Cultural Tourism as an Important Tool of Sustainable Development in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: - Sightseeing, museum, gallery, festival visits, and other cultural and ethnographic travelling are more and more popular activities. That results in an increased number of tourists in given destinations. The aim of the paper is to define cultural tourism and characterize its role in regional development in the Czech Republic. Since cultural heritage has huge impact on local as well as regional identity, it is an important factor for the development and resolving contemporary problems of Czech rural areas.

Key-Words: - Cultural Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Cultural Potential, Sustainable Development, Heritage Trail.

1 Introduction
A healthy and quality environment represents a fundamental condition for the development of tourism, one of the most important socioeconomic and cultural phenomena of our age. Tourism can facilitate such development as stabilizes the character and functions of a landscape, reinforces cultural identity and social bonds of a local community and positively influences local economy.

On the other hand, tourism can also be the cause of spatial, qualitative and social degradation of an area or amplify such degradation. That often results in the decrease of biological, socio-cultural or economic diversity. It is therefore important to develop such forms of tourism as respect the principles of sustainability, socioeconomically (i.e., employment, income, preservation of traditions) and ecologically (protection of nature, landscape). Cultural tourism, which can constitute a significant element of development of economically underdeveloped areas, including rural regions, is one of such forms.

2 Theoretical Framework of Cultural Tourism
2.1 Rural areas and problems of their development
In many countries rural regions represent underdeveloped areas facing numerous hardships. In the Czech Republic, rural regions also used to be neglected areas, characterized by a difficult situation of Czech agrarians, rapidly increasing unemployment, lack of finance, and insufficient legislature that could provide the possibility to invest in the development of business and job creation [9]. Upon entering the European Union the situation has changed. All member states of the EU aim to increase the living standards of rural areas’ inhabitants, to eliminate or at least attenuate regional disparities, to preserve the viability of rural space, population, and landscape [10].

The approaches to the development of rural areas and their definition represent a widely discussed matter in social sciences, and their origins can be dated back into the 19th century, to the concept of rural-urban dichotomy and continuum, elaborated on in 1929 by Sorokin and Zimmermann in “Principles of Rural Urban Sociology”. The authors present more than 200 indicators and describe the differences between rural regions and cities [20]. Their work has been elaborated on by Pahl who shows that the attempts to clearly and strictly delimit rural space prove rather problematic [13]. McDonagh, who presents Halfacree’s two conventional approaches to delimitation of rural areas – approach based on descriptive (i.e., observable and measurable) variables, and observation of various socio-cultural characteristics in relation to people’s environment – may also be cited [7].

To delimit rural space we can use various criteria, from the elementary through some more complicated economic marks to complexes of more
factors, which Perlín used to delimit various types of rural areas in the Czech Republic. On the basis of historical, social, economic and physical-geographical criteria the author identifies six basic types of rural population: a suburban zone, rural regions in rich agricultural areas, north (rich) Sudetenland, south (poor) Sudetenland, inland peripheries and Moravian-Slovakian borderland. These types are characteristic by their historical development, and also because of their socio-economical position and position in the system of population [15].

The indicators used for delimitation of rural space have both advantages and disadvantages; mostly they reduce their practical applicability, however. In the Czech Republic, the criterion of number of inhabitants is most frequently used. According to this criterion, a municipality is considered rural if there are less than 2,000 residents inhabiting it. According to this criterion, rural municipalities represent 89.8% of all municipalities and administer 73.6% of the state’s territory. Only a quarter of the total sum of citizens (26.3%) live therein, however [10].

Similarly to delimitation of rural areas, the notions of rural development have also been discussed for a long time in specialized literature. Primarily they are connected with the ever-changing and still unclear notion of how the recent rural regions should look like and what functions they have. Rural areas used to be perceived almost exclusively as important sources of national culture, an integral part of national symbols and important element for urban-rural relationships. Today, they are viewed from a considerably wider perspective. Today, a rural area is not only a place of residence, recreational area, an economic unit, a place of social contacts, cultural and natural space. It constitutes a unique part of the landscape. It represents the background of cities and has many economic, ecological and social functions. On the other hand, rural areas are also perceived as a problematic result of the processes of modernization, Europenization, and agriculture transformation. The differentiation between rural regions and cities is reflected in the deepening disparities in income and employment opportunities [6].

From what we have stated it follows that in accordance with the current modern approaches to the development of regions, which emphasize the provision of social welfare, and as a result of excessive consumption of natural resources, it is necessary to approach rural development from a multidisciplinary perspective [4].

