

Role of traditions in tourism development in the Czech part of the Bohemian Forest¹

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Abstract

The concept of tradition includes social, cultural and other deep-rooted customs, manners and rules, which have been preserved and handed over to new generations. From the viewpoint of tourism their existence belongs to so called primary potential. Sociological survey within the project "Strategy of sustainable development of the Šumava Biosphere Reserve" identified a broad range of traditions preserved in particular villages within the region. According to this survey 90% of local population claimed that certain traditional habits exist in their village. On the other hand, interest in local tradition is also demonstrated by empirical results concerning the visitors to the region. These results were obtained during a questionnaire survey related to the project "The role of tourism in the Šumava Mts. region development". Only less than 30% of the visitors encountered some form of local tradition. Comparison of the results of both surveys showed certain disproportion between the potential and its realisation. Our study aims at the evaluation of the extent to which local traditions actually contribute to tourism development within the region.

Key words: rural tourism, Šumava Mts. region, traditions, sociological survey

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one expression of the increasing importance of non-material forms of production and consumption, including the well-documented demand for "rurality" and its associated attributes of closeness to nature, healthy environments, tradition, heritage and authenticity. The very disadvantages of lagging regions, such as marginal agriculture, distance of large population centres, and the persistence of traditional activities, cultures and tourism in rural areas, represents the process of consumption of production and services to which real, imagined or fabricated values are attached. Tourism in rural areas can encompass many activities focused upon different types of resources, often with cultural and natural components. The main typical features of rural tourism include its close association with the quality of the bio-physical environment, high degree of pluriactivity among hosts, the importance of local culture and traditions, and the fragility of the rural economy in which it takes place (JENKINS 2001).

Association of traditions with this type of tourism is of great importance to tourism development. The concept of tradition is mostly expressed and understood as a sum of social, cultural, and other preserved habits, customs and rules practised for generations. Traditions were

¹ The terms "Czech part of the Bohemian Forest" and "Šumava Mts. region" are used as mutually exchangeable in this article. The Bohemian Forest is the oronym preferred by the editorial board; however, it cannot be used everywhere in the text as the term Šumava Mts. region has already become a part of official titles of several accomplished projects, political and planning documents, and some of our preceding articles.

an important factor in supporting social cohesion and anchoring local community in particular space. Today their role is changing. The spectrum of existing traditions, or their unique character, underline the value of a territory as a whole – not just for local community but also for the visitors as something special which is offered to them as one of the attractions within the territory. From the viewpoint of tourism development the existence of traditions is classified as so called primary potential of the territory. Their commodification becomes an attribute of the development of the use of rural areas for the purposes of tourism.

The image of the Czech part of the Bohemian Forest being perceived both by local population and from outside in a very similar way, causes that rural tourism is generally seen as the most promising possibility for future development of the region. The “Program of tourism development in the Šumava Mts. region” declares this area as very valuable in both the natural and cultural perspective. This material is based on the evidence that the region can be characterised by numerous cultural and historical monuments (urban, rural, technical, and architectonic, including UNESCO monument), by folk traditions, habits and crafts, by traditional social activities (festivals, fun fairs). It is possible to enjoy traditional local products such as beer, food products, wood, glass etc. (COLLECTIVE 2001). When we evaluate local cultural potential, traditions definitely play an important role in this area. This study is intended to contribute to the assessment of the extent to which the local traditions actually serve the purposes of tourism development.

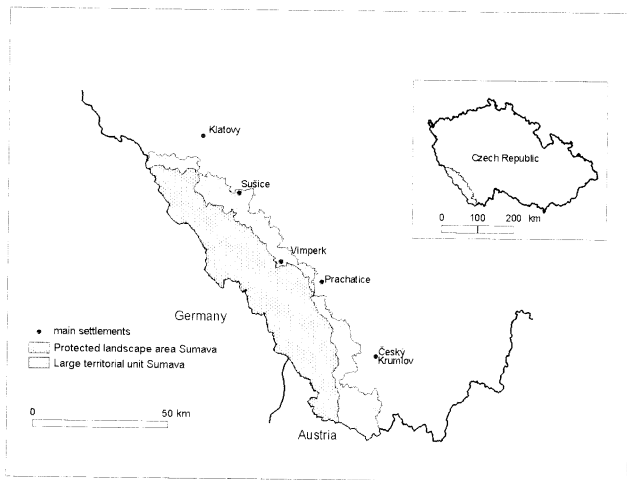


Fig. 1. Model territory.

