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Action sports lovers locked down due to COVID-19

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Abstract

What is it like for a family of skiers, mountain bikers, climbers and outdoor lovers to experience a quarantine? Not being able to move in nature gradually led us to think about freedom, the possibility of decision-making, civil society, solidarity and, at the end, to democracy in the Czech Republic. Our experience of Covid-19 quarantine turned from a small social experiment into a dragging confrontation with the wobbliness of the fundamental pillars of democracy in our country. The isolation itself couldn't go separately from reflecting on the social and political context. With some 7000 cases, Czech officials celebrated winning the battle against the spreading of the virus in May thanks to a three-month lockdown. By 14th October the total of infected has rocketed up to 150,000. Not only are we not winning over the epidemic. Tension increases in a further-polarised society as we suffer everyday losses in the battle against strengthening anti-democratic trends in our post-communist region. Therefore, this text is personally reflective as well as political in places where the two aspects meet.

Keywords

Quarantine; freedom; civil society; democracy; active lifestyle

Introduction

During the last week of February, we ridiculed the seniors storming Czech supermarkets for supplies. One of the jokes that I personally shared on Facebook featured a fake news of our first Czech victim of Covid-19, a 70 years old woman killed in crowd looting of a bread shelf. Less than three weeks later no one has died of the disease in our country but the same joke would not provide the relief of subconscious tension like it did then. What we would like to share in this paper is our personal reflection of the crisis-related changes in our family, work and social life.

What got us into the quarantine were two weeks of ski touring courses we ran in Tennengebirge, a remote part of the Austrian Alps. Ironically, there was no one infected in the small village of Werfenweng and when ski touring, one worries more about avalanches or getting injured or lost in the vast mountains than about catching a virus. We met less than a dozen locals during the whole stay. Opposed to that, the government text message we received when we crossed the border on the way home got us locked up in the middle of the second-worst infected area of Czech Republic after Prague.



Because we refer to Czech politics in the text, it may be useful for the reader to add that Czech Republic has a parliamentary constitutional democracy, re-established in 1989 after being part of the communist Soviet block for 40 years. It is ruled by the government with the Prime Minister as the head, together with the Parliament and the Senate. The president's role as the head of the state is more formal but the person in the seat can significantly influence political culture. The Economist Intelligence Unit rated Czech Republic a "flawed democracy" last year. (Economic Intelligence Unit, 2019)

Reflective diary

Thursday–12 March

L: Ours and our colleague's families are staying behind when all other participants of the course have fled Werfenweng immediately after learning the Czech government announced reducing the number of border crossings in order to enable mandatory symptom checks on all travellers. The designated time of the new border crossing arrangements coming into force was Friday midnight. Affected by the idyllic feeling of the nearly-deserted spring season alpine village we have refused to panic and agreed to discuss our options in the evening. As the Czech government's measures appear chaotic and amateurish, we are considering spending the weeks of quarantine in Werfenweng. After all, we are all EU citizens. The only issue that we are a bit worried about is whether we are able to afford a prolonged stay. The idea of spending the days of a coming chaos between home office at the friendly hostel, and ski touring and taking turns at looking after the children sounds quite attractive to both families. The turning point comes around 10pm when the hostel owner tells us the Austrian government has ordered to close all ski resorts and shut down all related services including accommodation. That, we realize, puts us at risk of eventually becoming unwelcome foreigners in a here and there far-right-inclined country. Now that we have opened ourselves to this line of thought it has occurred to us that in case of getting ill, the triage very likely wouldn't be in our favour. Still, we know we have until tomorrow midnight to cross the border without trouble. The Czech wild water paddling coaches from our department R and K are at a training camp in southern France with the national junior white-water kayaking team. They told us on the phone they were using Monty Python's Silly Walk as an anti-coronavirus medicine with their athletes. I note with some sarcasm that our Minister of Healthcare doesn't seem to have anything much more sophisticated up his sleeve.