The conclusion therefore is that maximum use of local potential is one of the main conditions for rural development. The authorities’ approach changes accordingly. As opposed to the former sector approach, viewing rural regions as areas with dominant agricultural production, the spatial approach, which perceives them as space for life and a place for recreational and relaxing activities, has been winning more recognition since the beginning of the millennium. For instance, Van der Ploeg et al., who understand rural development as a “multi-level, multi-actor, multi-faceted process”, emphasize the importance of local participants, local institutions, and local tools and products [21]. This change in the perception of rural regions has also been described in the work of the OECD [12].

2.2 Cultural tourism – its history and characteristics

Cultural tourism is not an entirely new phenomenon, as it might seem – its historical predecessor is the “Grand Tour” phenomenon of the 17th and 18th century. In this age, the British, German and Russian aristocracy travelled to Italy and France, with the aim of perfecting their education and forming their ideals and noble behaviour. At first, Grand Tour was therefore not perceived as a traditional holiday, although that did not entail an absolute lack of entertainment. Its aim was primarily didactic and initiative, with the traveller seeking to achieve a certain social status [18].

In today’s modern, frantic age, when substantial amounts of information can be obtained via the Internet, we cannot expect a primarily didactic character from cultural tourism. Nevertheless, its main focus – i.e., to obtain new information from the fields of history and architecture and to explore traditions and a different lifestyle – remains.

Cultural tourism may be perceived as conscious travelling, allowing the traveller to gather knowledge from the fields of history, cultural heritage and other people’s lifestyle. At the same time, cultural tourism contributes to a preservation and restoration of local cultural sources and to the economic well-being of a community. It focuses on history, architecture, archaeology, art, science, and traditions. Through cultural tourism, one can gain plenty of experience from a cultural environment which offers visual art and performances, festivals, music, theatre, rural lifestyle and atmosphere, gastronomy, historical and religious sights, fairs, ruins, archaeological excavations, historical sceneries, etc. [3].
We can also distinguish between a “superior” or “high” culture (works of art – paintings, sculptures, architecture, and music) and “popular” culture (traditions, lifestyle). “High” culture is manifested in cities in cultural institutions like museums, galleries, theatres, libraries and buildings of artistic importance. “Popular” culture is concentrated in rural areas, in outdoor museums and events (musical, theatrical and folk festivals, fairs, village fêtes, etc.).

In relation with the tendencies toward globalization and internationalization, the globalized “pop culture” keeps emerging ever more frequently. This kind of culture endangers cultural tourism with commodification (transforming everything into a commodity) and standardization (authenticity and uniqueness disappear) [14].

Cultural and natural heritage is usually common, and it is therefore in public interest to protect it. One of the valid reasons for protecting it is also because authentic cultural and environmental heritage cannot be produced in a short time, and at the same time, harm done to environmental and cultural heritage is hard to measure, and often irreversible. It is also difficult to allocate the sources to the protection [11].

From these principles we can derive the specific characteristics of cultural tourism:
1. It originates in local culture and distinctive spirit of a place (so called “genius loci”).
2. It emphasizes the quality of experience and satisfies the visitor’s desire for knowledge.
3. Personal contact and a certain level of knowledge are required (connection to market segmentation – see further).
4. It strives to minimize the devastation of environment and cultural exploitation of a place.

2.3 Supply and demand of cultural tourism
The increasing popularity of cultural tourism results from a number of factors, on the side of both demand and supply [17]:

Demand factors
- an increased interest in culture and cultural events
- search for authenticity (tiredness of globalization) and identity of a place, art, traditions and history
- post-modern consumption style (fragmentation of holiday with a preference for short-term stays to long-term ones – long weekend with cultural events)
- an increased mobility of cultural tourism clients etc.

Supply factors
- an increased offer of cultural events
- cultural tourism is viewed as a suitable form of tourism
- increasing problems in culture financing
- an increased role of non-material culture – atmosphere, experiences, feelings etc.

The supply of cultural tourism represents the relations between a place’s suitable characteristics and a community’s desire to share the cultural heritage of the place. As concerns the characteristics of a location, the factors mainly observed are:
- a location’s authenticity (social capabilities of a location, such as hospitality etc.)
- the appeal or attraction of a place (social appeal – architecture, folklore, crafts, historical and cultural events, environmental appeal – landscape, flora, fauna)
- level of acceptable changes connected to tourism (these are related primarily to the carrying capacity of environment – predominantly the number of visitors, as long-term impact of cultural tourism can have a devastating effect on landscape; a location’s infrastructure capacity is also important – conflicts between residents and visitors related to sources – primarily water and waste – may occur).

