

The winter season visitors to the Bohemian Forest – their views on recreation possibilities and qualities within the region

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Abstract

The contribution is aimed at presenting results of the sociological questionnaire survey that reflected opinions of the public on the quality of recreation and recreational possibilities within the Bohemian Forest region during the winter season of the year 2000. Besides identification of socio-demographic characteristics of winter season visitors to the Bohemian Forest, the main objective of the research was to identify the levels of their satisfaction with available accommodation and facilities for tourism, particularly with the conditions for sports and cultural activities. Attention was also paid to the length of visitors' stay in the region, to visitors' opinions on the attractiveness and image of the Bohemian Forest region, and their taking advantage of the National Park services.

Key words: visitors, National Park and tourist's services, type of accommodation, sports and cultural activities, questionnaire survey

INTRODUCTION

Attractiveness of the individual places for visitors is of volatile nature and to a great extent depends on waves of fashion. Nevertheless, up-to-date knowledge on demands and expectations of people coming for a visit to the region can help local and regional authorities to formulate reasonable strategy dealing with the phenomenon of tourism.

Tourism is a Bohemian Forest long-term tradition dating back to the 18th century (e.g. BAŠTA 1913, MOSS & al. 2000). Simultaneously, tourism and recreation are expected to become important factors forming the future of the region (TĚSITEL & al. 1999). In this context, the Bohemian Forest can be seen as all-the-year-round visitors' destination having, however, two main seasons – summer and winter.

This article aims to briefly describe the Bohemian Forest winter season clientele, their main socio-demographic characteristics, some behavioural patterns and views on quality of accommodation and services within the region of interest.

METHODS

To describe the clientele empirical data was explored. It was gained by use of sociological questionnaire survey that was conducted in February and March 2000. The sociological survey took place in the model area delimited by the Master Plan of the Bohemian Forest region (COLLECTIVE 1993).

The final version of the questionnaire was designed on the basis of a pilot study and after consulting the matters with the representatives of the Šumava National Park and Šumava Protected Landscape Area as well as with the representatives of the Regional Development Agency Šumava. Three versions of questionnaire were used during the field investigation – written in Czech, German and English. Data collection was carried out by use of inquirers – students of high school that reside in the region of interest (Český Krumlov, Prachatice, Vimperk, Sušice and Klatovy).

Adult visitors to the model area were defined as the basic set. It was determined by three attributes: the visitors were over 15, they did not have permanent residence in the model area and they were not there on a business trip. Empirical data was gathered by the method of random sampling from 487 respondents (including foreign visitors) who were present in the region of interest during the time of field investigation.

RESULTS

Characteristics of winter clientele

- Though lying along the Czech–Austrian–German border, the Bohemian Forest region is a recreational territory mainly for Czech clientele (94%). The visitors usually come from

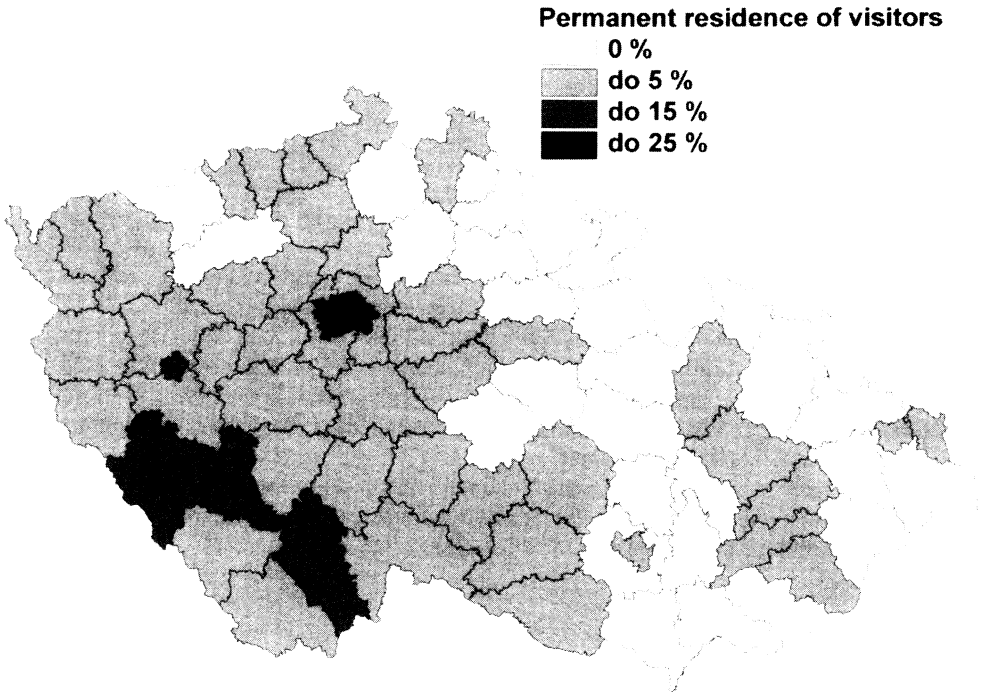


Fig. 1 – Permanent residence of winter season visitors to the Bohemian Forest

neighbouring areas and large cities like České Budějovice, Plzeň and mainly Prague (see Fig. 1).

