

THE INFLUENCE OF TOURIST INFORMATION MATERIALS ON THE EMERGENCE OF OVERTOURISM

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Abstract

Tourist information materials, such as leaflets, brochures, maps, guides and web presentations, significantly influence people's decisions about the form of their future or current vacation. Unfortunately, often the very form of passing on information about potential tourist destinations in the region encourages the tourist to visit especially the most famous tourist destinations, which can then suffer from the negative effects of mass tourism. On the contrary, lesser-known tourist destinations, which would welcome an increase in attendance, are often presented in these materials as of secondary importance. How is this possible when many localities are currently struggling with the negative effects of overtourism and at the same time most Czech rural regions live in long-term undertourism? The article presents the results of experimental research, in which the perception of tourist information materials was analyzed. The results of the research point out the main mistakes that the creators of these materials commonly make and thus support the uneven tourist development of the area. Furthermore, examples of good practice that act as a prevention of overtourism and potentially develop the whole region and not only selected highlights are presented.

Key words: Mass tourism, sustainable tourism, destination marketing, human-information interaction, overtourism prevention

Introduction

Uneven tourism development is a phenomenon that has worldwide validity. While some of the most popular sites suffer from overburdening, most other regions would rather welcome more tourists to them. This imbalance is largely caused by tourist information materials, from which the future tourist learns about the offer in the selected region. Various forms of tourist information influence people when choosing a destination (web presentations, social networks, book guides, etc.) and when staying in it (leaflets, brochures, maps, advertisements, etc.). If the information contained in them were presented in an appropriate form, they could contribute to reducing differences in destination traffic. Unfortunately, the opposite is true. Most tourist information materials in their form support the increase of disparities and the emergence of overtourism in the most visited localities.

This article presents the results of experimental research, which took place in 2021 on the territory of the Bohemian Paradise UNESCO Global Geopark, in which the reactions of people to various designs of tourist information materials were investigated. These results are supplemented by a content analysis of book guides focused on the tourist regions of Bohemian Paradise, the Giant Mountains and the Jizera Mountains.

Material and methods

The first method used is a content analysis of book guides for the three tourist regions mentioned above. All available guides found in the collection of the Regional Scientific Library in Liberec and the National Library in Prague were analyzed. There were a total of 73 of them, the oldest of which dates from the 1920s (Kafka's illustrated guide to the Czech Kingdom), the most recent was from 2021. The analysis monitored two key indicators: what is the geographical scope of the guide (what area it covers) and what space is devoted to the most famous tourist destinations (share of the total scope).

The second method used is an experiment in which randomly selected respondents (N = 100) evaluated existing and fictitious tourist information materials (leaflets, brochures and maps) and told interviewers which tourist destinations they were interested in and would like to visit based on these materials. The existing materials were selected from the entire territory of the Czech Republic, with emphasis on various forms and content of materials. Fictitious materials can be imagined as various templates for the distribution of information on the leaflet, where promotional material of a non-existent region was created using artificially created texts and random photos. These fictitious materials were created to verify the knowledge gained by analyzing real tourist materials and to clean them of the unwanted effects of knowledge of the presented regions. The design of the experiment is presented in Figure 1.

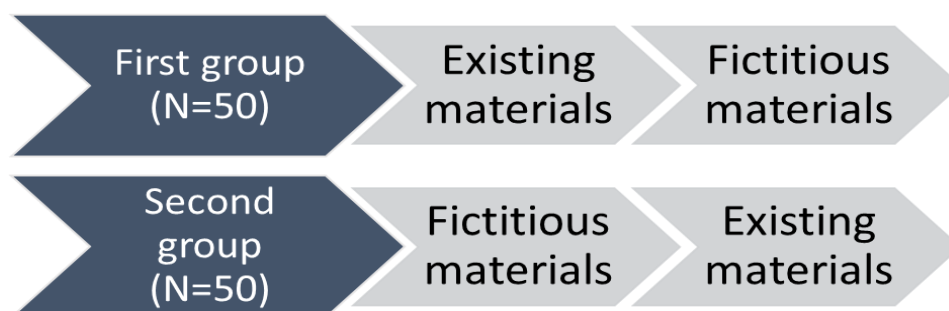


Fig. 1: Design of experimental verification of the influence of tourist information materials on the reader's preferences.

