

## Second housing at the edge of Prague metropolitan area: a SWOT analysis

JIŘÍ VÁGNER

Charles University, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development, Prague

**Abstract:** Two selected micro-regions in the southern hinterland of Prague are surveyed in the perspectives of their recreational functions in the context of some other functions. The paper is focused on opportunities and wide range of forms of tourism. After explaining delimitation and main features of the two micro-regions, the paper indicates current trends in tourism and mainly in second homes activities. The objective of the paper is to assess possibilities of future development in tourism and second housing activities in specific settings of endogenous and exogenous factors. The assessment is made with the help of regional comparison based on an adjusted SWOT analysis.

**Key-words:** tourism, second homes, Prague hinterland

Research support by Czech Ministry of Education (MSM:113100007) is acknowledged.

### 1. Introduction

Metropolitan areas and their hinterlands accommodate great numbers of different functions. There are residential, commuting, productive and service functions that often tend to deconcentrate in the geographical forms of suburbanization processes of functions within a metropolitan territory (Harsthorst 1992). The importance of such a territory for tourism and recreation should not be neglected either. Prague metropolitan area in Central Bohemia is a typical example of a well-developed area for the recreational function that is based not only on one-day recreation, yet mainly on second housing activities besides some other forms of tourism. Central Bohemia Region represents the recreational zone for Prague inhabitants. There are more than 100 thousands second homes in the region. This figure equals to one quarter of second homes in the Czech Republic with an extreme concentration (38,000) in only two administrative districts – Prague-west and Prague-east. Such an extraordinary concentration of second housing has not only been sustained by attractive natural conditions of southern surroundings of the capital city of Prague with their deep rocky river valleys and forested areas, but also resulting from specific tradition having its cultural roots since the 1920s in both the upper classes and the worker class (see further Bičík et al. 2001). However, the intensive concentrations of second homes and garden houses in communes in the metropolitan hinterland also form barriers hindering further urban sprawl and the suburbanization process with its dominant function of permanent residence. Moreover, second housing is often also setting limits to a boom in free tourism activities and to building new recreational establishments that could result in more significant economic effects sustaining local and regional development.



The paper is structured in three parts. First, after explaining delineation and main features of the two micro-regions (Hostomice region and Dolní Kocába region), the paper indicates current trends in tourism and mainly in second homes activities. Second, the paper is assessing possibilities of future development in tourism and second housing activities in the two micro-regions. The assessment is made with the help of regional comparison based on an adjusted SWOT analysis. Finally, main conclusions are drawn in the last section summarizing the outcomes of the regional comparison.

## 1. Delineation and main features of two selected micro-regions

### 1.1. Hostomice Region

Hostomice micro-region forms part of the main metropolitan region of Prague. The delineation of the micro-region was based on prevailing commuting processes to the centre of Hostomice (see Map 1). The region covers 93.9 km<sup>2</sup> and includes 13 municipalities (see Table 1). The micro-region is in the southeastern part of Beroun administrative district and located at the edge of Prague metropolitan region. The micro-region has population of about 4800 permanent inhabitants. Hostomice municipality was given the town status in 1992 again and it was also selected by the central government as one of about 400 municipalities with delegated administrative tasks to serve surrounding very small municipalities.

**Table 1.** Main characteristics of the municipalities in the Hostomice Region

Municipality	Area km <sup>2</sup>	Population	Perm. inh. houses	Recreational houses	Density RH/km <sup>2</sup>	RH/100 inh.	RH/100 perm. inh. houses	RH/ total houses %
Hostomice	28.28	1562	439	186	7	12	42	30
Běštín	2.99	284	102	63	21	22	62	38
Lázovice	4.89	92	31	44	9	48	142	59
Lhotka	5.35	267	92	35	6	13	38	28
Nesvačily	2.74	112	37	28	10	25	76	43
Neumětely	9.37	498	135	21	2	4	16	13
Osov	2.45	412	100	38	15	9	38	28
Podbrdy	3.78	163	48	13	3	8	27	21
Skřípel	3.06	108	30	15	5	14	50	33
Skuhrov	8.67	362	108	138	16	38	128	56
Velký Chlumec	4.53	350	106	147	32	42	139	58
Vižina	3.89	196	50	17	4	9	34	25
Všeradice	13.89	390	100	52	4	13	26	34
TOTAL	93.89	4796	1378	797	9	17	58	37

