BARRIERS IN FUNCTIONING OF CZECH GEOPARKS IN THE CONTEXT OF DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES

IVETA ČTVERÁKOVÁ, DANA FIALOVÁ, ZDENĚK KUČERA, PAVEL CHROMÝ

Charles University, Faculty of Science, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development, Czechia

ABSTRACT

The article focuses on geoparks as areas with a specific form of local heritage protection. It contributes to a research into two interconnected fields: firstly, the research into local people’s participation in local development; secondly, the research into tourism sustainability. Discussion of foreign publications reveals that in the context of Czechia geoparks are misunderstood concept. This argument is supported by a case study from one part of the National Geopark Železné hory. The field research proved that there are significant barriers to meeting the purpose of geoparks. Two conditions are required in geoparks: the possibility of cooperation among local actors and the ability to be competitive through a diverse offer of services and products. The paper discusses factors affecting the actual state of society and their operation in the local development. The aim of the paper is to identify the obstacles to the development of geoparks as a reflection of the problems in local and regional development. In addition, the article deals with possible instruments for the management of geoparks and their utilization for effective coordination of local development.

Keywords: geopark, regional development, heritage, Czechia

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1. Introduction

Geoparks are a relatively new phenomenon that is based on a combination of the concepts of local heritage, environmental protection and education. Geoparks, which were primarily established in the past decade, can be found in most European countries as well as in Asia, and South and North Americas (Global Geoparks Network 2015). In the course of the 1990s, the ideas of establishing zones with a specific form of protection, the “bottom-up” approach or collaborative planning, were being developed in the academic sphere already (Healey 1997). At that time, the concept of geoparks was discussed at the universities in France and Greece (Zouros 2015) as a reaction to the social and economic problems of some countries. The etymology of the word geopark is derived from the concept Gaia (Martini 2015) or the “goddess of the Earth”. The theory of Gaia (Lovelock 1994) can be interpreted in various ways. Based on this concept, the central motive of geoparks lies in a return of people “towards the Earth”, in the sense of going back to the nature and the landscape and in a renewal of the ties between people and inhabited landscapes (Pásková 2014).

The first geoparks were established in 2000 after the negotiations of four European countries (Greece, France, Spain and Germany) in reaction to their social and economic development problems. These countries have also had at their disposal an exceptional geological wealth, a beautiful countryside, and a rich culture and history (Zouros 2004). Thus chances of finding a solution to the above-mentioned problems were looked for in the development of sustainable tourism within the concept of geoparks. A definition of common instruments for the solution of negotiated problems (McKeever, Zouros 2005) was subsequently applied in the definition of geopark: “A geopark is a nationally protected area containing a number of geological heritage sites of particular importance, rarity or aesthetic appeal. These Earth heritage sites are part of an integrated concept of protection, education and sustainable development. A geopark achieves its goals through a three-pronged approach: conservation, education and geotourism” (UNESCO Global Geoparks Network 2015). The common instruments included the crucial idea of pointing out the potential utilisation of geological heritage for the economic expansion of disadvantaged rural areas.

Geoparks are not a single-purpose concept with a focus on abiotic heritage protection. Their message presumes positive impacts on regional development, identity, tourism and education. Unlike a national park, a geopark is not supported by legislation. The essence of landscape protection through a geopark lies in the consciousness and motivation of people willing to protect the area in which they live. As an institution, each geopark is responsible for its management (in Czechia, geopark is mostly a public-benefit corporation). Geopark management wants to motivate local residents to realise the uniqueness of their place. This awareness can awaken regional consciousness and identity, awareness of which can result in the feeling of responsibility for a given place among local
inhabitants. Therefore, the bottom up approach to protection, management and planning is a vital part of the functioning of a geopark. In the first place, the existence of the particular geopark relates to the perceptions of local residents and their abilities to co-exist and cooperate, while transferring their experiences from one generation to another (Pásková 2011, 2013; Čtveráková 2014).

Moreover, a geopark can be denoted as a trademark of a certain area. If a geopark meets the criteria described in the Charter of National Geoparks (a binding document arising from the European Geoparks Charter, on the basis of which Minister of the Environment designates an area as a national geopark), it is certified to the position of a national geopark for the duration of four years. Subsequently, an assessment is made of the fulfilment of the previously set objectives of the geopark, which leads to the three possible conclusions (MŽP CR 2007, Directive No. 6/2007): (a) the geopark has met the objectives and the certificate is prolonged; (b) the geopark only partly met its objectives and its remaining in the position of a national geopark depends on a rapid correction of deficiencies; (c) the geopark either did not meet its objectives or it seriously violated the Charter of National Geoparks, due to which it loses its certification as a national geopark.

