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nature-based tourism : pedagogics of
free-time context**

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach
dozwolonego użytku.

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SINGLE TRAIL BIKING AS A FORM OF NATURE-BASED TOURISM. PEDAGOGICS OF FREE-TIME CONTEXT

Introduction. The growth of mountain biking as a form of nature based tourism

The growth of mountain biking can be generally viewed as a positive phenomenon in the time of broadly discussed physical inactivity. At the same time, in order to maintain sustainability of biking on trails, it appears useful to be aware of the latent or already obvious conflicts related to the activity. Horn, Devlin, and Simmons¹ noted the social conflict developing between the bikers and the hikers. Environmental damage has been the main concern on the side of those who prefer foot travel on trails. According to the authors, the conflict is largely related to the way people think about places. "People negotiate a meaning for a place both through their own direct experiences there, or indirectly through interaction with people for whom the place has a meaning." Kerr² suggested the impacts of mountain biking in natural areas to be arranged into four categories: social, biophysical, human safety, and political. The ratio varies geographically. According to Kerr³ it is due to the fact that mountain biking is not permitted in American wilderness areas. Therefore bikers tend to lobby against the creation of new wilderness areas.⁴ There are three common practices conflicting with sustainable use of the natural environment in mountain biking. These practices include off trail riding causing erosion, on or off trail riding on hiking trails through areas serving as natural habitat for protected animals, and erosion caused by increased concentration of visitors during mass bike events and competitions.

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¹ C. Horn, P. Devlin, D. Simmons, *Conflict in recreation: The case of mountain-bikers and trampers*, <http://www.mountainbike.co.nz/politics/articles/horn/index.htm> [access: 25.02.2013].

² A. Kerr, *A niche for bicycles*, „Wild Earth” 2003, nr 13 (1), s. 26-31.

³ A. Kerr, *A niche for bicycles...*

⁴ J. Hasenauer, *A niche for bicycles*, „Wild Earth” 2003, nr 13 (1), s. 21-23.

Bike trail builders, forester and nature conservation

Our case study presents one that has grown to surprising success and regional popularity in one of the economically weakest parts of the Czech Republic. In 2004 a forester with interest in outdoor sports and photography moved to a remote village named Černá Voda with his family. The group realized that what they all really seemed to like about their rides were the short portions of riding on narrow paths. At this time they stumbled across a piece of information on IMBA,⁵ the abbreviation standing for the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA), a non-profit educational association whose mission posted on their web page reflects the idea of sustainable play in the outdoors: “to create, enhance and preserve great mountain biking experiences.” The organization was obviously supporting an idea they thought was solving their problem – building trails exclusively for biking. While the possibilities to make a living out of climbing, kayaking or snowboarding turned out to be in fact limited in the area, the discovery of the extraordinary biking potential of Sokolí vrch seems almost natural from today’s perspective. There were miles of old hunting trails carved into the slopes of the mountain, lying hidden under leaves and bramble, some parts still obvious, some lost for decades. In some sections, the base of the trail would be paved with rocks and the angle of descent or climb was perfect for mountain biking.

In 2006, a group of five bikers began a history of the biking subculture in Rychleby⁶ when they decided to build a trail biking area, beginning with restoration and adaptation of the lost hunting trails. The focus on the restoration of the lost trails proved to be a wise strategy. Together with the project leader’s professional background in forest keeping and the group’s unprecedented determination to build their own playground it caused the door leading into the pristine forest to open for bikers in Černá Voda.

Today, a growing number of visitors can choose from about sixty kilometers of trails built exclusively for biking. The number of local bikers has tripled, the founder of the trails has been elected the mayor of the village, and the biking arena is internationally certified by the prestigious “IMBA Ride Centers”⁷ and “IMBA Flow Country Trails”⁸ labels.

The key question has changed from “How to build trails attractive enough for people to travel to one of the worst accessible places in the country?” to “How to sustain the development while potential threats grow in complexity?” The door to the forest has been open but its traditional users remain conscious, if not suspicious, likely to be watching closely what is happening. While a growing number of bike parks are open to bring summer visitors to existing or newly built ski resorts, the trails in Černá Voda are specific by popularizing a pristine part of landscape among a completely new type of visitors. The awareness of the environmental issues and motivation to behave in a sustainable way among this clientele is difficult to monitor or predict. Mountain bikers, the forest keep-

⁵ <http://www.imba.com/about> [access: 15.01.2015].

