

UTILIZATION OF LANDSCAPE AND CULTURAL VALUES IN THE STRATEGY OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE FOOTHILLS OF THE RYCHLEBSKÉ MOUNTAINS

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Abstract

The foothills of the Rychlebské Mountains, together with the rest of the Jeseník district, are the scene of radical socio-economic changes which, after the end of World War II, shaped the region by expelling most of the original German population. After the suppression of economic activity of the population, which transformed the original forested form of the landscape into the agricultural and industrial stronghold of the First Republic, tangible and intangible heritage remained in the landscape referring to important milestones of our state, which, thanks to this article, will not be forgotten. In recent years, this area has met with increased interest from tourists. The aim of the article is to point out the forgotten cultural values associated with the defunct settlements and its original inhabitants. Against this background, a tourism development strategy can be built, which will help the distribution of tourist destinations in a wider area of interest and at the same time offer the potential for everyday relaxation and education.

Key words: Sudetenland, defunct settlements, changes in the cultural landscape, settlement Zastávka, Jeseník region

Introduction

The Rychlebské Mountains (Polish – Góry Złote, German – Reichensteiner Gebirge) is a small mountain range of an area of 276 km² in the Javorník Promontory, in the north-west area of the Jeseník District, on the border with Poland. It is not just the character of the local nature, which remains unaffected by developed tourism, that is a reason for visiting and holidaying in this north-east corner of the Czech Republic, but also the cultural-historic legacy of the original German settlements, as represented by the extinct settlement of Zastávka (German – Stillstand) for example. This settlement met the same fate as many others in this region and can be used as an example to remind ourselves of the troubled history of the entire region and its impact on today's world.

In order to understand the reason for the dynamic development of the Jeseník Region (and likewise the remainder of the so-called "Sudetenland" – the region in today's Czech Republic with a predominantly German population from the mediaeval ages until 1945 – 1947, usually border areas), we have to travel back to the 13th century, when colonisation of the foothill regions of the Jeseník and Rychlebské mountains was instigated by the bishops of Vratislavice (Macháček, 2011). Over the course of history, these settlers, who were mostly of German origin, transformed a landscape of mixed forests into an economically flourishing area, the so-called "Wealthy Sudetenland" (an area covering the north-west and north-east borders of the Czech Republic).

Rising nationalistic tendencies resulted in the Sudetenland separating from the Czechoslovak Republic in 1938, when the protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was created, and joining the Third Reich (Knopp, 2002). After Nazi Germany was defeated, nationalist tendencies turned against the Germans, who, with a few exceptions, were forced to leave Czechoslovakia. Nearly three million of the Germans living in this region met this fate. The Jeseník Region, specifically, had a population of just under 72 thousand in 1930, only 41 thousand remained at the beginning of the new millennium (Macháček, 2011).

There are several reasons why the region deteriorated so rapidly during the nineteen fifties and has not yet recovered. The main factor was the reduced population, which was supposed to be partially compensated by the arrival of Czechs and ethnic minorities. However, the newly settled inhabitants had no motivation to remain in the area. Life in border settlements was much harder than in the interior of the country. The difficult local living conditions were tolerable for residents while they were able to work and live on their land. However, this connection to the land was forcibly cut by communist collectivisation in the nineteen fifties. This meant that the Rychlebské Mountains were nearly depopulated after one hundred years. This ended a century of industrial development of the Jeseník Region, which established itself as an economically prosperous Czechoslovak stronghold in the second half of the 19th century thanks to Adolf Rayman's enterprises. His son Adolf integrated other successful companies by establishing the Regenhart & Rayman enterprise. This world-renowned

company exported linen cloth to West Europe and America and employed approximately 1500 people in the Jeseník Region. The subsidiary Moravolen was established after nationalisation, and this company was terminated when the communist era ended. The kaolin quarry with attached kaolin processing plant in Vidnava met a similar fate. This company employed 3,000 people from the second half of the 19th century. During prosperous times the company also exported products and material throughout Europe (Zajonc, 2015). In the second half of the 20th century, we were witnesses to the sad transformation of a prosperous stronghold of the First Republic into a district with a high unemployment rate (the highest in the Czech Republic in 2009), with a limited job market and below-average wages.

Another element that steadfastly remained in the region throughout centuries of adversity and was effectively removed in the second half of the 20th century was people's connection to the place they lived in. Their emotion was reflected in a personal connection to the soil and their property, respect towards the work carried out by their forefathers and the desire to have a home in the Rychlebské Mountains. This desire was manifested for example in the Tančírna (Dancing House) building in Račí údolí, where inhabitants from Javorník and the surrounding area came to enjoy some culture from 1907 until the end of the 2nd World War (Brachtlová, 2005). Towards the end of the 19th century, tourism began developing in the region hand-in-hand with the cultural element. The Moravian Silesian Sudetenland Mountain Association, which was established in 1881, is credited with laying the foundations of today's hiking routes in Hrubý Jeseník and the Rychlebské Mountains, as well as building hiking chalets (the oldest is called Švýcárna and dates from 1829) or the iconic Zlatý Chlum observation tower above Jeseník, which dates from 1899 (Kovalčík, 2010).