The aim of the article is to identify and discuss the barriers in the functioning of Czech geoparks, to analyse their causes and to outline the ways they can be dealt with. In the European context, comprehensive solution to this problem has not been given among the authors dealing with the topic of geoparks. Moreover, barriers in the functioning of geoparks throughout the world tend to be regarded only as a complementary part of other researches. In Czechia, the study of barriers to the functioning of geoparks can be attributed to a number of reasons. Despite having existed for a decade already, geoparks are still encountering some problems, especially caused by the barriers associated with their insufficient embedding in Czech society. In addition, the problems relating to the institutional support can be also mentioned. As a result, the article discusses and also offers potential solutions to these problems.

In its first part, the article acquaints readers with the concept of geoparks and the principles of their functioning. The general ideas are subsequently specified, using the example of establishment of geoparks in Czechia upon the background of sustainable tourism development since the 1990s. Examination of the beginnings of geoparks in Czechia and of the diverse approaches to them adopted by various actors, have become a basis for the empirical part of the article. Results of a survey conducted in May and June 2014 in a part of one of the Czech national geoparks, the National Geopark (NG) Železné hory (East Bohemia), are presented. The survey among local actors, complemented by field observation, was conducted by means of semi-structured interviews. The survey primarily concentrated on the perceptions and interpretations of changes in tourism in the context of the establishment and functioning of a geopark as seen by the local actors who participate in tourism management. The survey uncovered many barriers to the development of the studied geopark. The identified barriers were subsequently sorted into three thematic circles (the barriers arising from the past, the barriers that are due to the misunderstanding of the whole concept, and the barriers caused by the current support for tourism), that were set into a broader context.

Some of the uncovered barriers could be generalised and associated with the problems that are linked with the development of not only other Czech geoparks, but also with the barriers to the development of tourism in other Czech destinations. The basic asked questions were as follows: What is the cause of the stagnating development of geoparks in Czechia? What is the origin of the barriers hampering the development of geoparks? Do geoparks have the necessary institutional support and, at the same time, the support from local actors?

2. Geoparks in relation to local community

A geopark and the community within its boundaries create a whole that has a deeper connection with the concept of social capital because when a geopark is formed, the vital role is played by local actors. There is a variety of concepts of social capital because when a geopark is formed, the vital role is played by local actors. There is a variety of concepts of social capital (Pileček, Jančák 2010; van Deth 2008). Van Deth (2008) created a model of measuring the collective social capital that works with two sets of aspects (structural and cultural). The former include all types of social networks (membership in associations and volunteer organisations, participation in public affairs, etc.), while the latter tend to rest on a general trust in people and institutions as well as civic norms and values, such as fostering of bilateral relations, solidarity, identification with a certain area or political events. In a form, both sets of the aspects can be found in the concept of geoparks. The local actor that establishes a geopark should stimulate locals’ interest and motivation in participating in coordinated activities. The idea is derived from the notion that efficient work of an originally small group of people makes other residents actively join the activities, which helps the development of a geopark and, to some extent, the development of a region as a whole.

Along with an active participation and interest in local events, the feeling of belonging to the geopark appears among its inhabitants. People come to identify themselves with the region in which they live (Paasi 1986; Chromý, Semian, Kučera 2014). The concept of geoparks is based on the idea that territorial identity can be formed by means of community’s co-existence with a landscape
Between formation of regions and geoparks certain analogy may be observed, because in both cases, the vital role is played by individuals' initiatives and the creation of the image of the area in question (Pasini 1986). Like regions, geoparks, too, are areas with delineated physical and cultural boundaries (Chromý 2000).

3. Geoparks as an opportunity for rural development

The idea to establish geoparks reflects the need to deal with the problem of rural development because a geopark can be perceived as one of the ways of its support through maintaining or renewing local traditions. Zouros (2004) defines a geopark as an area combining the protection and promotion of geological heritage along with sustainable development. Bailey and Hill (2009) consider a geopark a synonym for the cooperation among local people and institutions, who share the vision of the future and are thus creating a unique identity of an area.

