

Choice of (geo)tourism product themes in Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

Choice of suitable themes is one of the key steps in the preparation of tourism products. Selection must respect the specialization of tour operators (travel agencies) in this field and in the system of tourism of the region and, essentially, be based on an analysis of the tourist market, particularly competing travel agencies and analysis of the structure and the interests of current and future participants. Designing units of travel agencies must devote constant attention to all possible sources of ideas, even if it were suggestions towards minor changes to existing products. At present, client attention turns both to nature and to technical monuments. With regard to long-term orientation of the Czech lands for mining activity, mentioned problems are further discussed. Besides the factual base, i.e. the specific locations that fit the theme, a man perceived spirit of the place, usually summarizing under the concept of genius loci, plays an important role.

Key words: product theme, theme suggestions, geoscience tourism, mining tourism, genius loci

INTRODUCTION

Tourism, as a dynamic open system, is undergoing constant changes, which correspond to the extent of knowledge and level of technology development, the actual structure of human society and the needs of potential participants of tourist activities. Development of the tourism market leads to the necessity to come up with increasingly offering new products for both current clients and new target groups.

The process of developing new tourism products begins by generating and collecting ideas, their classification and analysis, and then determining the product concept (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 shows that it is a continuous process that requires constant attention, the necessary checks, adjustments and innovations. This is the only way to succeed in extensive and highly variable environments of specialized tourism.

At the beginning of the creation of the

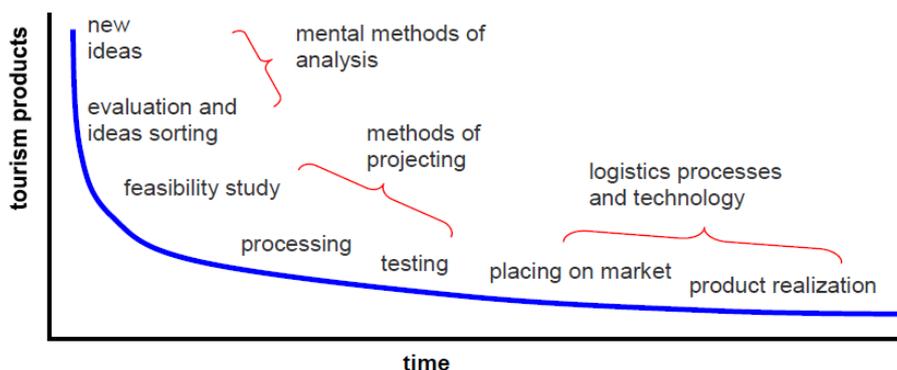


Fig. 1 Process of tourism product development and implementation (Schejbal, 2013)

product, supporting central thought, thus a good idea should be found. Choice of themes is one of the key steps in the preparation of tourism products. Selection must respect the orientation of tour operators (travel agencies) in this field and in the system of tourism of the region and essentially be based on an analysis of the tourist market, particularly competing travel agencies and analysis of the structure and the interests of current and future participants. They must focus on each specific customer group or target market. Creation of tourism products of the region is therefore not possible without a clearly defined long-term strategy implemented by tour operator. At this stage of the process, the mental analysis methods are applied, which result in the development of mental model. It is based on the findings of ongoing obtained from various sources incomplete or difficult to assess, the facts and tacit knowledge. We must also consider the limitations of short-term memory, or any non-compliance with the principles of logic, and the like. This is also related to the fact that the mental model is not always comprehensible to others and can be interpreted in different ways. Effective means to provide methods of creative thinking, which are based on assessment of the subjective probabilities (brainstorming, brainwriting, Delphi method). Therefore, a further step is necessary to switch to the principles of systems thinking, which are applied in a follow-up design phase.