Friday–13 March

L: A sudden change of rules is announced around 9am. It puts everyone who won't be back before noon—12 hours earlier—into mandatory isolation. As there is zero chance of getting packed and making it to the border in three hours, we are preparing ourselves for a time of inconvenience. The image of border checks immediately evokes memories of distress, reminding us that we have the Iron Curtain imprinted deeply in our souls. The best feeling of the Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution 1989 was the one of our nation becoming part of the world community again. The English phrase 'Velvet Revolution', signifies the idea that the revolution was brought about without violence. One of the most symbolic events of it was tearing down the electric fence. The ugly symbol of the Iron Curtain was a concentration camp-style barrier consisting of barbed wire, high voltage electric fence, anti-tank obstacles, and bared land closing in the entire country for forty years. A thought of the fence possibly reinstated as a "protective measure" in an atmosphere of fear is unsettling. Despite the fact that only people trying to flee from here died on it, the electric fence was presented to us as a protective measure throughout my growing up after all.

Later afternoon: we are leaving Werfenweng having accepted that we are to enter a new, likely unpleasant experience. Yet, it seems better than potentially facing more serious problems in a suddenly much more foreign-feeling country. Knowing we will go straight into quarantine; we did a

bigger shopping at the local grocery. It was touching when the lady at the counter gave us a free pack of *Mozart kugel* chocolates for our daughter with wishes of good luck.

Saturday–14 March

J: A rest day after two weeks of daily ski tours.

L: We are at home in our flat we rent in a renovated former firehouse now owned by the Czech Red Cross. The house is located in Sokolska Street in the historic downtown of Olomouc. On my way down to the garage in the morning I met our elderly neighbours. I let them pass at the mezzanine, trying to keep the recommended 2m distance. The stairway was crowded; the Red Cross which has a first aid teaching facility on the first floor didn't cancel their class. A bricklayer is still building a wall separating our part of the large former fire truck garage we share with the Red Cross. He's been on the job for three weeks. No one we meet is wearing a mask, same as in Austria. The washing machine loads are countless as usual after a long technical sport trip. We sit surrounded by all the half-unpacked luggage, boxes with food, and unsorted gear, making phone calls, reading the news, eating, and drinking wine. We are trying to figure out what our possibilities are. M wishes for a movie so we watch *White Fang*. I think the film is nice, despite lacking Jack London's exhortative message about freedom.

Sunday–15 March

L: With a feeling of endlessness of isolation, we watch movies and TV series almost the whole day. Every now and then we still discuss what we should do and how we can survive that long without our beloved outdoors. Over four months we got used to active, intensive, and exciting interaction with nature. "At least there is still sex," jokes J. The whole towns of Litovel and Uničov plus about twenty villages near Olomouc are put into isolation. M has a light temperature in the evening which makes us a bit worried. J is less worried than me, convinced that the cause is fatigue from the long travel together with a psychosomatic reaction to the new and stressful situation. "Those affected by quarantine are likely to report distress due to fear and risk perceptions. This distress can be amplified in the face of unclear information and communication that is common in the initial period of disease outbreaks" (Johal, 2009, p. 53). It is no longer useful to deny we are trapped in something we have no control over. We agree to embrace the fact and write about the experience.

Solidarity is gaining significance across social media. Health care personnel are growingly being praised for bravery as they are risking their own health and lives despite lack of protective equipment. A variety of ways is being used to express thanks, from simple posts to organized evening clap hands applause rituals taking place at balconies and windows. We discussed how we would handle it if, when our quarantine would be over, a whole state ban locks us up for longer? The main theme in this matter seems to be our psyche—will it drive us to be nervous, aggressive? We had some intense quarrels in the past. We are considering moving to Rychlebské stezky—the MTB trail centre where we run a bike school for kids. The place is near the Polish border, about two hours drive from Olomouc. Located on the northern side of the Jeseníky Mountains, it is one of the most remote places in the Czech Republic, with pristine nature. We helped to start the trail center 11 years ago. We are part of its grassroots community and it is one of the places we feel we most belong to.

