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(Ethical statements are based on rules defined by the Committee on Publication Ethics/COPE.)

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EDITORIAL

Dear readers and friends of Studia Turistica,

Welcome to this year's third issue of the journal. We are delighted to offer you an interesting professional reading again. Given the global developments and the impact of the coronavirus crisis, we also focus on this topic in the new issue. The authors focus on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on medical and spa tourism. This research emphasizes the economic effects and the use of state aid, and the prevention of infectious diseases. Another paper entitled „The Importance of Singletrails in the Forest Environment for the Recreation of Residents and its Benefits for Regions“ focuses on the impacts of singletrails on the social environment and stakeholders. The third paper, which focuses on internet marketing communication of hospitality establishments, presents how individually selected restaurants in Slovakia communicate with customers through websites and social networks. Through these platforms, one can get more attention from loyal and potential guests and increase the number of orders in these challenging times. Last paper examines and evaluates the funding of DMOs in Slovakia by state grants. The amount of funding is constantly increasing and many DMOs are having problems with funding.

We hope you will find the reading stimulating.

On behalf of the entire editorial team of Studia Turistica, we wish you a Happy New Year! May 2022 be an extraordinary one.

Petr Scholz
Editor-in-chief



First Czech Electronic Scientific Journal
in the Field of Tourism

SCIENTIFIC PAPERS

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EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON MEDICAL AND SPA TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

The research focuses on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the area of spas and medical tourism in the Czech Republic. The research emphasizes not only the economic effects, but also the use of state aid and the prevention of the spread of infectious diseases. A questionnaire was sent to 42 spas and to 192 medical facilities providing services to medical tourists. Interviews were also conducted with experts in the field. The research lasted 3 months, from October to December 2020, 32 questionnaires were answered. It was found that, on average, sales of medical facilities fell by 75% and they provided care to two thirds less clients. Almost all medical facilities replied that they now place more emphasis on hygiene and prevention.

*Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic. Health care providers.
Medical tourism. Spa tourism. Prevention.
State support programs.*

INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, mankind has encountered threats from various infectious diseases that have been more or less dangerous. As the availability of travel increases, so does the possibility of the disease spread to all countries. At present, vaccination against this disease is not available for everybody, the only defence that humanity has now, except of its immunity, is to minimize the spread of the virus, especially by reducing or even preventing social contacts and travelling, which has resulted in significant inhibition of tourism, including medical tourism, and also spas which has a long tradition in the Czech Republic. The research was conducted by interviews and questionnaires. The problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in medical and spa tourism were identified and solutions were outlined to help these areas recover from the large financial loss.

The term “health tourism” is a generalized concept that still needs to be defined in greater detail as it encompasses broad concepts such as spa tourism, wellness, and medical tourism (Smith & Puczkó, 2015). In terms of the demand for health tourism, it is necessary to distinguish between wellbeing and healthcare. Wellbeing is especially for healthy people who emphasize prevention and do not require any treatment yet. Thus, their goal is to stay healthy (Tabacchi, 2010). Authors such as Goodrich (1987) define health tourism as health-enhancing tourism using facilities or services that allow health examinations, nutritional counselling, trials of alternative medicine and herbal medicine, or spa treatments. According to Lunt et al. (2013) health tourism is ‘the organized travel outside one’s local environment for the maintenance, enhancement or restoration of an individual’s well-being in mind and body’, while medical tourism is defined as ‘the organized travel outside one’s natural health care jurisdiction for the enhancement or restoration of the individual’s health through medical intervention’. Sometimes it is not possible to determine the exact boundary between these two terms. Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) describe health tourism as a set of different relationships aimed at maintaining health.

Spa has a very strong tradition in the Czech Republic, while medical tourism is still developing. Thus, there are relevant data available on the issue of spas, but data on medical tourism are still not collected and available. The COVID-19 pandemic affected both

sectors, mainly by preventing tourists from moving into the country. The aim of this study was to collect data on spas and medical tourism and to find out how the pandemic, and the associated outflow of foreigners, affected these two fields.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SPA TOURISM

The definition of spas themselves is based on their basic and internal natural resources, ie healing mineral waters. These waters are classified according to their composition and temperature, as well as their healing effects on the organism (Navarrete, 2020). However, their function is not only therapeutic, but also focuses on personal development, mental relaxation and overall contact with nature (Smith & Puczkó, 2015).

Spas are set aside as a specific form of tourism. Its existence is conditioned by natural healing resources and climatic conditions of the spa areas. It focuses on convalescence and treatment of the consequences of diseases, rehabilitation and health prevention of the population. Spa as a part of health care, includes treatment stays using treatment methods: balneotherapy, physiotherapy, oxygen therapy, climatotherapy, spa tourism, anti-stress programs, etc. Thanks to prolonging life expectancy, especially interest of seniors in preventive and therapeutic effects of spa care and wellness centres is still raising (Del Río-Rama, Maldonado-Erazo, & Álvarez-García, 2018).

The International Spa Association (2017) defines a spa as a place of business through which the customer feels a general sense of personal wellbeing, with a range of different services aimed at renewal of the mind, body, and spirit, indicating diversity of services, which lead to physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. Capellini (2009) describes a spa as a mineral water source, place, or locality where this type of source has been discovered and is used to improve health. It is a place where there are natural mineral resources and at the same time a company is willing to provide health services, treatment and activities that depend on natural resources.

Frost (2004) understands the spas as part of departmental facilities or as part of urban spas. They provide accommodation, spa treatment, various accompanying programs, and meals. The spa also has qualified staff such as nutrition therapists,

physiotherapists, masseurs, psychologists, and doctors. Barrows et al. (2012) add that spa resorts are a comprehensive facility that focuses on healthy eating, fitness, exercise, yoga, aromatherapy, and other services that lead to relaxation and wellbeing. Therapeutic spa treatment is a non-invasive form of treatment and means for the spa patient an improvement of the state of health and at the same time therapeutic rest, i.e., it is not a leisure activity, but a form of treatment. Spa tourism is a healing process and deals with the health function with the use of natural mineral water for use in spas (Tabacchi, 2010). Currently, there are many spa facilities that do not provide classic traditional services, but focus on their uniqueness (agrotourism spa, beer spa) and successfully promote it (Biernat & Sempolska, 2019). Visitors can come to the spa for healing or wellness services. One group seeks to improve health (convalescence from the disease) and the other to maintain existing health (prevention). Hotels and resorts are trying to adapt to these two demands to satisfy as many clients as possible (Dimitrovski, 2015). Spa services are also increasingly becoming a source of income for hotels and resorts, as guests are willing to pay extra for high quality services and privacy (Pelegrín-Borondo, 2020). Lee (2007) mentioned that tourist traveling for wellness purposes to health resorts or spas are usually less at risk of medical misadventure. This type of leisure and recreational tourism has always been popular to enable the tourist to revitalize and rejuvenate themselves before returning to their normal routine in their home country. Unlike surgeons performing operations who have to be qualified and registered doctors, the level of accreditation and certification of the staff administering natural therapies at health resort can vary from country to country. Although it is believed that natural therapists can do little harm, some of the herbal remedies that are used can be just as potent and harmful as orthodox pharmaceutical products.

MEDICAL TOURISM

There is no one definition for medical tourism. However, it is generally accepted that this term is used to refer to travel activity that involves a medical procedure or activities that promote the wellbeing of the tourist. For example, the term 'healthcare tourism' has been used to cover travel and tourism that are related to medical procedures, health, and wellbeing purposes (Lee C. , 2007). Weisz (2011) stated that the terms medical tourism and health tourism cover many issues. Connell (2013) finds

a complete in-depth definition of medical tourism, which is referred to the market as a niche product that incorporates both health services and travel packages. Individuals are willing to travel regularly for long distances so that they could consult their problems with experts in various diseases. They are also willing to pay for quality services and at the same time like to promote these services further, so the motivation to maintain treatment at a high level is great (Barrows, Powers, & Reynolds, 2012).

The most accurate definition for medical tourism can be considered in the study of Bookman and Bookman (2007), where they describe medical tourism as 'an economic activity that entails trade in services and represents the splicing of at least two sectors: medicine and tourism'. King (2009) describes the medical tourism market as a place where buyers (patients, clients) and providers (agencies, facilities) agreed a specific product transaction. The one who initiates the whole process is the buyer himself, who, thanks to his own research and resources (mostly the internet), creates demand on the market. With today's technology, patients can select from the inexhaustible amount of medical care options. At the same time, they have the possibility to choose the country where they will undergo the procedure, the price they are willing to pay, and the agency that will take care of everything for them. If a medical tourist can work with information resources, he or she can find an effective medical facility that is best suited to his or her specific needs (King, 2009). Bookman and Bookman (2007) study mention that medical tourism depends not only on the resources of the host country, but especially on international communication between organizations such as insurance companies, intermediary agencies, the health sector, clinics and doctors, travel agencies and others. There are fundamental aspects to maintaining competitiveness in the global health tourism market that are defined by the PEST analysis: political stability, economic stability, social factors, and technological infrastructure (Dunn, 2007). The implementation of this knowledge is needed to maintain an effective health facility. The service provider must deliver the medical tourism product to international patients. This product can be defined as a health service that is related to tourism aspects for foreign patients and is provided by licensed and qualified physicians. A triangle is formed between health care providers or intermediaries, clients, and physicians, which must be interconnected (Bookman & Bookman, 2007). Medical tourism market can

then expand into the public health system and can improve the conditions of local health facilities by providing beds, technology, qualified staff, and financial resources for hospitals and for home patients, thus increasing the quality of medical services (Bookman & Bookman, 2007). High quality provision of medical services is needed to obtain accreditation, thanks to which medical tourists can better orientate themselves in the market of health care providers. According to Dunn (2007), obtaining accreditation is especially important for new providers trying to enter the market. A medical facility may receive accreditation through the Joint Commission International (JCI) when fulfilling the conditions and standards. Horowitz and Rosensweig (2007) argued that a competitive medical facility must provide consulting services, quality physicians, postoperative care, and ethical or moral values. Meeting these criteria leads to the global growth of the medical tourism market and the sustainability of the development of trade associated with it.

Medical tourism is gradually beginning to develop more and more not only in the business world, but also in the field of science and research. More and more studies are focusing on medical tourism research and trying to collect relevant data (Lee & Fernando, 2015). Based on the study of Hunter (2007), medical tourism is known as a combination of characteristics of the medical industry and the tourism industry at a travel destination. Lunt (2016) defines medical tourism as a particular form of patient mobility, where patients travel across borders or to overseas destinations to receive special treatments. The most popular destinations in the medical tourism market are Thailand, India, Costa Rica, Mexico, Malaysia,

Singapore, Brazil, Colombia, Turkey, Taiwan, South Korea, Czech Republic, and Spain (Karadayi-Usta & SerdarAsan, 2020). Medical tourism is also considered an opportunity for healthcare innovation and a new area of investment (Conell, 2006). The patient pays for all the care himself. There are many reasons why a patient should travel for the procedure. Above all, it is a question of lower financial demands than at the home clinic, shorter waiting times, better or more accessible health care or the fact that the client will be kept more anonymous (Conell, 2006). Guy and Henson (2015) cite the most common reasons for lower medical costs, shorter waiting times, better quality or availability of a procedure that would not be legal in the home country. Tseng (2013) adds as another reason the unavailability of the procedure, or the fact that the procedure is not covered by a health insurance company in the home country. These are often patients who are from developed countries, so they are relatively rich, but for some reason they do not want to undergo the procedure in their own country, so they choose another country, mostly the one that is cheaper from their point of view (Bennie, 2014). The Czech Republic also attracts couples who cannot have a child in a natural way, thanks to more lenient legislation in the field of assisted reproduction (Kotíková, 2013). The concept of medical tourism includes all procedures in the following fields: cosmetic surgery, dentistry, cardiology, cardiac surgery, orthopaedics, bariatric surgery, reproductive medicine, transplantation, ophthalmology and diagnostics (Lunt, N., Carrera, P., 2010). Based on the information mentioned, Figure 1 was created, which summarizes the main differences between spa and medical tourism.

Figure 1: The main characteristics of spa and medical tourism

	Travelling abroad	Doctor involvement	Push factors	Pull factors
Spa tourism	Not necessary	Not necessary	Health improvement and wellbeing	Healing natural resources
Medical tourism	Yes	Yes	Insufficient healthcare in the origin country	Quality Costs

Source: author’s own elaboration

SPA AND MEDICAL TOURISM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

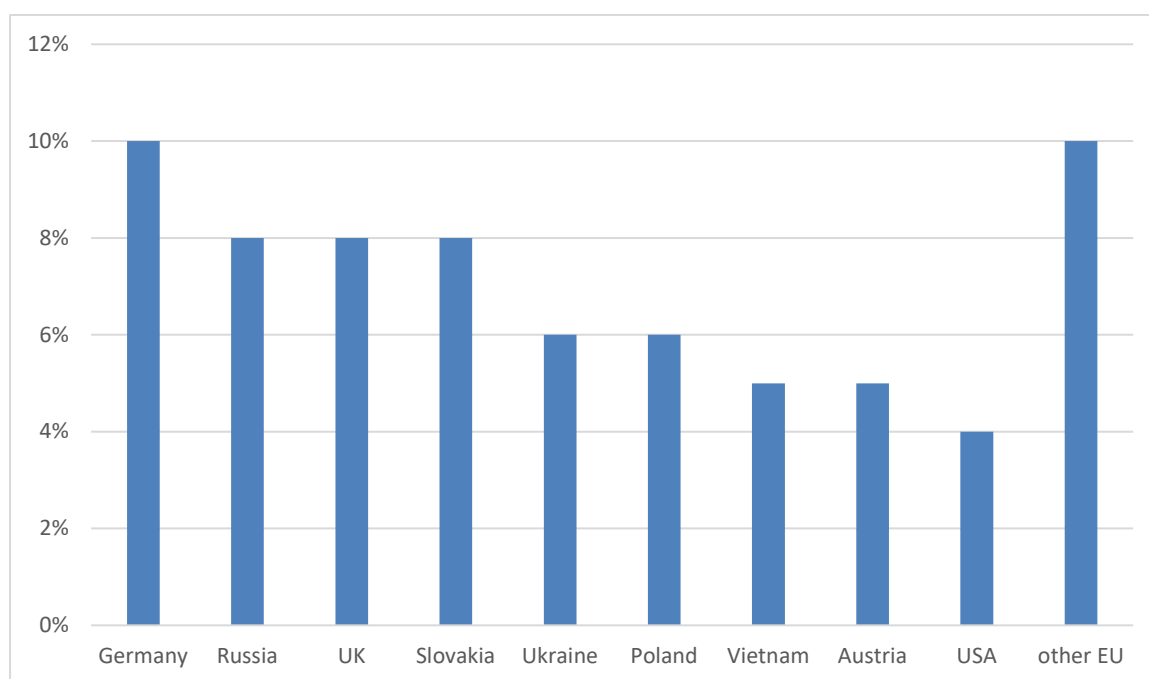
Spas have a strong position in the Czech Republic with a rich history given mainly by natural resources and tradition. The relationship between spas and tourism has undergone major changes, especially in the last decade. Tourism has become an integral part of human personal consumption. The changes in the political and economic field that occurred after 1990 have fundamentally reflected in the field of spas in our society. It is becoming a new lifestyle of the 21st century to absorb and implement as many activities as possible in the shortest possible time.

In 2019 there were 884 000 clients recreational in Czech spas, which is an increase of 3.82% comparing to previous year (Machová, 2020). Czechs are 55% of them, 24% Germans, 7% Russians. Two of the three spa guests headed to the spa in the Karlovy Vary region. Tourists from Asian countries also come to the fore in absolute numbers of arrivals. For example, more than 13,000 of them came to the spa from Taiwan in 2019. However, they only stay in the spa for a single night. Tourists from China and South Korea behave similarly. On the contrary, tourists from Saudi Arabia will spend more than 20 days. Israelis

also spend above-average time in Czech spas (12.5 days). Unfortunately, the number of their arrivals is declining year on year. Tourists from Ukraine have an average length of stay similar to the Russian clientele, 10.6 days, and moreover, their numbers are growing year on year. Tourists from the USA also have a very high length of stay (on average 8.3 days) and the total number of overnight stays is 38,000. The Karlovy Vary region is the key one in terms of spa tourism. In 2019, it was visited by 549,000 spa guests and as the only region it has a significantly higher share of foreign spa clients whose visit culminates in the 4th quarter. Czech spa guests stay in the spa for an average of 10.8 days, creating a mass of 4.7 million overnight stays per year.

Unlike spa tourism, the Czech Republic does not keep official statistics on medical tourism, so the exact official numbers of incoming medical tourists by country are not currently available. According to the yearbooks of the countries in the section of medical tourism published by the International Medical Travel Journal (2017), Germany, Russia and the United Kingdom are among the most important source countries in the Czech Republic, as can be seen from the Figure 2.

Figure 2: Medical tourists in the Czech Republic by nationality

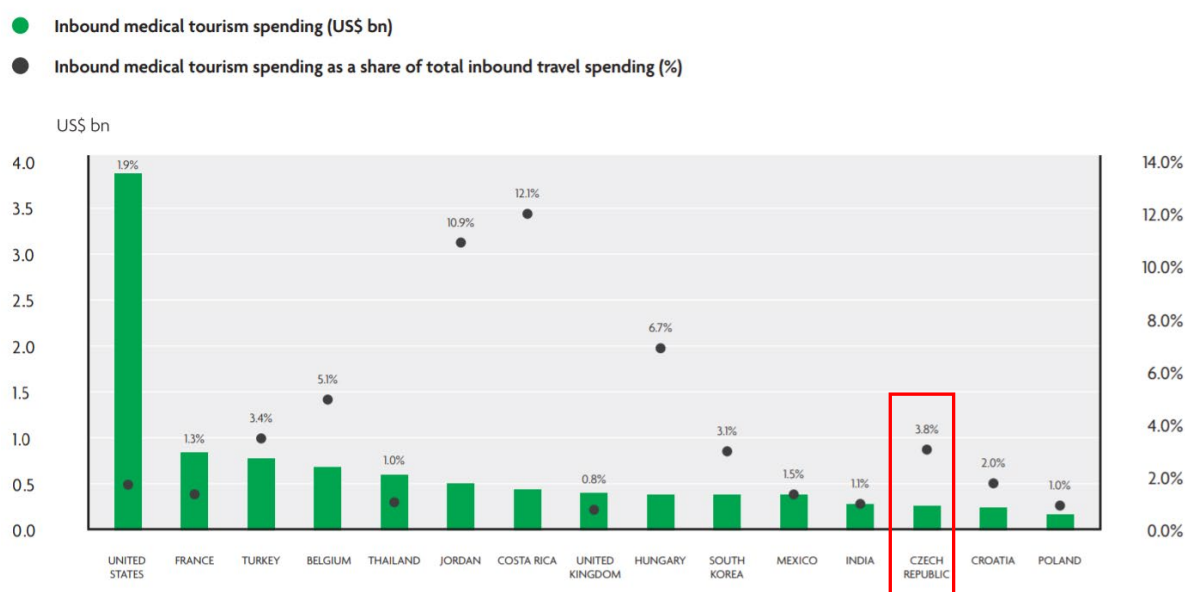


Source: (International Medical Travel Journal, 2017)

According to available data (International Medical Travel Journal, 2017), the number of medical tourists visiting the Czech Republic has more than tripled in the last 10 years. The Czech Republic ranks among the top 15 countries with the largest inbound medical tourism spending (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019), revenues from health tourism in 2017 almost 4% of total tourism revenues, which is 265 million dollars, which is about 5 billion Czech korunas (CZK, Figure 3). Depending on which medical facility takes

care of the patient, the money raised then travels to either the private or public sphere. In the Czech Republic, most facilities providing treatment for medical tourists are private, but over time, public medical facilities could also focus on these patients and thus get more money into their budgets. Of course, the effort to obtain more funding must not exceed the quality of care for all patients (e.g., the preference of medical tourists over domestic patients).

