

## Socio-Edutainment within Summer Camps?

### A Missed Opportunity!

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**Abstract:** The text deals with the general overlap of children's camps with the everyday life of their participants. The aim of this paper is to highlight the educational potential of children's summer camps in the Czech Republic within the context of an empirical study examining the viewpoints of children who have participated in them as well as the view of their parents. It briefly presents the ideological roots of children's camps. The authors also open up a key topic – the theory of socio-edutainment. The second part of the paper describes the concept of socio-edutainment through an empirical probe conducted among former participants of children's Catholic camps. The authors used semi-structured interviews with former participants of children's camps and their parents to obtain the data. The framework analysis was used to process the data. The authors present their findings separately for each group of respondents, which subsequently allows for comparison, revealing the differences in the concepts of the two groups of respondents. According to the statements of the participants, the summer camps contributed primarily by establishing contacts with peers; however, general social learning can also be included. An important impact which parents pointed out was making friends and learning to communicate. Finally, the authors summarise the findings of the empirical survey and contrast them with the reality of real children's camps, i.e., how the camp instructors use the means to achieve the educational potential of the camp.

**Keywords:** children's camp, socialisation, informal learning, peer group

The beginnings of children's camps in the Czech Republic date back to the early 20th century in connection with A. B. Svojsík and the development of scouting. In spite of the initial public opposition to the organization of children's camps (i.e., children being in simple natural conditions), the organization of children's camps has become a widespread phenomenon (Šantora et al., 2012). The organization of summer camps has gradually begun to be devoted to a number of organizations, besides the Junák, for example, the Czech Camp Union, the Sokol or the Association of Tourist Youth Groups.

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Since the first scout camp in 1912, the concept of the camps has changed as they reflect the socio-cultural characteristics of the time; therefore, in the current period, typical of a plurality of opinions, we can hardly find a united link in the ideological direction of the camps that existed in the times of deep normalisation in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. At present, however, we can notice another phenomenon: children's camps very often neglect or completely abandon their development potential. The original idea by A. B. Svojsík, and before him Baden-Powell and Seton, who began organising residential events for children, concentrated on children's development through their camping and activities in nature. In the concept of Baden-Powell and later A. B. Svojsík, the attention of the youth was drawn to nature (cf. Svojsík, 1991, pp. 15–25). The development of children through their outdoor stays was based on activities close to their own existing nature (ibid, p. 41).

The aim of this paper is to highlight the educational potential of children's summer camps in the Czech Republic on the example of an empirical study of the former camp participants' view and the view of their parents.

## **1 Socio-edutainment – the phenomenon of summer camps**

In this study, we try to point out the above-mentioned, but nowadays a sadly neglected aspect of the camps – that it is a creative, interesting and inspiring environment, especially for the development of their participants (i.e., not merely for fun). The children's camp, in an attractive form, allows children to develop and complete those competences that are neglected in school education programmes (primarily social competences, but also problem-solving, learning competences, etc.). We, therefore, consider it necessary to perceive the camps as an educational environment – but it is not, of course, a form of school education. Such an approach would be counterproductive – the environment of children's camps must also bear the elements of entertainment.<sup>1</sup> And this interconnection of education and entertainment allows us to use the concept of edutainment, which was clarified by Němec and Trna (2007), for example. This term refers to a combination of learning and fun; we could say it is school by play, learning by play.

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<sup>1</sup> Children's camps belong to the so-called fun-zone – a field of activities including elements such as fun or relaxation.

The environment of children's camps, as our survey has proven (see below), is typical of its social aspect of the whole process of personality development. This process is amplified by the specificity of the environment – the child is being compelled to cooperate with other children, to work in a group, there are leaders instead of parents, etc. Summer camps thus have (or should have) a sort of *socio-edutainment*.<sup>2</sup> We should understand it as a process of acquiring social competences through a specific entertaining atmosphere of the social environment. Of course, positive changes are considered desirable. Socio-edutainment is not possible without the basic pillar – a group. The group is a more or less closed social environment characterised by relatively close relationships, it has at least a medium-term effect (five days or more) and, of course, includes distinctive ongoing processes. The processes that influence socio-edutainment can include the stages of group dynamics that are closely related to the individual roles in the group and the personality characteristics of individual participants. From other affecting factors we can mention, for example, the used formative methods that strongly influence the quality of the resulting changes.

