

# Post-Communist Transformation of Tourism in Czech Rural Areas: New Dilemmas<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The past two decades have been marked by rapid transformations of tourism in post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, there has been little systematic research on tourism development in this region from the social science perspective, that is to say the anthropology of tourism. This paper attempts to outline key ideologies and practices of tourism in socialist Czechoslovakia and to contrast them with a new phenomenon of post-communist incoming tourism into Czech rural countryside, the emergence of recreational complexes called ‘Dutch villages’ and second homes owned by the Dutch. The main aim is to analyse the changing role of tourism in the process of post-communist transformation.

This paper is divided into three parts. First, it aims to review the overall nature of tourism in communist Czechoslovakia, highlighting the most typical features of both domestic and international tourism. The second part is dedicated to a short evaluation of post-communist tourism development in the country. Finally, the heart of the text focuses on Dutch ‘residential tourism’ in two Czech rural areas that have experienced both socialist and post-socialist tourism practices. In general, the attention is focused on the transformation of Czech rural communities due to the diverse impacts of tourism, and on the factors that either facilitate or hinder ‘host’ and ‘guest’ interaction in particular.

**Key words:** anthropology of tourism, post-communist development, modern rurality, rural international tourism

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## **Introduction**

Tourism has a profound importance in the contemporary world and represents perhaps the largest movement of human populations outside wartime (Crick 1989: 310). Tourism is also a modern form of acculturation: today almost every community and nation, be it large or small, developed or developing, is influenced to varying degrees by tourism (Jafari 2001).

In recent decades, a number of social scientists have engaged in debates on both local social complexity and global social connections (Coles et al. 2005: 463). Among them, anthropologists turned their attention to explore diverse topics relating to contemporary human travel, such as displacement, mobility, immigration, diaspora, and tourism.

Tourism offers exciting prospects for anthropology. In general, this discipline appears to be a science par excellence in the analysis and evaluation of dynamics of tourism, and, in particular, in the study of the social and cultural impacts of tourism on dynamically evolving socio-cultural, economic and political settings. The holistic approach of anthropological theories provides a unique framework for such a study.

## **A neglected world: tourism studies in post-communist Czechoslovakia**

Though tourism has become an established field of academic enquiry, there remain a whole host of issues that have been rather ignored by social scientists. By and large, this neglect refers to the region of post-communist Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic. Thus far, there has been little systematic detailed research on post-communist tourism development from the perspectives of the social sciences.<sup>2</sup>

On the whole, academic literature on tourism development processes in post-communist societies is written in English (e.g. Harrison 2001; Hughes and Allen 2005; Johnson 1995; Stevens 2000; Wallace 2001; Williams and Balaz 2000, etc.). Recently, a developing interest in tourism among scholars on tourism outside the main Anglophone stream has emerged.<sup>3</sup> Among the scarce works oriented towards Czech tourism from the social science perspectives, there is Johnson's article 'Czech and Slovak tourism, patterns, problems and prospects' in *Tourism Management* (1995).

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<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising given the fact that, according to De Kadt (1979), there were an equally limited number of studies on tourism development under socialism in the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Among the recent attempts to study tourism developments in post-communist Europe from the social science perspective, one can mention the *volume edited by Gorsuch and Koenker (2006) titled Turizm: the Russian and East European tourist under capitalism and socialism*, which includes many valuable essays, for instance *The proletarian tourist in the 1930s: between mass excursion and mass escape* by Aldis Pur, or *Shawn Salmon's Time travelers: Soviet tourists to Eastern Europe. Further examples include* Derek R. Hall's *volume Europe Goes East: EU Enlargement, Diversity and Uncertainty (2000)*, his chapter 'Tourism and Development in Communist and Post-communist Societies' in Harrison's book *Tourism and the Less Developed World: Issues and Case Studies (2001)*, Wallace's text in Smith's *Hosts and Guests Revisited (2001)*, focussing on tourism development at Lake Balaton, Hungary, etc.

<sup>3</sup> See articles in the Polish journal *Problemy Turystyki - Problems of Tourism*, the *Indian Tourism Recreation Research*, *Croatian Acta Turistica* and some others.

What are the reasons for such a dearth of tourism studies from the social science perspective in this country?

Firstly, it is the primary orientation of recreational and tourist institutions towards tourism as an industry, as a system of business transactions. Czech local tradition in the tourism literature is primarily concerned with aspects such as the description of travel flows, economic analyses of travel, travel and tourism management, and the like. Czech higher education in tourism studies primarily deals with auditing, categorising, listing and grouping the outputs or consequences of tourism. Moreover, as anthropology (viewed by the Czechoslovak communists as a ‘bourgeois science’) faces severe obstacles even today to become a fully institutionalized discipline within the Czech academia, there appears a similar predicament in transforming traditional tourism studies into the discipline firmly embedded in the social sciences.

Secondly, there is little interest resulting from a relatively small number of enthusiastic academics who would be willing to develop their careers in tourism, which is still viewed as something frivolous, something that does not deserve serious academic inquiry. Thirdly, there is still a significant language barrier as many of the academics simply lack the necessary language mastery to be able to read texts in English, and thus to become familiar with different theoretical approaches and empirical evidence within case studies. This is not to claim that local scholars should rely solely on the theoretical and methodological toolkit provided by the Anglo-Saxon anthropology of tourism, and *conduct a fieldwork and interpret it in accordance with those theories*. However, good knowledge of the relevant literature that exists in this subdiscipline is sine qua non for any scholarly endeavour that makes space for a critical assessment of the existing theoretical frameworks, and the possibility of presenting to scholarly discussions new interpretative strategies that fit the specific post-communist situations in Central and Eastern Europe.

