The guards' subculture is characterized by several common features, which create a sense of solidarity and cohesion within their group. The main and most important aspect of the prison guard's job is his "lockdown" inside the prison and exclusion (for specific working hours) from the surrounding society. Since the prison is a totally closed environment, even guards are forced to remain only in defined and designated space. The space they share with their colleagues and a group of inmates. Some mystery of the prison world has been transmitted to guards themselves, as their job is rather mysterious for the majority. This opens up space for the emergence of various stereotypes that describe prison guards as violent individuals who do not perform their job properly, and who physically abuse the inmates. However, this is contrary to what guards really experience. In most cases, the guards are exposed to the fear of possible physical assault by inmates (this risk becomes an everyday reality). They often become targets of intimidation, provocation and life-threatening "promises" to their loved ones. It logically results in weakening of relationships between guards and inmates that are based on the principle of formalized interaction. Neither closer ties, nor signs of friendship come into consideration. Thus, guards more incline towards formalized organizational goals and act within the prescribed prison rules. All these above-mentioned characteristics of guard's job strengthen the internal togetherness of the group, create strong cohesion and help build mutual trust and unity among guards within their subculture. The way of accommodation of American prison guards in 1975 helped the situation as well, since there was often a large dormitory set up within the prison grounds (it could be compared to a college dorm or army barracks), where guards lived together (Jacobs and Retsky 1975, 22–26) (this type of accommodation of guards is not characteristic of today's Czech environment).

Is it, however, possible to transfer this concept describing the guards' subculture, the American prison guard's world in 1975, to the context of the current Czech Republic and to apply it in the research of Czech prison system? The answer to this question is not clear, we cannot say yes or no. It is necessary to analyze particular salient aspects of the concept of the guard's world and assess whether they have their analytical justification in the current Czech context. The collected data show that the situation in the Czech Republic is, in certain aspects, the same as it was in Jacobs' and Retsky' research, but in other aspects it is different. In the next part I will outline what aspects of the situation are the same, what is different and why it is possibly different.

## **5. THE GUARD'S WORLD IN THE CONTEMPORARY CZECH REPUBLIC**

In terms of organizational objectives of prison and general characteristics of a prison guard job is evident that the present Czech guards experience very similar conditions to those reflected in the Jacobs' and Retsky's research in 1975. What has changed significantly, however, is the internal cohesion of the guard's world

and the form of their mutual relationships. Currently, the aspects such as trust, respect, etc. have been disappearing from the prison guards' subculture.

Czech guards, just as their counterparts in the USA in 1975, now experience a feeling of stigmatization of their job by the majority (according to the respondents, most guards when interacting in society rather keep their jobs secret and strong distance from the prison guard job is apparent in this population), they are employed in the environment that is typical with special working conditions such as specific working hours in shifts, isolation from outside society for a period of employment, constant fear and uncertainty of assaults by inmates and that leads to a deepening of social distance between inmates and guards and subsequent inclination of guards towards the organizational goals of the detention facility (as you'll see below, following the organizational goals is a key factor in maintaining stability in the group of prison guards). From the perspective of external characteristics of the guard's world, the situation does not differ much. Considerable differences occur in the cohesion of internal relationships among guards and in overall stability of the guard's world. In the case of the American guards their subculture was characterized by close ties and relationships, which included trust and mutual respect. According to the respondents, precisely these aspects, however, are beginning to transform and disappear in the contemporary Czech prison system.

As research focused on the conceptualization of the role of prison guards in Czech prisons conducted by Lukáš Dirga and Jaroslava Hasmanová Marhánková shows, it is evident that the guard's world is also disturbed by an important factor in terms of loss of power, a certain blurring of power boundaries within the Czech prison system. Guards describe their position as very problematic when they are losing their power position, which may lead to an increasing distance both from the ideal of prison system in the form of rehabilitation of inmates, and from their own work (guards see their contributions to the rehabilitation of inmates in the current conditions of the Czech prison system as zero). Responds of guards refer to the frustration over the loss of clearly defined power boundaries (especially towards the population of inmates) and to increasing uncertainty arising from unclear rules (Dirga and Hasmanová Marhánková 2014).