In a broader sense of the word, we can perceive socio-edutainment as one of sources that support and enhance the process of socialisation (cf. Nakonečný, 2009, p. 102) or Hewstone and Stroebe (2006, pp. 80–82).

## **2 Socio-edutainment in the summer camp – an empirical probe**

### *2.1 Methodology*

Based on the above assumptions about the essential functions that the summer camp can accomplish in the development of social competences, we conducted an empirical probe to uncover *whether participants in a particular type of Catholic camp perceive the outcomes of the summer camp stay in terms of their social interactions and autonomy in normal life, and how these outcomes are manifested*. Since it is primarily parents who have a unique opportunity to observe the development of their children in the long run, we realised the importance of focusing not only on the viewpoint of former

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<sup>2</sup> This designation is created by combining the words *socio* (i.e., referring to the social component of being) and *edutainment* (in the meaning as interpreted by J. Němec, i.e., learning by play, entertainment).

camp participants but also on their parents in our survey. The results of our empirical probe also enabled a basic comparison between the views of the former participants and their parents.<sup>3</sup>

As a basic technique for determining the impact of summer camp activities on both groups of respondents, we chose interviews conducted on the basis of the main research questions. However, special sets of questions (interrogation schemes) were prepared for both groups of respondents. In order to analyse the obtained data, a qualitative *framework analysis*<sup>4</sup> was used, mainly because the data had a certain trace of the query and was, therefore, quite materially structured.<sup>5</sup> The process of data analysis itself can be divided into five phases, as shown by Ritchie and Spencer (1994):<sup>6</sup>

#### 1) Introduction to data management

At this stage, the researcher is thoroughly acquainted with the data management, during which we identify the recurring themes and ideas that are used in the following phase.

#### 2) Identification of the thematic framework

The main task is to compile the so-called thematic framework – the index (see Figure 1); based on this framework the data will be identified, sorted and compared.

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<sup>3</sup> Given the research objective, it was natural to ask a group of former participants; their parents have the opportunity to evaluate and assess the development of the child from a distance.

<sup>4</sup> This scheme of qualitative data analysis was developed in the 1980s. The authors of the framework analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) tried to facilitate the systematic examination of qualitative data.

<sup>5</sup> Five participants of the children's catholic camps (19–26 years) and five parents (of different ages) were involved in the research – the interview was always conducted with one of the parents of each participant. The participant-respondents were deliberately chosen from one type of summer catholic camp organised for five years, thus ensuring greater comparability of the data. The basic criterion when choosing the respondents for the research was repeated participation in the camp – we believe that the influence of children's camps can only be assessed if the child has participated more than once: multiple participation contributes to the consolidation of habits adopted in the given environment. Interviews took place in November and December 2014.

<sup>6</sup> In the Czech Republic, the framework analysis is not extensively described; the basic overview is provided by Hendl (2005), while Macků (2015) published a more detailed elaboration.

### 3) Indexing

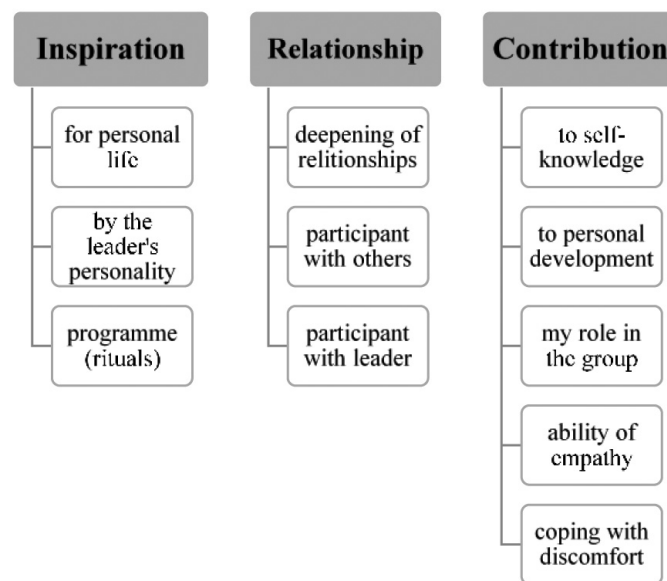
In the indexing phase, the thematic frame is applied to the original data. The researcher reads in detail the text data and assigns them a numerical index based on the index – i.e., the outlines of the main and partial themes.

### 4) Thematic mapping

This consists of summarising the points of each part of the data and placing it in a table. For each topic, a special table is created, which contains a partial theme in the column, then individual cases in rows.