Finally, many Czech scholars face severe logistical problems associated with empirical research, which is often combined with a lack of records and documentation from the socialist past making diachronic perspectives difficult.

## **Tourism under state socialism**

An overall nature of any kind of tourism refers to a mixture of economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions, including socialist tourism. Though there was a vast range of differing experience among the individual socialist countries – due to the different stages of socio-economic development and cultural history,<sup>4</sup> one can still select certain common features, derived for instance from the nature of ‘socialist non-market economy’: centralized bureaucratic organization; inflexibility and antipathy towards individualism and entrepreneurialism; constraints on mobility (only a few citizens in communist countries were permitted to travel to capitalist countries); a low degree of development of service industries (economic growth was based upon heavy industrialisation, while service industries had a

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<sup>4</sup> As Hall rightly points out, despite a common ideological framework, one can detect differences in levels of development, resource bases, cultural histories etc. (Hall 2001: 94).

minor role); currency inconvertibility and restricted access to hard currency; constraints on international tourism, and discouraging exit visa policies. These features were truly incompatible with the nature of international tourism development (Hall 2001: 93).

## **The development of Czechoslovak tourism under socialism**

The development of tourism in Czechoslovakia can be broadly divided into two phases, each of them bearing distinct features. The first phase (until the advent of communism in 1948) does not exhibit any diametrically opposing trends from the tourism developments proliferating in the Western Europe at that time. Tourism developed mainly in the economically strong countries, of which Czechoslovakia was an integral part. However, after the communist takeover in 1948, the situation changed dramatically. There appeared a great schism, and the subsequent development brought about a relative incommensurability between Czechoslovak tourism and that of Western Europe (Průcha 2009; Heiman 2009; Tůma and Vilímek 2008).

By and large, the socialist era is regarded as the time of separation and reclassification of existing economic mechanisms, customs and traditions (Kárník and Měchýř 2001; Kalinová 2007). Unlike for instance in Hungary, where a vibrant individual, informal capitalist sector co-existed alongside with a state-dominated, socialist sector, Czechoslovakia established a purely state-dominated, socialist agricultural and industrial sector, which was equally reflected in the realm of tourism (cf. Wallace 2001). By privileging heavy industry and nationalising all private property, the totalitarian system devastated the Czechoslovak economy, caused a substantial decrease in the quality and quantity of services, made significant damage to the environment and lowered the tourism potential available for the following generations.

After 1948, all the tourist buildings such as large cottages, summer villas, private resorts and fine estates were expropriated, nationalized and redistributed to party officials and workers' unions. The subsequent construction of public resorts and holiday homes was aimed primarily at the working class and youth. These actions changed the nature of tourism.

According to Williams and Balaz, a deeply socially and territorially segmented tourism system was the main characteristic of the socialist tourism in Czechoslovakia (2000: x). Tourism there was a mosaic of contrasting tourism attractions – internationally-renowned destinations and objects of the tourist gaze on the one hand, protectionist domestic tourism on the other.

On the whole, tourism under Czechoslovak state socialism was typical of domestic, group-oriented recreation of collective nature<sup>5</sup> in upland areas, mountains and water-sports resorts, sponsored by industrial enterprises, trade unions and youth organizations which was subsidised with the aim of 'silencing' the locals. The reward to the docile working masses came in the form of cheap accommodation and transport sponsored by the trade unions (so-called Revolutionary Trade Unions, ROH), state-owned economic enterprises

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<sup>5</sup> Derek Hall's term 'collective consumption' of tourism and recreation comes into mind in this respect (2001: 95)

and youth organisations. The major receivers were workers and peasants and their families. Special attention was also paid to school-children who spent their summer holidays in Pioneer Camps. Residential tourism also flourished within individual recreation buildings (private weekend houses, cottages and chalets), which represented a refuge from the political realities of the country (Kalinová 2007; Kárník and Měchýř 2001).

The intense development of domestic tourism went hand in hand with a rapid decline in international tourism.<sup>6</sup> Travel restrictions were applied on incoming tourists both from the East and the West. Restrictive tourism policies towards Western tourists led to a disruption of the Western tourist presence, with some exceptions in the form of Dutch incoming tourism.

In the course of time, the importance of state interventions into tourism grew. Tourism was seen as an important component of the production and reproduction cycle of the communist labour force – tourism and recreation was consumed collectively (Williams and Balaz 2000).<sup>7</sup> The analysis of tourism in any communist country is necessarily replete of politics and ideology as tourism in the language of communist rulers was predominantly a site for fostering socialist ideology and, conversely, imperialist imagery of the ‘rotten’ capitalist world.<sup>8</sup> The ideological nature of socialist tourism can be revealed in the emphasis put on the well-being of the working population, propagandist films and documentaries describing the happy local holiday-makers of socialist Czechoslovakia. Through tourism, the communist regime decided to buy off the locals, in return for their tacit consent with the regime.

*General discourse on socialist tourism as well as my own analysis* indicates that the socialist government regulated all types and forms of domestic and foreign tourism predominantly in favour of other socialist countries. Outbound tourism into ‘capitalist’ countries was inhibited by a number of administrative-political obstacles. By law, Czechs and Slovaks had the right to travel abroad, but this was limited both politically and financially. Those who seemed to oppose the regime were of course excluded from travelling to capitalist countries in Western Europe, let alone to the USA. From the financial point of view, people had the right to apply for hard currency once in three years, which also included Yugoslav currency. In theory, everyone could travel abroad once in every three years, but in practice this was not the case for 80 or 90 per cent of the population.

## **Post-communist tourism development**

The countries of CEE that have emerged from experiences of communist government have had to re-adjust to consequent shifts in tourism flows. Tourism has been seen to have particular importance not only as a new growth market but also, for political reasons, as a means of producing favourable images of these countries.