SUGGESTIONS OF THEMES

Topics that will form the basis of the newly processed and offered products can develop in different ways. Besides the proposals of travel agency own staff, they can make suggestions of customers, cooperating or collaborating persons or superior organizations, etc. (Fig.2). Designing unit of travel agencies must devote constant attention to all possible sources of ideas, even if it was suggestions

towards minor changes to existing products.

Because of the individualized interests in tourism and an increasing emphasis on experiential types of tourism, there may be a problem of choice high importance topics. To be successful, each topic under consideration should be based on some legend, which must be sufficiently attractive. The legend may be based on natural attractions of the region under consideration, the selection of which will depend on the orientation of the candidates under consideration.

It is obvious that travel agents, particularly those that focus on specialized tourism (geotourism, mining tourism, ecotourism etc.), must seek new types of activities and upcoming new ideas and products offered.

Very interesting ideas can be derived from historical events, from the lives of famous people (e.g. Karel Hynek Mácha, Petr Bezruč, Leoš Janáček, Salomon Rothschild, Joy Adamson, Zdeněk Burian, etc.) or from folk stories. Similarly, archaeological sites or monumental civil and religious buildings can be useful. Fictitious states like Wallachian Kingdom, Lachian margraviate etc., the territory of the fictional persons (King Ječmínek, Rybrcou - Krakonoš, Blaník Knights), spooks (devils, water sprites, White lady, Hejkal, jacks-o'-lantern) and the like are good sources of inspiration. Particularly a large number and range of ghosts are distinguished rumors in Prague. They can also enjoy the adventures of literary figures, whether fairytale (highwayman Rumcajs, Lotrando from Brendy) or fictional (Viktorka from Božena Němcová's Babička, Jan Ohnivec of Jirásek *Proti všem* etc.). This story attracted perspective customers experiencing the product only on a rational level, but also on the sensory and emotional level (Tarsanen, 2005).

An equally important aspect will be genius loci of considered locations. In Roman mythology, genius loci was considered to be a spirit or little god, protecting certain location. In today's