### 5) Mapping and interpretation

The final step is to illustrate all the information found and link the related knowledge together.



*Figure 1. Indexes.*

Applying the above-mentioned steps, we have obtained an index with an elaboration of the main and partial themes, as presented in Figure 1. We have subsequently used it for further work with the data: the individual themes were assigned to individual respondents' statements. This stage of the data organisation (i.e., the sorting of participants' statements according to specific themes) was followed by a so-called descriptive analysis. Its purpose was to distinguish essential information and present a clear message of the content.

Descriptive analysis includes three steps leading to gradual abstraction and acquisition of final categories (shown in the final mindmaps). These three steps include:<sup>7</sup>

- 1) identifying the substantial content and dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation;
- 2) refining categories and assigning the descriptive data to individual categories (the first degree of abstraction);
- 3) classification, where each category group is assigned to more abstract classes (the second degree of abstraction).

In our survey, we have sorted the acquired categories into three main classes according to their relationship to development of personality – i.e., *Factors affecting development*, *Factors supporting development* (input determinants), and *Development products* (outputs) for each group of respondents separately. Consequently, we searched for links between the categories in these classes.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2 Results

*Factors affecting development* (Figure 2) are in the background of the process and determine supporting factors, in other words: Whether camp participants actually develop their personality depends, for example, on how the camp is organized, but also whether the participants are going to the camp with the resolve to work on themselves, as well as whether other participants are motivated and thus strengthen each other in development. *Factors supporting development* (Figure 3) give to the individuals the certainty that they will succeed in different social situations. It can, for example, get rid of the shyness that hampers them in development or, on the contrary, they experience the situation of their own overburden, which may accelerate or otherwise facilitate the growth process. *Development products* arise when the factors and supporting factors meet together. Participants finally acquire skills and competencies. This is the development that an individual can use to benefit future social iterations.

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<sup>7</sup> These three steps are recorded in so-called generalisation tables, where the first column contains text from a specific column of thematic tables, the second column with a more general formulation, and in the third column we add the final sub-category (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 243).

<sup>8</sup> The final structure of the individual factors is presented in the form of mind maps generated by Mindmeister software.

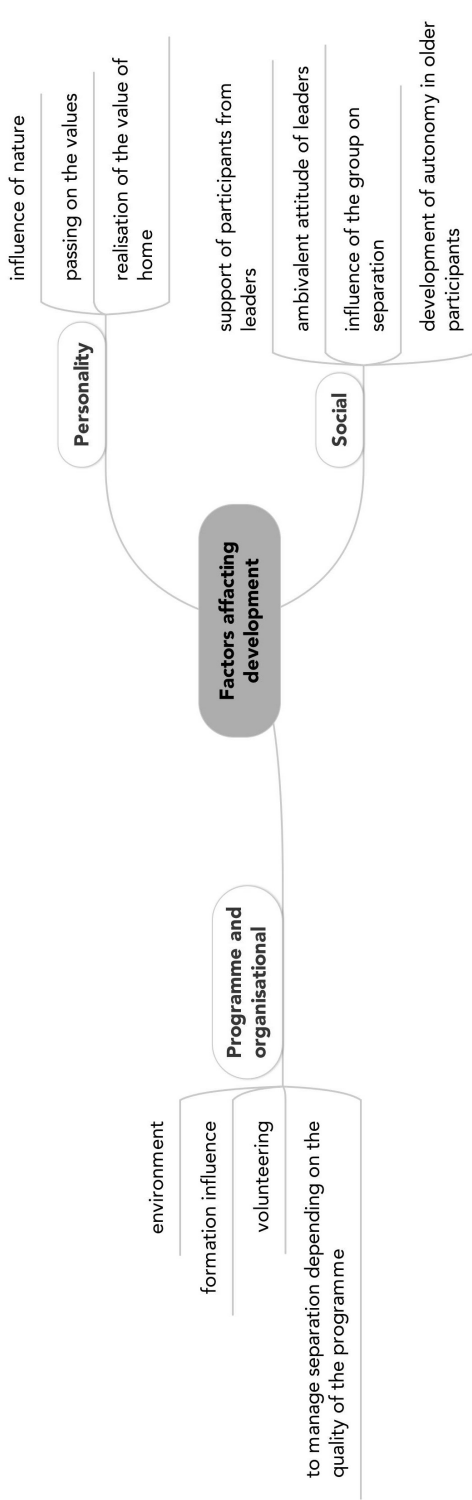


Figure 2. Factors affecting development.

