

# **SPECIFIC GENIUS LOCI OF ABANDONED SETTLEMENTS IN MORAVIA AND SILESIA – OPPORTUNITY FOR RECREATION IN REMOTE AREAS**

**Hana Vavrouchová, Veronika Peřínková, Tomáš Mašíček**

*Department of Applied and Landscape Ecology, Faculty of AgriSciences, Mendel University in Brno,  
Zemědělská 1, 613 00 Brno, Czechia*

<https://doi.org/10.11118/978-80-7509-831-3-0327>

## **Abstract**

Within the territory of settlements physically disappeared in Moravia and Silesia after the WWII (the database of these localities you can see at [zanikla-sidla.cz](http://zanikla-sidla.cz)), can be observed significant changes in the landscape structure. These trends of changes can be divided into four basic typological groups: 1) afforestation of visually open localities (most often at higher altitudes), 2) change in the structure of the agricultural land with a simultaneous increase in woody vegetation (most often at lower altitudes); 3) preservation of historical landscape structures (rather rare state); and 4) irreversible land use change (usually connected with the mining or water reservoir constructions). Each of these landscape types offers significant potential for tourism development. This potential is supported by specific elements (most often buildings or their ruins) resembling the previous presence of people, and completing the genius loci of the area. The significant objects connected with abandoned settlement are churches, chapels, small sacral buildings and cemeteries. These constructions are preserved within several localities without the regional differences but in the Bruntál region (50° N., 17°24' E) they are more frequent. Efforts to restore these buildings are evident across the localities, and many of these objects fulfill their primary function. Other elements connected with previous human presence are also represented on abandoned settlements' localities, such as stone paths, bridges and very distinctive landscape elements – stone walls.

**Key words:** land use change, cultural heritage, tourism, peripheral areas, renewal of traditions

## **Introduction**

Landscape structure has been constantly evolving. Somewhere the changes are hardly noticeable, somewhere the landscape structure has been overwritten to a completely new appearance. The most significant changes are characteristic for the landscape of fur-flung and peripheral areas – in localities of settlements that perished long ago. Landscape structure in these localities has been determined by depopulation – it is a contemporary wilderness, where we can, however, find traces of former human presence. In this region there is a whole range of places, with which everyday life was connected in the past, such as working in the field, going to school, church sermons... Here we can often come across hardened soil under an unused path, a cross far from the road, an old fruit tree or stone walls in the middle of woods. Today these places are abandoned – only wild societies of plants and animals, spruce monocultures or grazing cattle have become their inhabitants. Nevertheless, also with regard to the history it is necessary to keep reminding these places.

## **Materials and methods**

The area of interest is defined by settlements that physically perished in the region of Moravia and Silesia after World War II. The overview of these settlements is included in an interactive map of perished settlements ([www.zanikla-sidla.cz](http://www.zanikla-sidla.cz)). Trends in the development of landscape structure were interpreted based on aerial survey photos taken in the period from 1930s to 1950s. These treasures capture landscape structure before the human settlement perished. This time section is compared with contemporary state of landscape (based on orthophotomaps dating 2020 and based on field exploration). In the processes of landscape structure changes, we keep finding identical features across localities of perished settlements. Based on the typology of these changes we formulate general trends of landscape structure development in these localities. To illustrate these localities' regional context, the typology is supplemented by specific elements that help create genius loci of perished settlements. Elements that we selected to be presented are church buildings.

## **Results**

Changes of landscape structure in the area of perished settlements in Moravia and Silesia after World War II until the present reflect the trends to afforest localities with higher altitudes and to enlarge land blocks' surface area (land blocks meaning continuous areas of land used for the same, agricultural purpose in this context). Localities of perished settlements also bear more significant memory of

landscape connected with previous presence of people, and with regard to the fact that the majority of these localities are peripheral they also have landscape structure stabilized in the long-term. In the area of perished settlements and nearby landscape we can monitor the following trends in changes of landscape structure:

- Afforestation of localities with open view,
- Change of agricultural land resources structure, and concurrent increase in wood vegetation,
- Preserving historical landscape structures,
- Irreversible change of the use of the area.

Afforestation of localities with open view relates especially to locations with higher altitudes around Jeseník (especially perished settlements in the Jeseník and Šumperk districts. More significant increase in forest areas was mainly caused by natural fusion of non-forest vegetation with original continuous tree ground cover or targeted afforestation (usually spruce monocultures). In the past, land used for agricultural purposes was very typical even for these settlements located in higher altitudes, and it was arable land that made place for forest vegetation or that was replaced by pastures bordered by full-grown vegetation. Although the density of road network decreased substantially in these areas, these changes do not considerably influence landscape permeability. Pastures with fences present a rather significant barrier for people.