METHODS AND MODEL TERRITORY

The study is mainly based on the results of two questionnaire sociological surveys and their comparison. They were realised in the same territory delineated as the Large Territorial Unit Šumava (COLLECTIVE 1993); see Fig 1.

One of the two surveys took place in the framework of the project "Sustainable development strategy for the Šumava Biosphere Reserve" in 1996 and was aimed at mapping the life-style of local population. The basic set consisted of adult individuals in local population, i.e. people older than 18 years having their domicile in the model territory. Selected sample consisted of 500 respondents chosen by means of the combination of selection by quotas and randomised selection.

The second survey was carried out within the project "Role of tourism in the development of the Šumava Mts. region" in the year 2000 and was aimed at the evaluation of the attractiveness of the region for tourists. The basic set consisted of adult winter and summer tourist clientele, i.e. people over 18 years of age with domicile outside the region of interest, coming here for the reason of recreation. Selected sample was derived from the basic set by the method of randomised selection – 500 respondents in winter and just the same number in the summer season.

RESULTS

Host community

The sociological survey mapping the lifestyle of local population showed the spectrum of traditional customs still existing in local villages. According to the survey, 90% of their inhabitants claimed that there was a certain form of tradition in the community where they lived.

Fig. 2 shows that the most popular and frequented tradition in the region is erecting the maypole, carolling at Easter, village fairs and feasts formerly on religious basis, St. Nicholas' Eve processions, burning witches and harvest festivals. Other folk and liturgical habits such as e.g. those pertaining to the Advent, Passion, Epiphany and Corpus Christi Day were not mentioned so often which may correspond with the entire decrease in religiousness in our country (similarly FENCL et al. 2000). The list even includes quite a unique tradition of "throwing down the billy goat" (shazování kozla), which was rediscovered by the butchers' guild in the town of Vlachovo Březí in the middle of the nineties. There are even some "modern" traditions such as that of "last kick" (dokopná) in the sense of the end of football season (the word in Czech sounds similar to that expressing the end of the harvest of root crops by hoeing so we can consider it as filling the old form with the new meaning). Further traditions frequented in villages are mostly connected with the collective opportunity to consume alcoholic drinks but are less valuable or inventive as regards cultural contribution. The list did not include "town festivals" which first appeared after 1989, and it may take time before they are put on the list of living traditions in host communities. However, they have already been noticed and appreciated by the visitors to the region as a manifestation of local tradition (TESITEL et al. 1997).

Visitors to the region

The level of visitors' interest in local traditions can be documented by empirical results obtained during the questionnaire survey carried out within the project "Role of tourism in the Šumava Mts. region development" (Fig. 3). Only less than 30% of visitors encountered some kind of local tradition. The survey also showed that the frequency of such encounters was al-

