

TOURISM AND OUTDOOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES IN THE LIFESTYLE OF THE YOUNG GENERATION IN SLOVAKIA

I. PART



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Abstract: Organized activities performed outdoor, in the natural conditions, belonged among the popular ones and regularly practiced leisure activities in the past (Hrčka – Kvapilík, 1977; Zajac – Žišková, 1987 and Hrčka – Drdácka, 1992). Their main asset is the significant social, health, cognitive and professional and technical character. Currently, their proclaimed all-society importance has even increased, but on the other hand in the leisure time activities of our youth generation they lose their foremost position. Our effort is to contribute to the deepening of knowledge not only about tourism itself, but also about physical activities performed outdoor, help in their organizing and attract the attention of the youth in order to increase their performance.

Keywords: Outdoor physical activity. Slovakia. Legislative regulations. Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Slovakia is a rugged country, with flatlands in the south and high mountains in the north, situated on a rather small territory. This is a prerequisite for providing various opportunities of performing activities in the nature. Ideal natural conditions are suitable for tourism, but also the mountain climate offers good skiing and snowboarding conditions. Cycling is also very popular here, both road and mountain. The presence of a thick road network, numerous roads leading along rivers, field and mountain paths, tertiary roads, along with lots of interesting monuments, give prerequisites for fine cycling tour. In Slovakia are more than

4900 known caves, some of which being declared national natural monuments recorded in the List of cultural heritage of UNESCO. Thanks to the thick river network and colourful relief it offers those interested in rafting various conditions. Slovakia is also rich in curing waters and thermal baths and spas (1300 mineral springs). The country is extremely rich in water basins, dams and lakes, which represents an ideal combination of an active movement by the water connected with the visit to the surrounding nature, or cultural and historic attractions. On the territory of Slovakia we can count over 100 castles and manor houses, and at least twice as many palaces. Folk architecture is characterized by expressive diversity with numerous regional signs, folk crafts and rural culture curiosities. This is only a brief list of what our country offers to tourists.

SOCIAL IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM AND OUTDOOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

Moser (1981) points to the fact that the term „tourism“ is frequently incorrectly identified with the term „tourist traffic“ or „tourist trade“, or with the activities of travel agencies. That is why the term „qualified tourism“ is used, saying that to go in for qualified tourism means perform it in the way of active travelling. Qualified tourism he defines as: „the form of travelling for the purpose of satisfying curing, cultural and emotional needs, performed for pleasure and satisfaction from the performance by active employment of one’s own powers.

Tourism and physical activities in the nature form an inseparable part of the worldwide active tourism and represent a widespread social, political, economic and cultural importance. There are many definitions of tourism. The majority of them supports the one of the World Tourism Organization (WTO): „Tourism includes general activities of people, who do travel with the aim to have a passive or active rest and relaxation for a period not exceeding one calendar year without an interruption.“ Gaworecki (2003, p. 20).

Regarding the position and natural richness, tourism is for Slovakia very important.

The Slovak Government adopted by the resolution as of November 23, 2005 the „Conception of development of active tourism of the Slovak Republic“ (www.sacr.sk). Its main objective is focused on the development of active tourism with the focus on the support of active tourism, stressing ecotourism, spa and health tourism, agrotourism and rural tourism, with the strong connection with the local administration. The global aim of the permanently sustainable development of tourism in Slovakia is to stabilize

its position in the structure of fields of national economy and create prerequisites for its effective and long-term growth as the factor of economic, social, cultural and environmental development of society.

Natural conditions for the performance of tourism activities and sports in the nature in Slovakia are excellent, however, what lags behind is technical infrastructure and services.

Slovakia belongs among the so-called origin/destination countries that are both generators and destinations of international tourism. They can be divided into two main groups: countries that are mainly a source and destination of leisure tourism (France, Italy, Ireland) and countries that are mainly a source and destination for specific market segments (Tab.1).

Mainly ORIGIN countries	ORIGIN-DESTINATION countries	Mainly DESTINATION countries
Denmark	Belgium	Bulgaria
Germany	France	Czech Republic
The Netherlands	Ireland	Estonia
Romania	Italy	Greece
Finland	Latvia	Spain
Sweden	Lithuania	Hungary
	Poland	Austria
	Slovakia	Portugal
	The United Kingdom	Slovenia

Tab. 1 Division of EU countries

International tourism generated about 46% of total tourism nights. Tourists who are residents of EU-25 countries, in particular those from neighbouring countries, spent about 84% of these nights. This indicates the strong influence of intra-area tourism on the national market. However, unlike other eastern European countries, the bulk of international tourism nights was spent by tourists from eastern Europe and particularly from neighbouring countries. Among the six main markets of origin, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary accounted for about half of total international tourism nights in 2006 (53.3% in 2003). Other important markets were Germany (17.6%), Austria (3.4%) and the United Kingdom (2.8%) (Tab. 2).