⁶ <http://www.rychlebskestezky.cz/cs/> [access: 15.01.2015].

⁷ <https://www.imba.com/model-trails/ride-center> [access: 15.01.2015].

⁸ <https://www.imba.com/model-trails/flow-trails> [access: 15.01.2015].

ers, hunters and conservationists represent powerful lobbies locally as well as on the state level.

In a certain sense the situation in Černá Voda is offering a rare opportunity to observe the processes of transformation of local landscape connected with outdoor sport tourism development in “live” action. Progressive government strategies in a growing number of countries already build on well-established partnership with the International Mountain Bike Association and a solid body of field research. At the same time, the process of building foundations for properly negotiated long-term sustainable access to the forests for mountain bikers has only begun in other places, including Czech Republic.

Methods

Pilot study. Besides generating potentially useful data, the study offered an interesting opportunity to discuss some of the methodological challenges related to the complexity of sustainable nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation. Leaving vast space for further investigation, the study combines analysis of relevant legislature with fieldwork and available data concerning local conservation, forestry and game keeping between years 2006 and 2011. Primary fieldwork data was collected over the period from Spring 2011 to Summer 2014. During the period, photo monitoring and observation was conducted at 30 different locations at the trails on Sokolí vrch. The photo documentation took place during 8 visits to the monitored locations. Total of 49 hours was devoted strictly to observation at the most heavily visited spots.

Results

The studied factors reflect the current legislature relevant to the project, including the Nature and landscape protection Act Nr 114/1992, the Forest Act Nr 289/1995, the Water Act Nr 254/2001, the 100/2001 Act on the evaluation of environmental impacts, the European Commission 92/43 Directive from 21st May 1992, and the Natura 2000 instruction.

The study undoubtedly reflects our cultural and political context as well as the tradition of outdoor activities in the Czech Republic. A wide range of aspects was considered, from flora and fauna protection, through forestry and hunting, to landscape management and soil erosion. Based on the summary of literature and relevant legislature, practical reflection of three laws was specified as the grounding for our pilot study. In relation to the Nature and landscape protection Act Nr 114/1992, our study followed two objectives:

1. To pre-assess possible impairment of significant environmental, geomorphologic, or aesthetic features of unique portions of the local landscape. The considered features were typically related to determining the areas’ significant look or contributing to their habitats’ stability.
2. To find out if the operation of the trails could significantly endanger wild plants, animals, the local biotope or the entire local ecosystem.

In relation to the Forest Act Nr 289/1995, we assessed whether the obligation to avoid damage on the forest might be obviously being compromised by:

- disturbing noise;
- unauthorized building activity;
- off-trail riding;
- smoking and fire outside designated places;
- visible disruption of soil water regime;
- pollution and littering.

The eight monitoring visits to the most heavily visited parts of the trails revealed no excessively noisy behavior among the biking parties. Riding on prevailing limestone grit surface of the trails was observed to produce noise audible over a distance varying from 60 to 200 meters according to the profile and density of the vegetation for untrained human ear. The character of the surface may be contributing to the low documented impact of biking on the animal migration the Černá Voda trails. Although further investigation into wildlife responses to bikers is needed, it is likely that the noise of tires rolling on the gravel provides timely warning preventing unannounced approach the animals can easily get startled by. Though the trails are not patrolled the arena users are explained and at various spots reminded to respect the closing hours. As all the advanced trails attracting the real biking enthusiasts begin and end within the sight of the base, self-regulatory mechanisms were observed in the community when late arriving bikers were eloquently pointed at the trail ethics sign.

No unauthorized building activity was monitored or reported in connection with the Černá Voda biking trails. Off trail riding was monitored at some spots on several occasions typically due to trail design inadequacies. When reported to the trails management, the most problematic cases were addressed promptly by additions of bridges, banks or deceleration sections. While no smoking at rest areas was observed, cigarette butts were found around the highest point of the trail which could be left by bikers as well as maintenance or volunteer workers. As all wetland crossings and most watercourses are bridged and fords are typically found in spots with rocky bed, visible disruptions of soil water regime weren't noticed, although more extensive investigation would be needed to rule out the possibility. Lower than common level of littering was monitored which can be attributed to robust marketing of trail ethics from the arena's web page through the base to the signs at the trailheads as well as to regular trail cleaning.