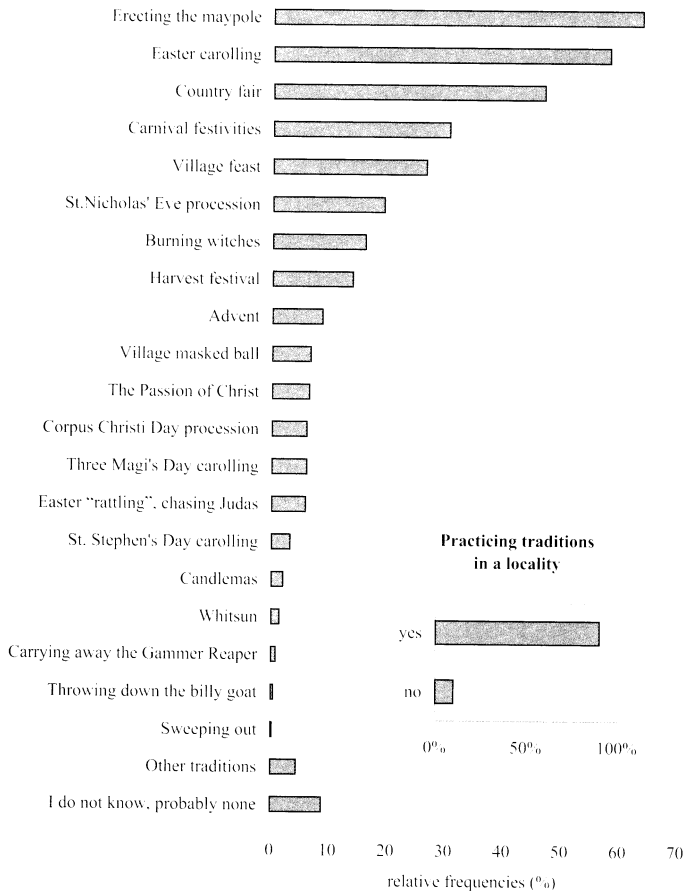


Fig. 2. Living traditions in the Czech part of the Bohemian Forest (host community).

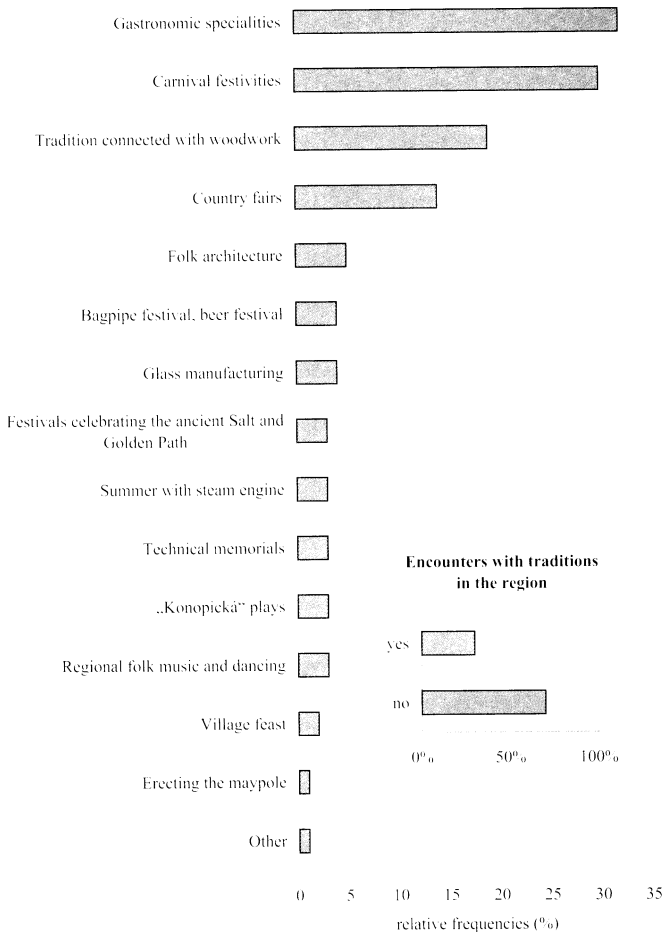


Fig. 3. Encounters with traditions in the Czech part of the Bohemian Forest (visitors).

