

Ostrava region: tourism at the start

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It is sad but true that most people still do not realize the huge economic and other reach of leisure-time projects. If planned and implemented properly, they are the source of significant economic benefit not just for the specific location - their importance extends beyond the region's borders. They bring a tangible multiplication effect - development of services and infrastructure in the close and broader surroundings, improvement of the population's qualifications etc. The post-Revolution euphoria, when many experts thought that crowds of Asian tourists would be visiting individual "regional" destinations in Bohemia and Moravia, was followed by a rapid disenchantment. What would they be doing here? If a Japanese or any other foreign tourist comes to the Czech Republic, he is especially interested in Prague. This goes down to only one thing for investors and municipalities: make targeted investments into projects focused on the domestic population, which constitutes over 50% of the travel industry's clientele in the Czech Republic.

Problematic funding

A recent discussion meeting organized by Stavební fórum under the name "Leisure-time projects - vision beyond current recession" in Park Inn, Ostrava, showed that tourism has a large and in many respects unique potential for development in the Moravian-Silesian Region. However, it runs against numerous obstacles, more than anywhere else. As always, money, or investments, is the biggest problem. There are principally four options available: either finance the project from own resources, or using a credit, or an available subsidy, or use a PPP model. If we omit the first option, all the other financing models have a strict requirement on investment return. All stages are very important, from project preparation, a feasibility study, to operational sustainability. Unfortunately, however, the segment of leisure-time projects has a history of operational problems, in other words economic return, in the Czech Republic. The problems with their operation are caused among others by a deficit of qualified personnel, risk of increasing prices of energy and inputs in general, and also sudden fluctuations of the CZK exchange rate etc.

A feasibility study has to take into account all of this, and that is why not every project "passes" economically. One of the possible solutions then is using money from EU's regional operational programmes. In the Moravian-Silesian Region, the Regional Council has prepared two billion crowns for supporting travel and tourism as well as local infrastructure until 2015. Its first invitation attracted 32 entities, of which 11 have been recommended for financing. They included projects for building nature trails, skiing trails, sports and entertainment centres and a golf course. "The biggest problem we are facing is clearly to determine what qualifies and what does not qualify as tourism. This is not clear with all applications," says Daniel Foltýnek, of the Regional Council.

Regions knows its priorities

It seems that the Moravian-Silesian Region is clearly aware of its tourism priorities and wants to support also projects of a non-investment nature. "Some projects can be hardly financed from EU funds. The region is therefore trying to secure alternative types of funding for its investments in this area," says Tomáš Ehler, of the Moravian-Silesian regional authority. This effort has already yielded some fruits - for example reconstruction of the St. Joseph Church in Fulnek, upgrade of the Mošnov Airport, reconstruction of the museum in Frenštát pod Radhoštěm and a new 3D orthophotomap model of the Moravian-Silesian Region. And other projects are already underway. "It is a project called Region of Many Colours and Opportunities. We managed to obtain CZK 30 million for it from the regional operational programme; this money will be used to promote the region at various travel and tourism trade fairs. We have also filed an

application for the financing of the Beskydy Main Trail project, which aims to develop cross-country skiing and cycling in the Beskydy region, with all that goes with it. In the future, we also count on programmes supporting the regions of Osoblaha and Jeseník,” Ehler explains.

The past to boost the future?

The strongly industrial landscape could be a huge asset for the regions of Ostrava and Karviná in the future. For example the former mining areas, today reclaimed, that extend for over 4,500 hectares between Karviná and Havířov are not used presently and are only visited by iron thieves - however, they could become an oasis of entertainment and relaxation in the future. The fact that there are many technical and historical monuments and a unique flora and fauna in the region could help.

A large portion of this area is owned by the company RPG. “About one and a half year ago we faced the question: what about it? Taking into account the nature of the area, it was clear from the very beginning that housing opportunities are very limited. So it could be used for commerce, eco-energy and entertainment. At present, the first such projects are underway. For example one of the buildings of the former Dukla Mine site has been rented by providers of electronic music and a six-storied nuclear shelter on the same site has been reconstructed and opened by a group of military fans. OKD is building a golf course near Karviná and a new Dinopark will be opened on the former waste dump in Doubrava, near Karviná; the number of its visitor annually is estimated at 200,000 people,” Eva Spasová, of RPG, describes the gradual development of the reclaimed area.

However, a more dynamic development of this landscape, somewhat forgotten and neglected, is prevented by its insufficient infrastructure, especially transport. But there are also other things missing, for example the mentioned labour force and, of course, also money. That is why RPG is considering the rental of the areas and does not even exclude the possibility of sale.

One of the ways to increase the attractiveness of the Ostrava region is definitely the use of brownfields and other industrial monuments, which are not rare in the region. A discussion breakfast by Stavební fórum on [Historical brownfields - chance for dilapidated monuments](#) will take place in the Zábřeh castle on 13 May 2009. The discussion will focus on the specific features of investments into monuments and on the examples of successfully reclaimed monuments, e.g. the Zábřeh castle and the Vítkovice castle, and on the possibilities of further use of the Bílovec castle. For more information on the agenda and an online registration form, please visit the discussion webpage.

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