Markets	2003		2006	
	Country	%	Country	%
1 st	CZ	33,6	CZ	29,3
2 nd	DE	21,1	DE	17,6
3 rd	PL	13,8	PL	13,7
4 th	HU	5,9	HU	6,4
5 th	AT	3,6	AT	3,4
6 th	NL	1,6	UK	2,8

Tab. 2 Main tourism markets in Slovakia

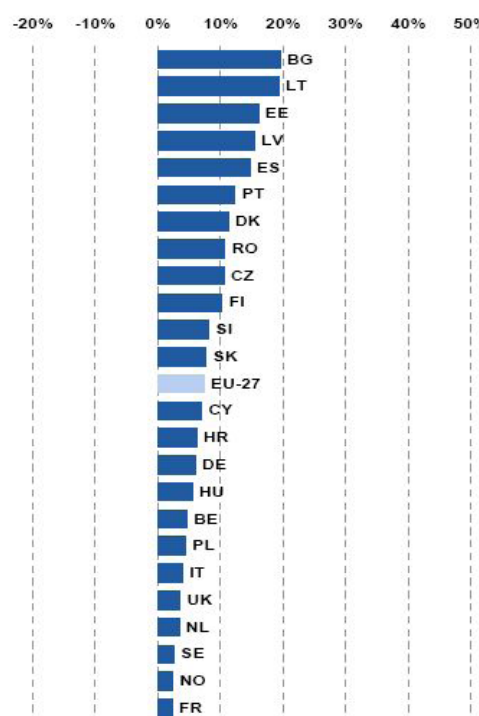
The contribution of international tourism receipts to the country's GDP is low (2.8% in 2006 versus 2.3% in 2000) in comparison to other countries in the same area. This is probably due to the prevalence of proximity tourism (Tab. 3).

MAIN TOURISM INDICATORS: SLOVAKIA IN 2000 and 2006	2000	2006
Share of international tourism receipts as a proportion of total IR in the EU-27	0,2%	0,5%
Proportion of international tourism nights compared with total TN in the country	35,4%	45,9%
Proportion of international tourism receipts in GDP	2,3%	2,8%
Ratio of international tourism receipts to expenditure	1,40%	1,44%

Tab. 3 Main tourism indicators in Slovakia

Comparing expenditure and receipts in Slovakia, tourism presented a positive balance of 368 million euro in 2006.

Following two years of decline in 2008 and 2009, the European tourist-accommodation sector continued in 2011 a recovery that started in 2010. The total number of nights spent at hotels and similar establishments during 2011 was well above the level of 2007, the year before the crisis began to affect the tourism sector (Tab. 4).



Tab. 4 Percentage change in number of nights spent by non-residents in hotels and similar establishments, 2011 compared with 2010

Although lower in absolute terms, Bulgaria and the Baltic States recorded the highest average annual growth rates between 2000 and 2006 (Latvia +17.9%, Estonia +15.8%, Lithuania +15.6%, Bulgaria +15.0%). Other countries where the average annual increase in nights spent by non-residents was higher than the EU-27 average were Poland (+7.4%), Romania (+7.1%), Iceland (+6.7%), Slovakia (+5.3%), Slovenia (+4.8%), the Czech Republic (+4.3%).

	No. of holiday trips (in thousands)			Share by type of trip	
	All trips	Domestic	Outbound	Domestic	Outbound
EU 27	1,046,804	801,575	245,229	77%	23%
CZ	25,735	20,064	5,671	78%	22%
HU	18,404	14,631	3,773	79%	21%
AT	16,887	8,485	8,402	50%	50%
PL	34,557	29,463	5,094	85%	15%
SK	5,947	3,593	2,354	60%	40%

Tab. 5 Holiday trips of EU residents in 2010 by destination and duration

The positive increase in the number of establishments between 2000 and 2006.

2000	AT	PL	SI	SK	UK
No. of establishments	21,092	7,818	846	1,559	75,320
No. of bed places (in thous.)	930	652	64	143	1,588
2006	AT	PL	SI	SK	UK
No. of establishments	20,457	6,694	707	2,043	79,383
No. of bed places (in thous.)	935	575	66	145	3,030
2000-2006	AT	PL	SI	SK	UK
No. of establishments	-0.5	-2.6	-2.9	4.6	0.9
No. of bed places (in thous.)	0.1	-2.1	0.5	0.2	11.4

Tab. 6 Number of establishments and bed places in various EU countries

The increase in the number of hotels in Slovakia between 2000 and 2006.

2000	AT	PL	SI	SK	UK
No. of Hotels	15,517	1,449	448	582	45,728
No. of Bed places in hotels	588	120	31	44	1,119
2006	AT	PL	SI	SK	UK
No. of Hotels	14,051	2,301	358	922	39,107
No. of Bed places in hotels	573	178	31	58	1,256
2000-2006	AT	PL	SI	SK	UK
No. of Hotels	-1.6	+8.0	-3.7	+8.0	-2.6
No. of Bed places in hotels	-0.4	+6.8	+0.3	+4.8	+1.9

Tab. 7 Number of hotels and bed places in various EU countries

Slovakia offers rich opportunities for tourism: started from national mountain tourism up to simple strolls along beautiful forests. Marking of tourist foot trail in Slovakia has a long-lasting tradition – it has belonged among foremost systems of tourist marking in the world for already 130 years. Uniformly marked trails form a compact network with the total length of over 14,000 km. You can choose any direction on a compass and take a walk in the beauties of the High and Low Tatras, the Carpathians, the Fatras, Slovak Paradise or Slovak carst region.