most identical in summer and winter clientele. Provided that they were willing to do so, the visitors could specify their encounters with local tradition. Some of them found it difficult because, according to their opinion, "everything is somehow traditional here in the Šumava Mts. area". Despite that fact we managed to obtain the following list made according to the number of respondents' references. The top positions are occupied by local gastronomic specialties and everything connected with woodwork, i.e. wooden products, wood carving including products from the wood festival in Volary. Also wooden clogs ("dřeváky") and special boards for resting dead bodies in isolated cottages in the winter season when deep snow caused a delay of the burial ("umrlčí prkna") were mentioned. "We regularly bring home carvings", claimed many visitors. Apart from the wood festival in Volary, which became a new tradition in the area and which helps to make small towns visible, respondents mentioned similar occasions, e.g. the "Bagpipers' festival and festival of beer" in Strakonice, the "Festival of the historical Salt Path" in Prachatic. In the winter season the visitors appreciated the Shrovetide tradition, in summer various country funfairs, e.g. "Vavřínecká", "Markétská", "Šumavská", "Sušická", "Kašperská" etc. One of the respondents claimed: "In winter I attend the carnival celebrations, now the traditional funfair Vavřínecká" (on the day of St. Lawrence). The respondents were also impressed by the traditional folk architecture typical of the Czech part of the Bohemian Forest, by glass products, by the "Šumava summer with steam", i.e. travelling on a local railway with steam engine, or by technical memorials such as the Schwarzenberg canal for floating wood, and electricity generator in Čeňkova Píla. Among the other occasions in the area are e.g. "konopická", "Šumava singing and dancing", "Music", village fair, erecting the maypole, pottery and straw products or even the races of dogsledges and unlocking the Vltava River. "Much information on the history of the Šumava Mts. region is provided by the museums in Sušice and Kašperské Hory, which we visited", claimed some respondents (TEŠITEL et al. 2001).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The accomplished comparison of both investigations results shows a certain difference between the potential and its utilisation. In this context, two interesting questions are at hand. Why did only one third of the visitors encounter a tradition manifestation during the stay in the region? Why do the lists of traditions cited by the respondents in both investigations partly differ from each other?

The above mentioned disproportion can be explained by the fact that tourism in the Czech part of the Bohemian Forest thrives due to the natural potential of the area whereas the cultural potential including tradition has just secondary significance for the visitors. The region has been visited by tourists since the end of 18th century. It still maintains the same historical image – deep forests, splendid nature, and also its moderate "lagging-behind" character. These are the most essential attractors for tourist clientele (KUSOVÁ et al. 2001). They come there primarily to enjoy nature and its beauties, practice sports and tourism, and relax in healthy and quiet environment. Social life and traditions play only the secondary role in attracting visitors (see Fig. 4).

The difference in the frequency of the mentioned encounters with tradition can be also explained by different amount of time spent in the region by local population and visitors. Tradition can structure the time, which passes by in a rather monotonous way. All traditional habits, or at least some of them, are related to a particular season or date. Thus people living in the region are more involved than those who only now and then come for a visit. What should be also mentioned is a different role of the local community and visitors. Local inhabitants can be active participants whereas the visitors mostly play the role of unintended or intended audience.

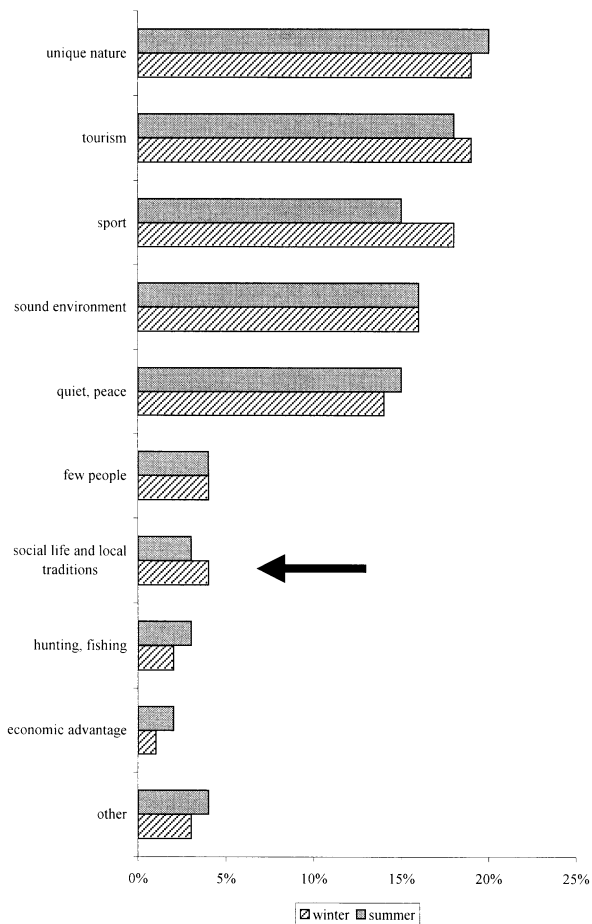


Fig. 4. Motivations of visitors to come to the region.