Results

The main results of the content analysis of book tourist guides are shown in Table 1. The analysis identified three phases of the development of the content of these books, each of which is the result of a different period of tourism development in the Czech Republic. The first phase reflects the timid beginnings of tourism, when there were only a small number of guides on offer and did not cover the entire territory of the Czech Republic. This corresponds to the relatively wide territorial scope covered by these guides. Attention is paid to the whole area in roughly the same way, only the most important tourist destinations are supplemented by other materials. However, this concept of the guide does not only lead to visit the most famous places, but also supports travel in general.

Tab. 1: Three phases of content development of book tourist guides.

	First phase	Second phase	Third phase
Duration	1920s - 1950s	1960s - 1980s	1990s - 2020s
Characteristics	Very wide delimitation of the tourist region, very even coverage of the territory.	Focus on smaller areas, more detailed description of major destinations.	Content commercialization, splitting into mainstream guides and guides for local readers.
Guide example	Kafka (1926)	Pacovský (1970)	Koláček (2015), Řeháček & Pikous (2019)

The second phase reflects the development of tourism during the communist era, when future top locations are already clearly profiled, but guides are not created on a commercial basis. During this period, it can be seen that the guides pay more attention to more well-known localities, cover smaller areas and less interesting regions disappear completely.

The third phase is a reflection of tourism as a mass phenomenon and a guide as a commercial product. The focus of the guides becomes twofold: on the one hand, they are short guides aimed at visitors from other regions who want to get to know the most famous sites; then guides to local audiences or specific topics (hobbies) that describe the whole region in detail. The mainstream guides then praise the most famous sites, which is why overtourism takes place there. Most of the photos come from the most famous locations, they are given more space in the description, more suggested routes lead to them, etc. Book guides must take in the bookstore, so the more photos of famous places, the more the customer buys them. Conversely, guides aimed at local audiences (e.g. Řeháček & Pikous 2019) these phenomena do not occur, but the emphasis is on the overall impression of the region, its natural beauty, history, genius loci, etc. This type of book guide can be an example of how to promote the region without the risk of overtourism.

The analysis of tourist information materials yielded similar results. The materials contain a number of elements that encourage readers to visit certain sites, usually the most famous. The following were identified as elements that could influence the reader's opinion: (a) visual attractiveness of photos, (b) space dedicated to the destination on the leaflet, (c) order in which the destinations are presented, (d) numbering, (e) superlatives in the description, (f) the position of the description on the leaflet. An example of a leaflet that clearly leads to a visit to three selected destinations is shown in Fig. 2. A

space larger than the rest of the region is devoted to the three selected rock towns. Although we will also read about other rock towns in the leaflet, their promotion seems more like a mention of something that is not so interesting and worth a visit.