Figure 3: Top 15 largest countries - inbound medical tourism spending (2017)



Source: (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019)

FUTURE PROSPECTS

In order to analyse the future development, 3 options of the possible development of the pandemic in the Czech Republic are considered: optimistic, intermediate and pessimistic. At the moment, it is assumed a rather pessimistic scenario, as the epidemic in the Czech Republic is still failing to get under control. Some spas are now being transformed into hospitals. For example, the Janské Lázně State Medical Spa began to help the Hradec Králové region with the influx of covid patients. The spa in Janské Lázně specializing in the treatment of the musculoskeletal system has set aside thirty-two beds for patients with a mild course of the infection, and other spas that will join this initiative may follow. In favour of the pessimistic option, it also plays a role that vaccines are currently available but still in short supply, a large part of the population refuses to be vaccinated and it is not clear how long the vaccine protects individuals and whether they will not have to

be revaccinated in the event of a virus mutation. This is also one of the factors that will undoubtedly affect these possible scenarios. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNCTAD, 2020) estimates that the travel industry will fall by as much as 80% by the end of 2020, a loss of up to 1.1 billion international arrivals, or 1.1 trillion in export earnings. One of the proposed solutions to mitigate losses in the health tourism market in a study from Malaysia (Tatum, 2020) is the effort of countries to release at least medical tourists, which is very complicated at the moment when health systems are overloaded by their own patients. On the other hand, some studies (Ghasemi, 2020; Bookman & Bookman, 2007) state that the COVID-19 pandemic has not only negative effects, but also positive effects, mainly due to the need for flexible decision-making on currently issued measures and the ever-changing situation. This has strengthened the management of healthcare facilities, its decision-making processes, the speed

of innovation, cost-effectiveness, or the approval of newly issued regulations. Furthermore, a pandemic can lead to new or better cooperation between the private and public sectors (Navarrete, 2020). Now, the future of economic, trade and tourism development depend on how national health systems cope with this pandemic. When considering that healthcare has long-term problems in a large number of countries, which have been overlooked every year, this task rests primarily with healthcare professionals. The share of health care expenditures in relation to GDP for the year 2019 in the Czech Republic was 7.6% (OECD, 2019), which is below the EU average and thus belongs to the last third of countries. Healthcare has been underfunded for a long time and faces many challenges, the system would need to be reformed, which is not a priority for any ruling party.

The current situation of spa and medical tourism in the Czech Republic is related to the above. These two areas of health tourism are influenced by two main factors. The lack of medical staff, which must be available especially in hospital facilities, where it is now very much needed, and the absence of medical tourists and domestic and foreign patients who would need spa care, but the current epidemiological situation does not allow them to do so. The theoretical part showed the declines of domestic and foreign tourists inbound in the Czech Republic, no study has so far focused only on spa and medical tourists, which is the focus of this research. The following results illustrate some of the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on medical tourism and spas.

DATA AND METHODS

The aim of this research was to find out how the COVID-19 pandemic has economically affected spa facilities and clinics providing care to medical tourists, whether they benefit from state support and whether the emphasis on preventive measures and hygiene has increased. The results were achieved by the method of qualitative research in the form of structured interviews and quantitative research in the form of sending questionnaires. Interviews were conducted with experts focusing on the issues of spas and medical tourism. There were 3 structured interviews with manager staff of spa facilities (from Karlovarsky, and Kralovehradecky district) and 3 interviews with experts engaged in medical tourism (for plastic surgery, stomatology,

and reproductive medicine). These experts were chosen based on the data needed and their willingness to provide an interview. Questionnaires were sent to providers in medical (n = 192) and spa facilities (n = 42). Medical facilities from almost all over the Czech Republic were selected, which provide medical services to medical tourists in the field of dentistry, reproductive medicine, plastic surgery, orthopaedics, and ophthalmology (based on the information on their websites). All chosen spa facilities are members of the Association of Medical Spas of the Czech Republic. Questionnaires were sent via email. Finally, 32 questionnaires were online completed, which were subsequently analysed. The dependence between the decrease in sales and the decrease in the care provided for foreign clients were calculated by correlation and regression analysis. The aim of using these methods was to know how much impact on health care providers has the absence of clients from abroad. From the emails sent, 51 came back with an automated answer that the medical centre was closed, so it was clear that they did not provide any care to clients. However, these facilities were not included in the research, as no clear reason for the closure or time frame was given.

Three research questions were identified:

Research question 1: How much medical facilities have suffered financial damage, and to what extent does it depend on the cancelled stays of foreigners?

Research question 2: Do medical facilities use any form of state aid?

Research question 3: Do medical facilities now place more emphasis on preventing the spread of infectious diseases in general?

These three research questions were identified on the basis of the need to determine the extent to which health centres were economically affected by the pandemic, whether these problems were caused by the fact that the movement of people from abroad was restricted and evaluate the use of state programs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 6 interviews were conducted with experts in the given issues and 32 questionnaires were answered, which were sent to medical facilities that provide spa or health care.

According to an interview with one of the providers of these services, the Czech Republic could lose because of the restrictions a total of hundreds of millions, maybe billions of CZK. It is not just about the profits of several clinics, but also about the money that tourists who seek health care in the country will spend. Large agencies and companies are able to sell services for a quarter of a billion CZK a year. One-fifth of respondents state that over 90% of planned interventions had to be cancelled. During their stay, clients also spend on accommodation, transport, meals, shopping, guide, and other services. In addition, they pay an average of 3,500 euros for the procedure itself. Until recently, medical tourists underwent hundreds of procedures a day in more than a hundred medical facilities. The Czech economy is now losing significant revenues. Funds from foreign clients allow clinics to purchase top equipment, which is then also used by Czech patients. For many doctors, the prestige and benefits associated with medical tourism are a reason not to go abroad. Clinics with a large proportion of foreign patients will have to reduce care for domestic patients and may disappear if the borders are not crossed for a long time.

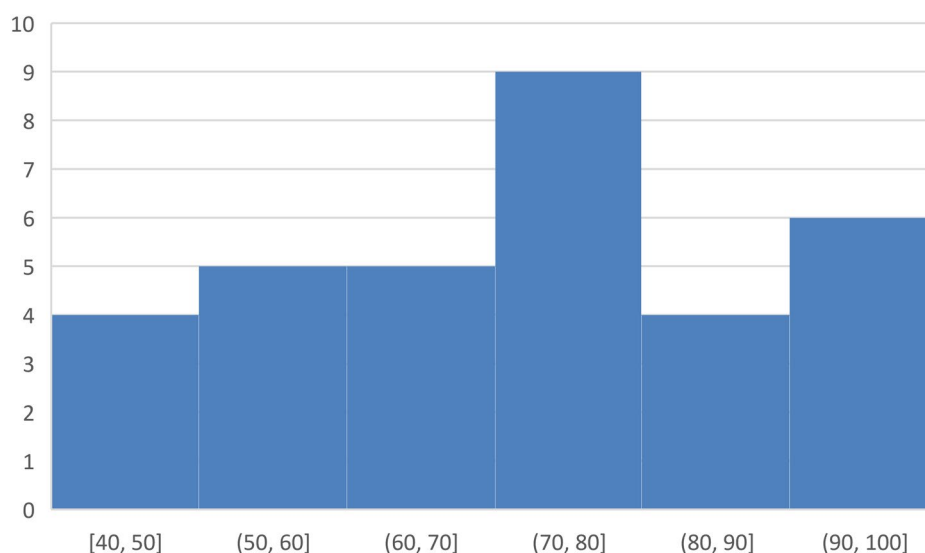
According to health care providers for foreigners, the Czech Republic has so far held the position of one of the most sought-after European destinations for medical tourism. The most frequent visitors are mainly British and Germans. While tourists from the UK come for larger procedures, Germans more often undergo smaller ones, such as dental treatments, due to the shorter distance. People from the Netherlands and Switzerland also come to the Czech Republic from Europe for medical treatment. However, clients from Arab countries or the United States are no exception. The state administration is not planning any support or subsidies for this sector yet, the problem is that there is no unifying association that would ask for any form of support. For example, in Turkey and Hungary, state aid projects for medical tourism in the form of promotion or subsidy of tickets have been running in the past. The state should support medical tourism, which brings billions of CZK a year to the Czech Republic.

It could support it with a marketing campaign, ticket subsidies, or provide subsidies to agencies and medical facilities dependent on this segment. Due to travel restrictions to prevent the spread of the infection, entrepreneurs in this field have no income. Entrepreneurs in medical tourism will not reach credit programs with the state guarantee COVID, because they are evaluated as risky. Without state aid, they are in danger of collapsing, and medical tourism is likely to move to other countries, radically reducing the country's competitiveness, which has been growing for decades.

The completed questionnaires show that while the average occupancy rate for 2019 was more than 75% for more than half of the respondents, in the first months of this year a downward trend can be observed, with approximately half of the facilities recording occupancy rates of 50% in January and February. The reduction of operations and the subsequent closure of spa houses was, of course, dramatically reflected in the volume of their income. The profits of the interviewed health care facilities fell by an average of 60% and lost a third of clients. At the same time, many facilities stated that they treated up to 90% of foreign clients last year, and only 5% this year. The loss of income also brings with it an accumulation of unfulfilled obligations to suppliers and clients. At the time of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, all facilities had introduced increased hygiene measures on the part of staff and clients and preventive measures, the importance of which they are now fully aware of. Almost a third of respondents said they had stopped accepting clients who had resided in Italy, China and Taiwan for a spa stay. The effects of the pandemic are currently most pronounced in the Karlovy Vary region, where spas and related tourism form a substantial part of the economy.

Figure 4 shows the declines in sales of individual medical facilities in 2020. The x-axis is formed by the intervals of decline in sales in percent, i.e., 9 facilities had a sales decline between 70 and 80 percent. The average decrease in sales is 75% (rounded to whole percentages), which is a very high number. One-fifth of medical facilities reported a decline in sales of more than 90%.

Figure 4: Sales decline



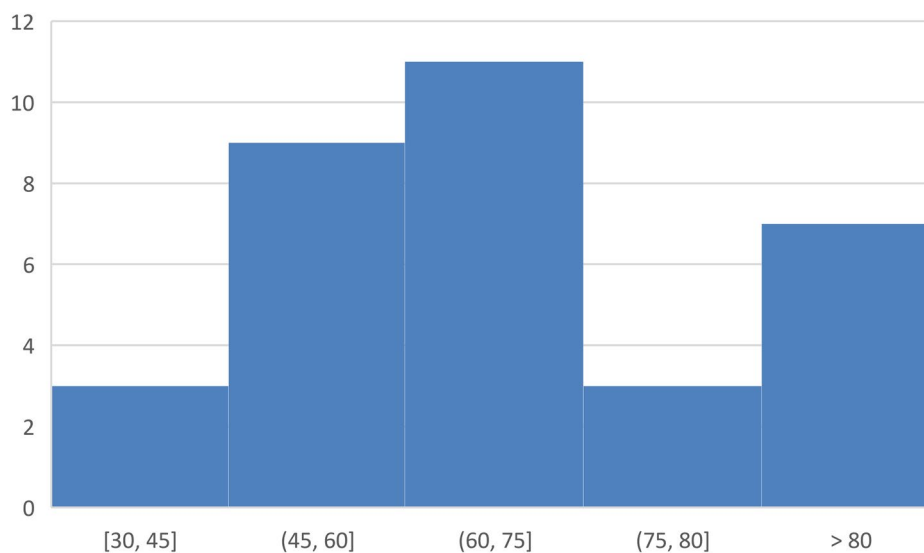
Legend: x: decrease in sales in %, y: number of medical facilities

Source: author's own research and elaboration

Figure 5 shows the share of all cancelled stays. The x-axis is formed by the intervals of cancelled stays in percent. On average, 67% of stays were cancelled. Over 80% of stays were cancelled in 7 facilities. At

the time of the research, healthcare facilities were no longer accepting orders for 2020, so an even bigger drop is expected.

Figure 5: Share of lost clients (%)



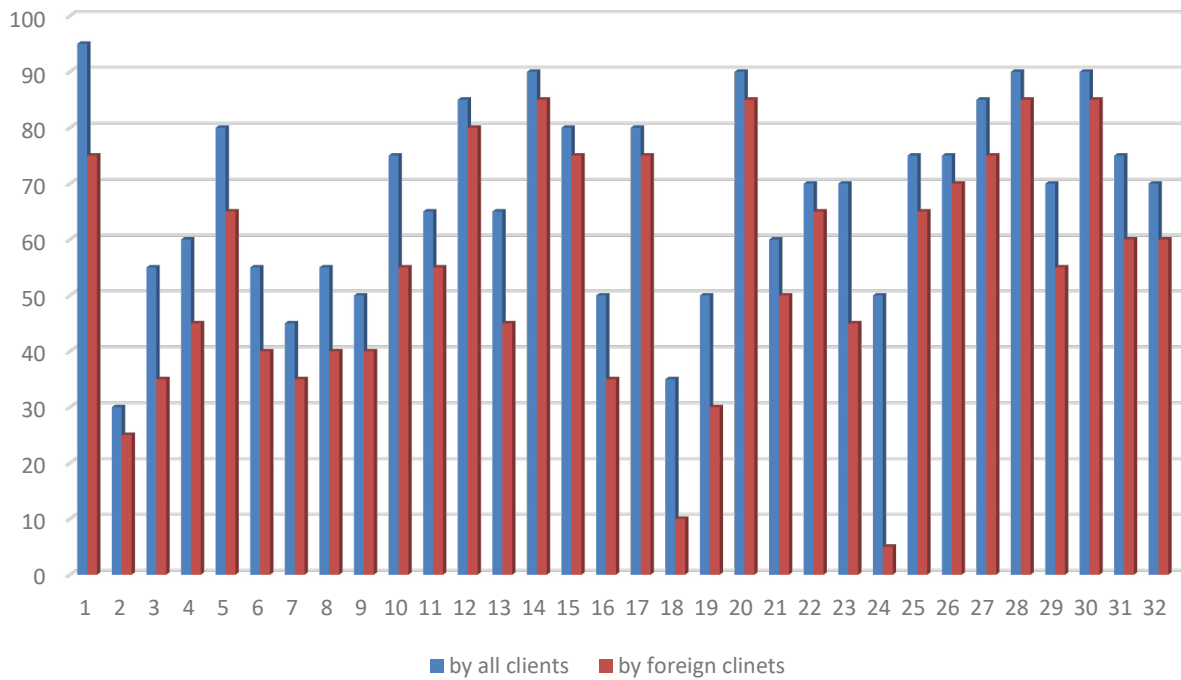
Legend: x: cancelled stays in %, y: number of medical facilities

Source: author's own research and elaboration

Figure 6 shows the ratio of foreign and domestic clients in the interviewed medical facilities. Foreign

clients often make 95% of all stays, both facilities providing care for medical tourists and spa facilities.

Figure 6: Cancelled stays (%)

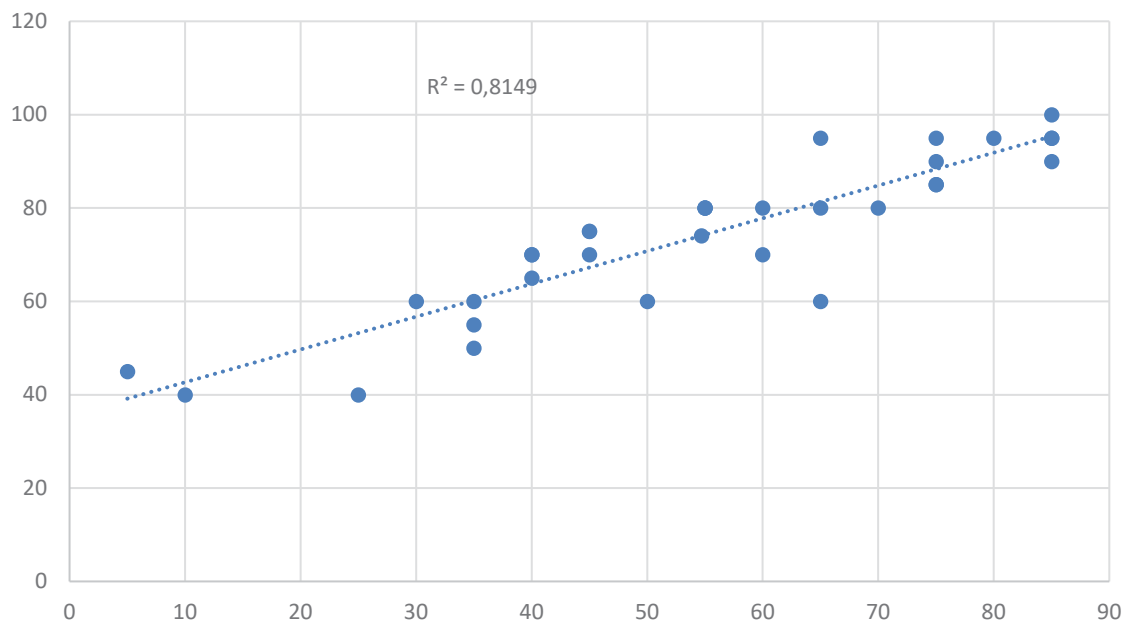


Legend: x: medical facilities y: cancelled stays
Source: author's own research and elaboration

Furthermore, a correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the dependence between cancelled stays from foreign clients and the decline in sales. The correlation coefficient takes the value of 0.902, so this dependence is strongly positively correlated.