Monday–16 March

J: The government announces a whole state quarantine, together with a restriction of free personal movement. All restaurants and shops are closed with the exception of grocery, pharmacy and pet supply stores. We begin to tidy the flat and sort things collected over the years in numerous boxes. M cries because of us limiting her cell phone time. We talk about the Coronavirus, draw pictures of it (Image 1). It seems to help and alleviate her anxiety about the unknown situation. People all over the country sew masks.



Figure 1. The coronavirus picture.

Tuesday–17 March

J: M sleeps till 11am. Many friends share photos of homemade masks, of making them, and wearing them, discussing who wears and who doesn't. When I woke up, I didn't feel like watching the news. Rychlebské stezky, our home MTB trail center, posts a message asking bikers not to come to Černá Voda for riding and to respect the government measures. We set up a daily regime and put a daily task checklist (English, writing, math, and application for reading, spelling-book, cleaning, playing, resting, and caring for guinea pigs) on the fridge for M.

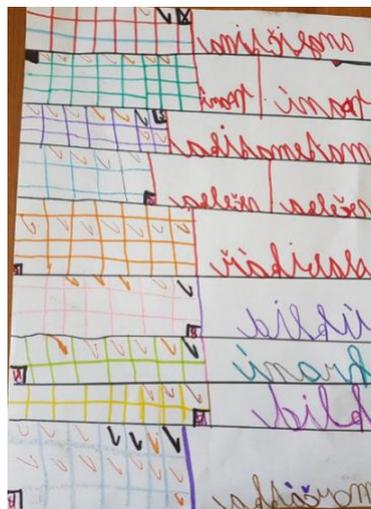


Figure 2. Daily checklist.

L arranges delivery of pet food and bedding for our guinea pigs as well as some groceries for us with our former student R over the phone.

L: I put on a neck tunnel and went down to the door to pick up what R had brought us. I was surprised to see he was wearing a mask. We kept about 3m distance and chatted for a couple of minutes. He explained that he wore the mask as a precaution since people might freak out knowing he had been to Austria. During the chat I saw two people passing by with masks on.

J: We clean the guinea pigs' cage and make a new den for Vločka and Čočka (their names: Flake and Lentil). We have dug out and installed an exercise bike. At a videoconference, the EU leaders agree to close the outer EU borders. We bake cake with M. On her way to bed, M proclaims that cake is healthy. I think she is happy from our common interaction, order and well-being that arises during baking (eye contact, smiles, touches, smells, sweetening, warmth, etc.). She struggles to fall asleep. She wants one of us to sleep in her bedroom with her. She says she fears everything. I start talking about the coronavirus again. I tell her, "The virus doesn't harm children. But it can harm ill or old people like grandma - that's why we are staying at home - to make sure they are safe". We count sheep till fifty, then she continues on her own and falls asleep alone in her room.

Wednesday–18 March

J: We don't really feel like getting up. Why should we? Eventually I get out of bed and open the window. It is a beautiful sunny day. How I wish to be outside! We discuss the connecting line for our academic article over a cup of coffee. Should we relate to the last border closure in 1968? Childhood memories and feelings of border checks on holiday trips to Yugoslavia, with the nerve-wrecking atmosphere of fear of being turned around or everyone in the car sent to personal inspection? M is still asleep. L tells me about the series he's been watching. M wakes up at eleven. What about getting into the car and driving to the woods for a walk during lunch time when there is no one out in the street? L finally gets through to the Public Health Office. The woman he talks to is absolutely strict about our isolation due to the visit to a high-risk country.

L: The lady's tone of communication was upsetting. I understand she must have been through a lot with hundreds of people calling this sole line for the entire county during this week. On the other hand, a little bit of politeness wouldn't hurt. The limitations on freedom—a key aspect of our life—certainly need some dosage and digesting.