Tančírna, along with most landscape elements and entire villages in the Jeseník Region, were abandoned when their founders left in the second half of the 20th century and many structures disappeared completely. This trend is common practically throughout the Sudetenland area. However, an initiative to develop the recreational and educational potential that permeates this region, originated in the Jeseník Region at the beginning of the 21st century. The objective of this initiative is to present the history of the Jeseník Region as a potential tool for re-discovering a connection to the place you live in. This connection is crucial for maintaining many isolated locations, which are facing the same issues as the Jeseník Region in today's globalised world, which lead to the outflow of the young generation, the group of people with the greatest potential to develop these areas. This is why it has never been more important to seek and find answers to the question of why people should live in the border areas and endeavour to maintain and develop values generated by a tumultuous historic development that has no counterpart in the interior. The activities of Hnutí Brontosaurus in the abandoned village of Zastávka, development of which our paper will focus on, can be considered the ideal platform for the aforementioned dialogue.

Materials and methods

Historical maps documenting development of the settlement, its surrounding area and changes to the landscape over just under the last 200 years, included geo-referenced imperial prints from the stable cadastre of Moravia and Silesia from 1836 (Archives of the Central Archive of Surveying and Cadastre, www.cuzk.cz) and aerial survey images from 1953 and 1964 (VGHMÚř Dobruška, © MO ČR). The current appearance of the landscape was provided by an orthophotomap (© ČÚZK, www.cuzk.cz) available via the WMS viewing service. The vector layer showing the cadastral area of the village of Uhelná from the cadastral map data file (© ČÚZK, services.cuzk.cz) was used for the context of administrative integration. ArcGIS Desktop software was used to connect coordinates to the background data and prepare map documents.

Results and Discussion

It is evident from the map documents (Fig. 1) that the first half of the 19th century was a period of prosperity for Zastávka. The settlement had a permanent population of 71 in 1836. This number fell to just under 40 in the first half of the 20th century. In 1946, after the original German inhabitants had been displaced, a failed attempt was made to restore the settlement and the settlement was officially shut-down in 1963. Of the original 12 buildings in 1836, only the foundations and the ruins of several buildings remained at the beginning of the new millennium (Macháček, 2011).



Fig. 1: Zastávka and its surrounding area in 1836, 1953, 1964 and 2020

Zastávka would have shared the fate of extinction and obscurity with another 13 settlements in the Jeseník District, if Hnutí Brontosaurus had not taken it under its wing at the beginning of the 21st century. Volunteers from this organisation cleaned up the area of the settlement and established facilities for recreational-educational events here over the last 15 years, as we can see on the aerial image of the detail of part of Zastávka (Fig. 2). These events are intended to provide a platform for people who are interested in spending their free time at the modest facilities of Zastávka, where they can work to establish and maintain the permanently sustainable development of this site. The remainder of the time is filled with lectures on environmental topics, outings, or team-building events focusing on cooperation between the participants and development of the team itself. By appropriately interpreting development of the concept of the activities of Hnutí Brontosaurus, it is possible to integrate the educational and recreational activities of the professional and lay public and development of tourism in the Jeseník Region.



Fig. 2: Detail of part of the settlement now used by Hnutí Brontosaurus (1953, 2020)

However, the aforementioned model is applicable to any location offering added value in the form of the historic or landscape aspect. The initiative to use these locations as a platform for holding recreational and educational events, which would interest the general public in spending leisure time in a unique natural environment (the Rychlebské Mountains for example), with an educational element, is then crucial in these areas. The professional public would be interested in an alternative environment for holding conferences on topics connected to the venue. However, the content should include the return to the values that accompanied the rise and prosperity of these isolated locations, such as the Rychlebské Mountains, in some form. The remainder of the content depends on the target group of participants. EU funding calls, focusing on development of rural areas and education, can be used to establish new facilities.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to specify the relationship between historic events in the Jeseník Region and the current issue of the geographically uneven development of the society of western countries. A society whose population is concentrated in urbanised areas, may be more effective, but this effectiveness comes at the price of uneven distribution of tangible and intellectual capital, which concentrates work and leisure opportunities into agglomerations with a high population density through positive feedback, at the cost of stagnation of the population in the rest of the country. This phenomenon can be considered the main catalyst for the outflow of the younger generation from rural areas, with the subsequent reduction of the competitiveness of these areas.

The topic of developing tourism in isolated locations and potentially creating the motivation to live in these locations and establish the local economy is a set of complex issues, the solution to which cannot be found in a single specific event or project. It is therefore all the more important to ask what specific actions could contribute to resolving this issue and to initiate a dialogue on this topic with the general public and the professional public. Multi-day stays in isolated locations, for instance in the Rychlebské Mountains, combining recreational and educational elements with support of development of tourism at the location these are held, is a suitable platform for this dialogue.

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Souhrn

Rychlebské hory prošly v posledním tisíciletí dramatickým vývojem. Z neobydlené lesnaté části vratislavského biskupství se v rámci procesu velké kolonizace stala prosperující část Zemí Koruny české a později První republiky. Z důvodu převažující části německého obyvatelstva však po konci 2. světové války byla oblast vysídlena a s jeho obyvateli odešla z kraje iniciativa zde budovat, inovovat a rozvíjet, která byla odjakživa závislá na vztahu lidí k místu, kde žijí. Řada drobných sídel v pohraničí zcela zanikla a ty zbývající se z důvodu vysokého průměrného věku bude zejména v budoucnosti potýkat s nedostatkem produktivního obyvatelstva. V hledání způsobu, jakým odlehlé lokality udělat znovu atraktivní pro mladou generaci, nám může pomoci příklad zaniklé osady Zastávka, v jejímž zázemí Hnutí Brontosaurus realizuje rekreačně-osvětové akce. Jejich přenos na nové lokality se jeví jako vhodný nástroj podpory konkurenceschopnosti pohraničních regionů a rozvoje místního cestovního ruchu s pozitivním dopadem na společnost jako celek.

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