The following Figure 7 shows a regression analysis with a coefficient of determination of 0.81, which can be interpreted that the variance in the data is 81% caused by cancelled stays of foreigners so the prediction error will be low. This is evident due to the regression line from which the points do not stay too far.

Figure 7: Sales decline vs. Lost foreign clients



Legend: x: lost foreign clients, y: sales decline
Source: author's own research and elaboration

It can be stated that the decrease in sales is largely due to stays of foreign tourists, which were cancelled. This result can be influenced by the fact that foreign clients usually pay for their stay themselves and spend more on additional services, i.e., foreign tourists contribute more to the spa budget than domestic tourists. That is why, despite the high increase in domestic guests in the summer months, the decline in sales for the whole year was so great. The state now wants to support domestic residents to book stays in Czech spas and compensate for at least a little loss. However, the question is how many Czech guests the spa would have to accommodate to compensate the income from foreign clients.

The second research question concerned the state support for medical facilities. Health care providers have either not benefited from any support, or are still awaiting approval, or have used some form of support under business grant and cash schemes. Spa facilities have found support in the state programs COVID – Lázně or Antivirus. All respondents from the spa facilities use this support. Spa facilities involved in the COVID – Lázně (Ministerstvo pro místní rozvoj, 2020) program are therefore temporarily unable to provide services to self-payers who use discount vouchers issued under this program. The government has set aside a billion CZK for the COVID spa program, for which a maximum of 250,000 vouchers can be issued. The Ministry for Regional Development is preparing an extension of the COVID - Lazne project at least until 31 March 2021. The subsidy is intended to cover the costs incurred by accepting discount vouchers for the implementation of health, preventive stays in facilities. Those, who have a registration from the relevant regional authority, or another administrative body authorized to issue an authorization to provide spa treatment and rehabilitation care, have registered for support and meet the conditions of the grant applicant. The ANTIVIRUS (Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí, 2020) contribution is provided as compensation to help employees who do not work due to obstacles to work on the part of the employer (restriction of business operations, reduction of demand for accommodation services, etc.) or selected obstacles to work on the part of the employee (ordered quarantine by staff). The allowance is provided exclusively to employees in an employment relationship who have not been dismissed by the employer. The allowance is provided only if the employer has actually paid compensation of wages to employees and duly paid compulsory public health

and social security premiums and a contribution to the state employment policy for both employees and employers. Compared to the spring months, the spa can still provide health services, even if only those covered by public insurance, but its volume has gradually decreased, due to people's fears, failure of surgical procedures that precede stays or overload of surgeries that would list the spa chronicles. The failure of complex spa care (funded by insurance companies) will lead to the spa failing to reach the negotiated spring compensation, which consisted of a temporarily higher reimbursement for the insured in the second half of the year. It is its extension to part of 2021 that, together with the extension of the validity of spa proposals and state vouchers, will be a key priority for spas in negotiations with the government on how to help them overcome these times of crisis.

Based on the interview with one of the spa experts, it was important to obtain a notification from the European Commission for the subsidy title COVID – Lázně. The notification will make it possible to use up the total prepared amount of CZK 1 billion, which represents 250,000 vouchers, or preferential preventive stays in domestic spas. The support is in the Temporary Framework regime (limit EUR 800 thousand / per entity until the end of 2020). It is a quick support of business entities in connection with the COVID pandemic. The state's ability to support tourism through vouchers can be beneficial for a time. But it is only a temporary, short-term solution that helps spa facilities that are more focused on self-payers belonging to the low- and middle-income group. Prices for stays and treatment for such subjects are lower and therefore more affordable in combination with a voucher. On the contrary, the spa, which is aimed at a rich foreign clientele, suffers from low interest or even limited access of this clientele to the Czech Republic. The worst thing is that possible new hygienic and epidemiological measures can be expected because of the so-called second or even third waves of the pandemic. The only practical solution for spa facilities that have been and are dependent on the relevant tourism segment is to limit the activity to the minimum. The effects of the pandemic show that it is not possible to prepare effectively for such events. There is a lack of interconnection of spa treatment care with other health systems in the field of information systems and in the medical field, clinical research in spas has stalled and spa medicine is neglected.

The last research question asked whether healthcare facilities place more emphasis on preventing the spread of infectious diseases. The question in the questionnaire was not asked so explicitly but is the result of several partial questions following this issue. Despite the fact that there are many regulations and documents on what actions are necessary to prevent the spread of the infection, in the end the whole system rests on the working staff who actually perform these actions. It is therefore important for staff to be aware of the importance of hygiene and prevention. Almost all medical facilities are now raising their hygiene standards and paying more attention to compliance with rules that were in force before, but often have not been properly observed. Some healthcare facilities have introduced staff training on hygiene and prevention. Proper preventive measures can save a lot of money as a result.

The results are influenced by the small number of respondents, which is due not only to the impersonal form of research, which is not possible in the current situation, but also to the epidemiological situation where many facilities are closed or unwilling to provide information. Values are rounded to whole numbers. It would certainly be good to repeat the research in 2021, when data for the whole of 2020 will be available.

CONCLUSION

The research was focused on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on spa facilities and medical tourism providers. The Czech Republic has so far held the position of one of the most sought-after European destinations for medical tourism. The most frequent visitors are mainly British and Germans. While tourists from the UK come for larger procedures, Germans more often undergo smaller ones, such as dental treatments, due to the shorter distance. People from the Netherlands and Switzerland also come to the Czech Republic from Europe for medical treatment. The Czech Republic ranks among the top 15 countries with the largest inbound medical tourism spending, revenues from health tourism in 2017 which is almost 4% of total tourism revenues. It was found that due to epidemiological measures, 67% of stays were cancelled and the facilities thus lost 75% of their sales. The Karlovy Vary region, where the largest spa facilities are located, was the most affected. A strong dependence was found between the cancelled stays of foreigners who could

not come to the Czech Republic or whose stay was cancelled by the provider, and the decline in sales. Income is therefore largely generated by revenues from foreign clients. It was further confirmed that the facilities now place more emphasis on the prevention of the spread of infections, especially at the level of executive staff. Of course, support at the national level is also very important, as the state should try to help all sectors that have been affected by the pandemic. All surveyed spa facilities use some state support, but not all facilities providing care for medical tourists have this option. For example, private clinics do not get support because they are rated as risky these days. The more clinics will close, the lower the competitiveness of the Czech Republic in the medical tourism market and their place will be taken over by other foreign clinics that has received state support. Whatever the scenario of further development, it is necessary to potentiate domestic, but especially foreign clients, to use local spas and clinics, and for the Czech Republic to regain its competitiveness and clients are not afraid to come to the country. Medical tourism represents a great potential that must have and receive every possible support from various sectors to guarantee its positive impact on the economic value through sources of employment and care to those in need of medical attention (international or local). It is also highlighted that medical tourism is a good option for the development of tourism holistically, with an emphasis on business, reflected in the capacity installed, in the accreditations and, therefore, in the quality of the service, and in the country experience with tourism.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SINGLETRAILS IN THE FOREST ENVIRONMENT FOR THE RECREATION OF RESIDENTS AND ITS BENEFITS FOR REGIONS

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ABSTRACT

The popularity of singletrails among off-road cyclists has been rising in the last few years, this leads to the construction of more singletrails. But what impact does the existence of singletrails have on the social environment and on stakeholders – users in a broader sense who are directly affected by the operation of singletrails? That is the question which has not been answered yet. Our research was focused on the observation of three selected model localities, in which singletrails were established. These were Singletrail in Moravian Karst – Jedovnice Trails, Singletrail in Moravian Karst – Mariánské Valley Trails and Rychlebské Trails in the Rychlebské Mountains. In each locality, the research was focused on seven groups of stakeholders who were affected in some way by the operation of the trails. A total of 182 semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the above mentioned stakeholders in 2019–2021. The text shows an overview of the identified significant impacts of the existence of singletrails on the social environment and it was conducted among a wide range of stakeholders.

Keywords: Benefits for municipality. Qualitative analysis. Singletrail. Stakeholders. Tourism.

INTRODUCTION

The following text deals with the identification of the impacts of the construction of singletrails on society and on its various social actors. We call them stakeholders – users of singletrails in a broader sense, whose life or social functioning is affected in various ways and diversely intensely by the existence of the singletrails. Firstly, it is necessary to mention that the singletrail is a one-way road with a maximum width of 1.8 m which has a natural surface and is built for off-road cycling. Singletrails are modified natural trails built for sport purposes. This is a modern direction in off-road cycling, which has its roots in the United States of America in the 70s of the 20th century. Construction of the first singletrail in the Czech Republic (Singletrail under the Smrk Mountain) began in 2008 and was finished a year later. Over time, the construction of trails – other trail centres or bike parks were built and off-road cycling became increasingly popular in the Czech Republic. According to the [MTBCZECH.CZ](https://mtbczech.cz) project, there are currently 28 trail locations in the Czech Republic, some of which have both a trail centre and a bike park.

There is only a little information on the impacts of the construction of singletrails in the Czech environment, although they are becoming the subject of public discussions. Impact research has not yet been the subject of a broader and structured research project that would look at impacts simultaneously from environmental and social perspectives. The following text seeks to at least partially fill in this gap. It looks for the answer to the question: what are the impacts of the existence of singletrails on the social environment and on stakeholders?

Three model singletrails were chosen for systematic observation. Their selection was calculated – chosen localities were different from each other in terms of biodiversity. These were Singletrail in Moravian Karst – Jedovnice Trails, Singletrail in Moravian Karst – Mariánské Valley Trails and Rychlebské Trails in the Rychlebské Mountains. The first two localities are located near Brno, the third singletrail is in Jeseníky. This singletrail has been in operation for the longest time, that is since 2009. The singletrail Jedovnice Trails was opened in 2016 and the singletrail in Mariánské Valley in 2018.

The examination of impacts at the social level required the creation of diverse data in the

environment of different types of stakeholders and thus integrate both qualitative and quantitative research. The quantitative research was focused on the users of the trails – cyclists. The research dealt with their preferences, their behaviour on the trails, the economic side of the use of singletrails or with issues connected with the influence of singletrails on changes in the surrounding nature. However, the following text focuses on the results of qualitative research, thus on the analysis of impacts at the level of a wide range of stakeholders whose lives have changed because of the construction of the singletrails. Firstly, researchers focused on the identification of key categories of stakeholders through pre-research. The result was the discovery of seven important categories directly affected by the presence of singletrails – we call them stakeholders. A total of 182 semi-structured interviews were conducted with these seven groups of stakeholders in 2019–2021.

The following text is divided into several parts. The first part will generally explain what a singletrail is and will focus on literature review. After that a description of three localities in which the qualitative survey took place will follow. In the next part of the text, the research methodology will be presented in more detail, this will be followed by the results of the stakeholder analysis. For better clarity of the text, a separate passage is dedicated to each of the stakeholders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

WHAT IS A SINGLETRAIL

The term *Singletrack* or *Singletrail* originates from the English expression *Single Track Trail*. We can find both expressions in the Czech environment. The term *Singletrack* was created by Kvasnička in 2007; it has been protected by the trademark since 2012. In this text we incline to the usage of the term *singletrail*. According to the Czech Mountain Bike Association (which will be referred to as ČEMBA) singletrail is described as a one-way road of “*the width no more than 1.8 m which has a natural surface, cannot rise above the half the inclination of the fall line and any part of the trail should never have an overall inclination bigger than 15%. The crown of the trail is completely sunken in the slope*”

and bends slightly in the transverse direction so it could drain water. In the travel direction, the trail usually changes direction and inclination, at least for a short time. This prevents water from running fast down the surface and causing erosion. What is more, the winding nature of the trail also regulates the speed at which cyclists can move on it" (Kvasnička, Slavík, n.d.).

SINGLETRAILS AND LITERATURE

We can most often find researches about impacts of singletrails or Mountain Biking on the environment in foreign literature – for example Marion and Wimpey (2007); Quinn and Chernoff (2010); Cessford (1995). In the Czech Republic, academic staff of the Mendel University in Brno are devoted to this topic, for example Schneider et al. (2008) or Hruža and Zemanek (2018). A project named *Conditions for the harmonious alignment of biking in the forest environment with the interests of nature conservation and regional development* (TL02000505) is currently being carried out at this university. This text is a part of the project. The main goal of the project is to describe impacts of singletrails on the socioeconomic sphere in more detail. Firstly, we will briefly focus on how the topic is reflected in foreign literature. Secondly, we will introduce Czech literature written about the topic.

One of the subjects the foreign literature in the socioeconomic sphere focuses on is the economic benefit of singletrails or Mountain Biking for a locality. Lau (2014) focuses mainly on the economic benefit of this new kind of tourism for chosen localities. One of these localities is Kamloops, which is a Canadian city in Province of British Columbia. According to a study carried out in this locality (study on mountain bike tourism), 7 300 mountain biking tourists visited the locality in 2015. Many visitors were on road trips of medium length (3.8 days) with the average stay in Kamloops being 2 days. Average daily expenditures per person was \$76 per person. Total dollar-sum economic impact of mountain biking tourism in Kamloops at \$3.5 m total per annum was substantial. Outcomes of the study thus confirm that mountain biking has a great financial impact on the locality. The topic of the economic impact of singletrails or mountain biking on localities is also discussed for example in studies: White and Smith (2014); Buning and Lamont (2020); or Meltzer (2014).

In the Czech professional environment, the socioeconomic sphere is discussed for example in

a text by Fialová et al. (2019). Their text centres about the evaluation of the attendance of a monitored singletrail, furthermore it summarizes the outcomes of a questionnaire survey focused on preferences of singletrail users. Outcomes of the study state that *„the implementation of singletrails in the locality has increased the spectre of recreational possibilities, which has attracted a number of visitors who surely would not have come to the STMK territory were it not for the paths “(...) „It has also increased the potential and attractiveness of the operators of catering facilities since most of the visitors prefer hot meals during their visits. Thus, the construction of the singletrails brings economic benefits to these establishments as well“* (p. 14). According to the conclusions made in the text mentioned above, the negative aspect of singletrails is primarily the illegal passages on the paths – *„The assessment of passages performed in 2017 proved that the number of passages outside the opening hours of the singletrails reaches up to 5 % of total number of passages through the singletrails“* (p. 15).

In the Czech environment, the impact of singletrails on stakeholders is discussed in the text by Kozumplíková et al. (2018). The text summarizes outcomes of a feasibility study of the construction plan of the town Písek. It was planned to build a new singletrail near the city of Písek in the natural park of Písecké hills. Authors of the text describe the outcomes of Cost-Benefit Analysis from the point of view of individual stakeholders. One of the outcomes of their analysis is the fact that residents perceived the project of the construction of singletrails rather negatively, what is more, the problems residents connect with the existence of singletrails surpass the positive impacts that they expect.

The overall summarization of the study is as follows: *„The values of the indicators of the methods for evaluating the effectiveness of investments reach the levels at which the project can be recommended for the realization. Positive NPV refers to the excess of the positive effects of the project over its negative consequences “*. (...) *„Despite positive results of the feasibility study, the representatives of the City of Písek decided not to support this project and listen to the wishes of local inhabitants“* (p. 31).

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCHED LOCALITIES

Singletrail in Moravian Karst – Jedovnice Trails

Jedovnice Trails belong to Singletrail in Moravian Karst and they have been in operation since 2016. The trails are located approximately 25 km north of Brno in a small town Jedovnice in Blansko district in south Moravian region. There is around 2,800 people living in this small town. Jedovnice is a traditional and attractive tourist location which is often visited thanks to the Olšovec pond, mainly in summer months. Jedovnice Trails have the station of departure in the camp next to the Olšovec pond where is also located the Base for cyclists. You can find bike rental services, services for cyclists, Information Centre and bistro in the Base.

Singletrail in Moravian Karst - Mariánské Valley Trails

Singletrail Mariánské Valley is located near Brno-Líšeň and village Mokrý-Horákov. The trails in Mariánské Valley have the same observer as Jedovnice Trails. As in the previous case, Petr Vaněk is behind their construction. The trails came in operation in 2018 and there is still no Base which could offer service to cyclists as in the Jedovnice Trails locality. Cyclists can also choose from three circuits here.

Rychlebské Trails in the Rychlebské Mountains

Rychlebské Trails are (together with the Singletrack under Smrk site) one of the first singletrail sites in the Czech Republic. The first circuits began to be built in the spring of 2009. Rychlebské Trails have a Base, which is located in the municipality Černá Voda. There is a camp near the Base, and there is also a bike rental service. The Base also offers a wide range of refreshments, cyclists have the opportunity to purchase cycling clothes and other bike accessories. There is also an information centre. Rychlebské Trails have numerous circuits of varying difficulty, the trails are constantly being modified and expanded.

SINGLETRAIL ATTENDANCE

Visitor monitoring was carried out as a part of the TAČR project at all three research sites during selected months in 2019 and 2020. The visitor monitoring was ensured by the Partnerství, o.p.s. company. The monitoring was carried out using automatic counters, which were systematically distributed in each research location so they could count the total number of visitors at a given time interval. Eight automatic counters were placed in the Moravian Karst – Jedovnice Trails area, seven of them were in the Moravian Karst – Mariánské Valley Trails area and four in the Rychlebské Trails in the Rychlebské Mountains area. The total number of visitors (cyclists) of each area in each month is shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Number of visitors (cyclists) in researched localities in selected months of 2020

	Singletrail Moravský Karst – Jedovnické Trails	Singletrail Moravský Karst – Mariánské Valley Trails	Rychlebské Trails in the Rychlebské Mountains
May	51 665	26 445	3 396
June	42 426	15 790	12 805
July	68 156	18 452	22 080
August	64 886	16 527	21 562
September	36 568	13 102	12 502
Total	263 701	90 316	72 345

As can be seen from the table, the highest number of visitors in the monitored period (1 May 2020 – 30 September 2020) was at the Moravian Karst – Jedovnice Trails locality (263,701 visitors). The second most visited locality in the given period was Moravian Karst – Mariánské Valley Trails (90,316 visitors). The number of visitors at the Rychlebské Trails in the Rychlebské Mountains was 72,345. Currently, we do not have enough quality data to

be able to compare the development of the number of visitors at each locality in recent years. However, the available data shows that the Moravian Karst – Jedovnice Trails singletrail in particular is very popular among the visitors and is very busy, especially in the summer months. The following section will describe how the number of visitors of the monitored sites is reflected in lives of some stakeholders.