Eder and Patzak (2004) were among the first to have specified the criteria for the functioning of geoparks under the auspices of UNESCO. The main six criteria are as follows: (1) preservation of geological heritage for future generations; (2) education of general public; (3) functioning in harmony with sustainable development principles; (4) operation in coordination with other national and international programmes; (5) definition of limits of a geopark; (6) a sufficiently large area enabling the development of a region (this encompasses generating economic activities, hubs for the stimulation of economic expansion and the sites of geological-paleontological heritage with archaeological, ecological, historical and cultural values).

Geotourism is one of the instruments of geoparks. It is a subset of widely practiced and well-known ecotourism (Dowling 2010). The original definitions of geotourism are associated with the tourism closely focusing on geology and geomorphology (Hose 1995; Dowling, Newsome 2006). In the course of time, this approach started to broaden and the definition of geotourism also included such vital aspects as education, culture, history or tradition (Sadry 2009; Dowling, Newsome 2010; Hose 2011; Fialová 2012). A comprehensive geographic definition of geotourism is contained in the Arouca Declaration on Geotourism: "Geotourism is tourism which sustains and enhances the identity of a territory, taking into consideration its geology, environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents" (Arouca Declaration 2011). With regard to the interaction between geotourists and local communities, this largely depends on the extent with which local residents are involved in the production of services, establishments, products and knowledge associated with the area in which geotourism takes place. It is presumed that participation of a local community in geotourism is vital on account of the development of the community itself, but it also largely contributes to tourists’ satisfaction (Dowling 2010). The bigger the impact of the atmosphere of a place (genius loci) on tourists, the bigger the chance of their leaving it with a strong experience, which is one of the objectives of geotourism.

4. Creation of geoparks in Czechia

Before 1989, tourism in Czechia was considerably lagging behind the situation in other European countries. The main changes in tourism since 1989 have been primarily of a socioeconomic character, being related to the expansion of new forms of tourism and associated with growth in tourist demand and offer (Vystoupil et al. 2010). Czechia became a very attractive destination, but after a time, this gave way to stagnation of tourism, which has been increasingly concentrated in the capital of Prague (MMR ČR 2015). Other areas in Czechia only account for a minimum proportion of foreigners’ visits, mainly concentrating on domestic tourism instead. Insufficient quality of local services, especially in rural areas, has been one of the main reasons of the falling number of tourists in some regions (Vystoupil et al. 2010). One could see another important change: transformation of the tourism policy because it was greatly stimulated by regional and municipal authorities, whereby the finances spent on the expansion of tourism were also better allocated. Tourism was also gradually gaining major support from European Union funds (Vystoupil et al. 2010). Support for tourism from the European Union is mainly targeted at the instruments for sustainable development of tourism and aid in the development of rural areas, such as by means of geoparks.

To some extent, geoparks follow up the transformation of tourism that has been under way since 1989 as they are offering new opportunities for its development and focus on its previously unknown forms. The transition from the “4S” model towards the “4L” model, associated with people’s new motivation to travel and new expectations linked with tourism, is one of the main theoretical bases of this transformation with respect to tourism marketing. The concept 4L (“landscape, leisure, learning, limit”) reflects the demands of present-day tourism in which tourists turn their attention to the landscape and learning (Franch et al. 2008). It is just the combination of tourism and education that enhances the performance of the tourism industry (Lam, Ariffin, Ahmad 2011).

The beginnings of the geopark network in Czechia trace back to 2005, when the first Czech geopark Bohemian Paradise (Český ráj) was established, and also became a UNESCO Global Geopark. At that time, the Council of National Geoparks, an advisory body of the Czech Ministry of the Environment, was formed in Czechia. It is comprised of members of expert institutions (universities, the Czech Geological Survey, the National Heritage Institute, the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Regional Development) and representatives of individual national
geoparks. The Council recommends to the Czech Minister of the Environment areas for designation as national geoparks and assesses whether the objectives of Czech geoparks are met (National Geoparks 2015).

In 2007, Directive of the Ministry of the Environment No. 6/2007 was drafted in Czechia for the sake of the ministry’s unified strategy when nominating Bohemian Paradise as a national geopark. The directive regulates conditions and steps to be taken when a national geopark is to be designated (MŽP ČR 2007). The process of establishing a national geopark starts with presenting the documentation with the intention of declaring a geopark in a clearly delineated area to the Council of National Geoparks. The body then assesses the intention and votes about the establishment of a candidate geopark. The candidate geopark must present the nomination documentation for the position of a national geopark. An evaluation is made by two independent members of the Council of National Geoparks. If the area meets all of the criteria, it is certified as a national geopark.

