

NEW SOFT TRENDS IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PERIPHERAL REGIONS

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Abstract

Post Covid 19 development of marginal regions of Czech Republic needs our attention. Social and health decline during Covid19 pandemic may be combined later with economic and environmental degradation. This is the case of some peripheral endangered regions in Czech Republic like Southern Moravia and Weinviertel, Northern Austria, which is rich on valuable recreational and tourist potential. New attitudes and clever management would be needed to secure proper revitalisation after economic crisis following pandemic and local tourism decline. Balanced use of resources, local manpower, unique natural phenomena and typical cultural assets secures optimal regional development and lowers negative environmental impact, we are afraid of. That is why new trends and innovative ways of development of recreational potential of the Moravian landscape should be searched.

Key words: Recreation, touristic use, environmental impact, rural development, country landscape

Introduction

Southern Moravia border region underwent turbulent development in the past. We in the Czech Republic still think the region of Southern Moravia and Weinviertel, Northern Austria, as being a region of plenty. However during WWII and in the post war decades a lot of its wealth has been used up and only a little put back in. The region that used to be one of the richest in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as well as in the pre-war Czechoslovak Republic, has become marginal. The Moravian border area near Austria is in a deplorable state. There was a shortage of safe drinking water, the air was considerably polluted in some places, small towns, historical sights and villages are dilapidated. Due to the iron curtain demographic degradation occurred on both sides of the border. Young and educated people were leaving this area where they could see no prospects. Yet it is a region where people of different nationalities were used to working together, a region with an interesting and fertile landscape and rich natural resources.

The fall of the iron curtain has opened a new chapter in European history. New economic, cultural and political opportunities and prospects have appeared especially in border regions. It is possible to take up again what was once historically held in common. New life has been brought to the recently dead strip of land between the Czech Republic and Austria and, thanks to the new political conditions the region is once again located in the centre of Central Europe. However, many negative aspects that started in the past are continuing and, in some areas, have even become more significant. This is true for example of the environment and of the changes in the socio-demographic character of the population. Other negative aspects have appeared only recently and are becoming a danger - e.g. higher unemployment. On the Austrian side of the border distrust of foreigners and migrants was growing amongst certain social groups mainly because of their concern about employment opportunities. Production is being transferred from there to locations with cheaper labour that is to former socialist countries or to Asia. The population of the area, as well as leaders in local and national government were confronted with facts they had no experience of - new opportunities and new dangers were appearing.

Material and methods

This is why an idea of regional plan going beyond national frontiers including both the Czech Republic and Austria has been worked out. It was expected to help deal with major problems concerning the region's development. Its objective is to support permanently sustainable development of the region and prevent uncontrollable growth that might bring more problems than benefits. As the project involved a border area in which still different laws, decrees and procedures were applicable, great demands were made on co-ordination and co-operation.

The benefits of this research task were seen in the scientific, educational and political areas. Academically it means the development of new, up-to-date methods of spatial and regional planning and their unification with the planning methods used in Austria, Germany and the rest of Europe. Active participation by students in research and planning work on the project was an educational innovation. They deal with real tasks jointly with their foreign partners for the benefit of specific communities in the given area. The politically positive aspect is in dealing with problems in the border region common to both nations, the development of effective methods of joint work and a sense of

understanding for the needs of the other side. The project is based on the new concept of regional cooperation, which is the essential basis for the European Community. Additionally, a whole series of regional activities and projects have appeared such as the planning of national parks and nature reserves, touristic infrastructure, regional water-management systems, the restructuring of agriculture, regional demographic problems, the improvement of the ecological situation, the development of local infrastructure, the construction of new border crossings for tourists etc. These intentions require mutual agreement and co-ordination.

Teams of experts were dealing with various problem areas in the region. The structure of settlement and social, socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the population were among the most important. Plans for the development (sometimes also for the suppression) of industrial and agricultural production and forestry were being drawn up. Problems concerning the protection of soil (wind and water erosion), water management (shortage of water and its bad quality - very few sewage treatment plants) and the protection and regeneration of the environment were interconnected. Experts on road construction were dealing with the region's links to the motorway, road and rail networks taking into account the ecological effects and expected increase in tourism.