However, the argument of mere shortage of time should be viewed as relative. The investigation of both winter and summer clientele showed that the relationship of the visitors to the place of their recreation mostly has a long-term basis. More than 80% of respondents did not come to the region for the first time and more than 60% even come repeatedly, on a regular basis. Among the respondents were also the owners of second homes, cottages, who do not represent a "pure" type of visitor. Due to their strong ties to the property and locality they represent a mixed type somewhere between visitors and permanent dwellers. Nevertheless, their active participation in the life of the community is hindered owing to the fact that they are predominantly oriented to the "inside" of their cottage (e.g. LIBROVÁ 1987, 1988).

Not only the time available but also the perception of territory differs if we compare both target groups. It is matter of fact that the survey was done in one area – both locals and visitors were interviewed within the Large Territorial Unit. From the list of traditions mentioned by visitors is evident, however, that visitors perceive the Czech part of the Bohemian Forest as a much more broader area that includes the piedmont and district towns lying there as well. The reason seems to be simple. Territorial mobility of visitors is high. Two thirds of them come to the region by use of their own cars and they use the car when discovering natural and cultural beauties.

The visitors are mainly keen on spectacular traditions close to theatre performances. They are clearly visible and easy to perceive and thus the visitor does not have to devote extra time and effort to participate in or at least passively attend the particular tradition-related happening. Some of them became real theatre performances. The visitor then consumes not the tradition itself but its image, or in a worse case its "accompanying attractions" such as e.g. the ever-present stall-holder markets. Similar is also the character of the "new traditions", such as town festivities, Šumava summer with steam engine, floating wood in canals etc. Their origin can be explained by the concept characterising tourism as a catalyst of local tradition renewal (JENKINS 2000).

Also the "gastronomic specialities of the Šumava Mts." occurred in the list of traditions made by the visitors. Concurrently, the survey mapping local population lifestyle showed that local inhabitants would treat their visitors generally with meals typical of Czech country cuisine. This fact could be an incentive for a more general discussion on the different lifestyles of visitors and local people. According to the survey, the region is a recreational background for the clientele of mainly urban origin. Viewed from their perspective, the entire countryside as such is actually a reflection of a tradition, urban people need sometimes in order to come back to their roots.

It is possible to state that there are certain reserves in the offer of the "local traditions" realised by the host community. However, the commodification of cultural potential begins to develop in the form of the "tradition for tourist". At present this effort is motivated mainly by the ideas of profit and prosperity of the region based on tourism-related income. Nevertheless there are also considerable disadvantages of such strategy. Besides other factors it is excessive commercial utilisation of local culture. It drives local community into globalisation processes, which these people can neither manage nor even influence. They may even become endangered due to the loss of their own identity. Thus the low-level use of the cultural potential need not necessarily be evaluated only negatively as inability to cope with modern trends of development. It can be as well a manifestation of unconscious self-protection reflex of the local community.

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SOUHRN

Pod pojmem tradice rozumíme souhrn společenských, kulturních aj. ustálených zvyků, obyčejů a pravidel zachovávaných pokoleními. Z hlediska rozvoje cestovního ruchu jejich existenci řadíme mezi tzv. primární potenciál. V sociologickém průzkumu v rámci projektu „Strategie trvale udržitelného rozvoje biosférické rezervace Šumava“ bylo zachyceno spektrum tradic udržovaných v šumavských obcích. Podle něho 90 % místních lidí uvedlo, že se v jejich obci udržuje nějaká šumavská tradice. Zájem návštěvníků Šumavy o lokální tradice demonstrují empirické výsledky získané pomocí dotazníkového šetření v rámci projektu „The role of tourism in the Šumava Mts. region development“. Se šumavskou tradicí se setkalo jen necelých 30 % návštěvníků. Z provedené komparace výsledků obou šetření vyplynula jistá disproporce mezi potenciálem a jeho realizací. Cílem článku je posouzení, nakolik jsou místní tradice skutečně využívány pro rozvoj cestovního ruchu.