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<sup>6</sup> Apart from so-called ‘friendship groups’ from the so-called socialist camp.

<sup>7</sup> The ideological elites of late socialism viewed tourism as an export industry, rather than as an instrument of reproduction of working class.

<sup>8</sup> It would be a mistake to connect ideology exclusively to the socialist type of tourism. It goes without saying that tourism has always played an ideological role, to support, for instance, nationalist rhetoric (cf. *Pieter Judson's text* „Every German visitor has a *völkisch* obligation he must fulfill“: *nationalist tourism in the Austrian Empire, 1880-1918* published in *Rudy Koshar's* volume in 2002).

The end of communist hegemony after 1989 spelled a dramatic change for Czechoslovak tourism. Contrary to tourism in communist Czechoslovakia that had been characterized by rigid central planning, 'new' tourism became the vanguard of privatization and market liberalization. A strongly collectivist model of domestic and international tourism was replaced by a privatized tourism sector. It served as an illustrative example of successful growth, flexibility in services, as well as a reduction of centralism and bureaucratic control (Williams and Balaz 2000).

After the Velvet Revolution, the lifestyles of many Czechs and Slovaks changed due to a number of political, economic and socio-cultural changes that notably influenced the development in tourism. The era is characterized by an unprecedented growth of tourism. Outgoing tourism of residents grew over 442.2% between 1989 and 1991, and even 760% in 1996. There arrived 475% more foreign tourists in 1996 over 1988 (especially from Germany, Austria and Holland).<sup>9</sup> As for the outgoing tourism, all travel restrictions were removed and Czechs and Slovaks were easily able to go to Western European destinations for their holidays. There was a boom in travel agencies. In the mid-1990s, there were about 3,000 of them, compared to the sparse numbers in the past (one state-owned and one cooperative travel agency).

Though places of interest largely centred to Prague<sup>10</sup>, other objects of tourism interest have recently emerged, such as parts of south, west and east Bohemia, the south of Moravia, the Krkonoše mountains and similar.

The 'new' tourism embodied the symbol of post-communist 'freedom', a symbolic transition from the time of isolation, moral darkness to the hope that people might start to live their lives in dignity and light. Though many Western models of international tourism were adopted, the role of tourism in the process of transformation has to be seen in terms of the 'intersection of the new and the old'.

### ***The development of tourism in the Czech Republic: current trends in rural incoming tourism***

The fall of the so-called Iron Curtain marked an abrupt, profound change in all dimensions of the country's social reality. Socio-political, economic and cultural transformation gave rise to a growing significance of tourism. The newly recognized economic importance of tourism went hand in hand with an unprecedented growth in all types and forms of incoming tourism characterized by increased segmentation and differentiation of the tourism industry responsive, to special needs and interests. 'New' tourism typical of a new style of production and consumption, increasing mobility, flexibility, individuality and hybridity (Poon 1993) has also played a significant role in the process of transformation of Czech rural countryside.

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<sup>9</sup> These figures have been published by Czech Statistical Office in 2000.

<sup>10</sup> The transformation of urban tourism in Prague ranks among the most well-known and visible achievements. Of course, foreigners could always visit Prague, but during the Cold War curtain foreign visitors were not interested. After 1989, they were eager to see what they had been missing.

The essential connection between tourism and landscape has been recognized by many scholars. Lane (1994), for example, proposes three broad characteristics of rural areas that may also be related to their attraction to tourists. Firstly, low population density and small settlement size, secondly, traditional, agrarian land use and economies, and thirdly, traditional social structures, embracing ‘older ways of life and thinking, combined with scenic values and recreational opportunities of the countryside’ that attract tourists from urban areas (Lane 1994: 11).

In the past, Czech (and Moravian) rural areas were predominantly dominated by agriculture, animal husbandry, and minor industries (textile). Moreover, these areas have long played host to tourists, as elsewhere in Europe.<sup>11</sup> From the late nineteenth century onwards, Czech rural areas were integral part and target of domestic tourism, which comprised individual ownership of second homes (cottages, weekend houses and chalets) and/or corporate possessions in terms of holiday camps and recreational resorts during the socialist era. In Czechoslovakia, the phenomenon of second home ownership was exclusively associated with the most common way of domestic leisure in the communist era: cottaging (*chataření* and *chalupaření*, see, e.g. Bičík 2001), which was above all a form of escapism by the locals from the straightjacket of the communist regime into the private.

However, it is only since the 1990s that tourism assumed a more central role and rural space has emerged as a significant element of incoming tourism. New, alternative forms of tourism such as ecotourism, green tourism, or international nature-based tourism are above all the outcome of the shift from Fordist production to post-Fordist consumption, which reflects recent major changes in rural development in Western Europe instigated by the decline in farming as a determinant, followed by population loss, lack of public services, economic deprivation, and environmental degradation. The gradual shift from the agricultural to the rural known as the ‘post-productivist transition’ (Ilbery 1998) brought about new demands on rural space and the countryside settings. The traditional countryside characterized by a dominant agricultural sector and associated settlement patterns has been reshaped by the declining role of agrarian economy and local manufacture. As a result, it has become less a place of agricultural production and more an object of consumption, whether by tourists, conservationists, or incoming residents (Sharpley 2004).

## **Transformation of rural communities for tourism purposes in the Czech Republic**

The following text is grounded in empirical evidence derived from the first phase of ethnographic fieldwork carried out in two Czech villages – Lipno nad Vltavou and Stárkov – between 2008 and 2009. These studies are based on interviewing residents and foreign tourists and on the participant observation of both the hosts and the guests. At present, they only yield some preliminary data as the research is still in progress. An underlying aim of the whole project will be a complex comparative analysis of the interaction between foreign tourists and local hosts from the anthropological perspective that will reveal the

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<sup>11</sup> The natural environment has been an object of desire for Western tourists since the Industrial Revolution.

differences and similarities between foreign tourists and second home owners, and local residents, as well as their impact on the rural development.