J: The confirmation of the rigid ban brings us back to the irony of being locked down in Olomouc where the virus is present, due to coming from a place where it wasn't. Oh well. We clench our teeth and reaffirm sticking to the plan to live through it and report on the experience.

L: The temptation is hard to resist, though, as it requires following rules in ways that does not match with our own risk assessment. This could be one of the core aspects of the whole challenge. With decades of action sport experience, we are used to assessing risks and making decisions. I have always assessed risks more thoroughly, imagining various scenarios and analysing available inputs. I am aware of a huge amount of luck that got me through all the way here. I know it can only take one hundredth of a second, one slip of a finger or tire to prove my risk management skills insufficient. Still, I would say that we tend to make fairly informed decisions in situations involving risk. Opposite to that, we often see people who generally give the impression of being more careful actually not even notice danger. We wonder if it's easier for them to trust the government measures when they are used to not thinking about risk.

J: During an hour on the exercise bike, I am thinking how much this reminds me of being grounded when I was a kid. As this was the most effective punishment for me—have to stay inside and can't go outside. Can you imagine there are people who are voluntarily enjoying this?! Aren't we doing the same thing with a mobile phone ban for M? I get the past feeling of being punished by kneeling in the corner and persuading myself to endure it ... clench my teeth ... I was mostly rescued by my older sister K, who offered to serve the rest of my sentence for me. I want to believe that my parents were doing their best at the time ... how much they had to be frustrated with lost dreams, living in a caricature of freedom. They got used to it and they find it normal today. It is the old known "certainty" now in the time of Coronavirus for them. Steps taken by our Prime Minister should be seen as a targeted election campaign for this group of people. They will re-elect him because he will always "protect" them in times of uncertainty. Dahrendorf wrote in 1997 (15) that "Closed societies do not

last. They nevertheless exercise a fatal attraction for people who cannot bear the strains of liberty." What we are witnessing today is "The other threat ... that of a new authoritarianism, the strange longing for civic self-mutilation in an incomprehensible world" (Dahrendorf 1997, 141).

L cooks lunch, M makes homework and then paints. After lunch we thought of a salvation idea ... we will go to the roof! The sun shines there and there is nobody. Divine two hours in the chair and in the sun. We are all painting.



Figure 3. We will go to the roof!

We are thinking of the overworked doctors and nurses. We can't believe there are people misusing the system, lying about symptoms in order to get tested.

In the evening M rages because we don't want to make an evening cinema. She feels betrayed. We understand that it is hard for her to be locked up for days. The rage turned to crying in a bed. L soothes her. They alternately giggle and cry in bed. Afterwards, M wants to be with me and cuddle. She asks if there are ghosts. One day she saw a shadow of St. Nicolas. But as he isn't a ghost she doesn't know if she was not dreaming. She is afraid to be under the blanket because something will bite her. She is also afraid to stick her foot out of the blanket because something grabs her. I told her that I was afraid, too, when I was her age. "What were you afraid of?" asked M. "Of everything," I answered. We both laughed a lot.

L: We seem to always question laws and rules—where does this come from? It could be the experience of the dullness of the totalitarian regime and a resulting rebellious worldview. Could it be our lack of trust in the authorities? I think practicing action sports plays a role in this. We co-create whatever we take part in. For us to obey it, a rule has to make sense. Intrinsic motivation dominates over reward or threat of punishment in us. We understand and respect the need to avoid putting the ill, weak, and elderly people in danger. We also do not want to add to the stress the healthcare personnel are already under. We consider it our civil responsibility which Dahrendorf (1997, 59) connects with freedom in a straightforward statement: "civil society and freedom are inseparable".

We tend to believe that with most people acting responsibly the restrictions may be called off sooner.

