

STRENGTHS AND THREATS OF TOURISM IN THE HRANICE KARST

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<https://doi.org/10.11118/978-80-7509-963-1-0292>

Abstract

The Hranice Karst is a globally unique area with many natural and cultural-historical characteristics. However, it should be pointed out that the potential of these values is largely untapped. The main problem is the need for a coordinated communication strategy for all stakeholders and a sustainable regional development plan. The orientation towards tourism is very promising and desirable. However, there needs to be more adequate infrastructure and services for tourists (and residents) based on sustainability and protective facilities. Territorial values are managed without meaningful linkages, and their management can often be considered inadequate. The most attractive site, the Hranice Abyss (the deepest flooded abyss in the world), was monitored in 2022 to provide an overview of visitor numbers and profiles. This site may be overloaded in the future. The monitoring confirmed the site's tourist attraction and transit character (only a minimum of visitors stay longer in the area; there needs to be more information about the area and a more comprehensive range of services). This text summarizes the points for a management plan to diversify the tourist offer, sustainable recreation and local benefits.

Keywords: sustainability, local landscape values, world unique, protection vs. development

Introduction

Sustainability in tourism is already a familiar concept. However, it still needs to be determined whether sustainability is always correctly interpreted. The site's broader context needs to be considered, and a fair balance between the environmental, social and economic pillars needs to be found (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018). Taking environmental and social dimensions into consideration when prioritizing growth is not enough. Sustainability also has a local rather than a global context. However, it is still impossible to correctly evaluate sustainability tourism trends at the local level (Alfaro Navarro et al., 2020). One of the indicators can be the involvement of the local community in decision-making on activities shaping sustainable tourism. The combination of participatory regional development planning with other tools (e.g. multi-criteria analysis) can be understood as a tool for objectifying and rationalizing the decision-making process. The plan co-proposed and approved by the residents remains the most important (Sisto et al., 2022). Numerous authors point out the advantages of a participatory approach in planning sustainable tourism (e.g. Stacchini et al., 2022). A well-known effect is the complex development of the territory beyond the scope of the tourism sector and significant public acceptance of the spatial changes (Zachrisson et al., 2021). In this context, it is essential to mention the phase of participatory monitoring of the fulfilment of the goals (Brown, 2022), the phase following the public planning process. The goal of sustainable tourism is the creation of a *smart destination*, which enables the development of a sufficient and gentle offer of services, experiences and tourist infrastructure, minimally burdening the environment and, at the same time, integrating the visitor into the social context of residents (Cerdá-Mansilla, 2024). The location must be attractive not only for the visitor but also for the residents. This approach can also relieve over-touristy areas (Fray and Briviba, 2021) and create new regional attractions. It is desirable to apply this concept to the unique and vulnerable small-scale area of the Hranice Karst (49.5322767N, 17.7506514E). This paper is aimed at this study area, and the text below briefly describes the natural and cultural context.

Material and methods

Expert and participative identification of thematic and spatial conflicts was carried out. The expert analysis was based on a review of local and regional strategic documentation and a field survey. For participative identification of problems and possibilities for further development, the following activities were provided in 2022:

- interviews with selected interested parties/stakeholders (representatives of Local Government from three different villages, farmer, forester and cave manager),
- online questionnaire survey among the inhabitants of the Hranice Karst (150 inhabitants),

- a survey among tourists (colonnade in Teplice nad Bečvou and Information point Hranice Abyss – a total of 335 respondents).

The researched areas in the participative part were identical: identification of spatial conflicts, possibilities for improving spatial management, and residents' attitudes to tourism development.

Most of the Hranice Karst area is agricultural land with a low proportion of greenery. Compared to the national average, the total area of forests is slightly lower and dispersed. These forests are often part of a special nature reserve (small-scale).

The karst phenomena are linked to a specific limestone base, but numerous are not documented. The recorded karst phenomena have the character of caves and sinkholes. Among the most significant are the Hranice Abyss and the Zbrašov Aragonite Caves. Healing mineral waters and Spa (Teplice nad Bečvou) are typical for the area. Hranice Karst is geomorphologically highly diversified. There are active and closed quarries in the area. Reclamation was mostly carried out in closed quarries. Bečva River and the surroundings enhance the recreational potential. The cycle path that passes through this area is a significant tourist attraction.

Cultural and historical values can be categorized into point, spatial, and line elements, and existing and defunct structures can be distinguished. Architectural values of a point character prevail, with a significant concentration in the built-up part of the spa town of Teplice nad Bečvou. Those include public buildings (train station, hotels) and private and industrial buildings. Other cultural monuments are, for example, the pavilions of mineral springs in the spa, the ruins of the castle, or the spa park.

The paper presents the results of an expert and participatory analysis of Hranice Karst's tourism potential. Weak points are identified, and recommendations are formulated to increase the development potential.

Results

The following conflicts and recommendations emerged from the meeting with **selected stakeholders**:

- The unsuitable surroundings of the Hranice Abyss (HA) and the necessity of trail revitalization (e.g., improvement of trail drainage and tourist infrastructure).
- The role of the Information point is insufficient, and the necessary modernization of services and equipment is lacking.
- A request to increase tourist attractiveness (e.g., constructing an observation tower in Teplice nad Bečvou is planned) and develop a comprehensive (unified) value management plan. The goal is to keep visitors in the region and change the location's transit character.
- The forest manager draws attention to the HA's excessive tourist attendance and the significant conflict between tourism and nature conservation.