Nature, rural space and tourism have been inextricably linked since the dawn of modern tourism in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century. Rural tourism played a major role in the nation-building processes in many different countries and regions, not excepting the Czech lands under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and subsequently after the rise of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918. It helped to foster Czech national identity. Over the course of time, tourism has become an integral element of diverse rural economies by 'using' the countryside and natural environment as its significant basis and resource. Nature has thus turned into a tourist product: tourism dominates the uses of the land and the appearance of the area. Different places and regions are being planned and transformed in order to attract more 'nature-oriented' international tourists.

The transformation of the rural landscape for tourism purposes has yielded new geographies of tourism. Different types of landscapes have emerged with the advent of new forms of tourism. Novel uses of the natural environment include, above all, the rapid growth of international nature-based tourism whose aim is to meet the needs of western urbanized and industrialized societies. A case in point is Dutch tourists seeking vacations in a Czech 'natural' environment. There is continuity in the Dutch incoming tourism with the past. As has already been indicated, Dutch tourists who were coming to communist Czechoslovakia to spend their holidays in the mountains and in the landscape near the natural lakes (mostly in their caravans, or tents) were largely perceived as cultured and wealthy.<sup>12</sup> They represented the only case of western tourists who visited the country relatively steadily, between the 1970s and 1980s. After 1989, the nature of their visits changed dramatically. Basically, there are two types of Dutch nature-based tourism. Firstly, individual ownership of second homes owned by the Dutch in Czech rural countryside, and secondly, international tourism in recreational parks initiated by Dutch investors, attracting a predominantly Dutch clientele.

As for the former, the recent foreign (predominantly Dutch) purchase of country vacation homes has become common throughout Czech rural areas.<sup>13</sup> What are the reasons for Dutch international temporary and residential migration? The use of leisure and second homes is particularly associated with the so-called Dutch special needs that have been confirmed during interviews with informants and participant observation in the studied areas. At the top is the need for space: around 18 percent of Dutch second homes are situated abroad. The countries in which Netherlanders have their second home include France, Spain and Belgium that are at the top of the list. The Czech Republic has 974 Dutch second homes, which accounts 2.7 per cent of the whole (according to the Dutch Housing

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<sup>12</sup> Generally, foreigners were looked upon with a certain degree of distrust. East Germans were seen as 'déclassé proletarians and peasants without social grace' (Wallace 2001: 312)

<sup>13</sup> It has become very common for the tourists to buy a farmhouse, restore it and use it as a vacation home. There emerged many restored homes, newly painted with well-kept gardens – they are owned by foreign guests but remain unoccupied for the most of time.



Need Survey 2002/2003, quoted in Priemus 2005).<sup>14</sup> Another need expressed by some of the informants stems from environmental concern, i.e. the threat of floods. For most of the interviewees, however, the most important motive given for purchasing a Czech property is escape, such that it becomes a theme to which they repeatedly return in the context of talking about their working lives in the Netherlands as well as their general feelings about place and home. Escape from leads inevitably to what the escape is to: 'Escape is the main theme, from pressure of work, everyday routine, from commodification, to a space which is a bolt-hole, a retreat or a genuine break from paramount reality' (Chaplin 1999: 41). My hypothesis was that affluent Dutch migrants oscillate between their homes and other places (called 'the second home') in order to rediscover rural idyll in the places that have not allegedly lost 'authenticity'. I assumed their motivations as largely anti-urban and anti-modern. In other words, the urge of 'getting away from it all', and escaping from the 'nightmare of repetition' (Cohen and Taylor 1992) which typifies everyday life: the stress, the pressure, the drive to achieve, away from the constraints of rationalized production and commodified consumption. Research outcomes, however, did not validate my hypothesis. Self-conscious rustic minimalism is not as all-pervasive as it might appear. The concept of 'voluntary simplicity' defined by Elgin (1981) is in sharp contrast to the reality of the Dutch village in Lipno which is both ultra-modern and looks the same (standardized patterns of the houses). Ritzer's (1998) 'all-pervasive hell of the same' has not been proved. It equally fails to characterize the Stárkov case. The 'Dutch way of life' in both the villages is to a large extent commodified: an alteration of patterns of consumption towards more natural, simple foods has not occurred. On the contrary, shopping is largely supermarket-based, instead of being taken place in local groceries and small shops. The manner of living that many of the second home owners share largely perpetuates the urban pattern: though staying in smaller scale living environments, their contact with community is non-existent and is limited to the members of their own 'tribe', if any.

As for the second type of Dutch nature-based tourism in recreational parks, there is a growing interest in building new recreational complexes in rural areas. To secure a livelihood by diversifying their agricultural activities, rural populations offer their assets – public space and landscape – to international forms of tourism. Now, communities are selling their vacant farmlands, abandoned agricultural fields and meadows to foreigners seeking to build new recreational complexes that have been commonly named as 'Dutch villages'.

## Case studies

My research activities focus on two Czech rural settlements – Lipno nad Vltavou and Stárkov – that have recently embarked upon the project of international tourism, which uses public space and rural landscape as one of its principal attractions. Both the

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<sup>14</sup> In general, it is very difficult to assess the number of second homes. The new 'residents' who usually spend a long period of time in their second homes are not normally recorded in the Census of Population. There is a lack of information provided by official sources.

rural localities are heavily dependent on international tourism that was initiated by Dutch investors, attracting a predominantly Dutch clientele. The Dutch investment includes both the construction of recreational parks and individual ownership of second homes in the Czech rural countryside.