When describing an ideal state of relationships among colleagues at a workplace, in the case of prison environment, guards used the analogy of a sport team, where the principles such as trust, respect, the ability to rely on each other, etc. are above all. Precisely these features of social interaction are critical for the job of prison guard. From their perspective, in the environment that is typical of constant threat of violence, the cooperation with other members of the prison service is necessary and close ties with others give a prison guard security and a certain amount of peace. Precisely the above principles of sport team cooperation, however, are beginning to largely disappear. Therefore, if there is no trust at a level at which it should be, even the internal cohesion of the guard's world weakens, which consequently affects both their work, and the mutual relationships. What has to be done to change the situation?



## 6. WHAT IS AND WHAT IS NOT THE CURRENT CZECH GUARD'S WORLD FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ITS PARTICIPANTS

One of the most important phenomena of the contemporary Czech prison system, which contributed to the loss of trust among guards, is the occurrence of prohibited items in the inner areas of prison. In recent years, illegal objects such as mobile phones, drugs, alcohol, etc. have been increasingly confiscated from inmates. So here comes the logical question: How these items got to those cells? Someone had to bring them in. It cast suspicion on guards so they begin to suspect each other, which results in a weakening of mutual ties. Men Bořek and Šimon<sup>8</sup> give an illustrative testimony concerning this phenomenon, they describe it as follows:

Mr. Bořek: *"You know, for example, there is a guy on your shift, but you cannot prove it to him. You know he is dealing with them [the inmates – author's note]. You know they got him hooked. They can be drunk and you know this bastard brought it to them. How can you expect some backup from a guy like that? Like I said, the times when we really worked as a team are like 10 years gone."*

Mr. Šimon: *"You are actually in the same boat with'em [with fellow guards – author's note] and have to pull together against the others. On the other hand, things happen and you basically suspect and judge your colleagues for what they do. Somehow mobile phones are getting there, somehow drugs are getting there. Someone has to bringin' it in, cuz it does not get there itself. So it must be someone. Either checks are not doing properly, or someone has to be bringing it in. I'm more of the opinion that someone was paid for bringing it in."*

Regardless of the way the aforementioned illegal objects get to prison, whether intentionally or unintentionally, it leads guards to the suspicion that their colleagues do not perform their work as they should. It results in a disintegration of coherent guard's world into a system of atomized groups that have fairly good relationships within themselves, but they do not communicate with each other much. Seeing the guard's world as a fragmented system of individual social groups led me to the question of the factor that separates the groups. What is it that holds the individual groups together, but also separates them from the others?

The in-depth analysis of respondents' statements indicates that the guards' subculture is divided into groups of younger and older generation (differentiated based on age and seniority). The most frequently mentioned factor that creates the feeling of solidarity among the older generation is the experience of military service. Representatives of this group perceive it that they are the bearers of good values and order, which are necessary in the prison guard job (values and order were instilled by military service). According to their statements, it is these values and order the younger generation is missing. What separates the guards is the experience with a military environment. This is also associated with a negative view of the older generation on the current recruitment procedure of new members of

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<sup>8</sup>In order to maintain anonymity of the respondents I mention pseudonyms created for analytical purposes of the research.

the prison service. Due to a shortage of staff in the service the admission criteria are becoming permeable and young people, who are not sufficiently mature and experienced, are being recruited for the prison guard job.<sup>9</sup> Immaturity and inexperience cause that they are quite easily manipulated by the inmates. They can get into such extreme situation, where they are no longer able to cope with the pressure of the environment and manipulation by the inmates and end up bringing them the abovementioned illegal items. This risk was the most frequent topic of the older generation guards speaking on how new members are being recruited in the contemporary Czech prison system. Mr. Břetislav talks about the recruitment as follows:

*“He [prison guard job applicant – author’s note] can do some pushups, some squats, run a few laps, it means that he passes the physicals [physical tests required for admission to prison guard job – author’s note]. Then, I think there is another test, it is psychological test. He passes psychological tests and is accepted. Then they put this inexperienced young rookie among those inmates. He, of course, starts on those towers and so on, but there is a shortage of stuff so after a while he will end up among them anyway. And there are guys, for example, who are doin’ their time for fraud, Section 250, and they might deceive the whole village. So with this rookie, it takes two shifts and they have him in palm of their hands, and then it is no wonder that the guy is under so much pressure that he starts bringing’em phones, drugs and stuff. He doesn’t know the way out.”*

Another social trend that contributes to the loss of trust among prison guards is an increasing uncertainty that affects mainly the labor market. Today, at a time of high unemployment, everyone fears about the stability of his/her job and almost nobody is sure if he/she does not lose the job. The increasing job insecurity and fear of losing the job is also apparent in the testimony of Mr. Miloš:

*“I think that now it’s gettin’ worse [relationships among guards – author’s note], but again, the possible reason can be that everyone is worried about his job. It is simply a different time, everyone fears he may lose his chair.”*

It is associated with the development of so-called risk society analyzed by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck. It is characterized by uncontrollable risk affecting many spheres of social life, particularly the labor market (Beck 2004). Prison guard job is no exception. The greater the pressure on a particular position, the more worried an individual is that he might lose the job. Metaphorically, this could be described as a transition from a situation where everybody pulled together resulting in the struggle of all against all. Everyone is worried about his/her job, no one is sure, everyone tries to keep his/her job and consequently no one does

<sup>9</sup>At this point it is worth mentioning that the findings and interpretations show only the perspective of one social group (prison guards), and thus it cannot be generalized to the entire prison environment. My objective is not to raise any absolute statements that could be applied to all prison guards without exception. Even among guards we can find individuals who would have a different opinion on the issue than the one presented by the participants in my research.

trust anyone. This is also a significant factor that helps to undermine relationships among guards and leads to a strategy of self-assertion at the expense of certain altruism within the group of prison guards. Such development can be viewed as a particular manifestation of the individualization of society process, which intensifies in contemporary society and affects more and more areas of an individual's life (especially the labor market). At the core of the individualization process is an individual who must be able to rely only on himself, to take care of his life, which takes its toll in the form of his separation from traditional groups, in which he was strongly anchored (such as social class, family, neighborly relations, etc.) (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) – one of those groups affected by individualization tendencies can be also the guard's world. Therefore, current individualization pressures or individualized forms of cohabitation substantially affect the cohesion of social groups, and it shows that even the guard's world is no exception.

So what is the bond that holds the guard's world together? It seems that in the current prison system in the Czech Republic it is not the power of mutual relationships among guards, but rather external organizational goals. The guards have a clear task that must be fulfilled and for this reason their cooperation is necessary. An effective cooperation requires communication at a formal level, exchange of information, compliance of rules and established order. Guards are forced to obey given orders and to manage to direct their behavior towards others according to the prescribed order. Goffman's team and his team impression management (Goffman 1999) are strong when interacting on "stage" towards other actors (inmates), but "behind the scenes" its cohesion is not ideal. Are there still any means how to minimize the negative aspects of employment in prison environment and possibly strengthen the inner cohesion of the guard's world? In this context, I decided to focus on the theme of sport. By society sport is viewed as a positive factor being beneficial in physical and mental health of individuals. Its positive effect on strengthening the social relationships among individuals within a group has been also emphasized (Sekot 2008). Thus, what is the importance of sport for the guard's world?

## **7. "PRESSURE VALVE" AND A SOURCE OF GROUP COHESION: THE IMPORTANCE OF SPORT FOR THE CZECH PRISON GUARDS**

What role sport can have in prison environment?<sup>10</sup> This question, unfortunately, is quite often being ignored, and if we already have some research on sport in prison, they are mostly focused on the inmates' population. But what can we say about the importance of sport for prison guards? The research shows that sport has largely positive effect for the guard's world. I describe it in the next part.