Until 2015, six geoparks certified on the national level were designated in Czechia. However, only Bohemian Paradise has achieved recognition on the international level and was accepted among global geoparks under the auspices of UNESCO. Along with it, the Geopark Egeria was certified on the national level in 2005. In 2012, the Železné hory Geopark and GeoLocí Geopark were certified and in 2014, the Kraj blanických rytířů Geopark and Podbeskydí Geopark followed. Some more areas (Joachim Barrande Geopark, Vysočina, Jeseníky, Raško and Broumovsko) are promoted for certification as national geoparks, too. Figure 1 depicts the location of existing as well as candidate national geoparks in Czechia.

5. Introduction of the area of interest

The area of interest is located in Eastern Bohemia, in a part of the National Geopark (NG) Železné hory. It straddles two administrative units, the Pardubice and Vysočina self-government regions (Figure 2). The area covers 136 km² (the whole geopark measures 777 km²), incorporating 20 municipalities and their parts with approximately 17,000 inhabitants (CZSO 2011). Although the delineated area is primarily located in the Vysočina Region, local residents have stronger links with the Pardubice Region. This is due to a change in the regional boundary (Chromý, Kučerová, Kučera 2009). Until 1999 the area of interest was part of the East Bohemian Region (the present-day Pardubice and Hradec Králové regions). Along with an administrative division, the area of interest can be delineated in other ways. With regard to local partnerships, the area of interest is situated within the Local Action Group (LAG) called Podhůří Železných hor (NS MAS 2015) and the following microregions: the Železné hory Centre, the Podoubraví Association of Municipalities, and the Hlinecko Microregion Association of Municipalities (RIS 2015). When it comes to the nature
and landscape conservation, the area of interest is a part of the Železné hory Protected Landscape Area (CHKO Železné hory 2015). Last but not least, the area can be delineated on the basis of tourist regions. It is largely situated within the Vysočina tourist region, overlapping to the Chrudimsko-Hlinecko tourist region in the northeast (CzechTourism 2015).

The discussed part of the National Geopark Železné hory (Figure 2) covers approximately one-fifth of its total area (136 km²) and it was chosen for the survey for a number of reasons. This is an internal periphery (Musil, Müller 2008; Havlíček et al. 2008) on the border of two regions. The survey was conducted in the area also for another reason: compared with its other parts, this is the least examined zone of the geopark. The research in the delineated part of the geopark was conducted at the end of spring and beginning of summer 2014 and followed earlier researches into the geology and geomorphology, natural, cultural and historical heritage of the area (e.g., Nedobitá 2002; Nováková 2012).

6. Research methods and used material

Before the survey started, a number of local actors and institutions were earmarked in the area of interest that may play a key role in the cooperation between the geopark and a local actor or between the local actors themselves. These actors include the elementary and secondary schools (Čhotěboř, Ždírec nad Doubravou, Seč, Trhová Kamenice, Maleč) and operators of the accommodation and catering establishments, especially in the zone of the Seč water reservoir which is still a well-known tourism destination (Pardubice Regional Development Agency 2009).

The main part of the survey constituted of guided semi-structured interviews with the most important actors in the area of interest. The objective was to identify the presumed forms of cooperation between local actors. Through discussion of the results of the interviews, one can subsequently identify possible problems that pose a barrier to the development of geoparks. In addition, the survey examined the attitude of the local community to the natural and cultural-historical potential of the area for tourism development. These findings are supposed to help designate the thematic zones to which attention should be paid within tourism planning.

The guided interviews were complemented by collecting further information through field observations, studying of panels on educational trails and tourist brochures provided in information centres. Respondents for guided interviews were selected from all parts of the area.
of interest as much evenly as possible, but there was also the impact of some large towns in which a major number of suitable respondents are accumulated. For the sake of collaboration in the survey, a number of local actors, including representatives of the local institutions, particularly the staff of tourist information centres, school teachers and tourism businesspeople, were addressed. The inclusion of the respondents from the ranks of local actors, not any randomly chosen locals, was motivated by the assumption that the awareness of geoparks is very low among laypeople in Czechia. Potential respondents were at first addressed by e-mail. This ensured their willingness to participate in the survey. The second contact with the actors ready to join the survey proceeded on the personal level at an agreed meeting. All 13 guided semi-structured interviews with various local actors (Figure 3) were conducted between May and June 2014. It was not necessary to include a larger number of respondents because answers to the posed questions repeated in different interviews. The theoretical saturation of the conducted survey was thus achieved.