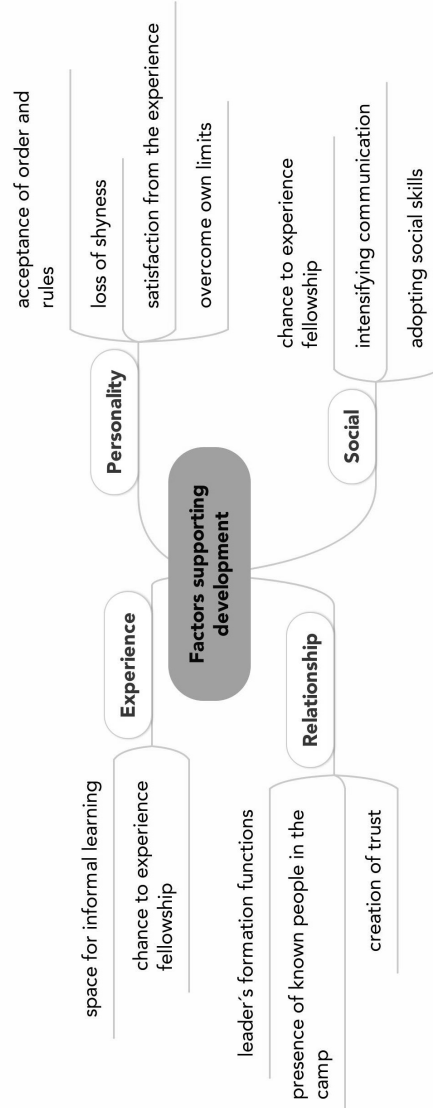


Figure 3. Factors supporting development.

*Factors affecting development* (positively or negatively – on the basis of individual assessment) are further divided into *personality, social, and programme and organisational factors*. Even in this case, individual areas include identified factors as factors influencing the process of personality development. For both groups of respondents, the division is the same.

*Factors supporting development* are those factors that lead to the easier functioning of an individual in society. We have divided the factors in this category class into four other sub-areas – *personality, social, relationship, and experience factors*. The individual areas then contain the factors identified by the research. The same division was created for both groups of respondents.

The last category class is *Individual development products* (competences or abilities and skills that can be termed as acquired in the process of personality development) as the output of the whole process. In a group of participants (Figure 4B), the products are divided into areas of *personality formation, social competences* (relationship formation and social skills), *communication competences*, and *work competences*. In a group of parents (Figure 4A), this category class is divided only into areas of *personality formation, social competences and communication competences*.

