
Velikonoce!

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As an Erasmus Student I was unaware of the traditions of the Easter celebrations in Czech Republic. Fortunately, the Erasmus Club of Faculty of Arts organised a Czech Easter Afternoon where over 50 Erasmus and other exchange students were able to learn about this seasonal event and the traditions it holds.



As well as learning about the Czech Easter traditions, the afternoon saw two Erasmus students bring along their children. The reason to mention this is because it is rare to see this on the Erasmus and exchange programme. Limei Zhang who studies in Portugal brought along with her Yu, her daughter, and Judith Schüler from Germany had her son Karl with her to share the experience.

To understand the traditions better we were shown a short documentary and a Powerpoint presentation about *Velikonoce* (Easter) in Czech Republic.

Firstly, we were introduced to what is called *pomlázka* (Easter Caroling) which is an event that takes place on Easter Monday in the whole Czech Republic, and is especially alive in villages and small regional towns.

It involves the men of the village or town binding willow branches together to create a stick like shape called also *pomlázka*. On Easter Monday the male members of the villages will visit houses to see the girls. When they get to the houses they will say a poem aloud



*,Hody, hody, doprovody,
dejte vejce malovaný.
Nedáte-li malovaný,
dejte aspoň bílý,
slepička vám snese jiný‘.*

Which translates to something like
*‘Give me a coloured egg,
if you won’t give me a coloured egg,
give me a white one,
and get your hen to lay another.’*

Then the men will lightly hit/beat the women with the *pomlázka* and in some regions additionally drench the women in cold water.

The reason for this beating ritual is because it is believed to bring health, fertility and longer lasting youth. The men also will be given in addition to the eggs a ribbon to put onto their stick, some chocolate or for the older men a shot of alcohol. By the end of the day the man’s *pomlázka* will be decorated with brightly coloured ribbons.

However, it is not only a male ritual to use the *pomlázka*, every leap year the roles are reversed and the girls get the opportunity to perform such a ritual too.



We then went onto to learn about the *mazanec*, which is a sweet yeasted bread made with rum soaked raisins and topped with almonds. The bread has a crusty golden surface but is soft inside. We were able to sample a taste of this traditional Czech Easter bread during the session as well.

Finally, we were presented with the main part of the Easter Afternoon Event, the traditional egg decorating or to use the Czech word, painting of *Kraslice*. It is usually the girls who decorate eggs on Easter Sunday in preparation for Easter Monday when they will give them to the boys as gifts.

The traditional Czech decoration of the Easter eggs has various techniques and uses a whole variety of materials such as bee’s wax, straw, watercolours, onion peels, ink, etc. Bright colours (reds, yellows, greens, etc.) and floral patterns are usually the basis for the egg design because of the association they have with the Spring Season.

The egg decoration itself can hold various designs. For example, Moravia has an egg design that is called *,Vnorovské Kraslice‘*. This uses the batik technique (bee’s wax) with a combination of red, yellow-orange, black and white colours. A variety of towns and villages particularly in the South-West region of Czech Republic have a specific technique on painting eggs.

A number of the students who came along to the Czech Easter Afternoon were painting eggs for the first time and so simple designs, colours and techniques were mainly used. However, there were also a small number of students from Bulgaria, Poland and Slovakia and so such traditions were not so new. Some eggs were decorated

using blue ink on white eggs, the batik technique or painting simple and decorative designs onto the shell.



The egg decoration activity makes you realise how creative but also how very patient you have to be, this is because of the fine details that one design can involve! It was a interesting and fun event to be part of. It was nice to learn of another culture's traditions during this Easter period!