- Most visitors come to the Bohemian Forest in their cars and prefer individual recreation.
- Three fifths of the visitors come regularly, and they are mostly owners of cottages and weekend houses (see table 1).
- They visit the region seasonally preferring summer and winter. All-the-year-round visitors are again mainly the cottage owners.

Image of the Bohemian Forrestr region

- The visitors characterised the Bohemian Forest by means of the following key words: deep forests, National Park, splendid natural scenery, mountains, quiet and sparsely populated territory good for relaxation, kiosks and market places, helpful people.
- The main attractors of the region, which were mentioned by the respondents as relating to recreation and tourism, are as follows: nature and its beauties, tourism and sports generally, healthy environment, peace, quiet and solitude.
- The region is attractive also from the viewpoint of social and cultural activities for 4% of the visitors. This applies mainly to people who are under twenty years of age.
- More than 60% of the visitors are interested in the area of formerly strictly guarded and inaccessible border belt and military zone. The reasons are various: beautiful and unspoilt nature, discovering originally forbidden places, low density of population and peace, opportunities for sports, mysteriousness and adventure, picking mushrooms, or other reasons including personal ones.

The type of accommodation and duration of stay

- More than a half of winter visitors come for a short stay (for one day – 22%, for a weekend – 31%). One third of the visitors (36%) come for a week and only 11% come to spend longer time within the region.
- Considering the type of accommodation there is the prevailing tendency to stay in private weekend houses and cottages. This applies approximately to 40% of the visitors, whereas 26 % of them accommodate in pensions and 15% in a hotel (see Fig. 2).
- Most winter visitors (97%) never change their place of stay in the course of their visit to the region.

Table 1. – Relationship between accommodation type and frequency of visit.

| Type of accommodation | Do you come here regularly ? | | Total |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------|-------|
| | Yes | No | |
| Hotel | 63.6% | 36.4% | 100% |
| Pension (guest house) | 62.2% | 37.8% | 100% |
| “Zimmer frei” (bed and breakfast) | 33.3% | 66.7% | 100% |
| Own cottage, weekend house, flat | 81.7% | 18.3% | 100% |
| Employer’s recreational facility | 61.1% | 38.9% | 100% |
| Tourist hostel | 50.0% | 50.0% | 100% |
| Rented cottage, weekend house, flat | 41.2% | 58.8% | 100% |
| With friends | 63.3% | 36.7% | 100% |
| Elsewhere | 44.4% | 55.6% | 100% |
| Total | 63.2% | 36.8% | 100% |

- When they decide on the type accommodation and place to stay within the region, most visitors follow recommendations and information gained from their friends.

Within the region, there are numerous possibilities for the visitors to put up as to the quality of accommodation – from spartan facilities with latrines to new or reconstructed objects comparable with West European standard. There are some conveniences that are, irrespective of the broad scope of the offer, perceived as the biggest advantages of accommodation in general as is provided within the region – peace, kind personnel and family-like atmosphere, warm rooms and food, feeling of privacy, acceptable prices, splendour of landscape and a strategic position for the choice of sports activities.

Territorial mobility of the visitors

- Up to two thirds of the visitors (60%) make trips to see natural or cultural sights and also visit towns in the Bohemian Forest or the foothills.
- Almost a half of visitors (46%) prefer spending their holidays in a special way which the Germans call “Urlaub grenzenlos” – they visit places on both sides of the state border.
- Those who came in their cars use these vehicles for transport within the region during their stay as well.
- Only 40% of the visitors take advantage of public transport. They are mainly young people and students who reached the region by train or by bus. From their viewpoint there are still some reserves in the field of public transport in the Bohemian Forest region.

Sports and tourist facilities in the region

- Considering the facilities for sports and tourism, most visitors are satisfied with the marking of tourist trails, with catering and refreshment possibilities, with downhill skiing and cross-country skiing trails network. On the other hand, they are not satisfied with public car



Fig. 2. – Type of winter season visitors' accommodation.

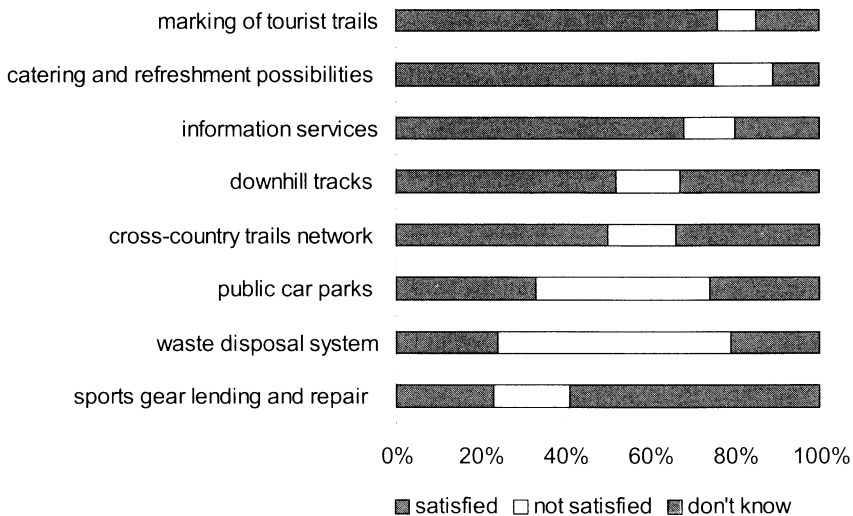


Fig. 3. – Satisfaction with sports and tourism facilities within the region.

parks and waste disposal system. The visitors were mostly unable to express their opinions on services providing rental and repair of sports outfit (see Fig. 3).