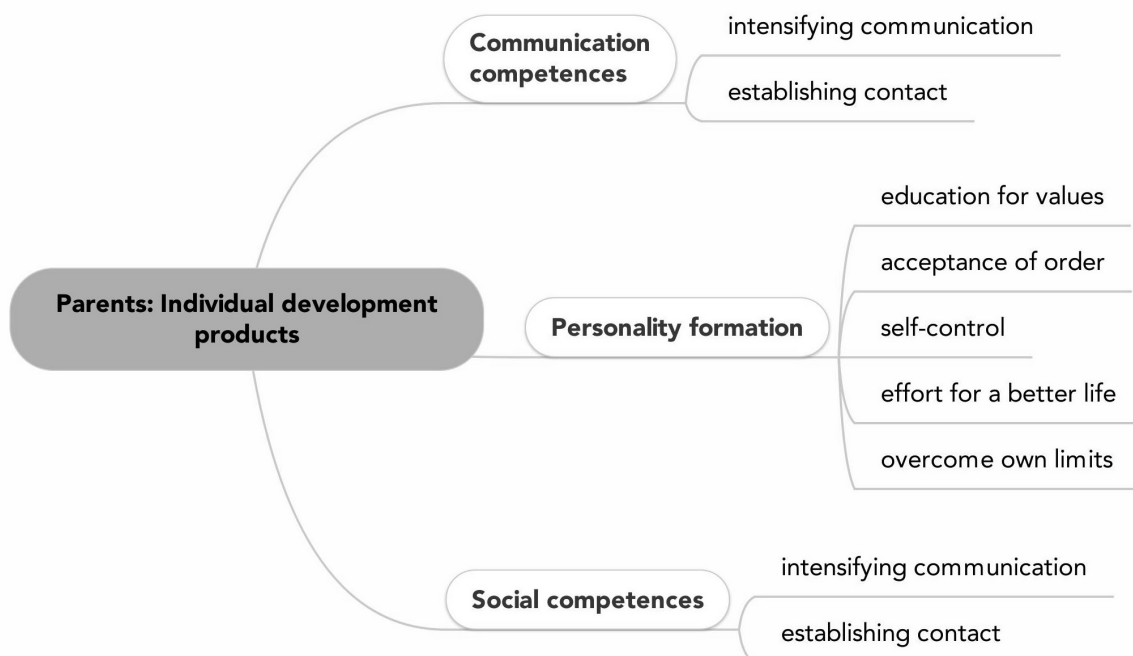


Figure 4A. Parents: Individual development products.



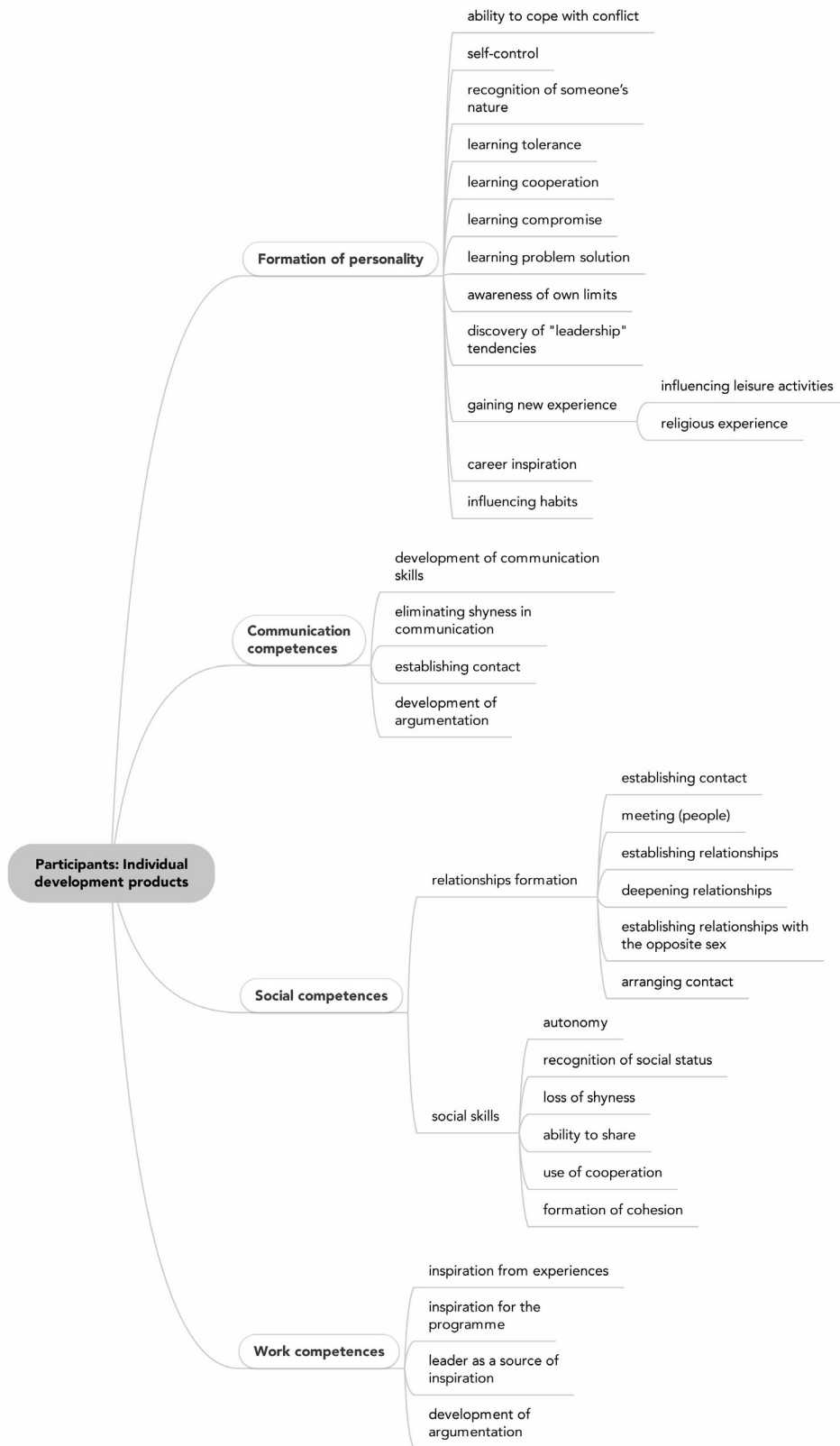


Figure 4B. Participants: Individual development products.