2.4 Segmentation of cultural tourism’s market
Generally, supply is caused by the interest of duly motivated clients. Some of the motives for participation in cultural tourism are: educational reasons, personal relationships to local historical heritage, interest in emotional experiences, desire for unique experiences and search for experience. From the point of view of marketing, the motivation factors of cultural tourism can be divided into the following categories: physical (sensory perception), cultural (curiosity, learning), social (contacts), spiritual (contact with nature, religious motives) [19].

The popularity of tourism aiming at visits of sights, museums, festivals, fêtes and ethnographical peculiarities keeps increasing. It is therefore proper to ask who the clients of cultural tourism are. There are several approaches to the segmentation of cultural tourism’s market:

1. General approach:
   According to this approach, there are clients with high motivation (they consider culture very important), having knowledge and looking for
deeper experience (they are willing to get to know other communities and their culture thoroughly). The primary aim of these clients is to see a historical monument, a historical scenery, visit a museum, a cultural event, or spend some time with native inhabitants (in the case of visits to exotic destinations). A different group of clients visit the cultural monuments, but they also wish to spend some time on non-cultural trips (shopping, for example). Another group comprises accidental clients, who only visit various cultural locations and events occasionally.

2. Segmentation according to Richards:
Richards describes culturally profiled clients of cultural tourism. For a culturally profiled client, visiting cultural locations and monuments is the main aim of holiday, although he does not forego other sorts of entertainment. Culturally profiled clients are primarily educated people with high income, and according to Richards, they represent 10 % of all cultural tourism’s clients. They are important for determining future orientation of cultural tourism, and by principles of marketing they can be understood as pioneers and innovators. For a culturally non-profiled client, a visit to a cultural location is but one part of holiday, where entertainment, shopping, sightseeing tours and other interests dominate [16].

3. Segmentation according to Bywater:
Bywater discerns between clients motivated by culture (this regards the so-called “high” culture, where a visit to a cultural location is the primary interest), clients inspired by culture (they visit mainly one cultural place – St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City, for instance, or a specific cultural event) and clients attracted by culture (who visit museums or expositions during their holiday). According to Bywater, the first group comprises approximately 5 % of clients, the second group 30 % of clients, and the third group 60 % of clients [1].

4. Segmentation according to McKercher and Du Cros:
According to McKercher and Du Cros, there are two basic types of clients. A purposeful client, looking for deep cultural experience or experiences is led by cultural factors primarily. On the other hand, an incidental client is not influenced by cultural factors only, but includes “consumption” of culture (he or she visits museums and exhibitions during his holiday because it is “in”) in his consumer behaviour. Between these two poles there is a “sightseeing” client, who is led by cultural factors, but does not have deeper knowledge and experience, and a casual client [8].

3 Cultural Potential as an Important Factor for the Regional Development in the Czech Republic
The character of some regions (e.g. rural locations) is a result of centuries-old interactions between people and the original environment. Some of these interactions have had a positive effect (creation of cultural landscape), while others have resulted in “malign” changes to the structure of landscape. This primarily involves a loss of ecological and aesthetic richness, which leads to the uniformity of landscape and a loss of location’s identity.

This problem is typical of the Czech Republic, too, which is why the characteristics of the main factors of regional development in the Czech Republic, including the use of cultural potential and cultural tourism, are included in the “Regional Development Strategy of the Czech Republic for the period of 2007 – 2013”. Besides defining the notion of “culture” the document also handles culture infrastructure and cultural service, including the definition of the state’s role in determining the methods and forms of care of historical monuments [10].

The Czech Republic is rich in culturally-historical monuments. From the perspective of cultural tourism attractions, the World Heritage Sites listed by the UNESCO are the most important. In our country, twelve historical monuments are inscribed on the list. The Czech Republic is also rich in natural beauty. Within the boundaries of the Czech Republic, there are four national parks (Šumava, Krkonoše, Podyji, České Švýcarsko), over 1200 protected areas, and a number of ponds, lakes and reservoirs. Landscape rich in forests and fields, with the possibility of running agricultural tourism, represents a third of the territory [5].