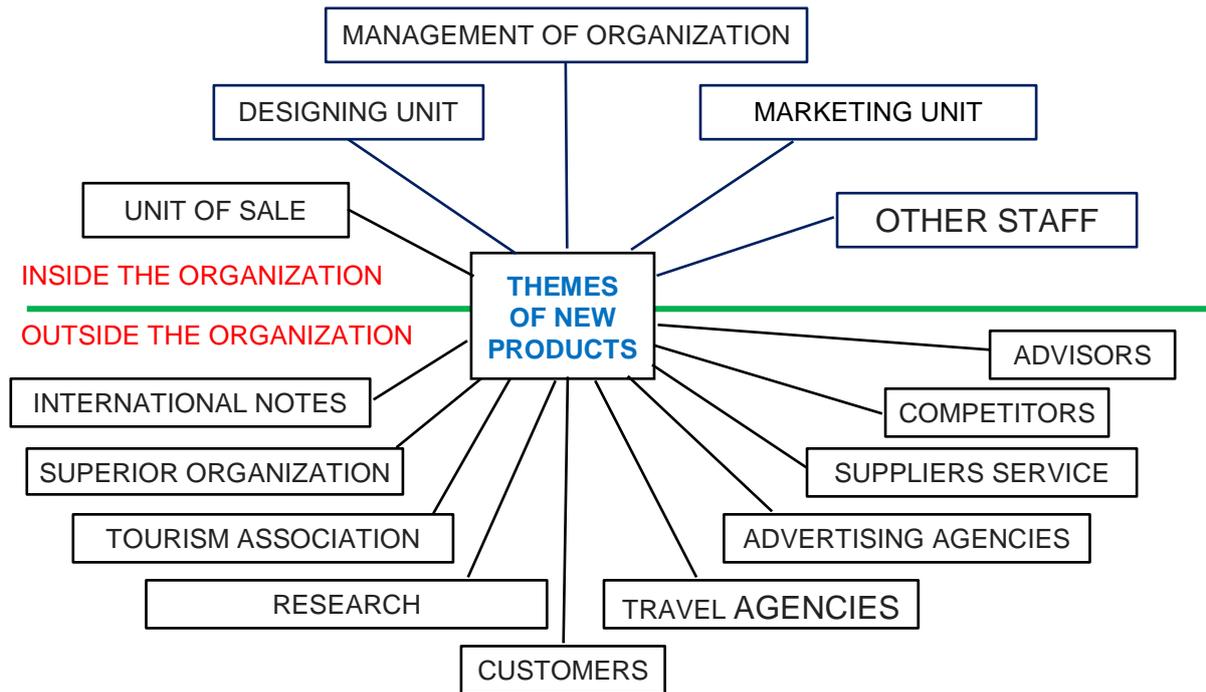


Fig. 2 Sources of tourism product ideas

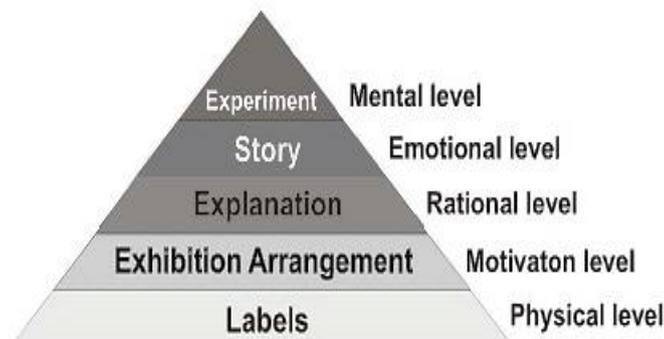


Fig. 3 Applying Maslow's hierarchy in experience tourism (Tarssanen, 2005)

conception, this phrase has more importance of special atmosphere given area than a kind of local protection strength. Pásková and Zelinka (2002) assumed that this term is a "holistic summary of tangible and intangible manifestations and history to the present locations, unique and unrepeatable, creating its continuous interaction with the spiritual world of a visitor or a resident of the multi-dimensional dynamic perception of the site." Clearly, there is not any universal concept that would express the concept.

At present, consumer attention turns both to nature and technical monuments. With

regard to very complex and unique geological structure of the Czech Republic and long-term orientation of the Czech lands for mining activities, both aspects are further discussed.

THEMES OF GEOSCIENCE TOURISM PRODUCTS IN CZECH REPUBLIC

Suggestions should primarily be based on the interests of current and expected participants in upcoming products of geoscience tourism, obviously while

respecting the structure of geosciences. Several topics can be defined, e. g. mineralogical and petrographic, paleontological, general-geological, volcanological, hydrogeological, engineering-geological, mineral resources geology. A very good source of ideas is information on geological sites in the Czech Republic, stored in a database of important geological sites, which contains records of particular localities protected in various degrees of protection, but also on the sites scientifically significant or interesting, many of which can be designed to protect.

Geoparks, which are constituted at the national, European and global level, are relatively new concept providing besides environmental protection also education possibility. From the perspective of geoscience tourism themes in the Czech Republic, mainly National Geoparks provide information for making suggestions (Fig. 3).

Interesting natural objects that can be subject of product are numerously located in each part of Czech Republic. Some are mutually isolated, e.g. different stone cliffs, stone fields, tors, monadnocks, klippes, troughs etc., while others are grouped into

large formations. Typical examples of such formation are sandstone rock cities, karst areas or neovolcanic areas in Central Bohemia.

THEMES OF MINING TOURISM PRODUCTS IN CZECH REPUBLIC

Czech Republic is a classic area of mining activities, which cover a period of more than three millennia, respectively, considering the production of pottery and the collection and mining of hard stones, dating back to a much earlier time. This was reflected in the many remnants connected to the mining activities, e. g. relicts after extraction of precious metals, especially in the Middle Ages and latter ore mining non-ferrous metals, iron and finally brown and black coal. Besides the preserved mining objects (Fig. 4A), a large number of monuments is kept in the mining museums (Fig. 4B), air museums and educational trails.