Thursday–19 March

J: Just another day in quarantine and another beautiful sunny day. We can see the sun behind the windows. Having coffee. M still sleeping. She woke up at 10 am. Workout. From midnight everyone must wear masks. I am making a biking photo book for M. Our friend brought us masks, some food and textbooks for M. It is so nice of her; we did not ask her to do it. I work out watching TV series on Netflix. M is doing math. We are tempted to take her out to the woods but again decide to withstand. We all three together make pancakes for lunch. It is a great interactional activity. M is happy. She eats four pancakes! She voluntarily goes to do reading tasks. We go to the roof again. M draws, L is playing the ukulele.



Figure 4. M draws, L plays the ukulele.

I take these notes. This is actually normal for many people—stay home, eat, sleep, watch the news, no outdoors, no nature, no walk and physical movement hard to understand.

Will this become frequent or common in M's future life? Save lives by sitting at home? With every next virus? What if fear becomes one of the main forces shaping life in our country again? There are 694 people infected in CR. People over 65 and those with special needs are provided special shopping hours between seven and nine am in grocery stores and supermarkets.

We call our grandparents and we watch a movie all together (*Frozen 2*). M goes to bed without any scenes. L is working out watching the series.

J: German Chancellor Angela Merkel has a great speech about the Coronavirus. "Let me assure you: For someone like me, for whom freedom of travel and movement was a hard-won right, such restrictions can only be justified as an absolute necessity. In a democracy, they should never be decided lightly and only temporarily—but at the moment they are indispensable to save lives." I think we wouldn't struggle with the isolation so much if we'd have more trustworthy people in our government. There is evidence of the PM's corporation having contributed to the paralysis of the protective equipment supply. The Czech president Miloš Zeman had an embarrassing speech. He encouraged actors to visit and entertain the elderly in the senior homes. That is absurd, considering they are the population at the highest risk. I think it is important for us to endure this isolation. Among other things, for M, who should know we are doing this not because of the ban but out of solidarity with those in danger.

Friday—20 March

J: Just another day in quarantine. Finally, the sun is not shining outside anymore. It is easier to stay at home. I'm reading some news and articles about Coronavirus. I'm calling a colleague J an older man (I missed his call yesterday). He is alone (with a dog) in a vacation house near Olomouc. 10am. L is drinking coffee, M and I sort toys. M is building trains. We were surprised by our friend and colleague from our faculty Iv who brought us fresh bread, strudel, parmesan and—OMG—wine! Those tastes inspired us. The weather is worsening, so we have quick soup and go to the roof. It is beautiful and warm. We draw and read. After two hours it is getting cloudy, so we go back to our apartment. I work out, L and M play with trains. L works out on an exercise bike, I prepare dinner, M talks to her friend on the phone. Our friend calls that she is in the store and asks if we need something to buy. She brought us fruit and also wine. M doesn't protest against bedtime.

California has closed the borders.

L: My perception of time has changed from time dragging to time passing quickly due to slow progress at planned things and tasks. The founder of our trail resort sent an email to greet and

encourage us in the quarantine and wrote about increasing hysteria taking over the village. Mountain bikers are seen as a threat by the locals. The trails remain closed.

Saturday–21 March

J: Lovely wake up with sex. It is cloudy outside, how sweet. Coffee. News. M wakes up at 10:30. We have a late breakfast. I share a story of myself nearly causing a heart attack to the chef by putting ‘eggs any style’ on the order when working as a waitress in New York many years ago. M and I clean her room. We sort her toys. L on an exercise bike. I’m cooking lunch. I called my friend P. For her, nothing changed except for less morning stress at the kindergarten. She says we should feel lucky to be in quarantine because when shopping, she feels the ubiquitous fear that tends to transmit to her. After lunch we have a coffee and M calls her friend T. I exercise. Motivation is hard today. Our friend from the US calls. L talks with him and his family. M is too shy to use her English.

L: The news of young and middle-aged people having died of Covid 19 in other countries begins to change our perspective of after-quarantine time. There are 1000 Czechs infected by Coronavirus.