The semi-structured interviews are situated on the fictitious frontier between the structured (shared) interview and a non-structured (indirect) interview (Hendl 2005). The used draft of the interview in the form of an overview of crucial questions is presented in Table 1. The order of questions in the interview is not strictly given, only recommended. With his/her response, a respondent may follow up any other question, not only the subsequent one. The questions are open because of a general idea that a respondent should be free to express the opinions, so that the real state of the examined topic is covered as best as possible. In addition, the respondents were of a varying professional background and had differing knowledge of the topic in question.

The data collection by means of the method of guided interviews and their processing are time-consuming. Before the interview itself was conducted, the purpose of the survey was explained to each of the respondents. The duration of every interview was about 30 minutes. The interviews were not recorded by any device (the respondents mostly did not wish this), but notes were carefully written down both in the course of the interview itself and after it. The atmosphere during the interview and respondent’s conduct were also observed. In order to find out the interrelatedness of various local actors, at the close of each interview the respondents were asked to provide contacts to other persons they consider suitable candidates for this survey. The survey had the big advantage that it was carried out in the “home” environment of each of the respondents, thanks to which the field worker could understand important circumstances.

The analysis of the interviews was conducted in the programme MS Excel by categorising the data on three levels (Švaříček, Šedová 2007). On the first level, explanatory notions that represent a certain phenomenon were searched for. Subsequently, codes were created from them. Since some of the notions were repeated, the codes had to be renamed, depending on the need. On the last level, the codes were categorised according to their similarity or internal coherence. In this way, ten categories were created, between which one can observe some bilateral relationship. On the basis of these ten categories, an analysis of the knowledge and phenomena in the area under observation was made and conclusions were reached, when it comes to the functioning of the geoparks and barriers to their development. While interpreting the findings gained by the method of semi-structured guided interviews, the fact that the conducted survey is based on subjective perceptions of reality, expressing the views of the actors involved, had to be considered (Disman 2002; Hendl 2005).

7. Selected barriers to the development of geoparks

Based on the survey, some problems accompanying the development of the delineated area were identified (Čtveráková 2014). The results can be considered of being of general validity for the topic of development of geoparks in Czechia. The conclusions of the survey are complemented by further findings about the historical development of the political and economic situation in Czechia (Vystoupil et al. 2010) and from the report National Tourism Policy Concept 2014–2020, drafted by the Czech Ministry of Regional Development (MMR ČR 2013). As already mentioned, the categorization of the data gained in the form of recorded interviews with the key actors gave rise to ten interrelated categories (bad cooperation, poor support, insufficient promotion, support for regional products, diverse ideas, no change, activity of schools and tourist information centres, quality of accommodation, beautiful nature and landscape, bicycle touring) that well describe the main findings. Further will be discussed only the three selected categories that characterize the barriers in the relationship between a geopark and regional development, and which also outline the main obstacles to the development of Czech
geoparks: bad cooperation, poor support, and insufficient promotion. These categories influence one another and are closely interconnected.

