
International Mountain and Outdoor Sports Conference

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From Thursday the 20th November to Sunday the 23rd November, the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport of Charles University played host to the 7th International Mountain and Outdoor Sports Conference. The event was organised by the Department of Turistika, Outdoor Sports and Outdoor Education and saw experts from departments of outdoor sports in universities all over the world come to Prague to share their work and experiences with like-minded individuals. Outdoor sports enthusiasts and students alike were also present.

The core aims of the conference were to discuss the health, educational and economic sustainability aspects of outdoor activities. This was to be achieved in a series of lectures by academics in their respective fields, complemented by a number of practical workshops. Despite the variation in nationalities present, the atmosphere was one of continual interaction, discussion and mutual learning.

There were a number of key speakers throughout the conference and they were supplemented by lectures from the many other lecturers and experts there. The key speakers were Dr. Pete Allison from the Moray House School of Education in Edinburgh, Scotland, Professor Colin Beard from the Sheffield Business School in England, Dr. Jo Barton from the University of Essex in England and Dr. Eduard Inglés Yuba from the University of Barcelona in Spain.



The most fascinating part of this conference that I attended took place, rather fittingly, outdoors. It was a workshop concerning the use of outdoor education to develop methods for integration through nature and culture. The workshop implemented several exercises and activities where we had to work together as a group, setting aside nationality, age or any other differences. Teamwork and communication were essential in ensuring we could obtain our objective efficiently. Other activities included ones where people were required to think “outside the box” and make use of both their surroundings and, depending on their circumstances, their imagination. The workshop allowed me personally to access and make use of parts of my psyche that I don’t use on a regular basis.



Following the workshop, a brief coffee break took place after which I attended a very interesting lecture by Dr. Andy Martin of Massey University, Palmerstown North in New Zealand. His talk was about the development and subsequent decline of an organisation well known in his country named Outward Bound. This international non-profit aims to foster the personal growth and social skills of participants by using challenging outdoor expeditions. Dr. Martin chronicled the organisation's creation, rise, decline and efforts to re-establish itself as an important part of development for youngsters and others alike in New Zealand. Outward Bound was set up on core values by influential German educator Kurt Hahn in 1941 and grew to be to have 40 schools with over 200,000 participants. However, financial difficulties meant the organisation lost its way and the experience was stopped in many countries. As an employee of Outward Bound, Dr. Martin offered what he thought would bring the company back to its former days of high participation and popularity.

Other notable lectures I managed to attend included a presentation of studies conducted on ultra-elite long distance athletes and mountaineers attempting to ascend K2 carried out by Karen Weekes of Tralee IT in Co. Kerry, Ireland, an examination of outdoor research from a Czech perspective by distinguished lecturer from Charles University Dr. Jan Neumann and a discussion of the health benefits of outdoor exercise by Dr. Jo Barton.

On the whole, I had an excellent experience of what overall was a very successful event and which was thoroughly enjoyed by all. The conference allowed people with expertise in similar fields to come together and share their experiences with each other in a non-formal atmosphere. It was the seventh International Mountain and Outdoor Sports Conference, and I'm sure there will be many more as the event seems to be going from strength to strength.



Daniel O'Toole is a third year Law with Politics student on Erasmus here at Charles University from University College Dublin. He wants to pass the law exams after his degree and hopefully become a solicitor. He chose to write for iForum as he has a keen interest in journalism and felt this would be an excellent way to develop his writing skills and also to meet new people. Daniel other interests include sport and music.