Our aim was to compare the identified factors within specific category classes, so we considered it important to note not only the differences but also what the two groups of respondents agreed upon. In the following text, we gradually present the specific resultant categories – factors common to both parents and participants and for each of the groups of respondents separately.<sup>9</sup>

### *Factors affecting development – common categories*

The factors that influence the development of an individual typically cannot be defined solely in terms of their positive or negative impact. Nevertheless, among the factors with a rather positive impact, we can mention, for example, a *programme* that enables both the education and overall personality development of the participants in the camp. Typically, this is a set of activities and play opportunities that, in addition to their gameplay, conceal development potential. However, play or any other activity will have a developmental impact, depending on the level and ability of the leaders.

Other important elements profoundly affecting the personality of the participant are *nature* and the *environment* (cf. Kraus, 2001). A properly set up environment (especially social environment) allows the participants to adapt to it so that they feel good in it (i.e., the question of relations between the participants and the instructors, as well as among the participants). The participant can thus focus his/her attention in a different direction: the environment becomes an element supporting the learning process and the acquisition of competences. An inappropriately set environment makes the participant's path to the positive effects of the camp more difficult, but we cannot say that it eliminates all potential, though.

### *Factors supporting development – common categories*

In the camp environment, there exists a *specific order and rules*, which are important and can be perceived as a pillar of the camp environment. Positive or negative sanctions for tidiness, punctuality, or non-acceptance of rules are very common in children's camps. Some principles are thus instilled in the participants: these principles enable keeping the camp running, but they also have a strong potential to be transferred into the participant's daily life (for example, enhancing the *autonomy* of the participant in everyday life).<sup>10</sup> It is

<sup>9</sup> For stylistic reasons, for the sake of text clarity, we also abandon the terminology of accurate hierarchical expression of the results (categories, classes, factors, etc.).

<sup>10</sup> This phenomenon is confirmed, for example, by this excerpt from an interview with one of the parents: "There were also conflicts with the leaders. (...) These conflicts were a sign of

not just the application of camp principles to everyday life: the effectiveness of this transfer stems from the linking of the camp's régime and the partial challenges brought by the camp programme and camping itself. First, there are interactions the individual has to deal with – among the participants, or between the participants and the instructors.<sup>11</sup> The participants are forced to overcome themselves, and this experience teaches them tolerance and compromise. In this respect, de facto, it is a step out of the convenience of the comfort zone, which has a developmental effect on the participants.

The question of discomfort is crucial when considering the specifics of summer camps. In many cases, it is a physical discomfort, caused not only by the complexity of the programme but also by the simplified life conditions.<sup>12</sup> In the vast majority of cases, however, we encounter a social discomfort that is caused by separation from close family members, and sometimes even close friends. This fact highlights the already mentioned role of group dynamics (and, in essence, it is a prerequisite for successful socio-education), but the *presence of other known people in the camp* is also important. This enables participants to establish contacts, but also to avoid shyness and *establish a trustful atmosphere*. The proximity of a well-known person, whether as a co-participant or an instructor, makes it easier for the participant, especially in younger school-age children, to integrate and manage a non-standard situation. Establishing a confidential relationship results in a *loss of shyness* and further *deepening of relationships*.

The above facts help to *create cohesion, the leader becomes a model and inspires the participant*. The moment of the meeting of the participant and the leader, situations in which he/she is a leading authority, but also situations where the leader is a friend, a close person, allows the participant

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the fact that they had to accept the order. If conflict did not come, he would submit to it implicitly and would not think about it. When there's a fight, it's a sign that there's a kind of interaction." (resp DF, participants).

<sup>11</sup> "I had to overcome my anger to overcome myself. I had to learn to live with those different characters during that week. I consider this to be a great contribution because you will never put up with everybody" (resp. LN, parents).