Locations at lower altitudes are characterised by prevailing agricultural land with stabilised surface area. There are two types of changes in the structure of agricultural land resources. Firstly, there is a change in the size of medium-sized land blocks, which became significantly larger, nevertheless the land blocks still remain relatively small (e.g. the size of a land block of arable land in the agriculturally used area of Annín grew from 0.36ha in 1946 to 5.48ha in 2020). This change is typical for perished settlements located in lowlands in the district of Jeseník and Bruntál and for municipalities on the Czech-Austrian border. In a more jagged terrain this change is complemented by a transformation of arable land to perennial grass vegetation. This trend is the most evident in locations with higher altitudes of Bruntál district.

More rarely we can see preserving of the historical landscape structure formed by a mosaic of perennial grass cover and scattered wood vegetation copying stone walls and creating an aesthetic network that is clearly visible from the surroundings. These localities can sporadically be also found in the Bruntál region, and in localities with open view in the Jeseník district.

The last type of landscape structure changes is an irreversible loss of original sites. It is an overlay of original populated landscape with another – usually industrial – type of use of the area. In case of the post-war development in the region of Moravia and Silesia it is mostly mining and dam construction.

Localities of the perished settlements have distinct genius loci connected with numerous traces of human presence in the now abandoned landscape. In localities with higher altitude we can, for example, typically find stone walls (Duma et al., 2020). Preservation of landscape structure and historical objects is impacted not only by natural conditions and the fact that the localities have not been resettled, but also by the intensity of building demolition. Across localities we can find ruins of buildings originally used for residential purposes. Other historical buildings in various degree of intactness are frequent, too. These are especially small chapels (well maintained, or only ruins), and other small sacral constructions and cemeteries. Very significant buildings in perished settlements are churches. The pictures below show a selection of buildings adding the final touch to the landscape of perished settlements. In the Czech-Polish borderland in the districts of Jeseník and Šumperk these buildings have been preserved only exceptionally, in the Bruntál region, on the contrary, they are more often. Across localities we can see efforts to restore these objects. These objects can be divided into several groups by the current condition and use:

- 1) Distinct buildings located in woody vegetation not fulfilling their primary function (Fig. 1)
- 2) Buildings maintained and used in the long-term that fulfil their primary function (Fig. 2)
- 3) Smaller buildings in open landscape without primary function (Fig. 3)
- 4) Pious restoration of foundations of a chapel or church (Fig. 4)

Other elements connected with previous human presence are also represented on abandoned settlements' localities, such as stone paths (Fig. 5), bridges (Fig. 6) and very distinctive landscape elements – stone walls (Fig. 7, 8). We can find them mainly on sloping lands at higher altitudes, especially in the Jeseník region. Stone walls can be considered as unique landscape features with enormous importance in biodiversity. Simultaneously, they complete the genius loci of abandoned localities.

Fig. 1: Hutov (Bruntál district)



Fig. 2: Lipňany (Třebíč district)



Fig. 3: Ječmeniště (Znojmo district)

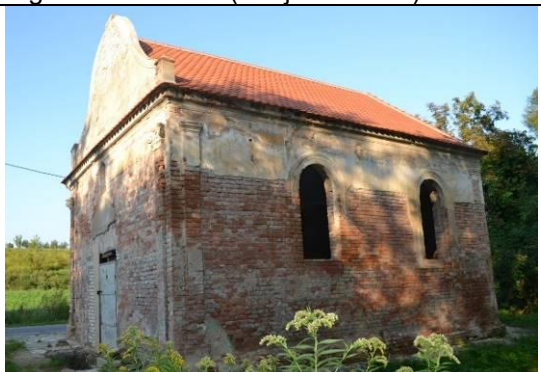


Fig. 4: Štolnava (Šumperk district)



Fig. 5: Studnice (Bruntál district)



Fig. 6: Ztracená Voda (Bruntál district)



Fig. 7: Hřibová (Jeseník district)



Fig. 8: Kamenné (Jeseník district)



## Discussion

The development and new role of perished settlements in Moravia and Silesia corresponds with the situation of perished villages on the Polish side. Latocha (2020) defines several trends in the development of depopulated Polish municipalities in the Czech-Polish borderland (Re-wilding; Stopping/reduction of the secondary succession, Educational paths, eco-museums, information boards; Restoration of sacral landscape; Large-scale tourist infrastructure; Renovations & new housing; Villages for sale). All of these trends can be observed in the Czech territory, too. Nevertheless, the efforts to restore the settlement function are minimal. Land plans embracing localities of perished settlements do not include any designs of areas designated for permanent residence at all. To lower extent there are some plans of new recreational areas.

In the area of perished settlements and in their neighbouring landscape we can very often find functional elements of the Territorial System of Ecological Stability. A number of localities are a part of the NATURA 2000 network or they are located in the protection zone of the Jeseníky Protected Landscape Area.