Residents see conflict areas mainly around the Bečva River because of an enormous traffic burden. The spa of Teplice nad Bečvou was also noted. Problems in this context are primarily influenced by the limited role of the spa in the cultural and social life of the wider region. Quarries are also perceived as a burden (mainly due to their further expansion). Most of the spatial conflicts are located in the built-up area, and a minimum of problems were identified in the open landscape. Transport and mining are seen as the most significant problems in the area. Residents lack places to sit along the roads, better permeability of the landscape, and a higher share of greenery in built-up areas and open agricultural landscapes. Residents spoke very positively about the role of tourism, and they support tourist development.

Tourists most often lacked a restaurant or snack stand, tourist infrastructure (benches, information signs, cyclists' infrastructure), educational trails, and overall connectivity of the location, including better information about the region's values, interesting localities, and services. Most respondents spent one day in the locality and continued to other attractions outside the region.

Experts identifying conflicts and development potential – according to the master plans, the land grab will be expanded (residential buildings, expanded areas of mines). This issue is connected with landscape permeability reduction and the negative fragmentation effect strengthened by the parallel traffic constructions of national and international lines. These structures intersect with large mammals' migration corridors, creating obstacles to their natural movement between the Beskydy and Jeseníky Mountains. The most significant problem of day recreation is the transport corridor leading through the Bečva Valley – the most valuable part of the study area. It is both an obstacle to space in movement and a significant noise source. Active limestone quarries are also a source of noise and pollution. However, the fragmented management of values significantly reduces development/tourist potential, and the problem is also poor values promotion and care. There is a fundamental lack of a conceptual plan and cooperation within the region and beyond. The potential for improvement of green infrastructure is also huge. Thus, local governments should focus on adapting the landscape to climate change. A side effect of these activities is the spontaneous growth of tourist potential.

Discussion and conclusion

The vast diversity of natural and cultural values determines the recreation potential of the Hranice Karst. However, the potential is limited in selected cases mainly due to insufficient maintenance and subsequent care (primarily cultural values associated with the spa area). Another problem is the non-conceptual approach to the visitors' management, which is related to the overloading of the most attractive locations (especially Hranice Abyss) and the transit character acceleration (most visitors do not plan to stay more than one day). This is a further important aspect: to find a balance between tourism management (one-day and multi-day tourist visits) and to increase the quality of everyday recreation (for the residents). The overall goal of measures of the recreational potential enhancement should be the tourist attractiveness diversification (with joint management plan) and the distribution of visitors in time and space (preventing over-tourism in vulnerable places and delaying day-trippers), the connection of cultural and natural values and the improvement of the overall spatial permeability (in the form of marked educational circuits and connecting unmarked routes into circuits) and the revitalization of neglected or degraded areas with high recreational potential (e.g. the post-mining areas and selected locations in the spa). The transition to a multi-day visit can be supported primarily by the spa – the spa management should participate more actively in regional development.

However, to propose quality tourism management, examining the area in detail and mapping all the values is necessary (Valjarević et al., 2017). This mapping could help diversify tourist destinations and limit the site's transit character. An exciting concept for encouraging repeat visits is the so-called tourscape (Torres-Moraga, 2024), which is based on identified and inspiring sustainability.

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Acknowledgement

The research was financially supported by the Gregor Johann Mendel Grant Agency of the Mendel University in Brno, project Landscape in Whole and Landscape in Detail – an Interdisciplinary Research of the Hranice Karst.

Souhrn

Hranický kras je celosvětově unikátní oblastí se značnou rozmanitostí přírodních a kulturně-historických hodnot. Lze zde však identifikovat četné atraktivity, jejichž potenciál je limitován nedostatečnou údržbou a následnou péčí. Udržitelný cestovní ruch založený na koncepčním přístupu a účinné komunikaci všech zúčastněných stran je zde velmi žádoucí a perspektivní.

Příspěvek prezentuje výsledky expertní a participativní analýzy potenciálu tohoto území a shrnuje doporučení pro rozvoj šetrného cestovního ruchu. Expertní analýza vycházela z rešerše lokálních a regionálních strategických dokumentací a z terénního průzkumu. Za účelem participativní identifikace konfliktů (tematických i prostorových) byla v průběhu roku 2022 provedena anketa mezi turisty, dále byly vedeny rozhovory s vybranými stakeholdery a proběhlo online dotazníkové šetření mezi místními obyvateli. Okruhy zjišťované v rámci těchto jednotlivých aktivit byly totožné: identifikace problémových lokalit; možnosti zlepšení managementu hodnot území, u residentů také postoje k rozvoji cestovního ruchu.

Na základě výše uvedených zjištění lze formulovat konkrétní doporučení. Souhrnným cílem *opatření zvyšujících rekreační potenciál* území by měla být diverzifikace turistických atraktivit a rozložení návštěvníků v čase a prostoru, propojení kulturních a přírodních hodnot jednotným managementem a zlepšení celkové prostupnosti území.

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