Evaluation of environmental impacts requirement

While an instrument already exists in Czech legislation in the form of the 100/2001 Act, projects like single track biking areas have not been required to perform the complete evaluation of environmental impacts common in more complex building projects. We may suppose that such minor building activities have remained out of scale for the respective authorities, but this could change over time. In order to help the creators of Rychlebské stezky anticipate and meet the potentially stiffening requirements, our monitoring reflected the standard list of assessed indicators. Some, though, such as impacts

on population including social-economic issues, are yet to be properly analyzed. Some, like local quality of air and climate can be only be discussed as secondary effects of for example construction activity due to the developing infrastructure and services or possible pollution from local heating. Soil quality and quantity, impacts on geological systems and natural resources, or impacts on flora and fauna represent measurables exceeding the scope of the conducted analysis and appear ideal for inclusion in larger interdisciplinary studies. Data on impact on landscape and impacts on tangible property and cultural heritage are recently being collected.

Despite the massive growth of visit rate on the trails, our findings reveal little significant growth in observed environmental risks for the period except for a temporary increase of certain type of game migration in years 2008 and 2009 in one part of the area and increase of soil erosion and off-trail riding on several portions of the trail. The photo monitoring documents restoration of balance within less than three months at problematic sections of the trail after modifications took place. Managing to get the chance to put the bikers' piece on the game plan of Sokolský vrch protected landscape area represents an undeniable achievement. It remains fragile, though.

Losing the game due to negligence can well be expected to be used as a precedent by the opponents of the idea of sharing the woods throughout the country. The legislature enabling people in charge to view those who don't belong to any of the above mentioned lobbies as a species that should be either walking quietly on a path or ideally kept away from the woods at all, hasn't changed. Access to the forests is still based on a complicated system of temporary exceptions.

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Abstract: The growth of mountain biking can be generally viewed as a positive phenomenon in the time of broadly discussed physical inactivity. At the same time, in order to maintain sustainability of biking on trails, it appears useful to be aware of the latent or already obvious conflicts related to the activity. The social conflict developing between the bikers and the hikers. Environmental damage has been the main concern on the side of those who prefer foot travel on trails. There are three common practices conflicting with sustainable use of the natural environment in mountain biking. These practices include off trail riding causing erosion, on or off trail riding on hiking trails through areas serving as natural habitat for protected animals, and erosion caused by increased concentration of visitors during mass bike events and competitions. Our case study presents one that has grown to surprising success and regional popularity in one of the economically weakest parts of the Czech Republic (the Rychlebské stezky arena above Cerna Voda, a rural village located near Jeseník). There have built about sixty kilometers of trails built exclusively for biking.

Keywords: physical activity, mountain biking, natural environment

ZRÓWNOWAŻONY ROZWÓJ W OBLICZU SPĘDZANIA CZASU NA ŚWIEŻYM POWIETRZU. ROZWIĄZYWANIE POTENCJALNYCH PROBLEMÓW A JAZDA NA ROWERZE JAKO POSTMODERNISTYCZNA FORMA TURYSTYKI

Streszczenie: W artykule poruszono kwestię wzrostu popularności jazdy na rowerze górskim, która jest postrzegana jako cecha pozytywna w kontekście dyskursu na temat niskiego poziomu aktywności fizycznej. Zdaniem autorów osobom uprawiającym ten typ sportu potrzebna jest wiedza dotycząca realnych i potencjalnych konfliktów odnoszących się do tego typu aktywności. Jednym z nich jest konflikt między rowerzystami i turystami. Z punktu widzenia turystów najpoważniejszym problemem związanym z rosnącą popularnością kolarstwa górskiego jest niszczenie środowiska naturalnego, a w szczególności jego trzy obszary: zniszczenia górskich szlaków, jazda po szlakach turystycznych, niszczenie naturalnego środowiska zwierząt w wyniku większej liczby osób na szlakach górskich oraz organizacja masowych wydarzeń związanych z kolarstwem górskim (np. różnego typu konkursy). W niniejszym artykule przedstawiono miejsce w Republice Czeskiej (okolice Jesenika, przy granicy z Polską), gdzie utworzono ok. 60 km szlaków przeznaczonych dla kolarzy górskich, unikając jednocześnie powyższych zagrożeń.

Słowa kluczowe: aktywność fizyczna, rower górski, środowisko naturalne