A big potential for the reconstruction of natural and cultural heritage of localities of perished settlements lies in data from aerial laser scanning (Affek et al., 2021). To identify the potential of the area in detail it is suitable to use the "reviving of villages" concept with the emphasis on economic changes and specifically changes in tourism infrastructure (Latocha et al., 2021). Vaz et al. (2020) recommends to establish development activities in the cross-border regions based on common history including the memory of the inhabitants. This potential is, to a limited extent, offered by the Czech-Polish and Czech-Austrian borderland. Another possible tool is a presentation and records of cultural and natural wealth of perishing localities in the form of a modern chronicle of settlements (more information on the concept to be found at: mko.mendelu.cz; Vavrouchová et. al., 2015).

## Conclusion

Landscape structure in the area of perished settlements has undergone significant changes in comparison to the original conditions. However, at present the new shape of these localities is stabilized. Anthropogenic elements that are so typical for these localities increase the attractiveness of the area. Most often this relates to historical buildings with a various level of maintenance and with different types of use. In general, we can state that localities of perished settlements have a high potential for educational activities in the form of educational trails creation and for the development of tourism.

## References

- Affek, A. N., Wolski, J., Latocha, A., Zachwatowicz, M., & Wieczorek, M. (2021). The use of LiDAR in reconstructing the pre-World War II landscapes of abandoned mountain villages in southern Poland. *Archaeological Prospection*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1002/arp.1846>
- Duma, P., Latocha, A., Łuczak, A. et al. (2020). Stone Walls as a Characteristic Feature of the Cultural Landscape of the Izera Mountains, southwestern Poland. *Histor Archaeol* 24, 22–43. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10761-019-00501-2>
- Latocha, A. (2020). Modern transformation of deserted settlements in the Sudetes Mountains, SW Poland. *GeoScape*. 14, 8. 10.2478/geosc-2020-0008.
- Latocha, A., Szmytkie, R., Sikorski, D., Tomczak, P., Kajdane, K., Miodońska, P. (2021). Reviving villages – a proposal for a concept and identification. A methodological approach. *Geographia Polonica*. 94. 5-27. 10.7163/GPol.0191.
- Vavrouchová, H., Mašíček, T., Šťastná, M., Vaishar, A., Kozlovská, S., Ševelová, M., Lincová, H., Stodolová, V. (2015). Moderní kronika obce - mentální obraz kulturní krajiny ve vnímání místních obyvatel. *Regionální rozvoj mezi teorií a praxí*. 4, 4, ISSN 1805-3246.
- Vaz, D., Lalana Soto, Ch. L. (2020). Landscape and post-rurality in a European borderland. *The Raia Central Ibérica, European Planning Studies*, 28:4, 691-712, DOI: 10.1080/09654313.2019.1632271

## Acknowledgement

This research was realized within the terms of the project titled "Identification and permanent documentation of the cultural, landscape and settlement memory of the municipality - on the example of extinct settlements of Moravia and Silesia" financed by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic under the Program to support applied research and experimental development of national and cultural identity for the 2018–2022 period NAKI (National and Cultural Identity) II, No. DG18P020VV070.



## Souhrn

Na území sídel, která na Moravě a ve Slezsku po druhé světové válce fyzicky zanikla (databázi těchto lokalit si můžete prohlédnout na [zanikla-sidla.cz](http://zanikla-sidla.cz)), lze pozorovat výrazné změny ve struktuře krajiny. Tyto trendy změn lze rozdělit do čtyř základních typologických skupin: 1) zalesnění pohledově otevřených lokalit (nejčastěji ve vyšších nadmořských výškách), 2) změna struktury zemědělské půdy se současným nárůstem dřevinné vegetace (nejčastěji v nižších nadmořských výškách); 3) zachování historických krajinných struktur (spíše ojedinělý stav) a 4) nevratná změna využití území (obvykle spojená s těžbou nebo výstavbou vodních nádrží). Každý z těchto krajinných typů nabízí významný potenciál pro rozvoj cestovního ruchu. Tento potenciál je podpořen specifickými prvky (nejčastěji stavbami nebo jejich ruinami) připomínajícími dřívější přítomnost lidí a dotvářejícími *genius loci* oblasti. Významnými objekty spojenými s opuštěným osídlením jsou kostely, kaple, drobné sakrální stavby a hřbitovy. Tyto stavby jsou zachovány v rámci několika lokalit bez regionálních rozdílů, ale na Bruntálsku (50° s. š., 17°24' v. d.) jsou častější. Snahy o obnovu těchto staveb jsou patrné napříč lokalitami a mnohé z těchto objektů plní svou primární funkci. Na lokalitách opuštěných sídel jsou zastoupeny i další prvky spojené s dřívější přítomností člověka, jako jsou kamenné cesty, mosty a velmi výrazné krajinné prvky - kamenné zídky.

## Contact

Ing. Hana Vavrouchová, Ph.D.

E-mail: [hana.vavrouchova@mendelu.cz](mailto:hana.vavrouchova@mendelu.cz)

Open Access. This article is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, CC-BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