Notes: RH = Recreational houses

Source: internal materials – Department of Regional Development, District Office Beroun (1991) – modified.





Map 1. Location of the Hostomicko and Dolní Kocába Region

Source: Česká republika. Automapa (1 : 500 000), Kartografie Praha, 1998.

The region is situated at the foot of the Brdy and the Hřebeny Hills with most of the settlements in shallow basins with average altitude of 310–350 m. The highest points of Hřebeny range reach over 600 m. A large part of the area is under forest (28 percent), with spruces, oaks and beeches in its hilly parts. The micro-region has unpolluted environment with large woodland areas and attractive relief and is therefore little surprising that there were some suggestions to establish in a part of Brdy and the Hřebeny Hills a protected landscape area. The proposals have not been accepted so far, there are some special activities in the whole Brdy region (a military zone, impacts of mining in neighbouring Příbram district) that are considered as incompatible with character of such a protected area. The Hostomice basin is a traditional agriculture area with arable land share of about 40 percent (crops and pigs, cattle and poultry production). Agricultural activities sometimes disturb recreational activities, but small industrial plants have less important adverse impacts on local environment. On the other hand, the region suffers from little job opportunities and, in consequence, commuting to neighbouring larger centres (Hořovice, Beroun and Příbram) is important. The location of the micro-region at the edge of Prague metropolitan area makes it possible to commute to rich labour market of the capital city of Prague as well. The local railway Zadní Třebáň – Lochovice forms a traditional “backbone” of infrastructure in the micro-region. It is interesting to note that there were



some suggestions in 1993 to establish an informal association of municipalities along this local railway. However, dominant traffic was transferred to the road axis Praha – Řevnice – Hostomice – Jince – Příbram.

### 1.2. Dolní (Lower) Kocába Region

The micro-region Lower Kocába (see Map 1) is also a part of the Prague metropolitan region. The micro-region was delineated in the framework of a project supported by the Czech Ministry of Agriculture and the National Agency for Agricultural Research titled "The Harmonization of Regional Development in the Kocába Basin" (Final Report 1997). The delineation was adjusted for the purposes of other surveys mainly based on information about regional commuting processes (see further Vágner 1999). The most significant features of the micro-region are the following ones:

- (i) significant internal heterogeneity of the region, but also characterized by common processes integrating the territory
- (ii) very intensive recreational activities (second homes)
- (iii) location at the edge of Prague metropolitan area with some suburban tendencies, but also with some strong features of a periphery

The region includes 9 municipalities (see Table 2) with total area of 114 km<sup>2</sup> and 5700 permanent inhabitants. Four municipalities are situated in administrative district Prague-west, five municipalities in district Příbram located just at the edge of Prague metropolitan region. There are many separated recreational settlements spread in the Kocába River Valley. The recreational settlements significantly changed local settlement structure and landscape with two local centres Nový Knín and Štěchovice. Nový Knín is a local traffic hub and a centre of services with micro-regional influence. Štěchovice (and settlement Slapy) plays the role of a centre with mixed permanent housing and recreational functions. Due to the location on important "weekend road" of the city of Prague (II/102) there is a wide choice of car services. The main differences within the region are mainly due to uneven distance to main transportation links connecting settlements in the micro-region with Prague. The western part of the region is close to Dobříš micro-region with good connections to the main motorway axis Praha – Příbram – Strakonice. Local railway Praha – Vrané nad Vltavou – Mníšek p. B. – Dobříš was important transportation link in the beginnings of recreational and second homes activities, but the current intensive car transport reduced significantly its infrastructure role in this part of Prague metropolitan area (see for locations of both transport axes Map 1).