Prison environment has negative impacts on its participants regardless of whether they are inmates or guards, and sport is assumed to have a relatively strong potential for overcoming the difficulties associated with time spent in the prison environment. In the inmates' population there we can see a positive significance of sport especially on the psychological level, as their regular physical sport

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<sup>10</sup>In most interviews, the respondents emphasized the team sports, so their use of the term sport referred to the collective sport activities.

activity serves as a mean to relieve accumulated stress and to cope with other specific social difficulties associated to the prison environment, such as isolation, etc. (Digennaro 2010). Thus, we can understand sport as an element protecting the physical and mental health of persons within the prison environment (Lewis and Meek 2013).

It is no doubt that also in the guards' population there is constant accumulation of stress arising from their employment (Dirga and Hasmanová Marhánková 2014), and guards have to find a way to cope with it. We can say that psychological stress is one of the biggest negatives associated with prison guard job (Jacobs and Retsky 1975) and therefore it is potentially highly problematic issue when considering an impact of prison environment on guards. At this point, sport is the most beneficial for guards, in their words, one of the key ways to reduce stress and the impact of prison environment they feel. Mr. Štěpán describes the importance of sport for guards as follows.

*“I think it [sport – author’s note] is very important, because any method of relaxation is very important for us not to be more mentally scarred than we already are. If there is more and more pressure, it will start accumulating and if you do not find how to release it, it will end badly, soon. You cannot control those emotions.”*

Mr. Štěpán put an emphasis especially on the importance of sport as a kind of "pressure valve", through which guards can relax and eliminate stress (alleviate mental pressure) accumulated from everyday practice in prison. Sport as the main method of relaxation ran like a red thread through the vast majority of respondents' statements. Mr. Luděk described the effects of sport in a similar way.

*“It is a form of relaxation, resting, you can reduce stress and recharge your batteries. Without it, you could not do the job more than a year. You might be bringing the stress at home and would be constantly thinking about it. It doesn't work like that. You need to find some activity where you do not think about the job and for me it is mainly the sport. I play soccer and that is my best way of relaxation. I mean mentally.”*

In order to relax guards seek mostly sport activities held outside the prison, where they primarily meet individuals who have nothing to do with a prison environment, and try to get into an environment that is not “infected” with any aspect of prison system. That means they try to think about things that are not associated with their job and to meet people they do not share any prison experience with. This effort is documented in the following statement of Mr. Patrik.

*“Mainly it is a way of relaxation [sport activity outside the prison – author’s note]. You can get out of there, away from those people. Get away from that staff and you can talk with someone else, with someone you actually cannot even talk about it. You can talk about other things, about the sport, so it is a great way of relaxation for me.”*

In addition to the possibility of releasing psychological stress outside the prison, sport plays another significant role for the guard's world, the role of an element

that creates a platform for meetings with colleagues (sport within the prison). To maintain a certain degree of cohesion in a social group, sport proved to be significant in prison environment, for example in Robben Island prison in South Africa, where Anthony Suze built a football association and sport here became a source of group identity, an aspect that united a group of inmates in the fight against the difficulties of prison environment (Suze 2010, 39–40; Korr 2010, 33). Thus, in this case, sport has become the main bond of a group in prison environment. Sport can become a factor of individual identity (constructed in association with sport performance), as well as group identity, where there is, in certain respects, socialization of an individual into a group through sport (Sekot 2008).

Based on the findings, sport appears to be important even in the Czech prison guards' perspective. In this regard, it works in two ways, first, it becomes a source of group cohesion, but then it also has a competitive potential that, on the contrary, separates certain groups.

