

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF HUMAN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN THE FORESTS OF THE DRAHANSKÁ VRCHOVINA HIGHLAND AND THEIR REFLECTION IN ARTS

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Abstract

Some preserved pieces of evidence of historical human economic activities are presented in three forest localities of the Drahanská vrchovina Highland (Czech Republic), which represent different environmental sites. These activities include coppicing, lime industry, metallurgy, charcoal burning and transport of materials and goods. We demonstrate the proofs of evidence by tangible and intangible cultural heritage objects, especially fine arts, belles-lettres, and legends. Primarily those that are closely related to the area of interest can be used in the interpretation of local heritage, thereby increasing attractiveness for tourists. Thus, the preserved pieces of evidence of historical human activities in the forests become not only a historical but also a cultural monument heritage that deserves adequate care and conservation.

Key words: natural conditions, cultural heritage, fine arts

Introduction

The concept of “local heritage” aims at strengthening the identity of the place, particularly by means of preserved natural, cultural and historical monuments (Carter a Ptáček 2004). Nevertheless, it is the phenomena of material nature that are usually considered the most attractive tourist destinations that visitors can view, admire and nowadays also capture on photographs or videos. The identity of the place (genius loci) is however doubtlessly also supported by objects of non-material nature such as stories, rumours, memories, local traditions, culture, cuisine etc. Interpretation of heritage conceived in this way is then understood as an “*educational activity which uncovers a deeper sense and deeper relations through the original objects, direct experience and illustrative means*” (Tilden 2007). It is therefore an “*activity uncovering to visitors something from the beauty and magic, inspiration and spiritual content lying behind everything that a visitor can perceive by his/her senses*” (Tilden 2007). Remains of human economic activities in forests have been subject to mapping on three sites of the Drahanská vrchovina Highland (Czech Republic) since 2020. The goal of this paper is to find out if and in what forms these historical activities reflect in arts, which can be used to enhance the area attractiveness for tourists by means of the interpretation of local heritage. Regarding the limited extent of the paper on the one hand and in fact the unlimited range of verbal, literary and artistic etc. sources, the submitted overview is only indicative and incomplete.

Material and methods

Natural conditions of the territory were assessed (mainly using the forest typological classification system developed by Forest Management Institute - ÚHÚL) (Ústav pro hospodářskou úpravu lesů Brandýs nad Labem 2020) on three sites in the Drahanská vrchovina Highland (Czech Republic) with an area of 5 km² with the following working names: North (mainly includes cadastral areas of Holštejn and Housko), Middle (mainly cadastral areas of Klepačov and Olomučany) and South (mainly the cadastral area of Pozoříce). Archives were used to provide data on the historical methods of using forests, and remains of this use were then verified in the terrain. Information about selected economic activities was sought especially in the regional literature, databases of fine arts etc. in order to reveal whether they are reflected in arts, too.

Results and Discussion

Each of sites is situated in different natural conditions characterized by forest altitudinal vegetation zones (FAVZ). The South site lies at the interface of Beech-Oak (FAVZ 2) and Oak-Beech (FAVZ 3) zones and represents the warmest and driest parts of the territory. The Middle site is characterized by the clear dominance of Oak-Beech (FAVZ 3) and by the significant representation of limestones as well as iron ore deposits in the past. The North site represents the highest altitudes, with the dominant Beech (FAVZ 4) and emerging communities of Fir-Beech (FAVZ 5).

All three localities comprise a number of variously preserved objects and traces of historical human economic activities in forests, which include coppicing (South), lime works (South) and transport of

materials and goods showing in the development of sunken roads and sunken fields (South). In the Middle locality, it was iron ore mining and processing, and charcoal burning which was frequent also in the North locality.

Coppicing is one of the oldest forms of forest management and was predominant in lowlands in the Middle Ages (Szabó et al. 2015). It is not surprising that it is featured in a number of fine art works. Their detailed list was presented by Lacina (Lacina 2016). A beautiful illustration of active coppicing can be seen on the plate of the Prague Astronomical Clock by Josef Mánes, devoted to November (Fig. 3). His father Antonín Mánes then captured a motif of forest edge with adjacent coppice with bizarrely twisted trees in his painting *Landscape with trees and a building* (Fig. 3). Attentive viewer will definitely notice a headed tree in the background, which is another phenomenon closely related to vegetative regeneration of trees by coppice shoots. Although the motif of coppices is relatively abundant in fine arts, we failed to find one that would relate directly to our area of interest. Thus, at least the locality of “Pařeží” (Coppice), situated north of the Brno-Lesná district (approximately between the localities of Middle and South) can remind us of earlier ways of using forests.