DATA AND METHODS

At the beginning of the research, it was necessary to define who will be the subject of the research. The research was focused on a wide range of users of singletrails. As a result of the initial identification of social actors and a description of their various benefits or interests; attention was focused on (1) representatives of the management of the municipality where the singletrail is located, (2) entrepreneurs whose services are being used by visitors of the singletrails, (3) operators of individual singletrails, (4) hunters whose hunting grounds are a part of the territory in which the singletrail is located, (5) residents who live in municipalities in the immediate vicinity of the observed singletrails, (6) cyclists who use singletrails, and (7) tourists who visit these locations but not because of singletrails. A total of seven subcategories of participants were selected for the research.

The research used both qualitative and quantitative approach, which complemented each other. The text presents the results of the qualitative part, in which the techniques of semi-structured interview and ethnography were used. The interview scripts were different for each subcategory of users, they reflected their specific role and benefits or harm was caused by the construction of singletrails. A total of 182 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The vast majority of interviews took place directly in the monitored localities – in municipalities and near the trails. A total of six field trips took

place, so each locality was visited twice during the research. Ethnography was also a part of field trips. Researchers repeatedly stayed near the singletrails and observed what was happening around them: various events, incidents, the behaviour of visitors and the behaviour of residents. The researchers wrote down all the results of the observations into sheets, and they also wrote down other notes and observations into field diaries. Ethnography was very important – it allowed researchers to better understand the local environment and what is more it helped them to better understand the events and opinions of users.

SAMPLE SELECTION

Purposive (non-random) sample selection was used for some stakeholder groups, while probabilistic (random) sample selection was used for other categories of users. Representatives of the municipal management, which were mainly mayors or deputy mayors, were chosen by purposive sample selection, as well as operators of individual singletrails and hunters. Probabilistic sample selection was used in the remaining four categories.

The total number of addressed stakeholders was based on data saturation. As soon as the researchers obtained information that was repetitive and found nothing new, they stopped looking for and contacting other participants. That is why there is a different total number of interviews in each research locality and in each stakeholder category (Table 2).

Table 2: Number of interviews according to individual categories of stakeholders and research localities

	Singletrail Moravský Karst – Jedovnické Trails	Singletrail Moravský Karst – Mariánské Valley Trails	Rychlebské Trails in the Rychlebské Mountains	Total
Municipal management	2	1	3	6
Residents	16	16	24	56
Tourists	17	18	10	45
Cyclists	16	17	20	53
Entrepreneurs	3	2	4	9
Hunters	1	1	5	7
Singletrail operators	2	2	2	6
Total	57	57	68	182

As can be seen from the table, it was necessary to conduct most interviews with residents, cyclists and tourists. Through semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations, an extensive data corpus was created at some places. Interviews and observations were transcribed and further processed in qualitative software [Atlas.ti](#).

Within the data analysis, the researchers identified, according to the individual categories, the benefits that the construction of a specific trail had for them. The results are further presented gradually for individual categories of stakeholders.

RESULTS - BENEFITS OF OBSERVED TRAILS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

1. MUNICIPAL MANAGEMENT

Firstly, impacts at the management level of the municipalities in which the singletrails are located will be presented. In Jedovnice, representatives of the management believe that the construction of singletrails brought diversification, increased publicity and also attracted more people to the village, which is considered to be a positive step in supporting tourism in the locality. What is more, the growth of tourism was labelled as an original priority by the singletrail operators. At the same time, however, it turned out that the singletrails are a good advertisement for Jedovnice, but they are not the primary destination for cyclists and tourists. In this context, one of the participants mentioned the growing occupancy of the Olšovec camp, to which, according to him, singletrails did not contribute, but a change in the policy of the camp operators did. In terms of finances, singletrails and their users do not contribute significantly to the budget of the village. The only exception is the increase in sales in the camp, where some singletrail users find accommodation. The singletrail construction did neither contribute to the increase of interest in buying building sites, nor did it increase the number of new residents. Participants also did not detect any decrease in unemployment in connection with the construction of singletrails. Singletrail operators offer seasonal part time jobs, which, however, do not have any effect on reducing the unemployment in Jedovnice.

The second observed locality was the singletrail Mariánské Valley Trails, which territorially belongs to Brno-Líšeň. The representative of the management of this part of the city mentioned in an interview that singletrails are just another attraction that this locality offers, that the existence of singletrails has nothing to do with the growth of tourism and that singletrails are not the primary final destination of tourists. Any other activity is viewed rather negatively by the city management because Mariánské Valley is overpopulated and there is only little land that belongs to the city, and due to this fact, the city is not able to respond flexibly to the onslaught of cyclists and tourists. The construction of singletrails contributed to intensification of conflicts between locals and cyclists, which mainly concern (a) parts of the road where singletrails intersect with a tarmac road and (b) access roads. Singletrail itself has no value or validity, but it is mainly its proximity to the Moravian Karst that adds to its attractiveness. The construction of the singletrail has no effect on reducing unemployment in the locality and does not significantly contribute to the municipal budget.

The last observed locality was the singletrail Rychlebské Trails in the Rychlebské Mountains. According to the representative of the municipality management, who was approached by us, local singletrails have a direct impact on the growth of tourism, economy and even on employment. Their contribution is seen mainly in the growth of tourism, in overall improvement of appearance of the municipality and in the creation of new work opportunities that are closely connected with the above mentioned growth of tourism. In connection with the construction of the singletrails, tens of new eating places and 30 to 40 new accommodation facilities were built. The increase in available workplaces is also obvious in this sector. Thanks to this, the employment of residents increased greatly.

In recent years, the prices of plots of land and properties grew rapidly, which is connected with price unavailability of these properties mainly for young people and with growing dissatisfaction. While ten years ago plots of land were sold 50 CZK/m², in present day the price is, according to a participant, around 700 CZK/m². The participant also stated that the increase of prices in eating places, increase of foot traffic and increase of the waste production were obvious. Singletrails contribute greatly to municipality budget, nonetheless, if operators of accommodation facilities gave 100% of

fees to the municipality, the fees could, according to the participant, bring 500,000–700,000 CZK every year with today's fee of 20 CZK per person. In 2020, the amount of 300,000 CZK was collected thanks to the accommodation fee. This sum of money was passed to the municipality and it is, according to the participant, more money than the usual amount. Usually, it is around 200,000–250,000 CZK.

From the above stated, it is clear that, according to the municipal management, the singletrail Rychlebské Trails has the greatest impact on the municipality and its surroundings. According to the management in Černá Voda, singletrails completely changed the character of the municipality and their construction led to the sale of building sites, to the creation of new accommodation facilities and to opening of new eating places. This led to the decrease of unemployment of residents. Besides, singletrails contribute to municipality budget thanks to the accommodation fee. On the other hand, representatives of the management in Jedovnice and Brno-Líšeň neither believe that singletrails contribute greatly to the municipality budget, nor that they have a great impact on tourism. Both localities were already frequently visited by tourists before the construction of singletrails and participants perceive singletrails more as just another attraction and expansion of already developed tourism.

2. ENTREPRENEURS

Three entrepreneurs were approached in the small town of Jedovnice. They all started their business independently of singletrails, long before their construction. In all cases, the motive for entering the world of business was the “desire to try doing business”, which was possibly completed by an effort to transform the hobby into a profitable activity. In the interviews, they stated that although cyclists form a certain part of their clientele, it is not their primary target group to focus on – they generally focus on tourists and cyclists, of whom there were a large number in Jedovnice even before the construction of singletrails. It seems that the singletrails did not have a significant financial impact on the approached entrepreneurs.

In Mariánské Valley, researchers spoke with entrepreneurs whose business is directly connected with tourism. They have been doing business for many years (well before the singletrails were built)

directly in the recreational area of Mariánské Valley. So, their motivation to start a business here was not in any way connected with the singletrails. Thanks to the construction of singletrails, one entrepreneur has grown his clientele because of cyclists, so he started to adjust the facilities for them (especially the addition of places where cyclists can leave their bikes), however, he is not sure whether they are exclusively singletrail users. The business of another entrepreneur did not change after the construction of singletrails and there was no increased arrival of cyclists. Entrepreneurs agreed that Mariánské Valley is visited mainly by families with children who are looking for local attractions (bobsleigh trail, animal feeding, the possibility of going for a walk, etc.), while singletrails are only a marginal attraction.

In the locality of the Rychlebské Mountains, the addressed entrepreneurs do business directly in the tourism sector. Entrepreneurs from Černá Voda mentioned the crucial role of singletrails for starting their business. The construction of singletrails motivated them to start doing business. One of the participants stated that they run a business in the field of accommodation and that they have been hopelessly busy in recent years. Another one does business in the field of gastronomy. They stated that year after year, more visitors use their services. They added that in recent years there has not been much difference between weekdays and weekends, their business is fully occupied throughout the season. Another one estimates that locals make about 15% of total sales, the rest are cyclists or tourists. From the above mentioned, it is clear that the approached entrepreneurs combined their business activity with the construction of singletrails and most of their income comes from singletrail users.

Entrepreneurs from Černá Voda stated that the construction of the singletrail and the interwoven increase in cycling traffic caused their entry into business. The construction of singletrails had a positive effect on their business. On the other hand, entrepreneurs from Jedovnice and Mariánské Valley stated that they had been doing business before the construction of singletrails and that singletrails did not have any significant effect on their revenues. According to the participants, both localities have been frequently visited by cyclists and tourists for a long time.

3. SINGLETRAIL OBSERVERS

In the Jedovnice Trails locality, the operators stated that they intentionally chose a place close to Brno for the construction of singletrails. Another reason was that Jedovnice is a tourist area where there is already good tourism and sufficient infrastructure – accommodation facilities, restaurants, means of transport. The operators agree that the construction of the singletrail has a positive impact on the growth of tourism, and especially on the occupancy of the Olšovec camp. However, this statement contradicts what the representatives of the management of the town state. They said that the increasing occupancy of the Olšovec camp is not related to the construction of singletrails, but to a change in the policy of the camp. We found out that most cyclists were not accommodated here because they preferred one-day visits (all these cyclists were from Brno or its surroundings). Others mentioned that they stay in the locality overnight, but they are only rarely accommodated in the Olšovec camp. The results of the research thus rather confirm the claims of representatives of the town management, which are that the construction of singletrails is rather unrelated to the growing occupancy of the Olšovec camp.

The operators of the singletrail Jedovnické Trails mentioned that singletrails attracted cyclists not only from various parts of the Czech Republic, but also from abroad. We will talk about this in more detail in the section devoted to the influence of the singletrail on the cyclists themselves. Data shows that the Jedovnice singletrail is dominantly visited by cyclists from Brno and its surroundings. As for the finances, the operators came to an agreement that maintaining singletrails is very expensive and that financial subsidies are not sufficient. Operating costs are not covered even by voluntary contributions made by cyclists, that is why they want to ask for a part of the town's budget. They are planning to contact the region and the Ministry of Regional Development. The biggest source of income comes from the Base, where not only bike rental services and other services for cyclists are in operation, but it also offers a wide range of snacks and drinks.

Trails in Mariánské Valley have the same operator as Jedovnice Trails. As in the previous case, the operators chose the locality of the singletrail because of its location near Brno. What is more, they chose it because, as in Jedovnice, it is a tourist area where there is already good tourism and sufficient

infrastructure (accommodation facilities, restaurants and means of transport). The trails in this area are more attractive for residents and cyclists from the surrounding area, who can visit the singletrail after work. That is why there was no increase in tourism as it was planned because of the singletrails. During our interviews, we asked cyclists where they came from. Cyclists from Brno said that they prefer to visit the Trails in Jedovnice, rather than the Trails in Mariánské Valley because they like the design of the circuits more in the Jedovnice locality.

According to the singletrail operators in Mariánské Valley, there are frequent conflicts on different levels in the locality. Firstly, there are conflicts with hunters. These are related to the disturbance of wildlife, with which the operators disagree, mainly because Mariánské Valley and the surrounding forests have always been a busy area, even without singletrails. During the operation of the singletrail, various barricades and traps appeared on the trails several times. For example, buried spikes were found in inclined turns, which caused defects on cyclists' bikes or branches which were thrown all over the trail. Secondly, there are conflicts with pedestrians, mainly in places where the singletrail meets a paved road. We will return to both conflicts when describing the influence of singletrails on hunters and on residents.

The operators in Černá Voda agree that the municipality had not been very attractive area for cyclists, nor for tourists before the singletrail Rychlebské Trails was built. Thanks to the singletrail, a leisure activity not only for locals, but also for visitors from all over the Czech Republic and abroad was created. Because of the increase in tourism in the locality, several dozen new accommodation facilities and eating places were founded. According to the operators, the construction of the Base created new jobs, mainly for residents. During the year, the number of employees at the Base changes, but the usual number is four employees for the maintenance of singletrails in the forest and another three employees who are in charge of the bike rental service. There is one cook and two waitresses working in the restaurant at the Base. An important element in maintaining singletrail circuits are volunteer brigades, which have a community character. They take place regularly once a month and are a well-attended event by both residents and cyclists. The main purpose of these brigades is the modification of the trails. According to the operators,

the construction of singletrails in this locality did not go without the initial conflicts with hunters. They did not agree with the construction of the trails and expressed their disagreement by destroying the singletrail signage in the forest. However, the situation has calmed down and there have not been any more conflicts in recent years. Financing of the operation of the trails is multi-source, it consists of profits from the Base, voluntary contributions from users of singletrails, subsidies from the Olomouc Region, corporate partnerships, etc.

The operators of the singletrails Jedovnické Trails and Mariánské Valley Trails stated that they chose tourist areas near Brno for the construction of singletrails on purpose, because there had already been good tourism and infrastructure before the singletrails were built. On the contrary, according to the operators, Černá Voda had not been very attractive location for cyclists nor for tourists before the singletrails were built, what is more, tourism in the municipality had not been very good before the trails were built. The operators of Jedovnické Trails expected that the construction of the singletrail would attract cyclists from all over the Czech Republic to the location, but during the field trips we met cyclists mostly from Brno. According to the operators, the trails in Mariánské Valley in particular should have been targeted at cyclists from Brno. Cyclists from Brno and the surrounding area prefer the Jedovnice Trails to those in Mariánské Valley, because the circuits and the terrain are more suitable for them. The operators in above mentioned localities agreed with people working at the Base on the fact that the Base is a significant source of income for them. From this income they finance modifications and repairs of the trails. They consider the financing of the operation of the trails to be very hard and voluntary contributions from cyclists, and the profits from the Base are not able to cover all the costs. The operators mentioned conflicts mainly with hunters.

4. HUNTERS

Hunters rather rejected the singletrail Jedovnice Trails. Firstly, it makes it difficult to use the forest economically, and secondly, it brings in more tourists and cyclists, mainly in the summer months. There is a high risk of getting injured in the forest, this is caused by the ongoing logging and therefore the use of heavy machinery. Hunters, operators and cyclists agreed that logging is a big problem. Operators are particularly upset about the fact that logging

destroys parts of the trails, which they have to repair at their own expense. Cyclists complain that the areas where the logging takes place are not marked anywhere, so they do not know about them and then they are surprised when they encounter these areas. According to them, there is a risk of getting injured. In addition, the drivers of heavy machinery behave inconsiderately towards cyclists. Hunters insist on the logging because they want to use the forest economically and they complain about the indiscipline of cyclists who do not respect the closure of some areas and who enter the logging areas despite the ban, which, according to hunters, increases the risk of injury and slows down the logging process.

Another problem that has appeared are the concerns of hunters about the worsened conditions for hunting in the locality. Animals who are disturbed by the noise on singletrails and by a high concentration of people in the forests during the day, come out of the hiding only after dark. This makes hunting the animals problematic and leads to the overpopulation of some species or its spreading into areas where it would normally not occur. Singletrails should have originally serve as a place to accumulate cyclists in one place and also to take them away from other parts of the forest. From a longer-term perspective, however, hunters say that the trails seem to have had the exact opposite effects. Visitors of the singletrails are beginning to be the “most noticeable” visitors of the forest who occupy the area which used to be for animals or for other forest visitors, including the forest service which needs to use the forest economically. Because of this, sometimes there are conflicts with cyclists, and sometimes with the operators of the singletrails.

The operators of the trails in Mariánské Valley also mentioned conflicts with hunters. According to the hunters, the operators did not consult with the hunters where the trails should lead beforehand. The trails lead through need zones for animals. As a result, animals are being disturbed throughout the day and night. The trails lead past feeding racks and tree stands, which makes it difficult for hunters to do their job (they cannot hunt animals, which according to the participant may be a reason to terminate the lease they have with Lesy ČR). Problem are the cyclists who use singletrails even at night hours, which forces hunters to hunt late at night, and this limits especially the “working” hunters. The biggest problem is that cyclists do not follow the rules of

singletrails, especially the operating hours. The attitude towards the construction of the Base in this locality is negative, the construction would lead to an even greater growth of tourism in the locality, and thus an intensification of the already existing problems. The operators are not interested in solving the problems. However, the operators do not agree with this statement. One of them proved this by trying to solve the problem with cyclists who use singletrails outside the operating hours by providing hunters with their phone number. The operator informed hunters that they could call anytime when the problem occurs and they would intervene. According to the operator, none of the hunters has called since then. Another operator argues that hunters should be aware of the fact that the forest should not be used only for economic purposes, but also for recreation and leisure activities.

The most interviews with hunters were carried out in the Rychlebské Trails locality (six in total), because the trails lead through several different hunting areas. Opinions of hunters differs in the evaluations of the operation of singletrails. According to some, the trails were built sensitively on old hunting trails, therefore it was not a big intervention in the landscape and the trails work very well. Other hunters were critical. Among the biggest negatives, the hunters mentioned the disturbance of animals in the forest and the worsened conditions for hunting. Another problem is the deterioration of working conditions in the forest, because the increased number of cyclists increases the risk of collision with the forest machinery. Furthermore, cyclists do not respect the closures of some trails (e.g., due to logging). Some cyclists do not respect the opening hours of the singletrails and use the trails in the late hours. Most of the time, conflicts occur between people working in the forest and cyclists who do not respect the marked route of singletrails and thus complicate the forest work. According to the operators of the local trails, there were conflicts with hunters mainly when the singletrail was opened. However, according to them, the situation has calmed down in recent years.

From the above stated, it is clear that in all the monitored localities, hunters are most annoyed by the fact that it is more difficult to use the forest economically, as well as the disturbance of animals and the complications during hunting. This is related to the high concentration of people in the forests, during the day and also at night. In the Mariánské Valley and Rychlebské trails localities, hunters

complained about the indiscipline of cyclists who did not respect the operating hours of the trails and used singletrails even in the dark. Hunters most often argue with the singletrail operators and also with cyclists themselves. Most of the conflicts concern logging and the fact that cyclists use the trails outside the operating hours and also the fact that they ride off the trails into the forest.