As the strategic document claims [10], the Czech Republic’s wide and structured – as compared to the other countries – network of cultural facilities is a positive factor for the development of cultural tourism. On the other hand, both moral and technological obsolescence of a considerable part of cultural and leisure-time infrastructure represents a major problem. One-sided model of cultural infrastructure financing with a strong dependency on the state budget and unclear relations to individual regions’ and municipalities’ budgets is also a significant deficiency.
Along with the cultural infrastructure’s obsolescence and unclear relations in its financing, the lack of appreciation for non-material culture (traditions, habits, traditional technologies, popular and regional gastronomy) represents another problem. These elements of non-material culture are, with several exceptions, insufficiently identified and animated. The continuity of identification with both material and spiritual cultural and natural environment is preserved thanks to numerous voluntary activities. In the Czech Republic, the activities of associations and voluntary activities in the fields of culture and art have a long tradition. The tradition of amateur theatres can be mentioned as an example. The focus of voluntary cultural activities is rather diverse. Mostly it derives from the region’s traditions, from demographic structure, structure of employment, and other criteria. These traditional cultural activities significantly influence social solidarity and quality of life in individual regions. That is why they are financially supported from public budgets and openly promoted in the form of festivals, fairs, competitions, nature trails and tracks and so on.

Czech national cultural monuments are administered by the National Heritage Institute, some further central organs like Prague Castle Administration, for example, by municipalities and cities, universities, non-profit organizations, churches, entrepreneurs, and other subjects. The Czech historical objects, along with the events held therein, have considerable importance for the development of tourism. However, out of the 40 000 cultural monuments in the Czech Republic, only 200 actively participate in tourism. The significant cultural potential is therefore wasted, as opposed to the advanced tourist destinations of Europe, or if used, the potential is in many cases insufficiently profitable [10].

A tourist product run in the Czech Republic as “Heritage Trails” since 1994 represents an exception in this regard. The “Trails” are an international marketing product, facilitating the promotion and development of tourism and Czech cultural heritage in selected regions. They are a network of selected locations, significant due to their natural, cultural and technical riches, folklore elements, and the quality of service and tourism facilities.

The running of “Trails” must fulfill criteria of sustainability, and the income from this product helps the local communities. Only thus it is possible to classify the “Trails” among the products that present the best of the Czech Republic’s natural and cultural heritage, as programs for independent and responsible travellers, travelling on their own, but with a detailed itinerary. The “Trails of Heritage” as a long-term program (run by ECEAT, the European Centre for Ecology and Tourism, and independent Czech non-profit organization) “promote and develop a unique cultural heritage, including regional gastronomy, for the purposes of tourism” [2]. On ECEAT websites, a guide of good restaurants with an offer of Czech and Moravian regional gastronomy can be found. The best restaurants offering regional specialties made from quality local ingredients are recommended. One can choose the restaurants by region, or the place where the visitor is at the moment or is heading for, or by price. “Heritage Trails – the best between Vienna and Prague” are connected to the Czech program of Heritage Trails [more at http://www.heritage-trails.cz/].

Along with the Heritage Trails as the most well-known cultural product, some further tourist products develop in the Czech Republic, such as wine trails [more at http://www.stezky.cz/uvod.aspx], beer trails [more at http://www.pivniarchiv.cz/tipy/pivni-stezky-vysoconou/mapa/], or horse trails [more at http://www.konske-stezky.cz/], which also influence (directly or indirectly) the regional cultural identity and contribute to the location’s development.

4 Conclusion

The cultural heritage is an important factor influencing the local and regional identity. At the same time, it represents one of a set of important tools for a sustainable development of Czech regions. Despite this importance, the activation of cultural values and their involvement in economic life of underdeveloped country regions still represents a neglected area of economic growth in the Czech Republic, especially so when it comes to the use of cultural potential in the area of a dynamically developing economic segment like cultural tourism. Besides the above mentioned problems with obsolescence of cultural infrastructure and its unclear financing, the unfavourable state of affairs is also due to the fact that effective use of cultural heritage is not only dependent on the development of transport and on the state of technical and informational infrastructure, but also on the correspondent level of human resources including the ability to animate cultural elements.

In this respect it is also important to realize that the perception of cultural and natural values is, besides activating the economic potential, at the same time a tool for intercepting a long-term
process of devastation of culture as such. The effort to preserve cultural traditions in national, regional and local scale (authenticity of cultural values, as opposed to consumption of mass culture) should therefore be the crucial element of a state’s culture politics. The state’s other task is to cultivate citizens and lead them to create a positive attitude toward cultural values. Through cultural tourism, the cultural assets can become a part of the nation’s value preferences.

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