Spatial plans have been drawn up at several levels. Most important is to record the relevant links in the region and draw up land-use planning documents. Sub regional plans were being drawn up for areas with special characteristics or for locations where there are conflicting interests. These are, for example, the Lednice-Valtice areas, nature reserves such as Podyjí or Jevišovka and areas surrounding big towns such as Znojmo, Breclav and Lednice. Plans for smaller areas include villages and their associated land located in the immediate vicinity of the border. The plans were drawn up with an accuracy corresponding to the scale of 1: 50 000. Local plans are guidelines and detailed land-use plans for individual, mostly neglected villages and their associated land. These are mostly related to the "Village Renewal", a project in which the institute for rural architecture was significantly involved.

The objective of the planning was the creation of a new concept of regional development. It was not a single regional plan that is being drawn up but a whole series of possible alternatives. It presupposes the drawing up of alternatives and options including possible experimental and simulation events, the methods of choice and periodic monitoring and evaluation. They should enable the local authorities to establish and control their own paths of development. In workshops working groups with regional planners from different states presented the main ideas for optimal regional development to the leaders of local and national government and interest groups and their feasibility was tested before being included in the regional development programmes.

Results

An analysis of settlement, demographic and socio-economic structure was carried out in all towns and villages in the Mistelbach, Hollabrunn, Horn, Breclav and Znojmo regions as well as in the surrounding areas, which have close links with these regions. An analysis of the existing environmental conditions and an analysis of the existing infrastructure were carried out mostly at the scale of 1:200 000 by the teams of urban and settlement experts. It is possible to say that the main problems of the South Moravian border region are the quality of water, both the drinking and surface water, environmentally sound sources of energy, the reallocation of reduced job opportunities in agriculture, limited financial resources of private owners, unsettled property relations, unprofessional renovation, low-quality and unsuitable building materials, and insufficient reconstruction of the road network.

The area in the region was strongly agricultural. Only in the regional centres of Laa an der Thaya, Retz, Znojmo and Breclav, there was a high percentage workers in industry, trades, and services. The remaining population lives from agricultural production that was once a great source of wealth (as numerous buildings in the region show). Today both the farmers in Lower Austria and the agricultural workers in Southern Moravia have considerable problems with agricultural production. Agricultural land has been expanded for decades and the landscape altered in order to increase agricultural production. The negative consequences of these alterations are now obvious. Local farm production cannot compete with the subsidised prices of other European agricultural products. Other alternatives must be sought.

Water, which was always abundant in this region, is now lacking. The border region of Lower Austria and Southern Moravia is a typical example of landscape changes caused by people. It is possible to discover out from old local maps how large the proportions of surface water, flooded areas, and meadows were. Regular floods were typical for the area. The structural changes in agriculture and the management of the local river Pulkava changed the situation completely. The river disappeared and the wetlands were drained. The amalgamation of small plots into big fields which has taken place in the past decades on both sides of the border under different social circumstances created a deforested landscape which promoted erosion, especially in winter seasons. The supply of

underground water was insufficient for the increased consumption of water in agriculture. The level of underground water was decreasing. On the Austrian side of the border this problem was even more serious. The Pulkava valley was one of the driest areas in Austria. There are projects for bringing water to the region (e.g. from the river Dyje on the Moravian side of the border) or for decreasing of its use by reducing irrigation, setting up retention tanks, and so on.

The region has many opportunities for the further development of tourism but its beneficial location in regard to the development of culture, commerce, services and industry should also be born in mind. The solution to the problems concerning the quality of drinking water, sewage treatment and sufficient supplies of natural gas and electric energy (obtained from solar systems, wind-power plants, biogas, and woodwaste) will create the infrastructure for further development of the region.