Lipno nad Vltavou is a village in Southern Bohemia lying near the lake of the same name on the left bank of the Moldau (Vltava) River, within the southern Sudeten Germany belt. According to the 2005 census, it has 537 inhabitants. The history of the village dates back to 1530. In the past, the village, largely populated by Germans, was a small lumberjack settlement and its population's major subsistence economy was timber floating along the Moldau River. After the Second World War, many Germans were displaced due to the Beneš decrees and the area was gradually repopulated by ethnic Czechs who decided to settle there. The fundamental change in the life of the village took place in the mid-twentieth century. In the 1950s, due to the construction of the dam,<sup>15</sup> the village was intentionally flooded. The historical development of the village predetermined its present shape to a certain degree. The construction of the Lipno dam, which seemed disastrous for the old settlement, created certain potential that allowed for the existence of a new settlement. This potential, however, was not be utilized because the village was situated in the close vicinity of the Iron Curtain. Thus, stagnation, rather than prosperity was the essential feature for almost the entire second part of the twentieth century. A new era was brought by the fall of Iron Curtain, opening up the borderland in the early 1990s.

It became obvious that the former economy focused on timber industry would be playing an ever diminishing role in the future. A gradual loss of competitiveness of the most of the former businesses resulted in the termination of many jobs, or in the restructuring of the rest that survived. The economic transformation was followed by a social and cultural change in the lifestyles of the local people. A gradual increase in unemployment brought about a decline in the service sector, and in general a worsening of the level of local facilities. The negative effects of the transformation of the Czech economy posed the question whether there was a solution to such a grave problem that would help secure working opportunities for the local people that would be compatible with the local conditions and thus could contribute to a sustainable development of the region. The answer came forward, the logic was simple: the historical development of the past forty years that had made the access to the borderland impossible has 'helped' to save the uniquely preserved countryside. Any type of industry in this region was doomed for ecological reasons. So, the only type of industry that was naturally taken into consideration was tourism.

The local authorities ostentatiously claim that the village made use of the above-mentioned potential in an exemplary way. The village did not possess any financial assets; therefore, it concentrated on preparing conditions for the influx of investors. Moreover, as they state, in the early 1990s the local authorities accepted a revolutionary principle of that period in that the village could create conditions for investment, which would be linked to private capital. In the same vein, they speak highly about the perseverance and

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<sup>15</sup> Lipno became the largest hydroelectric dam (4,650 hectares, 306 mil. square metres) in Czechoslovakia.

conviction concerning the right attitude that has borne fruit over time: in 1997, the village authorities made a deal with a Dutch investor who built (between 1999 and 2005) a tourist resort which has become known as Landal Marina Lipno. Its owner, Landal Green Parks, is part of the American concern Wyndham Worldwide, which is an internationally-oriented company in the field of tourism, recreational management and accommodation, and tourist real estate. The firm has business activities in more than 100 countries. Landal occupies the top position in its offer of recreational parks. It has over 60 parks with approximately 10,000 recreational accommodation units. In the Netherlands, there are 43 recreational parks. Outside Holland, it has built parks in Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, and the Czech Republic.

*Landal Marina Lipno stretches* in the area of 13 hectares offering over 306 studios and apartments. The area resembles the ‘South Bohemian landscape through Dutch eyes’, according to Czech architect Jiří Střítecký (quoted in Vítková 2006): a Dutch distinctive interpretation of the local rustic baroque shields and arcades combined with Mediterranean architecture. The apartments differ in size, ranging from 66 square metres (plus 9 metres for the balcony) to 154 square metres (plus 34 metres for the terrace). They offer accommodation from two to twelve persons per apartment. The interior of both the studios and apartments is standardized; all of the living rooms are equipped with the same Dutch furniture – a beige collapsible three-piece living-room set, beds of the same shade, wardrobes in light brown, a kitchen table in black, supplemented with black upholstered chairs. All the kitchens look the same as well, including the kitchen appliances such as microwaves, dishwashers or coffee machines, and even the utensils. The luxurious, elegant interior highlighted by modern paintings is supplemented with a large TV located in the living room, and a smaller one in one of the bedrooms, as well as an internet connection, under-floor heating in the whole living space and corridors, gas fireplace and air conditioning. Each apartment or studio has its own cellar and parking place. Besides the apartments and studios, the recreational park offers their clientele a whole host of out-door and in-door facilities: a large in-door swimming pool (free of charge for all the guests), restaurants, bars, sports ground, marina for sailing boats (136 anchoring places), etc.

As the park rose right at the Lipno Lake in the vicinity of the Šumava national reserve, it was promoted as a ‘place of rural and nature-based attractions’. The investment reached more than one billion Czech crowns,<sup>16</sup> which brought an unprecedented breakthrough in the life of the village; soon it has become the largest and best equipped tourist resort in Šumava and the whole region of Southern Bohemia. Similar to the nature of any industrial investment, this event has triggered off a chain reaction and further investment continued. The faith in the Dutch investor and the vision of a stable clientele in the form of foreign (especially Dutch) holidaymakers has launched further construction of a winter ski-resort Lipno Kramolín. The locality of Lipno has recently attracted a number of Dutch second home owners who have been buying cottages and houses from the local people, offering them unbeatable prices.

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<sup>16</sup> Lipno is a village boasting about the highest figure of foreign investment per inhabitant in Southern Bohemia.