<sup>12</sup> In our survey, this aspect did not occur very often, as the respondents came from among participants who took part in summer camps with a permanent base, electricity, running water, etc. We assume that the answers of tent camp respondents would be greatly influenced by this fact.

to experience acceptance from the leader, who is a model to the participant – not abstract, artificial or distant, but living and tangible.<sup>13, 14</sup>

### *Development products – participants*

The categories focusing on the outputs of educational processes for the purposes of the text are called development products. These are abilities, skills, and experience that a person adopts as a result of socio-edutainment.

We consider two products to be relevant for a group of participants. The more prominent is *learning* (*learning to tolerate, co-operate, compromise, solve problems, or process conflict, self-control, but also experience with influencing leisure activities or religious experience*). Learning takes place in summer camps usually through unconscious experience. The advantage of this approach can be seen in the nature and spontaneity of the participant. The individual naturally learns from everyday situations; in the camp environment, these situations are intensified by the peculiarity of the environment and the whole situation (cf. Straka, 2009).

*Relationships* represent another very strong product, mainly from the participants' point of view. Establishing *a relationship between the participant and the leader* is understood as the basic pillar of the educational formation (for example, Kapláneš, 2013). In addition to this “vertical” relationship, we also speak of the “horizontal” relationships, i.e., *relationships among participants*, which naturally have much greater weight in the participants' eyes.<sup>15</sup> The environment of the camp is, therefore, an important part of the

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<sup>13</sup> “I was inspired by the leaders in the camp – although they were adults, they treated us like friends. They were a model for me ...” (resp. LN).

<sup>14</sup> About the acceptance of the world of youth (participants), as described by the respondent, Mario Pollo speaks in his concept of cultural animation, requiring from the leader's personality a so-called “adult acceptance of the youth world”. This requirement emphasises the balance between friendliness and authority. Pollo points out that the leader should be open to the participants, but should not forget about the values he represents (cf. Kapláneš, 2013, pp. 62–63).

<sup>15</sup> In terms of relationships, we can see some imbalances between categories. The categories that fall within the so-called *Factors supporting development* and *Factors affecting development* (*contact with the leader, acceptance by leaders, fellowship, the presence of known persons in the camp, induction of trust, and leadership of the participant*) are focused on the dimension of the leader-participant relationship, categories listed under *development products* speak for the relations between the participants. From this, it can be concluded that the relationship of the participants and the leaders is important at the level of entry (the leader is an important person for the participant because of the process – what enters

social development of an individual, who learns here about interpersonal coexistence at two completely different levels that he/she encounters throughout his/her life. On the one hand, it is the horizontal level where the participant establishes the relationship with other participants, while, on the other hand, it is the vertical relationship, i.e., between the participant and the leader, who is at that moment the figure of authority, the superior. From experience gained in the camp environment, the participants can draw from everyday situations when they meet other leaders or later become leaders themselves.

#### *Development products – parents*

In terms of development products, we should mention the parents' focus on the level of inner attitudes and values (*education for values, acceptance of order, self-control, striving for a better life, overcoming discomfort, autonomy*). These categories in the context of the camp environment have an impact on the parents' motivation to send their children to the camps. The survey shows that parents perceive the camp environment as a place for passing on values that are close to them (it is also an important criterion for choosing a particular camp), but another important aspect to them is the area of communication and relationships.

Parent respondents regard fellowship as a significant development product in the summer camp with a related *emphasis on the social development of the individual*. In particular, they appreciate that the participants have the opportunity to *experience fellowship* in the camps, and by these means to *intensify communication* and *gain other social skills*. The *formation function of the leader* also plays an irreplaceable role. Based on this, we can conclude that the level of entry is more important for parents – they place more emphasis on what will influence their children, but less emphasis on the specific outcomes and effects of education.

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the camp events, what is the initiator of the events), while the relationship between the participants gains importance at the level of the output (the relationships among others are what the participant takes away with him, they are the result of processes happening inside the group in the camp environment).

### 3 Summary of the results

On the basis of the findings, we can state that the summer camps have a positive impact on our respondents in the field of social interaction. According to the statements of the participants, summer camps contributed mainly to establishing contacts with peers; however, social learning can also be included in the field of social interactions, for example, *learning to cooperate*. The participants' parents are less aware of the influence of the camps on social interactions, yet even this fact is evident from their answers. A more important impact, the parents pointed out, was making friends and learning to communicate.

In terms of social interaction, we perceive the difference between the group of camp participants and the group of their parents in what the groups emphasise – in the participants, the emphasis is placed on the level of the *output* (new relationships, friendships they establish – they focus on the effects), but in parents, on the contrary, it is the level of the input (what influences the children – environment, leadership, etc.). While both groups perceive the camp as beneficial to the social interaction and the functioning of the child in the group, they also point to the influence of the individual's nature, which determines the contribution to these areas relatively strongly.