**Table 2.** Main characteristics of the municipalities in the Dolní (Lower) Kocába Region

Municipality	Area km <sup>2</sup>	Population	Perm. inh. houses	Recreational houses	Density RH/km <sup>2</sup>	RH/100 inh.	RH/100 perm. inh. houses	RH/ total houses %
Bojanovice	10.97	387	123	338	31	87	275	73
Bratřínov	4.21	91	32	152	36	167	475	80
Slapy	20.24	595	180	902	44	151	501	80
Štěchovice	14.29	1345	335	1083	76	81	323	76
Nový Knín	29.62	1716	431	209	7	12	48	33
Malá Hraštice	9.28	594	176	385	41	65	219	69
Nové Dvory	8.38	182	55	89	10	49	162	62
Nová Ves p. Pleší	10.96	667	169	272	24	40	160	61
Velká Lečice	5.19	163	50	79	15	48	158	63
TOTAL	113.14	5470	1551	3509	30	60	219	69

Notes: RH = Recreational houses

Source: Census (SLBD) 1991 – District Praha-západ, Příbram, ČSÚ – modified.

## 2. Methods of surveys and basic facts on tourism and second homes

Main sources of information used in this paper are twofold. First, there are used data from central, regional and municipal statistical sources. Second, main relevant information is gained from field observations. In the two micro-regions a number of well-structured interviews was held with representatives of municipal self-government and other institutions, entrepreneurs, permanent inhabitants, owners of second homes and their families. In Hostomice region, interviews were held in 1991–98. In the Dolní Kocába region questionnaire surveys were held in 1995–98. More details about methodology are reported in a number of associated studies (see Vágner 1994, 1999; and Fialová 1992, 1995).

In 1998, there were 829 second homes registered in the whole Hostomice micro-region. This outcome means that about one third of all houses were used for recreational purposes. Of them 31 percent were log cabins (“chaty”) and small recreational houses and the rest were cottages. The boom of building of new recreational houses was during the communist era in two waves in the 1970s and the 1980s. The total number of recreants may exceed 3000 in full season (this number equals roughly to 70 percent of the permanent population of the micro-region; see Table 1).

The Dolní Kocába micro-region is much more densely occupied with the recreational houses (3419 in 1998). This number of recreational houses means a quadruple of permanently inhabited houses. About 90 percent of recreational houses are log cabins, often wooden ones. The tradition of building of second homes of this type has closely been connected with popular tramping movement since the 1920s already. The total number of recreants exceeds during summer weekends 15 000 and this number is a treble of the permanent population of the micro-region.



The results of surveys held in the two micro-regions show that a typical second home is used by three generations. The owners have average age of 40–65 years (Dolní Kocába region – retired people represent one half of owners). The owners are better educated, often with intellectual professions. In Hostomice micro-region about 80 percent of recreants live in Prague. In Dolní Kocába micro-region this share is even higher, 96 percent. Commuting by car is prevailing and takes 30 to 60 minutes (see for more detailed information on structure of second homes ownership and owners Bičík, Fialová, 1997; Fialová 1995; 1999; Vágner 1994; 1999).

The numbers of second homes were fixed in the two micro-regions during the 1990s. Interestingly, there are some shifts towards residential function (13 percent of second homes in Dolní Kocába micro-region is used in fact already permanently and even about 30 percent of owners consider it possible to take their second homes in future for permanent living (see Fialová, 1999).

For the beginning of the 1990s a slight grow of small local private shops and workshops, pubs, catering and accommodation facilities (small private hotels, rooms to let) with some features of agri-tourism ideas are evident. But the potential of the territory has not been exploited fully at all so far.