The small town of Stárkov is situated in the Eastern Bohemia region, not far from the Polish border (former Sudeten Germany). Its history dates back to the thirteenth century. In the past it was a place of farmers, coal miners (until 1890, when all the mines were closed), weavers and forestry workers. In the nineteenth century, the first textile factories began there. The first half of the twentieth century saw the development of timber industry and agriculture (flax). The population make-up of the settlement differed throughout history. The town was settled predominantly by Germans. For instance, in 1930 there were 892 inhabitants, of which only 102 were ethnic Czechs. After 1938, Stárkov was incorporated into German Reich – as part of the Sudetenland. After 1945, the majority of Germans were transferred to Germany and a new wave of immigrants arrived. During the communist era, all private companies were nationalized. The situation changed after 1989 when former land owners got their possessions back and could start doing business.

The tourist resort Green Valley Park (GVP) came into being in 1998 as the first ‘Dutch village’<sup>17</sup> in the Czech Republic; thus far it comprises 22 villas.<sup>18</sup> The GVP was a Dutch initiative, as the present mayor recalls:

The Dutch – Mr. Hoed – arrived on his own in 1995. When the borders opened after 1989, he firstly went to Poland and Hungary, but Czechoslovakia seemed to him the most appropriate – in terms of both people and prices. When he showed interest in our village we could not tell him “yes, we want it or we do not” as the village did not own the land – it was a private property. But the village had to issue a consent, which it did. At first the private owner – a local guy – had 51 per cent of shares, the village 10 and the rest was the Dutch investment. The Dutch investor had to establish some twenty limited companies in which he put in the land and then he offered the companies to the Dutch in Holland. It was quite confusing, even for the Dutch. They claimed “we bought a house in Stárkov”, but I contradicted, saying “No, you did not buy a house; you bought a company that owns the house.”

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<sup>17</sup> The term ‘Dutch village’ is a vernacular name for standardized recreational houses owned by the Dutch within Czech villages. It is used in public discourse, predominantly by the internet users, to assert strong criticism with this new form of international tourism. As I have noticed during my fieldwork, the term is largely refused by the local villagers. On the contrary, Dutch tourists seemed to be rather indifferent towards this term, showing no particular interest. Recently, the usage of the term (prefaced by ‘so-called’) has increased to appear in official reports and documents (e.g. Ministry of Regional Development). It is also increasingly being used in academia.

At present there are other ‘Dutch villages’ in the Czech Republic, mainly in the mountainous borderland. They are either adjacent to local villages (e.g. Panské pole near Rokytnice in the Eagle Mountains), or built right into the villages (e.g. Čistá’s project Happy Home – 42 bungalows serving as Dutch second homes, Stupná’s project Arcadian, with an average influx of some 140–150 Dutch per year, outnumbers the local population of Stupná - 40). Moreover, the Dutch are increasingly interested in buying a property in the Czech Republic but no longer within the areas informally called as Dutch villages. As some of the Dutch informants said, it is discouraging; they want to buy houses outside the Dutch villages. This trend has also been confirmed by the mayor of Stárkov who said that some villages nearby (Vernařovice, Straškovice, Petrovice) are ‘simply bought out by the Dutch.’

<sup>18</sup> Stárkov is planning to build another 30 villas in the near future.

After the change of legislation in 2004, GVP is a Czech company with Dutch capital. This change affected all the foreigners who were interested in purchasing property in the Czech Republic. Before *entering the EU*, foreigners could not buy property in this country. Now, foreigners who are permanent residents of the EU can buy property here.

## **Impacts of tourism on the local populations**

The growing influx of international tourists to Czech rural areas, the ongoing purchase of vacation homes and the emergence of ‘Dutch villages’ in various rural areas all over the country have contributed to profound social changes in local settings. In particular, it brought ‘greater and closer interaction between formerly restricted host populations and the outside world’ (Hall 2001: 99).

Contemporary forms of mobility and international tourism affect local identities. Increasing mobility into the rural area has reduced the autonomy and homogeneity of rural communities. The increasing breakdown of old socio-spatial patterns, the creation of new forms and processes are the major aspects in the transformations of rural society resulting from the development of tourism.

Foreigners (usually urbanites) who are moving into rural areas either temporarily or with the intention of permanent residence often bring different perspectives and ideas on how local development should be achieved and maintained and what a ‘better quality of life’ means. As a result, the countryside has become an arena of tensions, competing demands and conflicting interests. For some it became synonymous for economic and social regeneration, for others, it threatened to destroy existing social and cultural identity.

Modern rurality is frequently considered to be a positive situation because it represents a new vitality for declining social organizations. A tourism development may appear to be socially and economically beneficial to a local community; in particular, nature-based tourism can play a significant role in regional development. However, it may also create problems. There may be a multitude of factors that tend to affect interaction in a negative way, and thus complicate a path to development. I will treat them separately as analytical categories, while bearing in mind that in reality they often overlap.

The first group of factors revolves around spatial patterns. Second-home tourism and international tourism patterns may affect regional geography and spatial distribution. As has already been stated, the ‘Dutch villages’ were directly built into the above-mentioned rural settlements. However, both physical and symbolic spatial patterns are clearly discernible in both cases. In Lipno, the existence of three neatly bounded parts is clearly visible: first, the so-called ‘old Lipno’, which consists of the original village centre, and the periphery, intended for elderly residents who were moved there into newly built row houses after they had sold their flats or houses on more lucrative lands either directly to the Dutch, or to developer companies; second, a buffer zone called ‘New Lipno’ for the *nouveau riche* local residents, and Landal Marina Lipno as an enclave for foreign tourists and second home owners. Restrictive spatial patterns can be observed in the differential access to the local aqua-park. In the peak season, locals can visit it only between 4 and 9 pm.

Spatial boundaries are equally visible in Stárkov. The village is divided into two zones, between the ‘old’ settlement and the Green Valley Park. The physical closure is

accompanied by a low opportunity for, even absence of interaction. The Dutch do not go to see the locals, and the locals rarely go to see the Dutch. The situation loosely corresponds with the mayor's opinion he had expressed prior to the construction of the villas. 'I want the Dutch to be on the area of 13 hectares so that they do not bother the locals in the village, so that they stay in their own places.'