A detailed inventory of historical and current mining works can be found on the website of the Czech Mining Office and Czech Geological Survey - Geofond Prague.

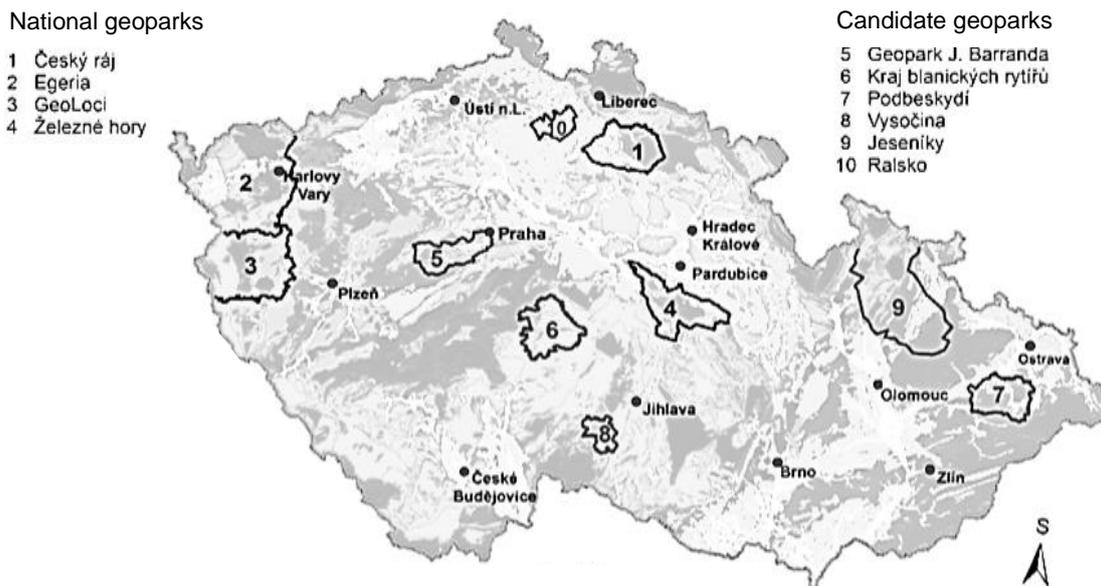


Fig. 3 Geoparks in Czech Republic (Čtveráková in Pásková, 2013)

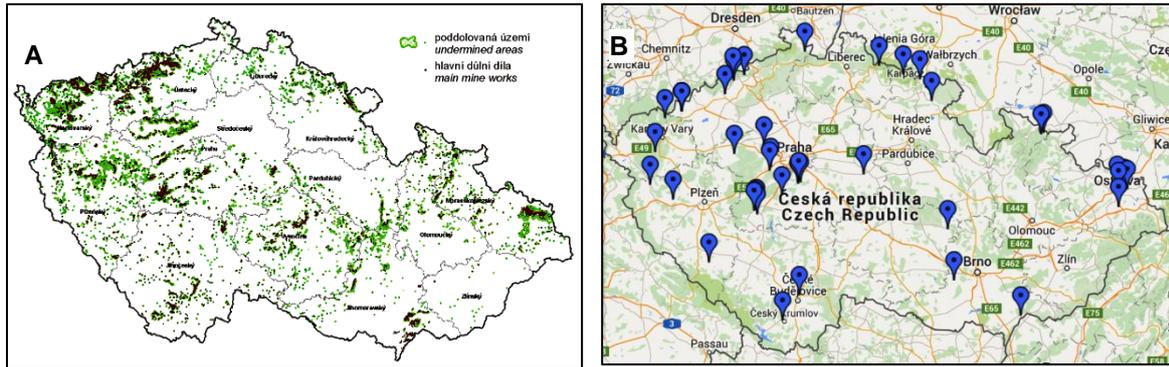


Fig. 4 A - mining objects (CGS – Geofond); B – mining museums (Zdař Bůh.cz).