In the first case sport serves as a source of cohesion within individual groups of guards, which are relatively isolated from each other based on belonging to a certain shift. Jacobs and Retsky described that one of the main characteristics of prison guard job is working hours in shifts (Jacobs and Retsky 1975), which is identical with the current Czech prison environment and that belonging to a certain shift cause the separation among different groups of guards. Thus, the guard's world disintegrates into a system of groups formed based on belonging to a shift. These particular shifts regularly organize sport competitions against each other within prison (most frequently mentioned sport was soccer), one of the most popular is the Christmas tournament, where teams of guards compete against each other, the teams are formed by the belonging to a certain shift, as Mr. Zdeněk describes in his statement: *"It is usually by shifts. Every shift builds its team."* During this tournament there is a quite strong rivalry among the teams (or shifts) and we can see how sport can work in the guard's world in two ways at a time. First, it helps to strengthen the cohesion within the team (shift), but then it also contributes to the mutual rivalry among the teams. In most cases, this rivalry is in a friendly spirit, but sometimes happens that strong hostility is expressed during a sport competition. Gentlemen Tomáš and Michal describe sport competitions of guards inside the prison as follows.

Mr. Tomáš: *"When it comes to those shifts, it's more like 'we're better than you', so they are more like rivals there and it is all about rivalry. Guys from one shift stick together and try to beat the other shift, to show that they are better than them."*

Mr. Michal: *"It helps strengthen the team. It's a lot about the team, but on the other hand, you want to beat the others, right. So you don't have such relationships with them. Certainly I do not think it would be in any hostile spirit. Sometimes it can happen that guys are at each other's throats, as the saying goes, but when the tournament is over, everything is back in the old routine and nobody is usually mad at anyone."*

In addition to this level of guards' sport competition in one prison, there is another one, which includes sport matches of guards among prisons, or at the international level. A common practice in the Czech context is organizing of tournaments involving representative teams of particular prisons, which compete against each other in various sport disciplines. At this level, the importance of sport is similar to the previous case. The sport activity shows signs of rivalry, but it is so, in the words of guards, in the friendly spirit and there is more seen the importance of sport as a platform for meetings. An excerpt from an interview with Mr. František provides an illustrative testimony on this dimension of guards' sport competitions.

*“When there is a match between prisons, it is more like an encounter of old friends who were together in Stráž [Stráž pod Ralskem is a town where the initial training of all future members of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic takes place. After the training, they are placed in individual prisons to perform their jobs – author’s note], at that school, they attended a training together and haven’t seen each other for a long time, so there they may encounter. It is more of a friendship.”*

The third dimension of guards' sport competitions are international tournaments involving representative teams of each country. These tournaments are about gaining prestige and networking with foreign colleagues and the importance of sport is again more evident in terms of strengthening the relationships and creating the group cohesion than in terms of hostile rivalry, although the rivalry aspect is still present, as explained by Mr. Filip.

*“Prison service [The Prison Service of the Czech Republic – author’s note] normally goes to international tournaments. If you’re good, they pull you out of there and put you in the national team. The Prison Service has won an international tournament the last two years. It’s just such a release. You represent the prison you work in and you try your best, you represent, you want to be the best. The same goes for the tournament in the prison. There you represent your shift and want to prove something, but it is not about any hostility, it is more about gaining recognition and meeting new people.”*

Also here sport plays a positive role in strengthening the team and the internal cohesion of the guard's world, which can through sport extend not only from one prison to another within the Czech Republic, but it can also provide a space for making connections and social networking among guards at the international level.

## 8. CONCLUSION

As seen above, the guard's world in the context of the contemporary Czech prison system is different from the one in the USA in 1975, especially in terms of disruption of internal cohesion of the social group, loss of trust among its members and low level of identification with their own job (with an ideology of Czech prison system in general). Furthermore, the guard's world has transformed into an atomized

system of smaller groups as a result of the pressure of individualization tendencies associated with uncertainty in the labor market. What is the role of sport in this constellation of social interactions within the guards' subculture?