5. RESIDENTS

As we can see in Map 1, Moravian Karst – Jedovnice Trails area is the most visited of the researched localities. Residents in Jedovnice have different opinions on the operation of singletrails. Some locals welcome the increasing number of cyclists, because they bring new opportunities for entrepreneurs and for the municipality, and in their opinion, Jedovnice is becoming rich thanks to them. But it is not just a purely financial aspect that is positive, singletrails make Jedovnice a more attractive locality overall. Singletrails increase its “municipal pride”. On the other hand, there were also critical opinions. People cannot go for walks in the forest undisturbed, pick mushrooms, walk dogs or go for a run, and they do not feel safe in the forest, mainly because of cyclists. The traffic situation has also worsened, especially on the shore of the Olšovec pond where the camp and the Base are located. Cars are mixing with cyclists and with crowds of pedestrians on a relatively narrow driveway to the camp. The increase in traffic contributes to the feeling of danger that locals feel. One participant directly stated that, according to her, Jedovnice “did not manage” to build sufficient facilities for singletrails, for example, the driveway is unsatisfactory and the necessary parking lots are missing. During the interviews with the management of the small town, it turned out that there was a problem with the driveway that should be solved. However, the road cannot be widened, so they are at least trying to cover the edges of the road with gravel. As for the conflicts, the locals agreed that there were no conflicts with cyclists, but at the same time they complained that cyclists are often inconsiderate to both pedestrians and cars. They drive fast on the roads around the Base and they do not want to move aside. The locals themselves use the singletrails only rarely.

The evaluation of the situation by the locals is different in Mariánské Valley. For many, the topic is insignificant and the singletrail is just one of many attractions in the Mariánské Valley location. Locals have noticed an increase in the number of cyclists

in the area, but it is difficult for them to distinguish whether they are cyclists who use the local network of bike paths or the singletrails. Due to the growing number of cyclists, some locals do not feel safe in the locality. They said that cyclists ride very fast on the roads and they do not take children nor dogs into account. There are accidents that are relatively common in this locality. According to the residents, singletrails do not have a great influence on the appearance of the Mariánské Valley. According to them, Mariánské Valley has always been attractive for tourists, there have always been various attractions. Singletrails are just another attraction, which, from time to time, brings some limitations.

In Černá Voda, two topics resonated among the residents in particular – the huge increase in tourism, from which many locals benefit, and the loss of peace that was in the village before the construction of the singletrails. The municipality came to life with the construction of singletrails – houses begun to be reconstructed, land was being sold, guest houses and eating places were built. Today, it is common for almost everyone in the municipality to run business related to accommodation or catering aimed at singletrail users. This fact is generally appreciated by the locals, as they do not have to commute to work and they can work close to their home. There was a huge increase in land prices. Some consider it good, land is being appreciated in price. However, building plots are becoming almost unobtainable, especially for young people. According to one of the participants, the conflicts did not have any specific topic and the locals got used to the increased traffic and noise. One of the participants stated: “They are all happy that they can earn some money now through the season and then later close the accommodation, it is really only seasonal. So again, over the winter, it will be the usual peace and silence here in Jesenice.” According to the locals, singletrails have significantly helped the local economy, locals can do business in the municipality and do not have to commute to work. New accommodation facilities were built and the number of restaurants and eating places increased. A lot of residents begun to renovate their homes and they are renting rooms during the season.

To summarize, according to residents, it is true that a significant problem is the recklessness of cyclists on roads outside the forest. Cyclists do not take other groups that use these roads (families with children, runners, people walking their dogs, tourists but

also motorists) into account. They drive fast on the roads, which makes locals worried about collisions and reduces their sense of security. Locals agree that singletrails have contributed to the increase in prestige of the municipality (especially in Černá Voda and Jedovnice), however, the operation of the trails is associated with increased noise and with the fact that the use of the forest for recreational purposes and for relaxation is greatly limited. The most beneficial is the singletrail Rychlebské Trails, thanks to which the appearance of the municipality has changed quite a bit – the employment of residents has increased, new business opportunities (in accommodation or gastronomy) have appeared and life in the municipality has been revived.

6. CYCLISTS

Cyclists on the Jedovnické Trails really appreciate the fact that the singletrail is close to Brno so the accessibility of the trails is very good for most of them. The fact that singletrail is popular especially among the cyclists from Brno is proven by the fact that the vast majority of interviewed cyclists came from Brno. In most cases, they came only for one day in order to use singletrails and then return home. Cyclists on the Jedovnice Trails appreciate the difficulty of individual circuits that are suitable for various groups of users – from beginners to advanced. They prefer the Jedovnice Trails to those in the Mariánské Valley, where they do not really like the appearance of the trails. The activity of the Base was very well evaluated, according to cyclists, the Base provides all the necessary services. Cyclists regularly use the services of the Base, especially the services offering refreshments. The biggest problem they have is the logging, which takes place regularly near the singletrails. This is connected with a higher risk of injuries. Singletrails are known as a “family place”, which is sometimes associated with the problem of irresponsible parents who take their children on singletrails and then they let them ride down without informing the children on how to behave and what to do when going down the singletrail. One of the participants stated that he had already seen a few injuries on the singletrails.

It is obvious that the vast majority of cyclists go to Jedovnice with a clear goal – to ride the singletrails. These are one-day visitors who, in most cases, come from Brno by their own car and park it at the Base. Apart from the services of the Base, they do not use anything else in the locality, they do not look for

accommodation and thus have very little effect on tourism and sales in the area.

Similar to the previous case, cyclists in Mariánské Valley praised the proximity of singletrails to Brno. However, only minimum of the interviewed cyclists stated that they were from Brno. This supports the statements of the interviewed cyclists from Brno, who, according to their words, prefer the singletrail Jedovnice Trails. Another difference between these two singletrails is in the number of times the cyclists visited the locality – in Mariánské Valley, only three cyclists stated that they use local singletrails regularly, ten cyclists stated that they were here for the first time. The other three stated that they are using the singletrail for the first time, but they had visited this locality as tourists before. In contrast, out of the sixteen interviewed cyclists on Jedovnice Trails, only two stated that they are on this singletrail for the first time and fourteen cyclists said they visit it several times a year.

The interviewed cyclists characterized the location of the singletrail in Mariánské Valley as clean, quiet, well-kept and with low traffic on the trails. This was appreciated especially by fathers with children. According to them, the route is kid friendly – children can learn to master the technique of going down the singletrails. This is one of the reasons why they liked the low number of cyclists because the children did not have to dodge more experienced and faster cyclists. Cyclists would especially welcome the construction of a similar Base as in the Jedovnice locality. There are no problems with parking and refreshments can be found in other places, but they would like to use the Base because of bike services and rental services. Cyclists either head to the singletrail or to other tourist destinations and activities that can be found in the area. According to some cyclists, singletrails cannot be ridden in the rain because the trails do not drain water very well. The water remains on the trails, the terrain is more rutted and cyclists are annoyed that they are covered in mud. In Jedovnice, the cyclists evaluated the situation regarding poor draining of the track as a bit better. The singletrail Rychlebské Trails was evaluated as the best regarding the draining problem.

Compared to the previous localities, the Rychlebské Trails are a locality that is chosen by cyclists from all over the Czech Republic. The length of stay is also different here – in the previous researched

localities the length of stay was usually one day, in the case of Rychlebské Trails it was a five-day or three-day stay. Cyclists are satisfied with the offer of accommodation capacities both in Černá Voda and in the surrounding municipalities. Cyclists often visit the locality with a group of friends, so they need more accommodation capacity and, according to them, they have no problem finding it in this locality. The operation of the Base, which according to the addressed participants offers a pleasant space, good food and beer, is positively evaluated. In contrast to cyclists from Mariánské Valley, cyclists in the Rychlebské Mountains praised the fact that singletrails can be ridden even when they are wet and during rainy days, in their opinion, the track is always well maintained and there is no problem with water drainage – water does not stay on the trails and because of that mud is not created and the terrain does not slip. A lot of interviewed people stated that singletrails in this locality are very unique and cannot be compared to other tracks across the Czech Republic. What is more, they are constantly being expanded and new circuits are being built. Cyclists praise this fact mainly because they can try something new and because there are so many circuits in the locality that they usually do not have time to try them all during one visit. According to the participants, the driving distance does not play a role here, because it pays to visit this type of singletrail even from more distant places. The only problem that the participants noticed was the bad signal of mobile operators in the locality. According to the participants, the parking capacities are sufficient, the prices are rather low compared to other singletrail locations, and the offer of refreshments is sufficient both at the Base and directly in the municipality. None of the interviewed participants got into any conflict in the locality, on the contrary, most of the respondents praised the helpfulness of the residents.

Regarding the problems associated with the operation of singletrails, cyclists on the Jedovnické Trails most often complained about the ongoing logging, which takes place in the nearby forests and could be associated with an increased risk of accidents. Cyclists in Mariánské Valley consider the non-existence of the Base and the bad surface of the trails, which is not properly drained, to be the biggest disadvantage of the locality. Cyclists did not mention any problem with the singletrail Rychlebské Trails.

7. TOURISTS

Most of the interviewed tourists in Jedovnice did not know that there were singletrails in this locality. One of the participants stated that they hope that the construction of singletrails will lead to safer forest trails for tourists, as cyclists will concentrate in another part of the forest. The most frequently mentioned problem in the locality were high prices in the entire area of the Olšovec pond and in the very centre of Jedovnice. The interviewed tourists, however, do not believe that high prices are related to the construction of singletrails, as Jedovnice has always been widely visited by tourists thanks to the Olšovec pond. According to them, the prices are comparable to the prices in Brno. Much bigger issue is the unsuitable road leading from the centre of Jedovnice to the very side of the Olšovec pond where there is the camp and the Base. The participants stated that cars with bicycles on the top of the roof are constantly driving to this side and the road is not suitable for that. Tourists do not feel safe on this part of the road, as they have to avoid cyclists and motorists. This confirms the statements of the participants from the municipal management and of residents. Tourists normally use water attractions around the Olšovec pond – rental of pedal boats, paddleboards, Wake Park or water skis. They come here mainly because of hiking, they usually plan to visit the Moravian Karst, the abyss Macocha and other caves during their stay. Most tourists consider singletrails to be a very dangerous sport and do not show interest in using them.

Tourists in the Mariánské Valley stated that they come from Brno or from places near Brno. In contrast to the interviewed tourists in Jedovnice, nobody was accommodated here, they visited the locality only for one day. The primary goal of visiting Mariánské Valley for most participants was hiking, relaxing by the pond, walking, refreshments, etc. Most of the interviewed tourists did not know about the singletrails in the locality, they did not pay attention to the trails in the area. Tourists did not like the indiscipline and ruthlessness of cyclists. They stated that in some places they did not feel safe because the cyclists were riding at high speed and there was a risk of collision. This is confirmed mainly by the statements of locals, who also do not feel safe due to traffic in certain places. Tourists stated that they prefer to visit the locality in the morning, when there is a lower concentration of cyclists and the locality is more quiet. Most of the interviewed people do not believe that singletrails had any significant impact

on the increase of tourism, as this area has been very popular tourist location for many years.

There were really only few tourists in Černá Voda and when we managed to talk to someone, it was either a residents or a cyclist. Tourists came from various parts of the Czech Republic and they were usually accommodated in Javorník. They knew about the existence of the singletrail but they did not plan to go there. They came for hiking and recreation. Tourists do not have conflicts with cyclists because they do not meet them in tourist places. Tourists stated that they like to return to the locality repeatedly, as there are plenty of different tourist activities. The presence of singletrails does not affect their decision making.

Tourists in the surrounding of the Jedovnice Trails and Mariánské Valley stated that the biggest problem connected with singletrails is the recklessness of cyclists who ride quickly and recklessly on the roads around the trails, which increases the risk of collision with pedestrians. Tourists did not know that there are singletrail circuits in the area. And this kind of sport does not attract most of them. In contrast, tourists in Černá Voda knew about the existence of singletrails.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The first important question was about the impact of singletrails on the social environment and on stakeholders. The impacts were examined in the perspective of seven categories of users of the areas in which the singletrails are located. The existence of singletrails has the greatest impact on the social environment and on stakeholders (especially on residents) in the Rychlebské Trails locality in the Rychlebské Mountains. Stakeholders from the municipal management, entrepreneurs, residents and operators agreed on a fact that the construction of the singletrail completely changed the character of the municipality – it increased sales of land and changed land prices, locals entered the business market, the unemployment decreased, locals did not have to go to work to distant localities, new accommodation capacities were build, the number of gastronomic establishments increased, financial revenues to the municipal budget increased due to the accommodation tax, etc However, the above mentioned is also connected with some negatives, such as the loss of privacy in the municipality, increased traffic (especially cycling), increased noise

in the municipality and increased production of waste. On the other hand, there are no significant conflicts between the interviewed stakeholders in the locality. According to the operators of singletrails, there were conflicts mainly at the beginning of the operation of the trails; there was a conflict between the operators, cyclists and hunters. According to the operators, the conflicts have stopped over the years. However, hunters are still complaining to this day, mainly about the indiscipline of cyclists who do not respect the prohibitions regarding entry to the areas where logging takes place.

Conflicts between different stakeholder groups are probably most evident in the Mariánské Valley Trails, where conflicts affect both operators and hunters, as well as cyclists, residents and tourists. Hunters are bothered by the fact that trails in Mariánské Valley lead through need zones for animals. As a result, animals are being disturbed during the day and night, which becomes problematic especially when hunters need to hunt them. Hunters complain about the indiscipline of cyclists who do not respect the operating hours of the singletrail and further point out that the operators do not make an effort to solve this problem. However, the operators do not agree with that, according to them, they are trying to resolve the situation. The research shows that the existence of the singletrail in this locality has rather negative effects on the social environment and on stakeholders (includes residents), as it causes many conflicts. What is more, the singletrail did not have any significant economic impact on the surrounding stakeholders in terms of profit.

The last monitored locality is the Jedovnické Trails. Contrary to the original expectations of the operators, these trails are used mainly by cyclists from Brno, who prefer them to those in Mariánské Valley. The trails are frequently visited and especially busy during the season. However, the impact of the existence of the singletrail on the social environment and on stakeholders (includes residents) is not as high as originally expected. This is mainly related to the fact that most users of the trails came from Brno. They usually go to the locality for one day and use only the services of the Base. This eliminates their economic impact mainly on the Base. Even in this locality, there are some conflicts that are associated with the operation of the singletrail, but these conflicts are not as big as in the Mariánské Valley locality.

The data we collected shows that the biggest economic impact was in a researched locality of Rychlebské Trails in the Rychlebské Mountains. It was in this locality that the construction of the singletrail has completely changed the character of the municipality. However, the character of the municipality has not changed a lot in the remaining two monitored localities and the economic impact in these localities was, according to interviewed stakeholders, minimal. The question for further research remains is: Is it more appropriate to choose suburban or more remote locations for the construction of singletrails?

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INTERNET MARKETING COMMUNICATION OF SELECTED RESTAURANTS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to examine internet marketing communication of selected restaurants (53) on the example of the city Prievidza (in Slovakia). The primary sources are the result of a survey carried out by standardized observation of individual websites (31) and profiles of restaurants on the social networks Facebook (47) and Instagram (19) on the basis of predetermined criteria and their point evaluation. The article uses methods of theoretical research such as analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, generalization, and a method of comparing the obtained data with theoretical background. The primary survey confirmed the use of Internet marketing communication in most restaurants in the city of Prievidza, pointed out the most used platforms of Internet marketing communication and the validity of online tools in the context of business attendance. The survey confirmed that although restaurants use online communication on websites and social networks, they do not know and do not use all communication options effectively enough.

Keywords: Internet marketing communication. Restaurants. Social networks. Websites.

INTRODUCTION

The society fast lifestyle causes more frequent use of the services of restaurants and other catering facilities. The choice of the restaurant is influenced not only by the quality of provided services, but also by its marketing activities, especially marketing communication. To address the customer, the use of traditional marketing communication is slowly disappearing, and it's being replaced by the Internet marketing communication. The potential customer obtains faster and more comprehensive information about the facilities from the Internet environment, which helps him to decide better.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Authors Cibák (2008); Mathews et al. (2016); McCabe (2009); Maráková & Šimočková (2015); Pike (2016) and Shao et al. (2016); Stuchlík & Dvořáček (2000); Zaušková et al. (2011) agree that communication is the most visible tool of the marketing mix. The way it is applied in practice is gradually changing. Foret (In Fedorko, 2016) emphasizes that communication on the Internet offers companies the opportunity to reduce advertising costs, streamline business communication capabilities, but also build long-term relationships with customers. Scott (2010) explains that the Internet has created many opportunities to directly target a narrow range of customers, with the cost of online communication representing only a fraction of the large advertising budgets for traditional offline campaigns. Among other advantages the application of communication tools on the Internet and the reflection of the latest trends in communication makes it possible to monitor customers' behavior in cyberspace (Labanauskaitė, Fiore & Stašys, 2020).

The trend is to use integrated marketing communication, which aligns the goals, target groups, messages and tools of the communication process in such a way that a synergetic effect is created, they support each other and thus achieve their positive effect on the overall result.

The goal of integrated marketing communication is to send the right message to the right customer at the right time to the right place (Luxton, Reid, & Mavondo, 2015; Maráková & Šimočková, 2015, Molho, Sousa & Vilhena, 2020).

The environment formed by websites, profiles on social networks, social media and others is important for marketing communication on the Internet (Janouch, 2010; Karlíček & Král in Fedorko, 2016). "The website is currently considered to be the basic instrument of electronic marketing communication, because all other communication tools link to it or navigate to visit it" (Gajdošík, Gajdošíková & Marčėková, 2017, p. 35). According to Scott (2010), the most important factor in the success of a website is its content. He considers the navigation and appearance of the page as other important factors, which are influenced by the choice of the right color, logo, fonts and design. Laco (2018) encourages companies to be aware of the purpose for which their websites should exist and to target a specific customers' target group, but draws attention to the need to ensure that they are regularly updated, which is often underestimated by the companies. He lists the most important criteria for evaluating websites from the perspective of potential customers, including expertise, trustworthiness and timeliness of content, site functionality, absence of disruptive ads, display speed, simple and clear navigation and, above all, site security.

Social media mean a broader concept than social networks (Janouch, 2011; Mariani, Di Felice & Mura, 2017). It is an online set of modern technologies and social relationships, while their content is created and modified by the users themselves, who can share it with others (Gajdošík, Gajdošíková & Marčėková, 2017; Treadaway & Smith, 2011). Scott (2010) includes to the social media: (a) blogs and videoblogs (b) video and photo download sites (Youtube, Flickr, Vimeo); (c) chat rooms (d) wiki pages, by which we mean websites on which anyone can publish and update content; (e) social bookmarking, giving users the opportunity to download and vote on content; (f) social networks.