More specifically, we can focus on the area of progress in the child's *autonomy*. Parents perceived this progress in their offspring in two areas: the first area is the ability to think independently, which leads to the child being able to perceive and accept the order of the camp, which they transmit to their own lives; the second area is the autonomy manifested in the fact that the participants were able to independently handle situations they had previously encountered during the camp. An important indicator of a true contribution of the camp is the ability to transfer habits from the camp to everyday life. Increased communication capabilities are reflected in *improving the quality and deepening of communication among participants*, reflected by both groups. The participants have benefited from the experience of group cooperation and, later, in the role of leaders, they used games and camp experiences (the obvious inspirational feature of the camp).

The main difference between the two groups of respondents is the difference in their view on the factors supporting/affecting the development of the individual and the products of the children's camp. While the *participants place much more emphasis on Products* and the external manifestations of the

whole process (learning, inspiration, relationships), it is *more important for the parents to see the inner influence on individuals* and products concerning inner attitudes and the internal shift.

Our results can be compared with the research findings of the T. Glover's team (Glover et al., 2011) within the Canadian Summer Camp Research Project. Their study identified five personal growth areas in which we can expect the participants to experience positive results: Social integration and citizenship, Attitudes towards physical activity, Self-confidence and personal development, Environmental awareness and Emotional intelligence. They revealed a positive development observed in campers in all five personal growth areas and also observed by parents and guardians in all five personal growth areas. These results also correspond to our findings – the congruence is quite high in the first and third of the above-mentioned areas.

## 4 Conclusion

If we analyse the results of the research among parents, we find out that fellowship and an emphasis on the social development of the individual are the most important topics for them. When we compare the viewpoints of the participants and their parents, we come to the fact that a functioning fellowship (i.e., relations among participants as well as between the participant and the leader) is a prerequisite for successful learning (acquiring skills, experience) through which the individual universally develops. Development does not occur spontaneously, but through a specific method. In the camps environment, this method is the process of informal learning (for example, a combination of circumstances in an actual situation) or a game. Playing games as a delightful method – as it is called by Komenský, and after him Němec (2002) – is the basic method of children's camps, as well as the whole approach we call the socio-edutainment. We understand it as learning social skills in a playful way and in a social environment.

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## Socioedutainment v prostředí letního tábora? Nevyužitá příležitost!

**Abstrakt:** Text se zabývá obecným přesahem dětských táborů do běžného života jeho účastníků s důrazem na potenciál, který dětský tábor má pro rozvoj v období mladšího školního věku. Pojednává krátce o ideových kořenech dětských táborů, které jsou typické pro český kontext. Klíčovým tématem, které autoři příspěvku otvírají, je teorie socioedutainmentu. Tento koncept autoři staví na tzv. edutainmentu a rozšiřují tak chápání pojmu na sociální rozměr osobnosti, přičemž za základní metodu pro rozvoj osobnosti je považována hra. Hra pojímaná teorií socioedutainmentu jako činitel umožňující učit se sociálním dovednostem v sociálním prostředí. Celý koncept



následně propojují s procesem socializace. Druhá část příspěvku popisuje koncept socioedutainmentu pomocí empirické sondy provedené mezi bývalými účastníky dětských táborů. Autoři využili pro získání dat polostrukturované rozhovory s bývalými účastníky dětských táborů a s rodiči těchto účastníků. Pro zpracování dat byla využita rámcová analýza. Autoři popisují detailní postup rámcové analýzy dat včetně jejího teoretického zakotvení. Následně předkládají podrobný popis zjištěných informací. Výstupy jsou autory vzájemně propojovány a zobecňovány, a přináší tak komplexní popis zjištění celého šetření. Zjištění jsou autory prezentována odděleně pro danou skupinu respondentů, což autorům následně umožňuje zjištění vzájemně porovnávat a poukázat tím na shody či neshody v pojetích obou skupin respondentů. V závěru příspěvku autoři shrnují zjištění z empirického šetření a staví je do kontrastu s realitou skutečných dětských táborů a tím, jak instruktoři těchto táborů využívají prostředků pro dosažení edukačního potenciálu tábora.

**Klíčová slova:** dětský tábor, socializace, informální učení, vrstevnická skupina