Sunday–22 March

J: Late morning sex. M is sleeping. Having coffee and breakfast. M is coming in at 10:30, telling us, she woke up at nine already. What did she do? She resists telling us. Of course, we know and while we would prefer a different activity, we understand. She was on her mobile phone. M is playing with an interactive book. We clean together. M and I go to get rid of some stuffed animals in M’s room. We fill a whole bag. Bravo! We call the grand-parents. They seem fine and having a good time. M and I play Jungle speed (a table game). I work out on the exercise bike. L cooks lunch and plays with M a game of Jungle speed. Having lunch—delicious! I love to come to a prepared lunch. M cleans the dishes and we play the Clack table game all together). Then we play another table game (Rat a tat) and have coffee. L and I are cleaning a window which was painted while restoring the facade of the house. We agree that we have no respect for the working class. I’m listening to an audiobook while fixing the windows. M is doing her math and then she is on the phone with her friend T. Our friend P offered to make a shopping trip for us tomorrow. We sent her a food list. M and I bake a banana cake. L joins us. Our colleague and friend R, with his girlfriend A, phone us. They are in quarantine in a garden house in South Moravia. They have only surface water (which freezes overnight) and old wood stoves. They made the quarantine a small survival experience. It was a lovely and funny phone call. M goes to bed. Today L reads a good night story.

L: A week ago we could only imagine possible confrontation with bureaucracy as the worst thing that could happen to us. Now health and threat of severe fines as well as fear of informers make it a much more complex issue.

Monday–23 March

J: Wake up. We have coffee and work on the computer. I ordered a pizza. It was interesting. I went out after the delivery called me. Our pizzas were waiting for us on the sidewalk in front of the door. The delivery girl sat in the car until I picked up the pizza. Oh, this lunch was delicious. Our friend P brings us some more food. L found a motorhome for sale. We agree to buy it. I feel like I’ve gone into a survival state. I focus my thoughts on here and now.

L: The doctors and nurses in hospital are in desperate need of the FFP3 protective masks and they are not getting them. The shipment from China the PM has been boasting about only contains grade 1 and 2 masks, which don’t protect from viruses and bacteria when it finally arrives. The Minister of Health’s centralisation of hospital supply, disabling standard distribution channels is being widely criticized. The delivery at the airport was accompanied by an embarrassing charade of thanks from government officials. Like during the communist era. Why, when we paid considerable money for the material and it is not the right type anyway? According to the Echo24 server the prevailing lack of appropriate protective gear could possibly have catastrophic consequences. A Slovak doctor working

in Spain describes the triage the doctors need to perform several times a day. People over 75 are put on anaesthetics and let to expire in the crowded Spanish hospitals to yield way to younger people with higher chances of recovery. We are tired of espresso and switch to our old mocha express. M is struggling with being locked in, asking repeatedly either for her cell phone or for attention in a variety of ways.

Tuesday–24 March

J: 1289 people infected confirmed. Why is it still counting this way? After all, it's just how many people show up by testing! We're waking up. We're having a coffee. Finally, I'm focusing on a single work project, preparing a presentation for Ski Instructors education. I'm pedalling on the exercise bike. I'm playing table games with M. I'm preparing lunch. M is excited about the motorhome. She collects all her money and gives it to us. So sweet. We call T and O: M's siblings. They are fine and healthy.

L: I must have overdone my knee on the exercise bike. It had been bothering me since I healed from patellar tendonitis last year but I kept it under control by managing optimum amount of exercise. Now it seems back.

Wednesday–25 March

J: Just another day in quarantine. We are having coffee. We are adapted. All the news coming from outside has become part of our life. The state quarantine was extended until April 1st. M and I have breakfast together and we play a table game (rat-tat-cat). M cuddles with guinea pigs and gives them carrots. L is still sleeping. He watched TV series late last night. Normally, he doesn't have the time. It is hard to force M to focus on homework. She keeps distracting me from my work. It makes me nervous and I'm strict on it. Home offices are cruel when you have a child at home. "I'm still a child, mami" and "I need the motorhome and go outside". She is right but she is also a schoolgirl, right?! Finally, she is doing math. Well, about three minutes. Hurrying optimism :-).