Social networks are based on the relationships between users, which may refer to each network differently. On Facebook they are marked as "friends", on Instagram and Twitter they are marked as "followers" (Bednář, 2011).

DATA AND METHODS

The subject of the article research is marketing communication on the Internet. The object of the research are the restaurants and catering facilities located in the city of Prievidza (we use the term restaurants). The aim of the article was to examine the Internet marketing communication of the restaurants in the city of Prievidza.

The basic sample consisted of all restaurants and catering facilities in the town of Prievidza. The research sample consisted of restaurants located in

Prievidza. We analyzed each facility and examined whether it uses its own website and social networks, and the extent to which Internet marketing communication of the facility meets the set criteria. We focused on the profiles of restaurants on the social networks Facebook and Instagram and evaluated them with predetermined criteria using the method of scoring according to Gajdošík, Gajdošíková & Marčeková (2017, p. 125). We adjusted and adapted the criteria to the needs of the survey (Table 1 for the website), especially in the case of social networks, to suit their capabilities and functionalities (Tables 3 and 5).

Table 1: Criteria for evaluating the website of the restaurants in the city of Prievidza

Evaluated parameters	Criteria	Points
Design	The overall look	0-3
	Logical structure and easy navigation	0-3
	Responsive design	0/1
	Photo gallery	0/1
Product	Publication of the offer (menu)	0/1
	Easy to find daily menu	0/1
	Information on opening hours	0/1
	Information about the restaurant	0/1
	Information about the possibilities of organizing events	0/1
Price	Information about discounts	0/1
	Information about payment options	0/1
Distribution	Possibility to book seats online	0/1
	Information on food ordering options	0-2
	Map with the location of the restaurant	0/1
Communication	Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	0-3
	Easy to remember domain	0/1
	Links to social networks	0/1
	Links to other websites	0/1
	Publication of contact details	0/1
Customer relationship management	Publication of reviews	0/1

Source: Own elaboration, 2020.

Due to the more complex determination of points, we evaluated the selected criteria on a quantitative

scale from 0 to 2, respectively 3, while focusing on the features listed in the Table 2.

Table 2: Evaluation scale of the restaurant websites

Evaluated parameters	Criteria	Points
Design	The overall look	3 p. - user-friendly, modern and eye-catching appearance
		2 p. - user-friendly, classic look without disturbing elements
		1 p. - basic appearance with partial graphic errors
		0 p. - uninteresting, disturbing appearance
	Logical structure and easy navigation	3 p. - easy and fast finding of the necessary information
		2 p. - drop-down menu with several subfolders
		1 p. - the need for a longer search for the necessary information
		0 p. - confusing and difficult to access information
Distribution	Information on food ordering options	2 p. - possibility of telephonic order and order via the bistro.sk portal
		1 p. - possibility of telephonic order
		0 p. - without specifying food options
Communication	Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	3 p. - 1 st - 8 th place in search
		2 p. - 9 th - 15 th place in the search
		1 p. - 16 th - 20 th place in the search
		0 p. - 21 st and lower in search

Source: Own elaboration, 2020.

Table 3 summarizes the criteria for evaluating a restaurant account on the social network Facebook.

Table 3: Criteria for evaluating the restaurant account on the social network Facebook

Criteria	Points
Suitability of profile and title image	0-3
Frequency of adding photos and videos and text posts	0-3
Number of followers	0-3
Publication of the current offer (menu)	0/1
Information on opening hours	0/1
Information about the sales center	0/1
Possibility of events organizing	0/1
Information about organized events	0/1
Information about discounts	0/1
Information about payment options	0/1
Timeliness of information	0-2
Map with the location of the restaurant	0/1
Easy search	0/1

Connection with other social networks	0/1
Connection to websites	0/1
Publication of contact details	0/1
Competitions for customers on social networks	0/1
Message response speed	0-3
Publication of reviews	0/1
Possibility to comment on posts by customers	0/1

Source: Own elaboration, 2020.

We evaluated the selected criteria on a quantitative scale from 0 to 2, resp. 3. The rating scale is summarized in the Table 4.

Table 4: Evaluation scale of the restaurant account on Facebook

Criteria	Points
Suitability of profile and title image	3 p. - different, up-to-date and eye-catching images (with logo, device name)
	2 p. - different images, no interesting content, bad classification
	1 p. - the same images or images with graphic defects
	0 p. - missing or outdated images
Frequency of adding photos and videos and text posts (last 6 months)	3 p. - at least once a week
	2 p. - at least once a month
	1 p. - at least once every three months
	0 p. - no contributions for the last 6 months
Number of followers	3 p. - more than 1,501 followers
	2 p. - from 701 to 1,500 followers
	1 p. - from 101 to 700 followers
	0 p. - up to 100 followers
Timeliness of information	2 p. - regular updating of information, notifications of temporary changes or news
	1 p. - updated information
	0 p. - outdated information
Message response speed	3 p. - in an hour
	2 p. - within one day
	1 p. - within a week
	0 p. - unspecified message response speed

Source: Own elaboration, 2020.

The criteria for evaluating the restaurant account on the social network Instagram can be found in the Table 5.

Table 5: Criteria for evaluating the restaurant account on the Instagram social network

Criteria	Points
Suitability of the profile picture	0-2
The overall look	0-2
Frequency of adding photos and videos and text posts	0-3
Number of followers	0-3
Adding image contributions of offered products	0/1
Adding image contributions of the sales center	0/1
Adding visuals from social events	0/1
Adding pictorial contributions to organized events	0/1
Text description of image posts	0-2
Contributions from other users with a device account ID	0-2
Connection to other social networks	0/1
Connection to websites	0/1
Publication of contact details	0/1
Competitions for customers on the social network	0/1
Instagram Stories Highlights (saved stories on the profile)	0/1
Possibility to comment the posts by customers	0/1

Source: Own elaboration, 2020.

The rating scale is summarized in the Table 6.

Table 6: Evaluation scale of the restaurant account on the social network Instagram

Criteria	Points
Suitability of the profile picture	2 p. - well visible, characteristic image
	1 p. - poorly visible, inappropriate image
	0 p. - without profile picture
The overall look	2 p. - eye-catching appearance, added different images with good quality, same finish, visually consecutive
	1 p. - neutral appearance, added images with good quality, without the same adjustment, occasionally repeating
	0 p. - added images with poor quality, visually unattractive
Frequency of adding photos and videos and text posts (last 6 months)	3 p. - at least once a week
	2 p. - at least once a month
	1 p. - at least once every three months
	0 p. - no contributions for the last 6 months
Number of followers	3 p. - More than 1,501 followers
	2 p. - from 701 to 1,500 followers
	1 p. - from 101 to 700 followers
	0 p. - up to 100 followers
Text description of image posts	2 p. - all posts with a text description (at least the last 10)
	1 p. - more than half of images with text description (from last 10)
	0 p. - images without text description
Contributions from other users with a device account ID	2 p. - The account is tagged in more than 0 images from other users
	1 p. - the account is marked on 0 - 1 pictures from other users
	0 p. - The account is not tagged in any images from other users

Source: Own elaboration, 2020.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the time of the survey (January - March 2020), there were 53 basic and supplementary restaurant catering facilities in the city of Prievidza. (The basic catering facilities include restaurants, motels and catering facilities with self-service. To the August 19th 2020 there are no motel or catering facility with self-service in the city. Most businesses providing catering services are categorized as a restaurant, so we use the term restaurant.) Below we summarize communications of restaurants on the web sites and social networks.

COMMUNICATION OF RESTAURANTS ON THE WEBSITES

Of the total number of restaurants in the city of Prievidza (53), 31 use communication via their own website. There are 20 basic catering facilities and 11 supplementary catering facilities. More than half of the companies that have a website (16 facilities, which makes up 51.61% of the total number of websites) received a full score when evaluating the overall look, thanks to a user-friendly and modern design. 12 websites received a two-point rating (38.71%) and two websites received a one-point rating (6.45%) on the basis of visual deficiencies (illegible fonts on the page, poor quality photos, photos visibly edited in graphics programs, overlapping text).

Navigation on most websites is easy with a logical structure. 24 websites received the full number of points (3 points), which is 77.42% of their total number.

All 31 facilities (100%) have responsive website design as well as published contact details. 23 web sites (74.19%) received one point for the photo gallery. Websites without their own photo gallery, but also pages of facilities that have a photo gallery but without content, received zero points.

The menu has been published on its website by a total of 27 of the examined restaurants (87.10%).

The daily (lunch) menu isn't posted on the website of 13 restaurants, which represents 41.94%. We assume that the reason may be the fact that the companies do not offer lunch menus in addition to the regular offer. The other 18 websites that contain the lunch menu have it easily identifiable.

29 restaurants (93.55%) have information about opening hours on their website. A total of 27 restaurants (87.10%) have information about their restaurant on their website. We consider for published information to be a brief text about the history of the facility, its vision, mission, or the main focus of the kitchen. Information on the possibilities of organizing social events is published on the website by a significantly smaller part of the monitored establishments, a total of only 13 restaurants (41.94%). Websites that had photos from such events, but without a text section, also received zero points.

Discounts on their websites are listed by 8 restaurants (25.81%). In this area, discounts are given mainly in the form of a quantity discount. Some of the companies offer a discounted price for the menu from 11:00 to 14:00, others offer a reduced price for the XXL menu. The most interesting are the loyalty systems, which feature two companies on their websites in the form of mobile applications, thanks to which customers receive coupons for food and drinks.

We consider for insufficient not to provide information about payment options. From the monitored companies, this information is provided by only 4 of them, which is only 12.90%. We also awarded a low number of points for the criterion of the possibility of booking seats online, as this option is offered on their website by only 3 companies (9.68%).

In addition to consuming food directly in the restaurant, customers have the opportunity to order food by phone and more and more companies offer their customers to order food through the Internet portal bistro.sk. Only 3 establishments also mention this option on their website (9.68%). Other 14 restaurants (45.16%) received 1 point in this criterion for providing information on the possibility to order food by telephone. The remaining 14 facilities (45.16%) do not provide any information on food ordering options.

The map with the location of establishment is published on 25 websites (80.65%), which will clearly make it easier for new customers to find a business. In the evaluation of the search engine optimization criterion, 5 restaurant establishments achieved the full number of points, which represents 16.13%, as after entering the category of establishment

and the city of Prievidza into the Internet search engine Google, their website was displayed in the top eight places. Two points were received by four facilities (12.90%) and the same number of facilities received one point. The other 18 facilities (58.06%) are without a score, as their websites did not appear in the top twenty.

Device domains are usually easy to remember. Only 5 devices (16.13%) have punctuation marks or text significantly different from the company name in the domain. The remaining 26 facilities (83.87%) received 1 point in the evaluation of the criteria. As almost all restaurant catering facilities in the city of Prievidza have set up at least one account on the social network, we can find a link to social networks on 24 websites (77.42%). On the other hand, only a small number of websites (6, which represents 19.35%) contain links to other websites, especially to the portal bistro.sk, or to other companies owned by the same owner.

The survey points to the fact that less than 59% of restaurants use their own website. Moreo, Cobanoglu & DeMicco (2013) was already emphasizing the importance of websites when he said that the first impression of today's customers often comes from the website, not by opening the door to a restaurant. Pomero (2005) notes, that if a restaurant wants some of the market share of new culinary tourist, they need to create, maintain and interact with their websites.

COMMUNICATION OF RESTAURANTS ON THE SOCIAL NETWORKS

Facebook

Of the total number of basic and supplementary catering facilities in the city of Prievidza (53), 47 use communication via the social network Facebook. There are 27 basic catering facilities and 20 supplementary catering facilities (restaurants).

For the suitability of the profile and title picture, we awarded the full number of points to 32 restaurants (68.09%). Two points were scored by 6 facilities (12.77%), one point by 7 facilities (14.89%). Zero points were awarded to 2 restaurants (4.26%) due to the absence of the title image, respectively eye-catching profile picture.

23 restaurants regularly (on average several times

a week) add photos, videos or text posts (48.94%), they received 3 points. 12 companies (25.53%) have a lower frequency of adding contributions, they achieved two points. One point was scored by 8 facilities (17.02%). In the past 6 months, 4 facilities (8.51%) did not publish any contribution, as a result of which they did not receive any points.

We consider the number of Facebook account followers to be an important indicator, as this number represents the number of people contacted by a given account who are interested in the news and contributions of the monitored restaurant. The lowest number of followers (up to 100) have 2 restaurants (4.26%). One point was scored by 13 facilities (27.66%) and two points by 19 facilities (40.43%). 13 facilities (27.66%) have a significantly higher number of followers (over 1,500).

31 companies (65.96%) have their current offer published on their account on the social network Facebook. A large proportion of facilities (40, representing 85.11%) have published information on opening hours and approximately the same number (41, 87.23%) of facilities as well as information about their restaurant. The possibility of organizing events (family celebrations, corporate gatherings, weddings, kary, etc.) is listed by 25 facilities (53.19%). Information on events organized by the facility itself is provided to potential customers via the social network Facebook by about half of the facilities (exactly 24 facilities, 51.06%). Significantly fewer companies report information on discounts, namely only 15, which represents 31.91%. On the other hand, up to 24 restaurant catering establishments (51.06%) provide information on payment options to their followers via the social network Facebook. Up to 31 restaurants (65.96%) have regularly updated information on the Facebook social network account, which received two points when evaluating the criteria of timeliness of information. Another 11 facilities (23.40%) have relatively up-to-date information, but these companies do not inform their followers about temporary changes or news, due to which they received only one point. 5 restaurants (10.64%) were evaluated with the number of zero points, as they do not have current information published. A map with the location of the restaurant can be found on 38 accounts from the sample (80.85%).

We can't find a simple search for a specific account on Facebook in only one case, because after entering

the restaurant name into a search engine on the social network Facebook, we find three identical-looking accounts, which can confuse people searching for information. However, the restaurant publishes regularly updated information on only one of them. The remaining 46 devices (97.87%) are easy to find on the social network Facebook. The connection to the website has 27 devices on its account (57.45%), which is a high number compared to the connection to other social networks, as only 2 devices (4.26%) have such a connection. In contrast, only 2 devices (4.26%) do not publish contact details. 9 facilities (19.15%) prepare competitions for their followers. These are mainly competitions with prizes for consumer, but also valuable or memorable items. Exactly 7 restaurants (14.89%) have a very fast response to messages (within one hour). The 13 restaurants (27.66%) have a slightly slower response to the news (within one day) on their account. No information on the speed of response to messages from the restaurant can be found on up to 27 accounts (57.45%). Companies achieve a significantly better balance in the criteria of publishing reviews and the possibility of commenting on contributions from customers. This option is provided by all 47 companies (100%), 41 restaurant catering facilities (87.23%) have published reviews on their Facebook account.

The results of the survey point to the fact that restaurants in Prievidza are aware of the importance of the social network Facebook and the importance of regular communication on this social network. Visualization of food and photo replication in social networks has a significant impact on the formation of positive impressions. Getting likes and approval of the reference social group is a mechanism that reinforces positive impressions (Frolova, Rogach & Ryabova, 2020).

Instagram

Out of the total number of restaurants in the town of Prievidza (53), 19 use communication via the social network Instagram. These are 12 basic catering facilities and 7 supplementary catering facilities.

We rated the account of restaurants that have a clearly visible image with two points for a suitable profile image; if it contains text, it must be clearly legible and not blurred. Two points were obtained by 10 restaurants (52.63%), one point by 7 establishments (36.84%). Account without a profile picture have 2 restaurants (10.53%). By 4 restaurants (21.05%) we

state that their account on Instagram has a modern, eye-catching appearance, as they publish quality photos with the same editing. The account of 11 restaurants (57.89%) has a neutral appearance. We consider the accounts of four facilities (21.05%) to be visually unattractive, due to the fact that the added contributions are of poor quality, aesthetically different and without the assumption of attracting social network users.

Regularly (on average several times a week) 4 restaurants, which reached 3 points, add image contributions (21.05%). Other 4 restaurants (21.05%), which were awarded with two points and 4 restaurants received one point (21.05%), have a lower frequency of adding contributions (at least once a month). In the past 6 months, up to 7 restaurants (36.84%) did not publish any contribution, as a result of which they did not receive any points. Given the results of the survey, we state that the management of accounts on the social network Instagram is neglected by the restaurants in the city of Prievidza. The number of followers of individual accounts is significantly lower compared to the social network Facebook. The highest number of restaurants have only up to 100 followers (9, which represents 47.37%). 5 restaurants (26.32%) received one point for the number of followers from 101 to 700 and 4 restaurants (21.05%) received two points for the number of followers from 701 to 1,500. Only one restaurant has a significantly higher number of followers, it gained 3 points (5.26%).

The Instagram social network is primarily focused on adding image posts and photos. As far as restaurant facilities are concerned, their priority is to publish the products which they offer, in particular food and drink. Such contributions are published by up to 14 restaurants from our selection (73.69%) and the same number of restaurants also publish photographs of their facilities. Almost half of the restaurants, exactly 9 (47.37%), publish photos from social events and private celebrations, and the lowest number of facilities, namely 6 (31.58%), publish photos from organized events.

In order to provide quality content shared by customers, it is important to specify the image contribution also in text, but only 6 restaurants (31.58%) add a text description to each shared contribution, thanks to which the restaurants were awarded with two points. On the other hand, only 2 restaurants (10.53%) publish a text description

of less than half of the shared contributions, for which they received zero points. The remaining 11 restaurants (57.89%) add a text description to more than half of the shared posts, based on which they were rated with one point. We consider as problem the low level of feedback from customers, which would be reflected in the labeling of the restaurant account in their own contributions. Only 2 accounts of restaurants (10.53%) are marked on more than five posts from other Instagram users. Other 6 facilities (31.58%) have their account marked on one to five contributions. The remaining 11 restaurants (57.89%) are unmarked.

9 restaurants (47.37%) have a link to the website on their account on the social network Instagram, but only 2 restaurants (10.53%) have a link to other social networks. Compared to the social network Facebook, a significantly smaller number of restaurants have their contact details (exactly 12, which represents 63.16%). Only one restaurant (5.26%) publishes competitions for customers on its Instagram social network. Instagram Stories Highlights (stored shared stories on account) can be found on the Instagram account of six restaurants (31.58%). As with the social network Facebook, all restaurants (100%) allow other users to comment on shared posts.

A survey in the city of Prievidza, which focused on all basic and supplementary catering facilities, confirmed that they are aware of the importance of online communication and use mainly the environment of the social network Facebook and their own website. Approximately one third of the devices also communicate via the Instagram social network. Despite the progress in online communication of facilities, the survey pointed to the insufficient use of the possibilities available to restaurant facilities in the online space. We assume that these shortcomings result from their limited financial and personnel possibilities (Albertová, Šebová, 2020).