Due to very difficult and dangerous mining environment, it was associated with a number of superstitions, full of various subterranean creatures, such as goblins, stone ghosts, sulfuric dogs etc., some of which miners thrived, but mostly harm. When preparing products, it is appropriate to come out from local legends that reflect the spirit of the particular region. The basis may be old Czech legends, such as legend of Libuše prophecy and the dispute nobleman Horymír of Neumětely with miners from Březové Hory that are listed in the Czech chronicle of Václav Hájek from Libočany, in the book *Silesian folk and mining rumors of Jeseníky Mountains* inscribed by Joseph Lowag, or in a book *Old Kutná Hora rumors* drafted by Jan Kořínek in 2011. Not forgetting a series of tales about the patroness of miners St. Barbara. Very touching is the legend of a celebratory Holy Mass of souls perished miners in the village of Hrušková in Slavkovský Forest. In the coalfields the Karel Polánek book *Bouquet of myths, legends and stories from the district Kladno* can be remembered. There are interesting stories about the discovery of coal in the Kladno or about blacksmiths Keltička who discovered coal in Ostrava.

Interesting themes can provide reclaimed area after mining activities. In this regard they excel North Bohemian brown coal basins. Realized projects of Czech reclamation school are respectfully recognized worldwide. Examples of well-

conducted reclamation can be found in the Ostrava-Karvina mining district, in the former uranium mines on the Czech-Moravian Highlands, in the Slavkov Forest etc.

THE ROLE OF GENIUS LOCI

Besides the factual base, i.e. the specific locations that fit the theme, plays an important role in a man perceived spirit of the place, usually summarizing under the concept of genius loci, respectively genius regionis (Vencálek, 2012). Christopher Day (2002) characterized the genius loci as "places able to reach of the human soul acts differently than sites that are merely pretty." As stated by Šípek (2001), in principle it is a psychological projection of their own human perspectives and scales on nature (geological and geomorphological character of the landscape, its hydrological and biological properties) and some anthropogenic objects, namely the phenomena created and modified by man. Norberg-Schulz (1980) in this respect divided the landscape of the romantic, classical and space. Similarly, classifies and cities. The problem genius loci dealt with the many of the authors.

The category "genius loci" includes a variety of archaeological, religious and natural sites that are associated with ideas or religions that marked the history of mankind. Besides the generally recognized

sites can be genius loci specific to a particular person, for example instead of happy and unhappy meeting vice versa.

Good examples of geotourism or mining tourism objects with strong genius loci in the Czech Republic include e. g. old tin mine Jeroným in National Geopark Egeria from the beginning of 16th century, or Lower part of Vítkovice with complex of coal mine, blast furnaces, steelworks and machinery enterprise.

Natural areas with strong genius loci are numerous. A very good example is the cirque Úpská jáma of trough Obří důl in the Krkonoše Mountains with Krakonoš garden and Devil's ridge and garden, glacial lakes in Šumava Mountains, Praděd surroundings in the Jeseníky Mountains, gorge Velký Štolpich near Ferdinandov in Jizera Mountains that inspired Carl Maria von Weber to the composition of romantic opera The Freischütz etc.

CONCLUSION

Selection, sorting and processing ideas into viable and marketable tourism product is the starting, but decisive step in the activities of travel agencies. The validity of this conclusion follows from the situation on the tourism market and especially from the changing spectrum of customer requirements.

Considering the disproportionately high number of travel agencies and vendors and the relatively limited number of potential customers in Czech Republic, it is clear that the tourism market represents a strong competitive environment. Therefore, there

should be an emphasis to find new ideas of upcoming products, one of the key conditions for success, or at least the survival of each enterprise.

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