Thursday–26 March

J: Today is the last day of our quarantine! M woke me up (she was in our bed ... moved there in the night, again). We had breakfast all together. M is playing, she doesn't bother us at all, nor does it require attention. This is a new experience. She washed her face in the morning and brushed her teeth without me telling her to do it. Rychlebské stezky have started a fundraising project hoping to collect money that will preserve the jobs for the trail building crew. I contributed so the center can open again for us eventually.

In relation to coping with the isolation we discuss our rather strong relation to freedom again. Do we see ourselves as some postmodern reincarnation of hippies or punks? While we value freedom very highly, we are probably just action sport enthusiasts. We ride at places, speeds, angles, and difficulty grades not too usual for our age on our mountain bikes and skis. At the same time, we have doctorates, jobs at the University, and run a bike school for children, which together provide us with or pay for all the expensive equipment. We live a simple but quite comfortable life. We go voting and support our children at their studies.

L: Two days ago, I had a long-planned call with my American climbing partner and closest friend. We shared our recent experiences. They are a few days behind in the pandemic development and have taken measures in Bellingham, Washington. It feels like T accepts the Governor's steps with respect, which is opposite to the how he feels about the president's actions. T's family enjoys the luxury of isolation at a beautiful house with a large property on the hillside of Chuckanut Mountain, overlooking Ocean Bay with Vancouver Island in the distance.

Not much later this evening our friend M, the head of our Mountain Rescue unit, called to ask how we were. He, too, had been in isolation after returning from northern Italy. Later in our conversation, he

shared that he is trying to solve a problem of moving his mother—who had undergone a major surgery from an orthopaedic hospital unit where an employee has tested positive for the Coronavirus. M shared that seeking help in Rožnov, a city of about 15000, is quite challenging and he has had to improvise, e.g., by borrowing a transport trailer from our mountain rescue unit. This was somewhat depressing. Overall, though, I was truly pleased by the call. I felt like I wanted to pass it on and called M, our colleague whose family stayed behind in Werfenweng with us. We talked about some of the positive outcomes of the crisis and agreed that one day we might remember these weeks as the only time in our whole lives when we weren't pressed by any deadlines and tasks requiring urgent action. J fiercely disagrees. She is expecting layoffs, with our profession hit in the first wave.

We think about things we appreciate more now: Free travel, personal contact, humour, responsibility, humanity, solidarity. J doesn't like the idea that it could be inspiring for young people. She thinks education should be able to serve the purpose. Why do we need people dying when the message of empathy (taught in Denmark as a subject) could be learned at school?

Friday—27 March

L: Confirmed by our doctor who put us in the quarantine, we are released to go out to do groceries and take a walk in the woods. We ride our bicycles towards a lake north of Olomouc. The cycle path is quite busy with people on bikes, others pushing strollers, some inline skating. Everybody is wearing a mask. Passing other people is weird with the facial expressions unknown. I wonder if we all unthinkingly expect a grim face under the others' masks. I notice that I feel strange in proximity to other people. We all seem to, so we take a small walking trail along the riverbank instead of the fairly crowded boardwalk that leads to the lakes. I feel short of ideas of what to do. I wish I could suggest something fun and playful that M would love to do. We stop on the bank by a big old tree fallen into the stream. M seems to struggle to find a way to fall into play on her own. Eventually I jump over to the tree's large root bag. It is separated from the bank by a narrow muddy canal obstructed with fallen leaves, sticks, and a few floating plastic bottles trapped in the sunk branches. My body feels ponderous and clumsy as I climb over the displaced roots. My patellar tendinitis has worsened. I am realizing that it may be a struggle to get back into feeling one with my own body again.

I got into quarantine fit and athletic. At its end, having gained some weight, stiff and aching, I feel awful. J discovers a fun play. She starts cleaning the obstructed canal between the tree and the bank. I happily join her and M who is already pulling things out of the water with a stick.