At the same time, foreign surveys point to a positive impact of communication via social media on the financial performance of restaurant facilities (Duan, Gu, Whinston, 2008; Kim, Li, Brymer, 2016). Their results confirm the positive impact of online reviews on equipment sales, as well as on the development of the number of customers. They remind that especially younger generations of customers trust online communication as well

as personal recommendations and tend to look for online communication before the first visit to a restaurant. The number of online reviews, the contributions of devices on social networks and the number of customer responses to contributions, as well as the appropriate interaction of administrators of individual platforms can affect the popularity of devices, which ultimately affects the fulfillment of business goals.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the article was to examine the marketing communication of basic and supplementary restaurant facilities (53) in the city of Prievidza on the Internet. We were interested which communication channels are preferred by the restaurants. The analysis shows that the restaurants in the city of Prievidza mostly use the environment of the social network Facebook for internet marketing communication. The account on this social network have 47 restaurants of a total of 53, which represents approximately 88.68%. Most restaurants have their accounts, set up on the social network Facebook, well-processed and regularly updated. Only 8.51% of them did not publish any contribution on their account for more than 6 months. The least used environment is the social network Instagram, as only 19 restaurants (35.85%) have the account on this network. Existing accounts also have problems and facilities do not sufficiently use the potential of the social network, as evidenced by the fact that up to 57.89% of existing accounts received less than half of the possible points from the specified criteria. On the other hand, also from the point of view of the demand side, the Instagram social network is less used than the Facebook social network - it has fewer registered users.

31 restaurants have their own website, which is less than 59% of all monitored establishments. The website environment is less frequently visited from the demand side point of view, as the information is not updated at a comparable frequency to the information on social networks. At the same time, visiting a website usually does not bring high speed feedback.

A comprehensive evaluation of the used online marketing communication environments in the examined companies is summarized in the Table 7.

Table 7: Use and evaluation of websites and social networks of restaurants in the city of Prievidza

Restaurants	Website (max. 27 points)	Facebook (max. 29 points)	Instagram (max. 24 points)
Restaurant Dráčik	17 p.	20 p.	Does not use
Valhalla Pub & Restaurant	20 p.	22 p.	Does not use
Restaurant Sedmička	19 p.	22 p.	Does not use
Preuge restaurant and bar	17 p.	11 p.	Does not use
At St. Florian's	19 p.	20 p.	10 p.
Bavaria Restaurant & Pub	19 p.	22 p.	Does not use
Restaurant U Zlatej Sovy	Does not use	23 p.	14 p.
Restaurant Medellín	Does not use	13 p.	Does not use
City Restaurant	Does not use	18 p.	Does not use
New Bei Jing Chinese Restaurant	Does not use	Does not use	Does not use
Shanghai Restaurant	16 p.	Does not use	Does not use
VEGFOOD	Does not use	24 p.	17 p.
Simply Vegan	Does not use	22 p.	17 p.
AeroRest	17 p.	22 p.	3 p.
Restaurant Perlla	14 p.	18 p.	Does not use
Oasis Restaurant	20 p.	25 p.	12 p.
Pizzeria & Restaurant L'ANGELO	Does not use	21 p.	11 p.
Panda Restaurant	Does not use	Does not use	Does not use
Welcome Restaurant & Pizzeria	19 p.	Does not use	Does not use
Extreme restaurant	Does not use	21 p.	14 p.
Restaurant U Tomáša	11 p.	9 p.	Does not use
Hotel Squash restaurant	14 p.	18 p.	Does not use
Teniska Restaurant	Does not use	13 p.	11 p.
Top Café Restaurant	18 p.	27 p.	14 p.
Stejk dom	16 p.	16 p.	Does not use
Charlie - restaurant, pizza, pub	18 p.	22 p.	Does not use
Restaurant Turbine	13 p.	13 p.	Does not use
Sabbia Ristorante	20 p.	22 p.	17 p.
Restaurant and pizzeria Relax	12 p.	19 p.	9 p.
Schnitzel Platz Yes	17 p.	16 p.	Does not use
Seventh pub	Does not use	17 p.	Does not use
U Bugyho Pub and Pizza	12 p.	19 p.	7 p.
Royal Pizza	Does not use	21 p.	Does not use
Pizza HELP in the Vault II	15 p.	22 p.	Does not use
Pizza Pub Amber	21 p.	21 p.	5 p.
Q pub & pizza	15 p.	16 p.	Does not use
Pizzeria Pepperoni	Does not use	21 p.	Does not use
Pizza QYX	Does not use	10 p.	Does not use
Pizza Pronto	Does not use	13 p.	Does not use
Don Papa's pizza	Does not use	Does not use	Does not use
Pizzeria Wanted	20 p.	27 p.	15 p.
Pub safe	Does not use	17 p.	8 p.

Brick pub	11 p.	13 p.	4 p.
4play sports & cocktail bar	Does not use	24 p.	13 p.
Woodstock Prievidza	13 p.	21 p.	Does not use
Domino	12 p.	Does not use	Does not use
Grill & Bistro at Priore	16 p.	21 p.	Does not use
KGB & specialties	Does not use	13 p.	Does not use
Döner Kebab	14 p.	24 p.	10 p.
McDonald's	17 p.	7 p.	Does not use
McD has a kebab in Prievidza	Does not use	12 p.	Does not use
Hoddok	Does not use	22 p.	Does not use
Baguette	Does not use	15 p.	Does not use

Source: Own elaboration, 2020.

We consider the website to be a suitable medium of internet marketing communication of restaurants, especially for new and potential customers, resp. for visitors in the destination, as they are more likely to use an Internet search engine, not a social network environment, to find a suitable restaurant. The website offers them clear information in the required structure. On the contrary, the environment of social networks is more suitable for regular communication with customers and obtaining quick feedback and thus for maintaining a permanent relationship with the customer. In the next survey, it would be encouraging to focus on the effectiveness of online communication of restaurant facilities in the context of revenues and visit rate of the establishments.

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FUNDING OF DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS IN SLOVAKIA FROM STATE RESOURCES

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to examine and evaluate the financing of destination management organizations in Slovakia by the state grants. The subject of the research is the financing by state grants. The object of research are destination management organizations. Financing of tourism organizations in Slovakia through state grants is realized on the basis of Act no. 91/2010 Coll. on the tourism support, as amended. The Act regulates the support of tourism in the Slovak Republic, the rights and obligations of natural persons and legal entities operating in tourism, the creation of conceptual documents and the financing of tourism development. The amount of the funds given by the states constantly grows from the year 2012 to 2021. There are many issues connected with the destination management organizations financing.

Keywords: Destination management organization. Financing. Slovakia. State grants.

INTRODUCTION

The financing of tourism in destinations is specific due to the cross-sectional nature of the tourism sector. We are talking about the financing of the public sector, the private sector and a separate category is the financing of tourism organizations, which represent combined form of public-private partnership and financing. One of the reasons for the establishment of these organizations is the possibility of pooling funds that will be used for a common purpose, namely to support tourism in the destination.

Systemic state support of the tourism development in Slovakia is regulated by the Act no. 91/2010 Coll. on the tourism support in the Slovak Republic, which defines the rights and obligations of natural persons and legal entities operating in tourism, the creation of conceptual documents and financing the development of tourism. According to the law, the fulfillment of tasks in tourism is ensured by the ministry, self governing regions, municipalities, regional destination management organisations, local destination management organisations and tourist information centers. Tourism in Slovakia belong to the competence of the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic. The ministry plays an important role in the development of tourism in Slovakia and provides direct and indirect and financial and non-financial support of the organizations operating in tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

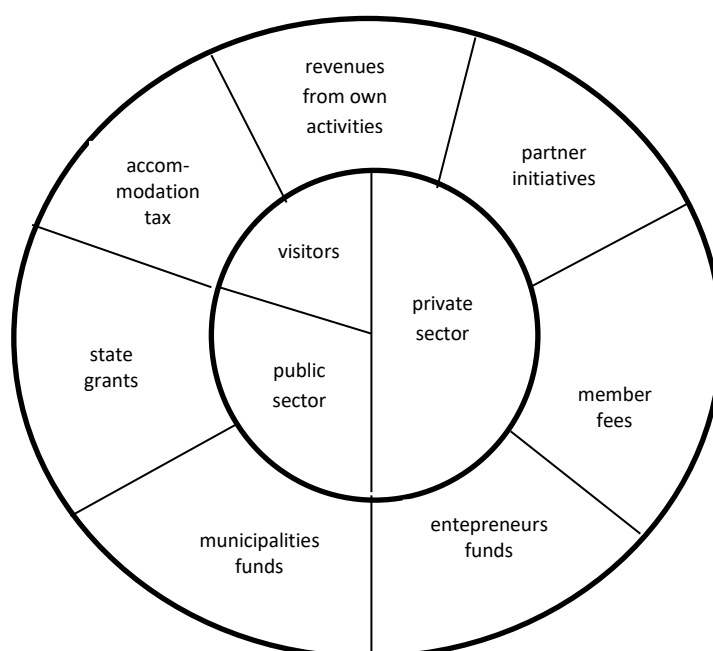
The financing of tourism from the point of view of the public sector depends on the importance of the tourism for the destination. If the destination has the potential for the development of tourism, it is the role of the state or local government to support this development (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Pompurová & Šimočková, 2014; Beritelli, 2018; Morrison, 2019).

The funding of destination management organizations is diversified and consists of several sources, in which the public sector, the private sector, as well as visitors should participate (Beritelli & Laesser, 2014; Reinhold, Beritelli & Grüning, 2018). The basic tools for financing the activities of management organizations are membership fees, contributions from municipalities, income from own activities, state/regional subsidies, local taxes, income from business entities, accommodation tax

and others (Gajdošík and Šebová, 2020). Financial security of the activities of destination management organizations is a prerequisite for the successful development of the destination. However, financial resources are also a limiting factor influencing the scope and effectiveness of the activities of the tourism management organization in the destination (Palatková, 2011).

The World Tourism Organization (2019) understands destination management organisations responsible for the management of destinations and generally falling into one of the following categories: national tourism authorities or organisations, responsible for management and marketing of tourism at a national level, regional, provincial or state destination management organisations, responsible for the management and marketing of tourism in a geographic region defined for that purpose (sometimes but not always an administrative or local government region such as a county, state or province) and local destination management organisations, responsible for the management and marketing of tourism based on a smaller geographic area or city. Organizational structures of destination management organizations vary. Various authors (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2012) have described various organizational structures including a government department or a division of a government department, a quasi-governmental organization (such as a crown/government corporation), a joint public/private agency, a not-for-profit membership-based organization, and private organizations. Destination management organisations funding may be derived from several sources but is generally reflective of the organizational structure as well as the context in which the organisation operates (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; Pechlaner & Innerhofer, 2018). Examples include government allocations of public funds, specific tourism taxes or levies such as hotel/room taxes, user fees, allocations from gambling and lotteries, membership fees paid by tourism organizations, sponsorship and advertising in destination promotional activities, commissions for bookings and sales, commercial/retail sales at visitor centres, and in-kind contributions to host travel writers and meeting planners.

Figure 1: Possibilities of financing of the DMOs



Source: Own elaboration according to Reinhold, Beritelli, & Grüning, 2018.

The success of the destination is influenced by several factors from the current state of the world economy, through globalization, current trends to individual requirements of visitors. The presence of a primary and secondary offer at the destination does not represent an exclusive advantage compare to other destinations. Strategic planning, quality of product, targeted marketing and cooperation of private and public sector subjects in the destination are even more important. The public-private partnership is a positive contribution to tourism. In order to establish and operate a destination on tourism market successfully, it is important to create a destination management organization that would effectively coordinate the activities of all stakeholders. Ensuring sufficient sources of funding is a necessary aspect of the functioning of such an organization and the fulfillment of its objectives (Gajdošík & Šebová, 2020).

Morrison (2019) claims that the development of tourism is closely linked to the functioning of destination management organizations and the products they offer. For the development of the tourism product, there is a specific need for cooperation of several subjects. A precondition for the development of the destination is to ensure cooperation between the public and private sectors, in which everyone has their own tasks to fulfill. Many domestic and foreign authors also pay attention to destination management organizations. They

perceive it as an essential component in the process of sustainable development and increasing the competitiveness of the destination (Buhalis, 2000; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Palatková, 2011; Marčeková & Malachovský, 2015; Pechlaner & Innerhofer, 2018; Gajdošík & Šebová, 2020).

DATA AND METHODS

The subject of the research is the financing of tourism organizations by state grants. The object of research are destination management organizations. The aim of the paper is to examine and evaluate the financing of destination management organizations in Slovakia by the state grants. Financing of tourism organizations in Slovakia through state grants is realized on the basis of Act no. 91/2010 Coll. on the tourism support, as amended. The Act regulates the support of tourism in the Slovak Republic, the rights and obligations of natural persons and legal entities operating in tourism, the creation of conceptual documents and the financing of tourism development. When creating the organizational structure of tourism, regional and local destination management organizations may be set up in the destinations, which at the same time form the basic research sample.

Table 1: Organizational structure of tourism in Slovakia

Level	Organization
National	Ministry of transport and construction of the Slovak republic
Regional	Regional destination management organizations
Local	Local destination management organizations

Source: Own elaboration, 2021.

There are currently seven regional and thirty-eight local destination management organizations (table 2) in Slovakia (www.mindop.sk).

Table 2: List of the regional and local destination management organizations in Slovakia

Regional destination management organizations	Local destination management organizations
Bratislava Region Tourism Northeast Slovakia Košice Region Tourism Trenčín Region Banská Bystrica Tourism Region Žilina Tourist Region Trnava Region	DMO Bratislava Tourist Board DMO Dudince Tourism DMO Nitra Tourist Board DMO Horný Zemplín a Horný Šariš DMO Klaster Orava DMO KOŠICE—Tourism DMO Kysuce Tourist Board DMO Malá Fatra DMO The Small Carpathians DMO Horehronie DMO Rajecká dolina DMO Banská Štiavnica Tourism DMO Region GRON DMO Region HORNÁ NITRA—BOJNICE DMO Horné Považie Tourist Association DMO REGION LIPTOV DMO Senec Region DMO Šariš Region DMO Vysoké Tatry Region DMO REZORT PIEŠŤANY DMO PODUNAJSKO DMO SEVERNÝ SPIŠ—PIENINY DMO Slovenský Raj & Spiš DMO Central Slovakia Tourist Board DMO “Šariš”—BARDEJOV DMO TATRY—SPIŠ—PIENINY DMO Regional Tourism Association Tekov DMO Regional Tourism Association Gemer DMO Trenčianske Teplice DMO Trenčín-Country-Surrounding DMO Trnava Tourism DMO TURIEC DMO TOUR NOVOHRAD AND PODPOĽANIE DMO Vysoké Tatry—Foothills DMO Záhorie Zemplínska DMO DMO Žitný ostrov DMO Štúrovo Parkan

Source: www.mindop.sk, 2021.

We analyse the development of the state grants in the years 2012 to 2021. We have obtained the material from individual organizations, from their websites, from the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic as well as from the register of accounts of the organizations.

We take closer look on the division of the state grants among local and regional organizations in Slovakia in the year 2020. We compare the amount of the state funds determined to support tourism development for individual destination management organizations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the national level, financing is provided by the government and the ministry; in the case of Slovakia, tourism belongs to the competences of the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic, where a tourism section has been established. At the national level, the state provides funding for the state's marketing activities as a travel destination, with most countries having a separate organization for this purpose. In Slovakia, such an organization called the Slovak Tourism Board was abolished on December 31st, 2016 (it was established in 1995) and its tasks were taken over by the ministry (Dula, 2020). Slovakia became the only state from the surrounding states that did not have such an organization. However, the government's decision re-established the national tourism organization, which was established again on April 1st, 2021. In addition to the above funds, the state supports tourism at the national level through educational activities, provides public goods used in tourism and is responsible for shaping tourism strategies and creating conditions for cooperation of all stakeholders.

Tourism organizations in Slovakia are established on the basis of Act no. 91/2010 Coll. on Tourism support as amended. They should support tourism development on the regional and local level. The law defines local and regional destination management organizations. In individual parts, in relation to local and regional organizations, it regulates the establishment of a regional organization, the rights and obligations of a regional organization, the demise of a regional organization, the establishment of a local organization, the rights and obligations of a local organization, local organization bodies, membership in a local organization, rights and obligations of a member of local organization,

budget and accounting of local organization, establishment and demise of regional organization, concept documents, registration of destination management organizations as well as financing of tourism development and grants. The sources of destination management organization financing are public and private.

Funding is important for organizations. Funds can be obtained by organizations from the membership fees, subsidies from the state budget, voluntary contributions from municipalities, natural persons and legal entities for tourism organization activities, income from their own activities, sales of products and services, brokerage fees, revenues from tourist information activities centers and non-repayable financial contributions from domestic and foreign sources, including contributions from European Union funds. The law deals with the possibilities of receiving subsidies, addresses the amount of subsidies for the relevant financial year. The subsidy will be provided only to tourism organizations registered by the ministry for the implementation of activities that are related to the main subject of their activities. The subsidy is provided for the relevant financial year, with the exception of the first year of activity of the destination management organization from the budget chapter of the ministry on the basis of a grant agreement concluded between the ministry and the destination management organization. The subsidy may be provided by the ministry to the local destination management organization in the same amount as the total value of collected member fees in the year preceding the previous budget year, while the maximum amount of the subsidy to the local destination management organization is limited to 90% of the total value of collected accommodation tax from the year preceding the previous financial year. In the case of a regional destination management organization, the subsidy may be the same amount as the membership fee of a self governing region in the year preceding the previous budget year, while the maximum amount of the subsidy to the regional destination organization is limited to 10% of the collected accommodation tax from all member municipalities of regional destination management organization in the year preceding the previous financial year. The subsidy is provided on the basis of a written application of the organization and the submitted project, which is focused on the implementation of activities that are related to the main subject of the destination management organization's activities.

The provided subsidy can be used for marketing and promotion, especially for participation in fairs, exhibitions, presentations, creation of a website, creation of a logo of a tourism organization, electronic marketing, creation of discount products, creation of promotional and information printed materials other than book publications; the activities of the tourist information center set up by the destination management organization, in addition to wage and operating costs; creation and operation of a reservation system; creation and promotion of tourism products; promoting the attractiveness of the destination so that it becomes the part of the permanent offer in tourism; tourism infrastructure other than the construction of accommodation facilities; provision of strategic, conceptual and analytical materials and documents, statistics and surveys; introduction of a service quality evaluation system; educational activities aimed at improving and developing the destination and tourism in it. The requirements of the project, the sample of the application for the provision of the subsidy and the conditions for the use of the subsidy provided to destination management organizations are set out in a generally binding legal regulation issued by the ministry.