Overall, we can assess the contribution of sport to the guard's world as positive, both on an individual level, where it plays a key role as a very important tool for relieving and releasing of accumulated stress associated with the prison guard job, and also it has a positive effect on establishing cohesion within the guard's world. The guard's world, as is clear from the above statements, disintegrates into an atomized system of smaller groups, which are separated from each other on the basis of seniority and belongings to individual shifts, and sport, in this case, may contribute to greater social distance among groups, but it is evident that sport is not the primary factor that would divide the guard's world, but rather it binds it to a greater extent. Thus, in addition to external pressure in the form of written rules and organizational objectives (see above) sport rather contributes to the formation of social cohesion of the guard's world than it would significantly distort it. But it also appears that even sport doesn't have such strength so far to overcome the effect of all the above mentioned negative aspects (illegal items in prison, mutual suspicion of illegal dealing with inmates, individualization pressures and uncertainty about the (un)stability of employment), that disturb the cohesion of the guard's world.

Limitations of this study include the selection of participants using the snowball sampling method and research reduction only to C type prisons (due to the practical implementation of the study). I tried to compensate these methodological limitations by the maintaining of sample heterogeneity, and I believe I managed to maintain the necessary level of data file diversity (especially with regard to the variability of the respondents in terms of age, seniority and prisons they work in throughout the Czech Republic).

In my opinion, the issue of sport in the prison environment (not only in the guards' population) represents the original and in the Czech context yet unused source of information about the importance of sport for actors who are in this specific environment every day. It certainly would be interesting to compare the importance of sport in different types of prisons not only from the prison guards' perspective, but also through the lens of other groups of participants of the world behind the walls with barbed wire. Thus, it opens the space for a new direction of research in the context of the Czech social science research.

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## RESUMÉ

*Cílem předkládané studie je komparace tzv. dozorcovského světa (Guard's world) v USA roku 1975 se situací v populaci vězeňských dozorců v současném českém vězeňství. Navzdory velké společenské významnosti (zejména vzhledem k dlouhodobě vysoké míře naplněnosti českých věznic) je vězeňský svět jednou z nejvíce poddimenzovaných oblastí sociálněvědního výzkumu v českém kontextu. Já se pokusím touto studií přispět k rozšíření vědění v oblasti vězeňství, přičemž je však důležité zmínit, že se ve svém výzkumu zaměřuji pouze na jednu skupinu aktérů vězeňského světa, kterou tvoří vězeňští dozorcí. Data prezentovaná v této studii vychází z vlastního empirického výzkumu provedeného v českých věznicích typu C. Metodologie výzkumu je založena na etnografické metodě a datový soubor tvoří 31 kvalitativních rozhovorů s dozorcí pracujícími ve čtyřech různých věznicích typu C v České republice a přibližně 70 hodin pozorování ve vnitřních prostorách věznic. Nejvíce problematickou částí výzkumu bylo kontaktování potenciálních respondentů vzhledem k obtížné zastizitelnosti populace dozorců. Z tohoto důvodu byla aplikována metoda sněhové koule. První klíčové gatekeepery jsem našel ve vlastních sociálních sítích.*

*Z výpovědí respondentů vyplývá určitá nekonzistence mezi světem dozorců v USA roku 1975 a v současném českém kontextu. Český svět dozorců je mnohem více atomizovaný a zasazený vzájemnou nedůvěrou jeho členů. Oproti americkému světu dozorců vykazuje ten český chybějící aspekty důvěry, respektu a motivace pro kooperaci mezi dozorcí. Společným jmenovatelem obou kontextů je akumulovaný stres získaný během výkonu zaměstnání dozorce v prostředí věznice. V tomto ohledu se ukazuje jako významný sport, který slouží dozorcům primárně jako nástroj uvolnění nahromaděného stresu („tlakový ventil“) a případný zdroj skupinové koheze. Sportovní aktivity mají pro dozorce ve vztahu k jejich zaměstnání velmi podstatný význam, který je možné rozdělit do dvou základních dimenzí. Tou první je sport mimo věznici, který slouží jako nástroj pro uvolnění stresu. Cílem je setkávat se s lidmi v mimovězeňského prostředí a nemyslet při sportovní aktivitě na zaměstnání. Druhou dimenzi tvoří sportovní aktivity v rámci věznice, které mají pro český svět dozorců význam zejména jako zdroj narušené skupinové koheze.*