From time to time, mainly in the peak season, locals do briefly visit the area for a drink. They commonly call it as 'going for a beer to Holland'. Locals also use an old outdoor swimming pool and children playground built during the communist times that are situated within the 'Dutch' area.

In such atmosphere, a researcher can come across bizarre situations: I asked one of the locals, an elderly woman, about the GVP; at first she did not know what I was speaking about. After I explained, she vaguely recalled it but said it was too far away for her to walk there – she never visited the place nor even considered the GVP to be an integral part of the village. The overall visual outlook of the 'old' parts of both places – Lipno and Stárkov – does not prove the existence of a foreign clientele which would bring prosperity: most local houses are old, inadequately maintained, many of them still waiting for reconstruction and repair. Local roads are in a terrible condition. Public services are declining, a comparable situation to other cross-border villages without revenues from tourism. This external impression was acknowledged in interviews with many of the locals. For instance, business at the local grocery in Stárkov has not increased since the arrival of the Dutch. They do not go shopping there (apparently because of the limited assortment of goods, as the area keeper puts it, and higher prices, as a local seller deems), they prefer to go shopping to supermarkets in nearby bigger towns. The old rural settlement in both researched places is in sharp contrast to the newly built-up areas intended for foreign clientele. In Lipno, for instance, the former historical settlement that was mostly flooded by the dam looks quite different at present. As the local elite put it, there is a new square with 'plentiful cosy cafés, decorative greenery, and promenade pavements.' Their opinion verifying that tourism is the right road to success and a prosperous future is, however, often contradicted by many critics (both locals<sup>19</sup> and outsiders) who largely point to excessive concentration of the tourism industry in one place, which makes an entirely unnatural impression on the landscape.

The second group of factors deals with a socio-demographic impact on the local structure of population caused by second home developments and international tourism forms and practices. The relationship between the extent of seasonal home ownership and changes in the local structure of the population has been traced in a number of studies (see e.g. Casado-Diaz 1999). Differences between the socio-demographic characteristics of local people and temporary migrants/tourists appear to be significant in both the researched places. A phenomenon of depopulation of the Lipno village centre and the dispersal of the population to the peripheral rural sectors has already been mentioned. At the same time, a growth in the local population has been observed due to the increasing number of incoming

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<sup>19</sup> Among those who find the place tasteless and ugly are the displaced elderly people.

foreign second home dwellers and also thanks to a steady influx of new residents – usually young Czech urbanites who are attracted by the village modernity.

Environmental issues rank among the other factors that may be instrumental in aggravating host and guest relationships. Stárkov GVP was built in a protected nature zone, regardless of the resistance of the regional environmental authorities. The project aroused sharp protests not only among the nature protectors, but also among some of the locals and other Czech cottage-owners. The recreational buildings in Lipno had negative environmental effects by stimulating the use of private cars and by increasing pressure on sensitive areas and traffic congestion.

The barriers sharpening the differences and enhancing social distance between the local population and second home owners and other foreign temporary migrants probably include the most discussed impacts: socio-economic and socio-cultural factors. Social relations are shaped in many respects by economic considerations. Differing social, economic and cultural backgrounds of the foreigners (their above average income, their ‘otherness’, the language difference, etc.), and the locals make way to a deepening social distance between local people and tourists. Economic gain, though an important factor in tourism development, may be accompanied by strikingly disproportionate distributions of the economic benefits associated with tourism.

In contrast, the growth of second homes and other forms of international tourism could be seen as a positive development from the economic point of view. Scholars have noted numerous benefits: second homes could have a stimulating influence on the local economy by the demand for services and the creation of job opportunities.

What are the costs and benefits of second homes for the two communities under study? The advocates of tourism as a strategy for development in Lipno put it in no uncertain terms: ‘tourism is a positive means’ (the economist of the local authorities, and the mayor’s girlfriend). The intention of local authorities was to avert economic and population decline in this rural area; a rapid drop in young people threatened the continuity of social life. Tourism served to help reverse this trend. It stabilized the population of the village, even increased it. It infused new wealth into community that was on the verge of extinction. Tourism raised incomes, increased opportunities for wage employment, gave the possibility of additional small-scale entrepreneurial activities associated with tourism, helped to create a new middle-income population. It helped to sustain the rural environment, which had experienced economic and population decline. It enhanced chances to modernise rural housing, which is implicitly for local residents (New Lipno satellite-townhouses). From this point of view, Lipno may serve as an example of successful adaptation to changing conditions.

However, the ownership of second homes and the existence of the vast recreational resort also have potential to cause problems if left unrestricted. Negative consequences underlying rapid changes were predominantly perceived by those who either have not adapted to or do not benefit from the new situation: the rejection of the old system, workplaces, service and social networks, which have not yet been fully compensated by the creation of new networks in their place. Moreover, the costs in Lipno include a rise in the

prices of food, rents, local houses, and community services. The locals point to the inflated prices for land – the coefficient of real estate tax is five, which is the country's highest possible legal level. Such an exorbitant rate obviously creates problems for local people who live on low incomes. Benefits seem to be distributed disproportionately among the local population. Increased social and economic stratification is happening, particularly between those who have and those who have not: those who own and operate tourism facilities and those who provide services only; between pensioners who are being offered a place to live in the newly built row houses 'beyond the old Lipno' and 'reserved for the elderly' in order to vacate their houses for recreational tourism.