7.1 Barriers to the development of geoparks arising from the past

In the sphere of cooperation, there is a relatively good coordination of the authorities that are interested in the development of an area by means of a geopark. However, the situation is quite different in the private sphere. The respondents doing business in tourism tend to be disinterested in the benefits of geoparks. As confirmed by representatives of the local self-governments, the tourist information centres (TIC) staff and the businesspeople themselves, there is a reluctance to cooperate and to help one another in the creation of opportunities for profit from tourism: “The problem here is that everyone only minds his own business and there is a lack of contact among people. One may provide accommodation to the clients, another providing them with entertainment, etc. (a TIC employee). On the contrary, there is still stiff competition. The cause of the present-day reluctance to cooperate with anyone, not seeking only one’s own profit, may be traced down in the past. After 1989, Czechia swiftly adopted the U.S. neoliberal model, while the Communist thought remained firmly embedded in many minds. This approach has often influenced even the next generation that only experienced the past regime in the childhood. In the business environment, everything is evaluated according to the principle of generation of immediate profit. In conjunction with the Communist legacy, this is a combination causing the current misunderstanding as well as reluctance to understand the new concepts of regional development such as geoparks. Possible explanation for mistrust in new development approaches thus provides a theory of path dependency (David 1985) meaning, that past or traditional practices or preferences continue even when more suitable alternatives are available. It is often easier to simply continue along already set path without risking failure or financial losses. Establishing an entirely new and more efficient approach is time-consuming and often more expensive. Therefore, local state of affairs has been only changing very slowly and one can judge that this goes hand in hand with the replacement of previous generations by those that have never lived under the Communist rule.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Target of question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your general view of tourism in your region? What are its strong and weak points?</td>
<td>The questions generally examine respondent’s opinions regarding the situation in tourism in the whole region of Železné hory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For what purpose do visitors primarily come here?</td>
<td>The question examines the interpretation of the tourists’ and visitors’ main motivation to come to the area of interest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your impression of the establishment of the geopark in Železné hory region? In which way does its existence have an influence on you? What is, in your opinion, the local residents’ attitude to the geopark?</td>
<td>Crucial questions aimed on finding out whether the respondents know about the existence of the NG Železné hory in the first place. If they do, it is then examined in which way the geopark has an impact on their practices. There is also the alternative that the respondents do not know anything about the geopark. This is why the following questions (apart from the questions 4 and 5) are targeted at the cooperation of actors in tourism and at the potential of the area for various forms of tourism development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you seen any shift in regional development since the Železné hory was designated as a national geopark? Has anything changed? What has it been?</td>
<td>The questions were asked if the respondents were acquainted with the existence of the NG Železné hory, examining the contribution of the geopark to the development of the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you engaged in any way in the activities staged by the geopark or do you even organise some events associated with the geopark in your own right?</td>
<td>Another question asked if there was a positive answer to the knowledge of the geopark. Its objective was to identify respondents’ participation in the activities of the geopark.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you cooperate with LAG of Podhůří Železné hory or some other micregion?</td>
<td>The question examines the interrelatedness of local actors with LAG and the associations of municipalities active on the delineated area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What could be changed and improved around you with regard to the offer to the visitors?</td>
<td>This question focuses on perceived shortcomings in tourism development in the area of interest and especially on finding what is lacked by both locals and visitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your view, what potential is here for what form of tourism?</td>
<td>The question examines perceptions of tourism potential in the delineated area for the possible subsequent proposal to improve the infrastructure, establishments, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which natural, cultural and historical heritage sites find the biggest response among tourists?</td>
<td>The question examines specific objectives of tourists and visitors coming to the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you support some regional products?</td>
<td>This question is to find out the extent of interrelatedness with local actors who are devoted to the manufacturing of products from local raw materials, food production and traditional crafts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your view of sustainable tourism in the future?</td>
<td>Final general question relating to the future of tourism in the delineated area and its sustainable development chances.</td>
</tr>
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Source: Authors’ own work.
A well-executed promotion may considerably enhance a faster understanding of the principles of geoparks (in the sense of bottom-up cooperation). The promotion should be aimed at disseminating the information about the advantages of cooperation and joint presentation of several businesses. The survey has revealed several centres of starting cooperation that may serve as a model for other businesses. This is exemplified by the cooperation of the operators of water attractions at the Seč water reservoir with the local provider of accommodation and catering services. However, destination management based on wide cooperation of current and new partnerships among local actors in tourism (Bieger 1996; Holešinská 2010) has yet to be established. Destination management in geopark should include informal relationships, knowledge and confidence, and apply destination governance concept (Beritelli, Bieger, Lesser 2007) underlining local actors’ rights and interests and partnership. Another form with which to spread consciousness of cooperation within the framework of a geopark is based on education and instruction, primarily targeting children. The foundations of such promotion are visible in the area of interest. The secondary school in Chotěboř not only cooperates with the NG Železné hory administration, but it also stages public events targeting at the explanation of the geopark concept. Children’s inclusion in the education of the public is very beneficial because it influences not only the children themselves, but through them, parents, the relatives and eventually the general public, too, are involved.

The interrelatedness of cooperation and promotion is also complemented by support for the actors, which is vital on the local as well as regional and national levels. Although the idea of a geopark suggests its support by the local residents’ initiative, a certain patronage and support “from above” bring a large contribution to its institutionalization. The area of interest is strongly influenced by its position on the border of two regions in this respect. The local residents still tend to feel more identified with the municipalities in the Pardubice Region (existing since 2000), although they are now administratively part of the Vysočina Region. According to the results of the survey, over one-half of the respondents feel a stronger link to the town of Jihlava in the Vysočina Region. This state of affairs causes a certain reserved stance of local residents on the regional policy. For a long time, the locals have been watching both the financial and other supports being sent more to other places of the Vysočina Region than to the places in which they live (Čtverákův 2014), which is hardly a good motivation for them to be involved in local/regional development.