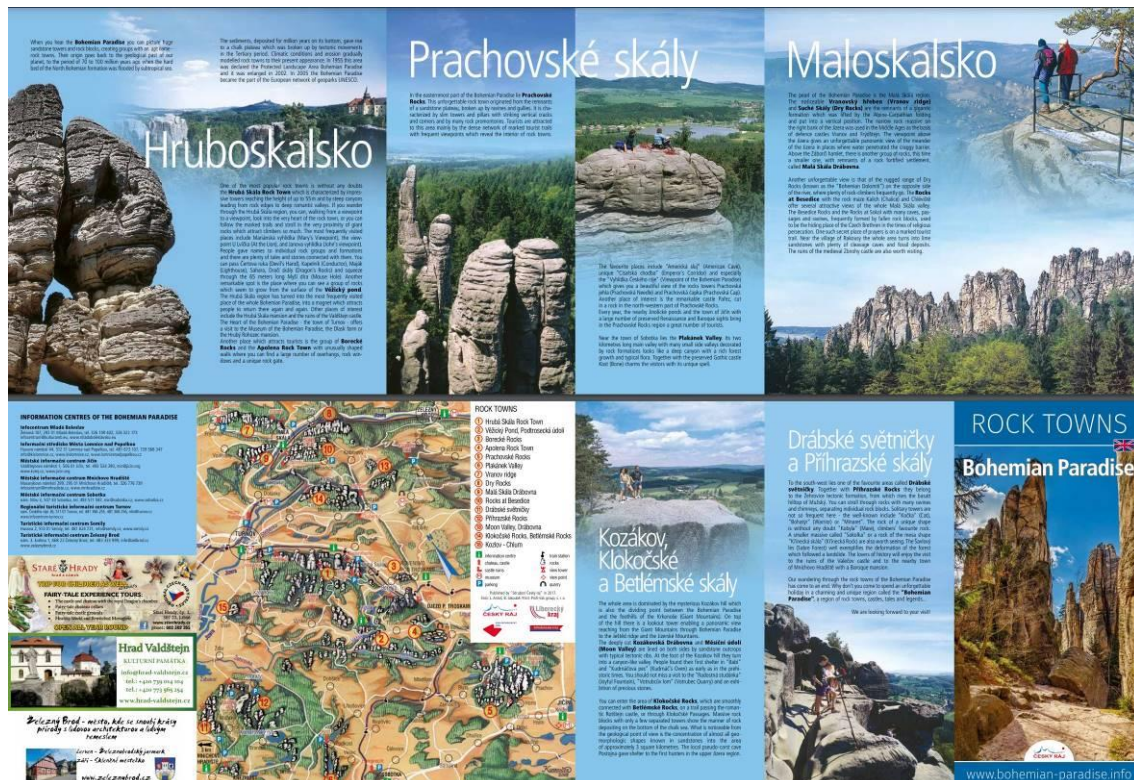


Fig. 2: An example of a leaflet promoting “rock towns” in the Bohemian Paradise, front and back side.
Source: Bohemian Paradise Association, publicly available.

So what should a leaflet look like that provides a balanced information about the various points of interest in the region? First of all, all localities should be given about the same amount of space, and each locality should have about the same attractive and large photo. Furthermore, localities should not be numbered and sorted according to the presumed importance, but, for example, according to alphabetical order, position on the map or other random element. No superlatives should appear in the description, or superlatives should be listed for all sites. It is also advisable to use a layout other than the classic one (e.g. presentation of locations in a circle around the map) in order to disrupt the normal reading order of the text (from left to right, from top to bottom). Some leaflets in the research did not contain the most famous sites at all. They are the result of a recent trend in which the regions are trying to do so-called demarketing (see Hall & Wood 2021, Gulsen et al. 2021, Drugova, Kim & Jakus 2021) in order to avoid overtourism in these localities. However, research has shown that visitors do not rate these materials very positively or that they are not very suitable for them, because they do not find links to top sites that they know from other sources. When a visitor does not find what he expects in the material, he feels deceived or does not consider the material to be good. It is therefore better to promote all destinations in a balanced way than to promote only lesser-known locations.

Discussion and Conclusion

Tourists' expectations regarding the experiences associated with their visit to the region are largely influenced by the tourist information materials they encounter. Whether it's book guides, various leaflets, brochures and maps, or presentations on websites and social networks, they can all significantly influence a visitor's decision on which destination to visit. Unfortunately, it is a sad fact that most tourist materials inform about attractions in the regions in an unbalanced way, devoting significantly more space and attention to the most famous localities. This approach then leads to overtourism in the most visited destinations, while in the rest of the region there are often very few tourists.

The article briefly presents the conclusions of the research conducted in 2021. These results are consistent with the findings of other marketing research from other fields (e.g. Huddleston et al. 2015,

Ziliani & Ieva 2015). The consequences of unbalanced promotion in the form of polarization of tourism are proved by studies dealing with overtourism in rural areas (Vegnuti 2020, Drápela 2021, Drápela et al. 2021). However, it has not yet been satisfactorily demonstrated that balanced promotion of the regions will alleviate the negative effects of overtourism in the most visited localities. Future research will have to prove that.

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Souhrn

Turistické informační materiály, jako jsou letáky, brožury, mapy, průvodci a webové prezentace, výrazně ovlivňují rozhodování lidí o podobě jejich budoucí či aktuální dovolené. Bohužel často samotná forma předávání informací o potenciálních turistických cílech v regionu vybízí turistu k návštěvě zejména těch nejznámějších turistických cílů, které pak mohou trpět negativními dopady overturismu. Naopak méně známé turistické cíle, které by zvýšení návštěvnosti uvítaly, jsou v těchto materiálech často prezentovány jako druhořadé. Jak je to možné, když se řada lokalit v současnosti potýká s negativními dopady masového turismu a zároveň většina českých venkovských regionů zažívá stav permanentního underturismu? Článek prezentuje výsledky experimentálního výzkumu, ve kterém bylo analyzováno vnímání turistických informačních materiálů. Výsledky výzkumu poukazují na hlavní chyby, kterých se tvůrci těchto materiálů běžně dopouštějí a podporují tak nerovnoměrný turistický rozvoj oblastí. Dále jsou uvedeny příklady dobré praxe, které působí jako prevence nadměrné turistiky a potenciálně rozvíjejí celý region a ne pouze vybrané zajímavosti.

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