In Slovakia there are 40 caves, of which 12 are open for tourists. Take a walk among natural jambstones, listen to the music of an underground concert hall, or raft in suddenly springing small rivers – all these are experiences of our caves. You will be fascinated by icy formations in Dobšinská ice cave, or bizzare forms in Ochtinská aragonite cave. Demänovská cave in the Low Tatras offers a dome, which is the largest space under the ground in Slovakia.

Yachting – rafting – flatboats and boats

Lowers of water sports will not certainly get bored.

6-hole golf courses can be found in Prievidza and Čierna Voda near Bratislava, 9-hole courses are situated in Piešťany, Tatranska Lomnica, Banska Bystrica, Košice and Rajec. You can play golf also in golf areas with 18 holes in Bernolakovo near Bratislava, Bač and at Tale. The only 18+9-hole golf course in Slovakia expects you in Velka Lomnica.

Hang-gliding and para-gliding are also interesting opportunities to start your adrenalin, however, you should be over 15 years of age. Balooning becomes more and more popular with Slovak people, too.

You can visit by your bike castles, towns colourful villages or stroll along demanding mountain cycling trails. There are 26 main cycling arteries covering almost 6,500 km, leading mainly along river flows and connecting various regions. Among the most suitable regions for cycling belong: the Danube River Valley, the Vah River Valley, Zahorie, Prievidza and its surroundings, Spia and Slovah Carst. Mountain bikes can be used in the hills of the Fatras, Tatras, Polana and Vihorlat.

On December 1st, 2011, the Slovak National Council adopted the amendment to the act on support of tourism. The amendment establishes provision of subsidies for local travel organisations in the amount equal to the total amount of membership contributions collected by the local organisation in the year preceding the last fiscal year, while the maximum amount of subsidy is limited to 90% of the total value of collected tax on accommodation in all member locations of the organisation in the year preceding the last fiscal year.

According to the Act, municipalities can be associated in local and regional organisations without any cadastral restrictions. This allows e.g. linking the municipalities having accommodation capacities with tourist attractions. The minimum number of founding locations is five, while the number of overnight stays at their territory during the last year must exceed 50 000. Travel organisations can be founded also by less than five locations; however, the number of overnight stays there must be no less than 150 000.

The amendment effectively combats “black overnight stays”. The more the local government earns on lodging and contributes to the organisation, the higher is the state subsidy to the tourist organisation. Provision of subsidies for regional and local organisations is set in the way not excessively burden the state budget.

On August 3, 2011 the Ecologist, prominent British environmental magazine, ranked Vysoke Tatry among the top 10 European national parks. This way, Slovak Tatry Mountains felt into the society of national parks of Switzerland, France, Great Britain, Greece or Sweden. The above national parks combine wonderful natural scenes with remarkable flora and fauna.

According to The Ecologist, Vysoké Tatry is one of the last places, where you can encounter izzard – critically endangered antelope species. Moreover, the national park is the home of marmots, brown bears and ample bird species. The national park description mentions the highest peak of Tatry Mountains Gerlachovský štít, mountain lake Štrbské pleso as a leaving point of hikes, or the symbol of Slovakia – Kriváň.

Slovak tourism grew by 7%. Another development will be facilitated by the amendment of the Tourism Development Law and the STB Marketing Strategy for 2011 – 2013

Bratislava, 23 June 2011. In the first quarter of 2011, the number of foreign tourists in Slovakia increased by 7% compared

with the same period in 2009. From our source markets, the largest increase was recorded in the number of tourists from the Ukraine (21.2%), followed by tourists from Russia, the number of whom increased by 18.8% compared with the same period of the previous year. These figures are taken from statistical data published by the Statistical Office of the SR.

Between January and March, Slovakia was also visited by a greater number of tourists from the Czech Republic (10.2% increase), as well as tourists from Austria (14% increase). In contrast, two important markets decreased. There was a 6.7 % decrease in German tourists, as well as a 2.4% decrease in Polish tourists. On the other hand, Slovak ski resorts, water parks and other winter attractions were visited by 2% more Slovak nationals.

The significant increase in the number of traditional winter tourists, Russians, Ukrainians, Czechs, Hungarians and domestic visitors, is certainly gratifying and proves that the targeted winter campaigns for these tourism markets, in which the STB cooperated with public and private entities, was worth it. Tourists were attracted by the extensive investments in winter resorts that have taken place in recent years, but mostly by competitive service packages, common ski passes and discount cards. In addition, Russian and Ukrainian tourists were also attracted by faster processing of visas.

The objective of permanently increasing the number of visitors to Slovakia is also enshrined in the STB Marketing Strategy for 2011 – 2013, which in May this year was approved by the Slovak government. The upcoming amendment of Act No. 91/2010 Coll. on the promotion of tourism will also form an important legislative document in the development of tourism in Slovakia.

Cultural and natural richness of Slovakia



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