## **Conclusion**

The main aim of this paper was to analyse the changing role of tourism in the process of post-communist transformation of the two Czech rural communities. A common framework for analysis was the conceptualization of development that happens through social processes comprising both continuity and social change.<sup>20</sup>

As has been argued, though the political and economic transition has brought about a whole host of new practices in the field of domestic and international tourism, it did not automatically imply a complete eradication of the 'old' approaches. The research analysis of diverse aspects of the 'hosts' and 'guests' relationships in the two Czech villages has indicated that each local community has experienced both socialist and post-socialist tourism practices. The continuities with the socialist past can be observed in the existence of three distinctive social categories in these areas: local residents, domestic weekend/holiday makers, and foreign (Dutch) tourists (of whom some have recently become local residents). Due to the complex, all-encompassing transition of the Czech Republic to a new social order, one can observe far more changes rather than continuities in rural tourism development. The emergence of international forms of rural tourism after 1989, connected with developments in western societies, post-Fordist consumption, and the new middle class, has brought about a new kind of 'modern rurality', characterized by the complete integration of rural areas within the contemporary economic and social organisation of the capitalistic world. As Árnason et al. (2009: 55) claim, 'modern rurality' emerges because rural resources have attracted urban ones. The novel significance of rural space has been recognized in that environment and landscape started to play a key role in rural

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<sup>20</sup> One of the frequent biases in academic literature on tourism is the failure to distinguish the social consequences of tourism from other processes of change occurring independently in a society. A fundamental question is whether it is tourism that is responsible for the changes observed, or some other factors. It is both easy and naive (and also irresponsible) to blame tourism on destroying host cultures and environments. Any scholar working on tourism and its effects upon a host community should empirically prove that tourism is indeed the cause of changes in the host society. The problem is that the effects of tourism are rarely distinguished from those of other contemporary forces for social change. Given that social change is highly complex, he/she must work out a sufficient link between touristic input with various kinds of sociocultural change, ruling out other possible internal and external sources of change such as industrialization, migration, the influence of the mass media etc, that is extra-touristic factors as possible sources of change (see Smith's *Hosts and Guests* 2001). Any researcher must simply go beyond the 'informed hypothesis' (Nash 2001: 25). Tourists may be chosen as conspicuous scapegoats.



development. Though there is diversity in rural development practices and outcomes, the determining feature of local developments is the consumption, rather than the production, of tourism-related activities that are becoming more and more significant in the use of rural space. As has been shown, the areas under study are heavily dependent on tourism and the landscape is one of its principal attractions.

The analysis examined how rural tourism and community development takes place on the ground; in other words, how it happens from the point of view of local actors, i.e. both local residents and tourists. Tourism development is seen as an ongoing process of negotiation (Wallace 2001: 313). There are considerable variations in the ways in which local people adapt to tourism challenges, or control tourism processes in the area, i.e. how much autonomy they gain in deciding how to handle tourism and tourists. It raises an issue of varying senses of belonging – the question on how people claim and attribute identities as ‘local’.<sup>21</sup> Local collective identities are often heterogeneous; there is considerable variability among the ‘hosts’, as well as among the ‘guests’ – neither are homogeneous groups that would follow the same interests. There can be struggles both inside the host communities and between the ‘hosts’ and ‘guest’ over land use, resources and rural economies, due to the conflicting understandings what nature – i.e. the environment and cultural landscape – means to different actors. Community members are often pitted against each other in support of or in opposition to tourism initiatives.

Nature-based tourism can play a significant role in regional development, but it may also create problems. There is always a contradictory potential of international tourism, which can be either a source of social divisiveness and conflict, or a passport to development creating welfare and new opportunities for local communities (De Kadt 1976).

Thus far, tourism development in the two research sites appears to be relatively economically beneficial to a local community. In its initial stages, hosts have learned to accommodate tourism through local community resentment and indifference towards tourists. However, they have not fully endeavoured to place limits and controls on the ways it affects their communities. The ‘stony silence’ (Chambers 2000) on the part of locals, however, can turn out to have nightmarish consequences in the long run. It remains to be seen which scenarios will take place in Lipno and Stárkov in the future.

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<sup>21</sup> The categories of guests and hosts are socially constructed, and in reality quite mutable; therefore we should study the processes through which touring and hosting are defined (Chambers 2000: 57).

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## POVZETEK

Zadnji dve desetletji so zaznamovala hitra preoblikovanja turizma v post-komunističnih državah osrednje in vzhodne Evrope, vendar pa je bilo sistematičnega raziskovanja turizma z družbene perspective, oziroma s perspective antropologije turizma, na teh območjih malo. Prispevek opisuje ključne ideologije in prakse turizma v socialistični Češkoslovaški in tega primerja z novim fenomenom post-komunističnega turizma na češkem podeželju, natančneje s pojavom rekreacijskih kompleksov, imenovanih 'Nizozemske vasi' ter drugih domov, katerih lastniki so Nizozemci. Glavni namen prispevka je analizirati spreminjajočo se vlogo turizma v procesih post-komunistične transformacije, sestavljen pa je iz treh delov. V prvem delu je narejen pregled narave turizma v komunistični Češkoslovaški in osvetljene najbolj tipične značilnosti domačega in mednarodnega turizma. Drugi del je namenjen kratkemu ovrednotenju post-komunističnega razvoja turizma, v tretjem delu pa se jedro besedila osredotoča na nizozemski 'bivalni turizem' v dveh čeških podeželskih območjih, ki sta izkusili tako socialistične kot tudi post-socialistične prakse turizma. Na splošno je pozornost prispevka usmerjena na preoblikovanje čeških podeželskih skupnosti glede na različne vplive turizma in na dejavnike, ki ali spodbujajo ali zavirajo interakcijo med 'gostitelji' in 'gosti'.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** antropologija turizma, post-komunistični razvoj, sodobno podeželje, podeželski mednarodni turizem

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