All three sites are interwoven with a pattern of sunken roads which are densest in the South. How such a sunken road could have looked like when it was actively used can be seen in the above mentioned painting by Antonín Mánes (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3: left: Josef Mánes – November, right: Antonín Mánes – Landscape with trees and a building

The dense pattern of sunken roads is a conspicuous feature of the territory, which could not have been neglected by artists. Writer Jaroslav Marcha (Marcha 1946) recalls for example the logging of beech halves in a wider area between the Middle and the South, and their transport to Brno. Carriages with heavy loads had to have “*both wheels closed in sharp*”, i.e. firmly attached by chain to the fixed part of the carriage in winter. As the wheels were slipping on the chain, the road was continually sinking.

Basically the whole territory has been affected by the lime industry, which is nicely captured in the local story “*About the drowned lime burner*” (Klvač a Mikulka 2006). It says about farmers from around Lipovec (North) who burned lime and distributed it to a wide area. The way back they made shorter by drinking liquor. Horses knew the way home very well and need not be driven. One day, an exhausted lime burner was going back home through a deep sunken road from Drnovice (near South). His thirsty and tired horses got close to the dreaded swamp called “Žumpy” (Sumps) where they wanted to have a drink. But the carriage weight pressed them into water so quickly that they disappeared in it together with the carriage and the unlucky lime burner. Poet Miroslav Daněk from Drnovice (Daněk 2008) captured the story in verse: “*Coming to wetland along the field path / you see Holy Cross knowing not why / it is no mystery, no nightmare / a lime burner and horses drowned there.*” It is remarkable that nearly an identical story is mentioned also by Jaroslav Marcha (Marcha 1946), only the place of the event is different: “*And a lime burner drove towards Znojmo. He slept in the basket, ate a half of the goose, drank a bottle of wine, horses became thirsty too, and rushed down to the river through a sunken way! The lime burner was sleeping like a log, twenty quintals of lime on the carriage. ... The road to the Dyje river is like a roof, and thus they all invaded there like a plum, the waves just licked and closed above them.*”

Rich and long time exploited iron ore deposits at the Middle site and in its close surroundings were tourist attractions minimally from the beginning of the 19th century (Golec 2014). It is therefore not surprising that many of local iron works were captured by artists of whom let us mention at least František Richter (Fig. 4), or Jakob Alt (Fig. 5). Both of them captured in their painting smelters that do not exist today and used to occur in the Punkva R. valley directly at the Middle site.



Fig. 4: František Richter (1821) – Blast furnaces near Blansko. (Mariánská huť Smelter). Collections of Moravian Gallery in Brno.



Fig. 5: Jakob Alt – Starohrabčec Smelter (Die Altgrafenhütte). Coloured lithograph from album “Blansko und dessen Umgebung”

In the forests of Middle and North sites, a great number of platforms after charcoal heaps have been preserved until these days, on which charcoal was burned in the past. The significance of this phenomenon in the area can be documented by the name of one street in Klepačov “On Charcoal Heap” or by the name of a forest road “At Charcoal Heap” - both in the Middle locality. Charcoal platforms in the wider surrounding of the studied area were described also by Jaroslav Marcha in his novel “Bird bread” (Marcha 1946): “*And on the charcoal heap, the beater points up to the hillside, they found herdsman Týn. Pšajuch killed him. Pity the good boy!*”, or: “*One day, Venci Stolář shot a roe-dee and buried it in the leaves on a charcoal heap.*”

As charcoal burning was generally widely spread in our countries, the activity understandingly very often mirrored in various arts. In relation to the studied area, one has to mention namely the folk literature. Charcoal burners play a decisive role in many versions of the story about an evil stepmother who threw her stepson into the today’s Macocha abbys (between Middle and South) because they found the boy hanging on a tree above the abbys, and rescued him (Buřková-Wanklová et al. 2021). Charcoal burning near Molenburk (North) was described in detail also by Antonín Jirušek (Jirušek 2018). Concluding his treatise, he even adds a part of the song sung by charcoal burners: “*We are black charcoal burners and have to get up early every day. Whether it’s cold or raining, we have to stand up outside, no other way.*”

Conclusion

Historical forms of forest management very often reflect in arts. Even in relatively small localities sized 5 km², representing three different sites of the Drahanská vrchovina Highland, we can find both

material and non-material objects of cultural heritage directly bound to the studied area. These objects are a key component of the tertiary landscape structure, which complete the genius loci in a unique way. Approaches highlighting the local cultural heritage are very useful in enhancing the area attractiveness for tourists. Thus, the preserved objects of human economic activities in the forests become not only historical but also cultural monuments which deserve adequate care and conservation.

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Souhrn

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