Exploiting the local potential for tourism could create a certain number of local employment opportunities. The attractive landscape around the Podyjí nature reserve, picturesque historic towns such as Mikulov and the unique landscape created by the Lichtenstein family with the well-known castles of Lednice and Valtice are extremely attractive for tourists. The combination of beautiful locations, leisure activities, and natural products processed locally could be commercially successful. A certain investment in the area will be necessary. This presupposes the recovery of the landscape - especially restoring water courses the extent that they allow swimming and water sports, the development of biocorridors, preventing water and wind erosion, aesthetically completing the landscape and providing a natural habitat for the local flora and fauna. It will also be necessary to take care of historic green areas that are parks and gardens within castle grounds, churches and village greens. Compared to Austria, the need can be seen to add to green areas, both those situated within population centres and that outside. The demands of tourism make it necessary to establish the Recreational and touristic infrastructure, which is now sporadically existing, but in many places still lacking. In particular, there is a lack of modern companies offering services connected with sophisticated, rapid-response telecommunications equipment. The creation of nature reserves and conservation areas criss-crossed by a network of educational trails allowing visitors to get to know sites of historical and cultural interest is also desirable. Existence of old now unused military roads alongside the interesting historical points of border region makes it possible.

It is necessary to give the Moravian-Austrian border region its own image as well as organising publicity and information programs, both in the Czech Republic and abroad. The landscape provides ideal conditions for family holidays and youth activities and events. The new approach taken to organising tourism allows what is known as "sanft tourism", that is tourism that does no ecological harm to the region. This means not building tourist facilities, such as gigantic hotels, big motels or leisure centres for large groups of people, in this landscape. This will entail using the natural and cultural potential of the region and developing and bringing out its special character. For a successful tourist industry to be established it is vital that the communities in the region regain their original distinctness and unique atmosphere. It should be possible to renew old traditions and customs, festivals and entertainment together with a revival of traditional handicrafts. It would be beneficial to convert buildings and features of historical or architectural significance (small chateaux, fortifications, farmhouses, lanes lined with wine cellars and working buildings such as mills, granaries etc.). "Bio-villages" and family "Bio-farms" able to combine agricultural and handicraft production with the provision of accommodation and food are an ideal example of this. It will be necessary to support agro-tourism, sports suitable for the region (golf, riding, cycling, water sports etc.). Approximately 400 kilometres of cycle paths criss-crossing the border and thematically conceived, are in the planning stage of preparation. These will then allow individual cyclists to choose their own routes. Due to a favourable geographical position sports enthusiasts will be able to pass through four different regions in the course of a single day: Waldviertel and Weinviertel and parts of Bohemia and Moravia.

Discussion

In commercial terms, it will be necessary to give a new image to local agricultural products (cucumbers, asparagus, peppers, and vines) and traditional Moravian cuisine, as well as to handicrafts and products made from local materials. To stimulate the development and renewal of locally manufactured products typical to the area and made from natural local raw materials and using manufacturing techniques specific to the region (wine, fish, works of art, consumer goods etc.). There is a certain opportunity here for conference-related tourism connected with the construction of an agricultural technology park on the border in the Seefeld-Kadolz area (on the Austrian side) and in Jaroslavice on the Moravian side. It will be possible to organise summer schools in chateaux in South Moravia, for the study of, for example, painting and drawing in Lednice, music in Valtice, drama in Jaroslavice and so on. Other localities offer opportunities for arts and craft courses, folk song and folk dancing courses and possibly other activities. Lednice and Valtice castles, which attract 300, 000

Czech tourists annually, are as yet unknown in Austria. Small towns formerly divided by the border, such as Laa an der Thaya and Hevlín, will have similar opportunities.

Conclusion

The situation in this region is such that cultural pluralism, experiments, and innovation must be supported. The multi-faceted culture in this area can be a significant source of economic benefit. Cultural tourism could become a growing and economically significant part of the tourist industry as a whole. However, it requires careful guidance through the joint efforts of all those participating, in order that the possible negative effects of the development of this kind of tourism can be avoided.

Souhrn

Přestavujeme nový koncept kontrolovaného rozvoje hraničního regionu Jižní Moravy. Vychází se z detailních analýz a dílčích oborových studií. Je utvořen na základě skutečných potřeb regionu, není tedy pouze formální, svrchu vyžadovanou administrativní záležitostí. Přesto musí splňovat dnes už náročné mezinárodní normy a oborové postupy. Region potřebuje v době po pandemii koronaviru a ekonomické stagnaci pružný, multidisciplinární, ale efektivní rozvojový plán pro akceleraci revitalizace a remodelace.

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