On the other hand, the subsidy may not be used for wages and operating costs of the organization, repayment of loans and interest on loans, interest on late payments, contractual fines and fines imposed according to special regulations, payment of obligations of the applicant for subsidies from the state budget of the state budget from previous years, fulfillment of obligations of the applicant for a subsidy from the state budget related to income from funds and grants from the European Union

and grants resulting from international agreements concluded between the Slovak Republic and other states.

The subsidy shall be approved by the ministry by May 31st of the relevant calendar year in which the application for the provision of the subsidy was delivered to the ministry. The ministry will provide the subsidy to the destination management organization within 30 working days from the approval of the subsidy by the ministry.

Regarding the crisis situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the tourism sector the most, and within it the regional and local destination management organizations and their members, there was guidance incorporated in the law that in order to provide a subsidy in the years 2022 and 2023 by the maximum subsidies determinations for destination management organizations the data from the year 2019 shall be used.

The goal of destination management organizations financing is to aim a direct financial support to tourism destinations and thus support their development. However, financial resources are a limiting factor influencing the extent and effectiveness of the activities of the management organization in the destination (Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2010; Vanhove, 2017).

Table 3 summarizes the state grants given to the destination management organizations in Slovakia from the year 2012, which was the first year of systematic financial support according to Act no. 91/2010 Coll. on Tourism support.

Table 3: Subsidies for destination management organizations in Slovakia from 2012 to 2021

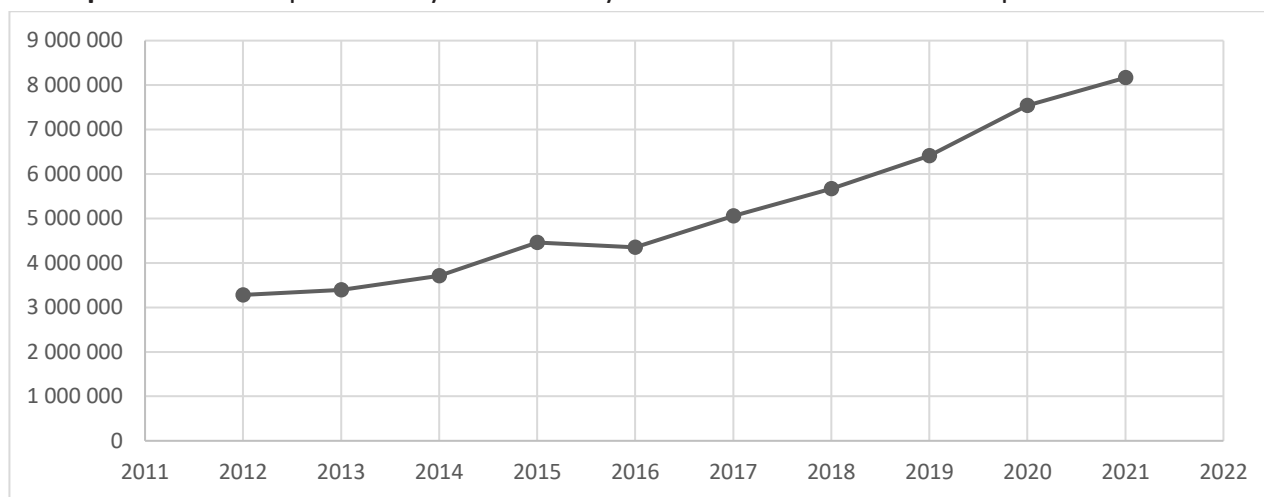
Year	Subsidies provided/Requirements in €
2012	3,281,302.64
2013	3,392,752.79
2014	3,707,589.46
2015	4,457,141.85
2016	4,352,259.08
2017	5,055,412.83
2018	5,669,956.05
2019	6,408,882.39
2020	7,544,616.31
2021	8,165,134.09

Source: mindop.sk, 2021.

The total amount of state grants given to the local destination management organizations in Slovakia in 2020 was €7,554,616.31 (in 2021 it is supposed to be €8,165,134.09). According to the table 3 there is almost yearly growth in the number of subsidies aimed on the support of destination management organization (only decline was in the year 2016 compare to year 2015 – 2.4%). The funding increased from 2012 to 2021 about 248.8%. For ten years total

number of funding through subsidies is around €52,035,047.49 (it is an estimate as we don't have final number for the year 2021). Problem is that many organizations rely fully on the state subsidies and wouldn't be able to operate without money from the state. Organizations are widely funded by grants. Own income creates only a small part of their financial resources.

Graph 1: Subsidies provided by state in the years 2012 to 2020 and the requirements in 2021

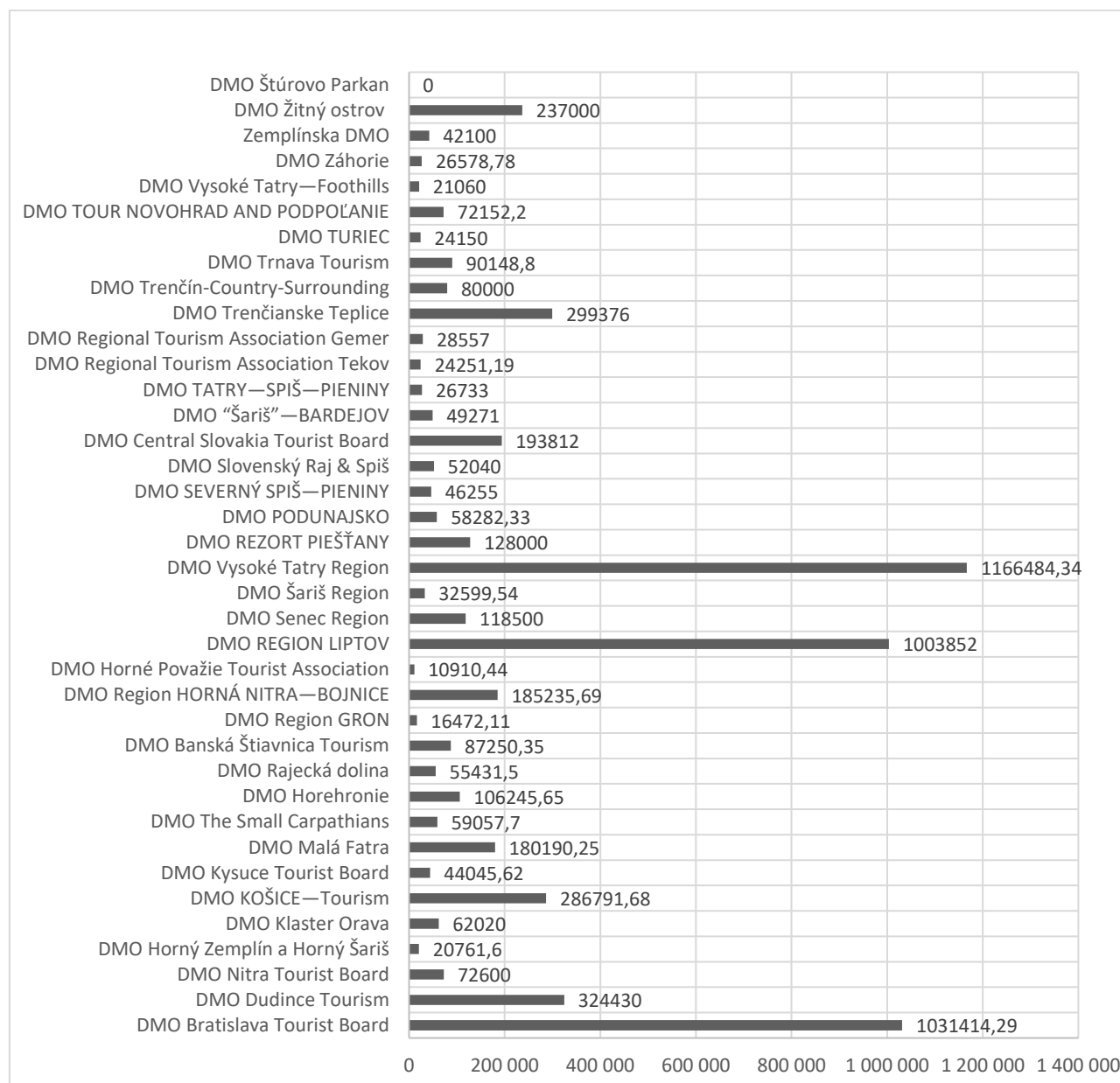


Source: www.mindop.sk, 2021.

Graph 1 shows the development of the subsidies provided by state in the years 2012 to 2020 and the requirements in 2021. When we want to have

a closer look on the division of the subsidies, we can look on the data from the year 2020 (Graph 2).

Graph 2: The division of the state grants among local destination management organizations in 2020



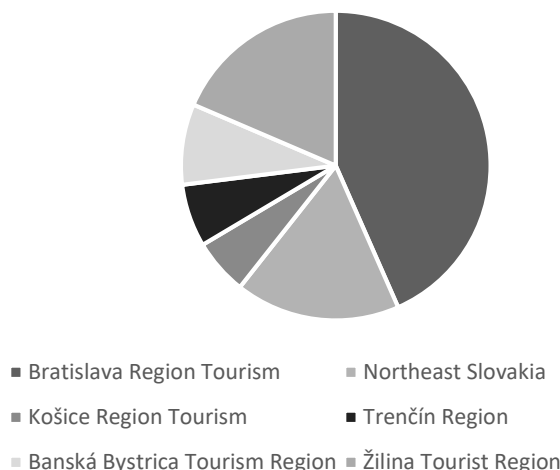
Source: Own elaboration according to www.mindop.sk, 2021.

The amount of subsidies paid to the destination management organizations in Slovakia was €7,544,616.31. Regional destination management organizations received 15.65% of all subsidies, local destination management organizations received 84.35% of all funds. Among local destination management organizations, there are three organizations, which are totally above the average of the received funds – DMO Vysoké Tatry Region, DMO Bratislava Tourist Board and DMO Region Liptov. These two regions and capital city belong also to the most visited regions in Slovakia and they receive highest support from state from the beginning of the grant system functioning. These three organizations

from the total number of 38 local destination management organizations take together 50,3% of all funds for the local destination management organizations. The question is, if it is the money from the state, which make these organizations so successful, or they would be successful also without such funding and if the resources shouldn't be used to support also other destinations in order to secure sustainable development in other regions of Slovakia as well.

The graph 3 describes division of the state grants among regional destination management organizations in Slovakia in 2020.

Graph 3: The division of state grants among the regional destination management organizations in 2020



Source: Own elaboration according to www.mindop.sk, 2021.

Total amount of the state grants provided to the regional destination management organizations in the year 2020 was € 1,180,556.25. To the most successful organization in the sense of receiving the funds from state support belong organization based by Bratislava self-governing region, Bratislava Region Tourism (€512,292.78). It is no surprise, that Žilina Tourist Board (€219,039.03) and Northeast Slovakia (€203,490.00) are on the second and third place. These are also the regions, where three more successful local destination management organizations in the sense of grant support operate. Trnava regional organization hasn't received any support in the year 2020, as it was a new established organization and Nitra self-governing region hasn't established the regional organization yet.

The amount of state grants depends on the membership fees and amount of selected accommodation tax. The membership fees of organizations are differentiated, each organization sets a different rate of membership fees. Their amount is published in the bylaws of the organizations. The operating costs of all organizations are fully covered by membership fees.

The results of the Kamannová survey (2008) show that the largest share in the financing of management organizations in Europe is represented by the public sector and within it local self-government, regional self-government and state administration. Membership fees are also important as the second largest source of funding and then funds from own business activities. Sponsorship is one of the less common forms of funding, with

grants and contributions from the European Union having the smallest share. In terms of the use of funds, management organizations in Europe spend the most resources on promotion, branding, product creation and tourism planning.

Funding is a critical point in the functioning of a tourism management organization. Most of the organizations in Slovakia do not create their own product and rely on other sources of funding. The extent to which the tourism organization will be subsidized from the state budget is determined by several factors, but especially by the number of overnight stays of visitors at the destination, the number of accommodation facilities paying accommodation tax (the amount of tax paid) and the willingness of businesses to cooperate and become members of management organization and pay membership fees.

Financing of the destination management organizations is a topic which always leads to the discussion. The amount of disposal funds determines the influence and strength of management organizations. Organizations with a low level of funding try to survive, often having one employee - the CEO. Those with a high budget, on the other hand, are the winners, because they have enough money. It happens, that the some destinations are supported more and some less, which creates even more regional disparities. In simple words it can be said, the the rich become richer and poor even poorer. That is many times the reason of criticism of the state support according to Act no. 91/2010 Coll. on Tourism support. Organizations are unable to

control the long-term development of their finances. The amount of subsidies changes every year and is also affected by external factors, which organizations are unable to influence (eg. changes in legislation, political, economic environment). There are many formulas for funding management organizations and there are also differences between the funding of many comparable destinations. The way the management organization is financed also has an undeniable influence on its management. Entities with the most resources tend to play a major role in managing the destination.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the article was to examine the funding of the destination management organizations in Slovakia from the state. As the finance resources are a limiting factor of the the activities the organization can perform. It is not the only factor, besides that the question of the professional and managerial skills of the organization representatives are of the same importance.

The Act, including its amendments, is an important systemic step in the development of tourism in Slovakia. The law is based on the principle of voluntary association, where business entities together with local municipalities (and other subjects) are encouraged to create professional tourism associations. „The aim is for the associated subjects to participate together in the management of the tourist destination, to professionally identify the weaknesses and shortcomings that have accumulated in recent times in the destination, to find the optimal and most effective solutions to address these shortcomings, which should contribute to increase of the overall competitiveness of the destination itself”(Rusinko, 2012, p. 60). It is a systemic change from the state downwards, because without state intervention it would not be possible to overcome the problems in tourism in Slovakia. Functioning destination management organizations in Slovakia also create space for cooperation within the countries of the European Union, especially in the case of cross-border cooperation of neighboring regions and the possibility of joint promotion, marketing and coordination of the tourism development.

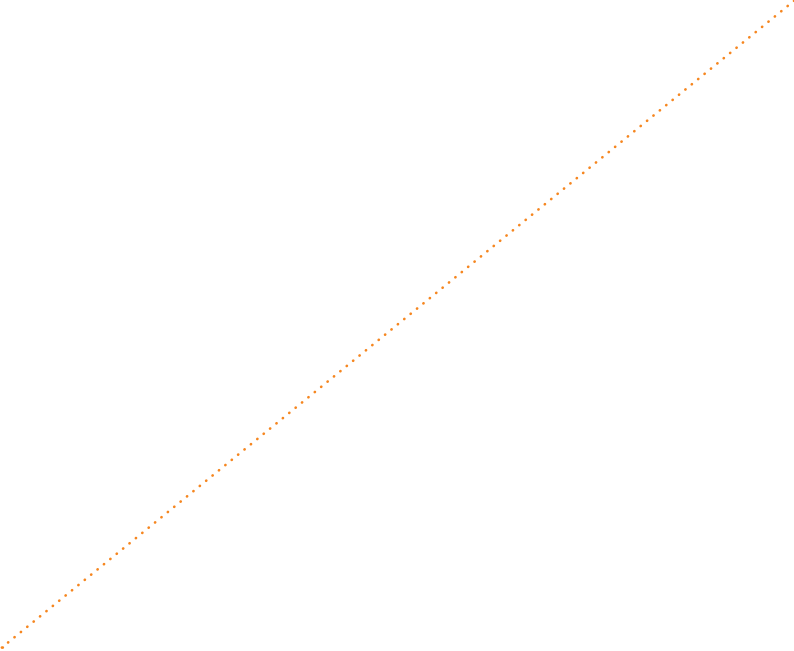
The problem is also in getting data about organizations. Despite the statutory obligation to publish account statements (these are non-profit organizations), it is often almost impossible to find the required data, or the financial data of same indicator is different in various sources (for example the amount of the grant from the Ministry of Transport and Construction varies on the web page of ministry and on the financial statements register, or in the information given by the organization itself on its webpage). Some organizations criticize the system of obtaining state grants. Their view of the redistribution of state grants is that if the maximum amount of grant depends on the amount of membership fees collected, organizations operating in regions with a low number of accommodation facilities and overnight stays do not have the opportunity to obtain sufficient funding to undertake activities related to the core business of the organization.

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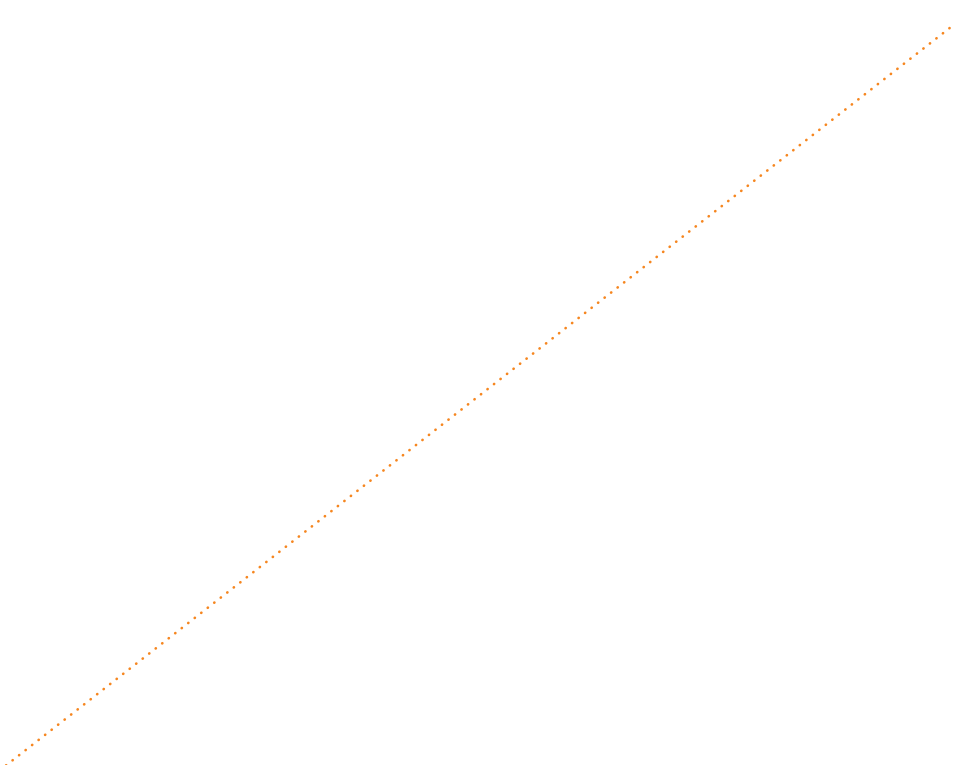
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