7.2 Barriers to the development of geoparks arising from support for tourism

Another problem, that certainly does not help the expansion of geoparks, is posed by a misunderstanding of the whole geopark concept and the mistaking of the notion of geopark with a geological collection or exhibition. As stated above, geoparks are not only based on geology, even though geology is one of its central motives. Geological exhibitions are often denoted as geoparks. This has also transpired from some of the conducted interviews. The respondents included some people who have never heard anything of any geopark. The very word “geopark” has the implication for them that this is a geological park, which they associate with the increasingly appearing outdoor geological exhibitions, such as those at school gardens (Chotěboř secondary school), in museums or other organisations (Vodní zdroje Chrudim). This false idea contributes to the degradation of geoparks to mere collections of rocks and minerals, omitting other, no less important aspects included in the geopark concept (association with the culture and history of a region, education, participation of locals, etc.). This situation can be improved by a well-targeted education and promotion of the geopark concept. It is useful to target the education and instruction at the schoolchildren who are only being acquainted with the concept.

7.3 Barriers to development of geoparks arising from support for tourism

Between 2007 and 2013, tourism enjoyed the biggest public support in Czechia’s history (Vystoupil, Sauer 2014). The largest volume of the support was spent on the basic and accompanying tourism infrastructure and on the adaptation and protection of cultural and historical as well as natural heritage sites. The investments were largely concentrated in large tourist centres. Minor volumes of investments were also recorded in the areas in which Czech national geoparks are situated, including the NG Železné hory. The sponsorship also supported regional products (Kašková, Chromý 2014) and environment-friendly tourism forms (National Tourism Policy Concept in Czechia for 2014–2020 in Vystoupil, Šauer 2014).

In the existing National Tourism Policy Concept (for 2014–2020), the support for geoparks seems to be less favourable, although it is directly named in the measure 1.4: Enhancement of the offer of primary potential of tourism (enhancement of the use of natural, cultural and historical attractions for tourism; MMR ČR 2013). This is due to the main instrument of the new concept, which is the Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP), as it does not deal with some priorities outlined in the National Tourism Policy Concept in Czechia for 2014–2020 (MMR ČR 2013). The main shortcomings in the priorities set out by IROP were described by Vystoupil and Šauer (2014). When it comes to geoparks, these are
primarily omissions of the certification systems of regional products (Kašková, Chromý 2014) that need a strong coordinating body without which they cannot operate. In addition, it does not deal with one of the biggest problems of Czech geoparks, which is the concept and interrelatedness of marketing activities and cooperation of local actors in a destination. There is no support for education in tourism, because the IROP primarily prefers education in technical fields, where tourism has little, if any, place. All the aspects the IROP does not take into account can bring about a certain stagnation of the development of Czech geoparks.

8. Conclusion

Geopark is a multi-layered concept that is originally based on idea of positive relationship between people and nature or inhabited landscape. The core of geoparks is formed by abiotic heritage protection in connection with sustainable regional development, education and tourism. The concept of geopark was theoretically discussed at the universities since 1990s and is used in practice since 2000 when the first geoparks were established and rules for founding, functioning and evaluating of geoparks were formulated. The first Czech geopark Bohemian Paradise was established in 2005. Concept of geoparks is not widely accepted by public in Czechia. Geoparks face many problems connected with ineffectual support, weak promotion and insufficient functional cooperation.

The article discussed the development of geoparks in Czechia and identified the barriers to their expansion in particular. The problems accompanying the establishment and functioning of geoparks arise from the existence of internal and external barriers. Both types of barriers reflect long-standing problems in a given region. The external barriers include general limitations caused by the nature of political, economic and social circumstances. Of them may be highlighted the influence of the former Communist regime, insufficient understanding of definitions of crucial notions and concepts (such as the geopark) or application of an inappropriate concept of tourism support on the national level. Internal barriers depend on local specific features of the areas in question. These are, for example, the problems associated with the boundaries of administrative units especially self-government regions and underestimated importance of promotion of geoparks, and with the unsuccessful application of modern development concepts due to insufficient provision of information, involved actors’ reluctance to cooperate, etc. As internal and external barriers are closely interconnected, possible solutions to them have to be approached accordingly. They lie in motivating the people on the local level to gain new information and in encouraging cooperation, building networks and dissemination of education. Finding the solutions for internal barriers can subsequently help in coping with external barriers, too. A possible solution to existing problems lies in the elimination or at least reduction of the barriers that were identified in presented research.