- To the question “what else should be done to make the situation even better” the visitors would appreciate: better piste quality and higher density of the network for both downhill and cross-country skiing, lower prices for ski-tows, extension of “skibuses” service (or introduction where the service is still missing), more parking places and reduced fees for parking, solving the problem of public toilets and waste disposal, minimising the deficit in the network of cash dispensers and mail services, more public pools.

Facilities for cultural and social activities

- Current level of satisfaction in this field is sufficient and the visitors don’t require any kind of mass offer. Only young people would appreciate more cinemas, concerts, theatres, exhibitions and discos. Possible improvement could consist in: building new public pools combined with sauna, organizing events for younger children, opening facilities on club basis, organizing tournaments in social games, building centers for sports and socializing.

Using the services of the National Park

- During their stay in the Bohemian Forest region, two fifths of the visitors took advantage of the National Park services. They mostly used information boards, visited some information centers, read printed leaflets and attended the lectures of National park rangers. They remembered the “ecobus” although it isn’t run in winter. Most of them were pleased with services quality and some of them would appreciate the “ecobus” service even in winter, when it could function as a “skibus”.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The presented survey of tourism and recreation represents one of research programs that have been carried out in the Bohemian Forest region in recent years. E.g. ČIHAR (1999) regularly does monitoring of tourism in the Šumava National Park. It is, unfortunately, not quite possible to compare findings of both surveys for two reasons. First, the model areas are not identical – Čihař's survey covers the area of the National Park whereas our contribution represents a broader area – besides the National Park it includes also the Protected Landscape Area. Second, Čihař's results are based on data gained in summer season whereas ours are only relevant for winter season description.

Nevertheless it is possible to compare the results which are independent of area and season and refer rather to the formulation of questions and scaling in the questionnaires used in particular field surveys. It is the "accommodation type", that is the topic of discussion in this case.

In ČIHAR (1999) there is considerable prevalence of the guest house type (almost 30%) within the whole spectrum of accommodation possibilities. Almost 15% of respondents were accommodated at hotels. The scale describing the type of accommodation does not have the category of "objects of individual recreation" (OIR), i.e. private cottages, weekend houses or stays in friends' and relatives' homes. This type of accommodation, however, prevails in our survey. In Čihař's study the OIR category probably merged with other possibilities within category named "other types of accommodation", which thus became the third most frequent case.

We suggest the scale could be changed if the information gathering on the type of accommodation is supposed to be part of the long-term monitoring of sustainable tourism in the core zone of the Šumava National Park. Supportive arguments for making OIR a separate category can be found in the study published by TRICÁTNÍK (2000). He investigated leisure activities of the citizens of Czech Republic. According to his survey, in 1999 35% of Czech citizens spent their inland vacation in their cottages and weekend houses, 27% of them enjoyed free stay with their friends and relatives, and 38% decided to make use of the offer of tourist services.

The survey reflects real behaviour of the visitors when they were choosing type of accommodation and the place to stay. When evaluating tourist facilities and especially accommodation capacity within the Bohemian Forest region, the survey results enable us to point out the necessity of considering the following facts:

- Accommodation capacity, as it is monitored by the Czech Statistical Office, does not reflect real situation in the region, mainly the possibility to accommodate at friends, place and in private weekend houses and cottages (40% of visitors).
- Accommodation capacity in the region itself needn't be a limiting factor to recreation development. The visitors to the region can accommodate outside the region and daily commute for recreation reasons to the Bohemian Forest.

The Bohemian Forest region has two main tourist seasons. In its next phase the survey will focus on the characteristics of summer season visitors. Thorough knowledge of visitors' demand of territory, their behaviour and movement within the territory will create an information basis for formulating the future likely development of the phenomenon of tourism and recreation in the model area. This is also the main aim of the project "The role of tourism in the development of the Bohemian Forest region" in the framework of which the research is carried out.

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Výsledky sociologického dotazníkového průzkumu zachytily názory veřejnosti na kvalitu rekreace a rekreační možnosti na Šumavě v zimním období roku 2000. Předmětem zkoumání bylo zmapování úrovně spokojenosti návštěvníků Šumavy s možnostmi ubytování a vybaveností území pro cestovní ruch, zejména s podmínkami sportovního i kulturního využití. Pozornost byla zaměřena rovněž na zjištění délky pobytu návštěvníků v území, posouzení turistické atraktivity a „image“ Šumavy včetně využívání služeb Národního parku. V centru zájmu bylo také určení sociodemografických charakteristik skupiny návštěvníků Šumavy.

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