Clearing the way for the river to take away stuck items feels almost symbolic. We can feel the sense of freedom again. Fighting to release soaked heavy branches and watching them float away is exactly what I needed to re-join with the family. When the canal is clear I put a thick stick across and M and I use it to walk over to the tree island. It is only two steps, but it gives us a little bit of a thrill, something so rare after the two weeks. More places around the world put the whole state quarantine in place. In Northern Italy, they have now been locked inside for three weeks and have little hope for change. Riding our bikes back home we discuss what consequences the stimuli and exercise deprivation may have imposed on entire countries.

Leaving aside the amateurishness resulting in multiple changes to already-made changes, the most unsettling aspect of our government's pandemic management is its grovelling to communist China. Billions are paid to Chinese suppliers for protective gear that Czech manufacturers were able to supply but wouldn't get the state contract. The PM manages to take the credit for our people's creativity and solidarity on CNN and in New York Times. Such a brazen twist of reality is amazing.

Concluding comments

People sewed masks, invented improvised respirators, and 3D printed protective shields for doctors and nurses not thanks to his clever and wise leadership, but because of his government's

incompetence. We stayed home not because of the threat of a 3 million fine but because we didn't want to make life harder for those already in stress.

Exercising outdoors has been made exempt from the order to wear a mask everywhere. Interestingly, most people still either keep it on or, including ourselves, put it on when passing someone. Anxiety is buzzing in the atmosphere. As Dahrendorf (in his book *After 1989*) remarks, the civil society must come first—then the state, *ex gratia* of the society. The citizen with his/her rights, freedom, and responsibility must be a priority. The key meaning of freedom in today's world remains mainly individual freedom from despotic power of the state practiced throughout history. Creepily infringing individual rights has been most typical for states whose cultures have been distorted by communist regime.

We have purchased an old motorhome so we can get out of the city. Even if the ban of accommodation, gastronomy, and other services is lifted before summer, the local communities in sport tourism destinations are in such a state of fear that it may take time before things go back to somewhat normal. One of the reasons that make us inclined to believe the recent crisis will cause permanent changes to our life is that I am typing these lines looking at green fields and woods from the window of a motorhome we purchased a month after the beginning of isolation. Despite the loosening of the restrictions, we felt a need to secure our connection to nature for the future. The fear of strangers in Černá Voda discouraged us from our original plan to buy a house there, move to the countryside and commute to work. We have turned to nomadic life instead. It may remain restricted to within Czech Republic for at least some time. Living together in a small motorhome for extended periods of time might turn out tiring or unbearable. The cost of keeping the old vehicle on the road could become excessive. We can just hope unlimited access to nature will outbalance the expectable inconveniences.

“To possess as the only certainty the wisdom of uncertainty requires great strength” (Kundera, 1986, 21) (Image 5).



Figure 5. “There is only one certainty, namely the wisdom of uncertainty.” (Kundera, 1986, *Immortality*)

Endnote

After all the restrictions were lifted suddenly and surprisingly overnight at the end of June, it seemed like the virus miraculously disappeared. In mid-October, the pandemic is back with more force. The recent defeat of the government party in the county elections shows loss of much of the trust and support they had from the vulnerable parts of Czech population who used to perceive the PM as their saviour. When the lockdown was announced the Czech president refused to cancel his annual celebration at the Prague Castle, giving another message of arrogance after he publicly called those who go bankrupt due to Covid-19 weak and those who sympathise with them idiots. The determination and unity of people willing to fight the epidemic despite chaotic leadership is still there but weariness is taking over. M cried when the schools closed again. Last year we thought she was privileged to be out of school and in nature for many weeks with us thanks to the outdoor part of our work. This autumn we made sure she had as much chance to go to school as possible from the beginning of the school year. On the other hand, she does love our motorhome life and we do, too. In a few days, we are going to load our bikes and gear and be outward bound again.

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