Facilitating the “bottom-up” decision-making process is one of the basic principles of the functioning of geoparks. There is the question of whether this approach, that was implemented in Southern and Western Europe in connection with geoparks within the framework of their definition (McKeever, Zouros 2005; Pásková 2011; UNESCO Global Geopark Network 2015), can also be applied in other countries. Although the problems associated with the “bottom-up” approach are largely a question of internal barriers, their origin can be primarily traced down in the past development of society. In other words, they basically arise from the existence of external barriers. The residues of views and beliefs from the Communist era still remain in the minds of many people. They are opposed to the development of a cooperative way of business on which geoparks are based. Findings from the survey in the NG Železné hory have suggested that this state of affairs has started changing for the better at present. First attempts to jointly present and cooperate in the offer of tourism products (e.g., a hub of cooperation between water sports operators and local owners of catering facilities was found at the Šeč water reservoir within the area of interest) or coordinate submission of joint applications for funding (National Tourism Programme, EU subsidies within the framework of cross-border cooperation, regional subsidies, etc.) may be observed. Similar points also apply to the cooperation within the geopark management (schools and tourist information centres in the area under observation) that is building partnership between public and private sector. Another centres of cooperation depend on geoparks’ management abilities and skills, and on willingness and ability of other local stakeholders to utilize the current networks as well as new partnerships.

The survey has investigated the suggestion that since a geopark is no administrative unit, the administrative boundaries of administrative units should not be limiting for them. However, it has turned out in the particular case that administrative boundaries do pose a problem for the development of a geopark, acting as one of its barriers. Moreover, although a geopark is no geological exhibition, it is often seen and even presented so by some actors. The potential of a geopark demands sponsoring that should have various sources. Financing is grossly underestimated in Czech geoparks because the public does not perceive a geopark as an instrument for the development of peripheral or neglected rural areas. Rather, it tends to be seen as a tourist attraction or a concept limiting people’s activities. In this respect, the potential of geoparks is being strongly underestimated.

Barriers to the development of a part of the NG Železné hory can be generalised as examples of the barriers to the development of most Czech geoparks, as problems on various scale levels that are causes of these barriers may be also generalised (lack of cooperation,
active participation, etc.). If there is a successful solution to the problems accompanying the functioning of Czech geoparks, the barriers to their expansion will be likely to start vanishing, too.

There has not been conducted any comprehensive research into the barriers to the development of geoparks yet. Foreign researches primarily dealt with the instruments with which to develop geoparks, while partial results of these studies denoted problems in the development of geoparks. In Czechia, many barriers to the expansion of geoparks are similar to those known from experiences in other countries (such as the barriers arising from the misunderstanding of the purpose and sense of geoparks, and the ensuing mistaking of a geopark with a geological exhibition or an excessive emphasis on professional geology). Although, barriers specific to the Czech environment also exist (such as an absence of cooperation between diverse actors and reluctance to develop it). Moreover, the way in which tourism planning is implemented in geoparks management should also be discussed. Above all, it is desirable to internationally compare the experiences with implementation of sustainable tourism within geoparks and the obstacles to its development (South and Western Europe as compared to Central and North Europe) in the future.

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RESUMÉ

Bariéry v rozvoji českých geoparků v kontextu různých okolností

Geoparky jsou v Česku i ve světě poměrně novým konceptem, který se neustále vyvíjí v závislosti na vnějších a vnitřních podmínkách. Výzkum geoparků vyžaduje uplatnění interdisciplinárních přístupů, neboť jejich podstatou je ochrana neživého dědictví, který se neustále vyvíjí v závislosti na vnějších a vnitřních podmínkách.

Vyšší vědci geoparků jsou vnímány jednak jako podnět rozvoje venkovských a periferních oblastí, jednak jako nová forma turistické destinačního produkce, která je možné využívat pro získání stávajících a nových turistů.

Člen přispěvků bylo definovat bariéry ve fungování českých geoparků a zjistit, jaké jsou jejich příčiny, a to na základě polostrukturovaných řízených rozhovorů s vybranými lokalními aktéry a zástupci institucí v zájmovém území národního geoparku. Výzkum vyšetřuje, které bariéry jsou ne z ochranu geoparků a tepelné, které jsou významné rozhodování a vytváření geoparků.

Výzkum geoparků vyžaduje uplatnění interdisciplinárních přístupů, neboť jejich podstatou je ochrana neživého dědictví, který se neustále vyvíjí v závislosti na vnějších a vnitřních podmínkách. Výzkum geoparků vyžaduje uplatnění interdisciplinárních přístupů, neboť jejich podstatou je ochrana neživého dědictví, který se neustále vyvíjí v závislosti na vnějších a vnitřních podmínkách.