### 3. Perspectives of the two selected micro-regions: a SWOT assessment

With the help of an adjusted SWOT analysis one can assess circumstances in tourism and second home activities in the Hostomice micro-region (indicated with H) and Dolní Kocába micro-region (indicated in italics with DK) using the basic classification in strengths, weaknesses and threats.

#### 1. The Strengths:

- (i) high quality of natural landscape potential,
- (ii) low level of air-pollution,
- (iii) vicinity of sources for tourism and recreation (Praha),
- (iv) great tradition of second homes activities,
- (v) *favourable location communications (DK in part),*
- (vi) large numbers of cottages resulting in preservation of houses and defence against depopulation (H),
- (vii) interest of local authorities in development of service sector and settlements, e. g. water and gas supply systems (H),

#### 2. The Weaknesses:

- (i) parts of the two micro-regions are in periphery away of main transport and communications, worse bus service, local railway in decline,
- (ii) neglected infrastructure and lack of basic service provision in periphery,
- (iii) insufficient publicity and promotion,
- (iv) lack of more important culture monuments,
- (v) disturbing impacts of some production activities (agriculture, constructions),
- (vi) bad conditions of dusty roads,



- (vii) problems with waste and its collection,
- (viii) limited possibilities for swimming,
- (ix) bad quality of drinking water (DK),
- (x) *pollution of woods and water (DK – end of traditional canoeing),*
- (xi) late and slow development of tourism facilities and other services,
- (xii) weak cultural and sports chances,
- (xiii) *bad access to health care (DK mainly)*

### 3. The Threats:

- (i) considerable inequalities between different parts of the micro-regions (peripheral locations) and in specific settlements in a small area,
- (ii) depopulation of some settlements, aging process in permanent population and owners of second homes, degradation and termination of some houses,
- (iii) physical planning and master plans for harmonized future development are missing,
- (iv) decline in public transport, termination of local railway lines that made well-known image of regions,
- (v) ecological burden and landscape degradation caused with overcrowded recreational settlements,
- (vi) lack of interest in future of regions and bad publicity ,
- (vii) wrong attitudes and relationships between permanent inhabitants and recreants and segregation,
- (viii) intermingling of traditional recreational settlements *and newly built large houses for permanent living, radical change of space (DK mainly)*

### 4. Conclusions

The assessment in terms of an adjusted SWOT analysis provides a basis for drawing of the following conclusions. First, there are tendencies towards transformations of settlements and changing functions of houses materialized in the shift of second homes to seasonal and permanent living. There also are tendencies to renting and extending wide scale of services. Second, there are opportunities and potentials for further development of tourism and recreation in the two micro-regions. There are opportunities for development of agri-tourist activities and building of tourist information centres (local authorities). There are also opportunities for support of one-day and biking tourism. There is also need for building other tourist facilities (camps, swimming-pools, petrol stations, small hotels, sport equipment, bike repair-shops etc.) in connection with “Green Fair” with international participants in Hostomice micro-region and with developing cultural centres of Dobříš and Nový Knín in Dolní Kocába micro-region. Such facilities are needed for foreign tourists as well as for realization of the programmes of the Association of the Municipalities in the Hostomice region focused on biotechnology and alternative sources of energy linking other municipalities to the Association of the Municipalities in the Mníšek area in Dolní Kocába region. There are also opportunities to extend cooperation focused on keeping of traditional local railways in function, on support of promoting actions (e.g. steam runs) and use of small railway stations in historic style. Third, there are chances to extend



information provision and services for curative stays taking advantage of relatively low levels of air pollution and making use of various traditional activities for building of some "Education Paths". Such as "Tramping at the Snake River" or "Tradition of Gold Mining" in Nový Knín area (the museum in Nový Knín should be used for other promoting exhibitions and auctions) in Dolní Kocába micro-region. There also is a need for asserting of some type of protection of old weekend-houses and wooden log cabins that are valuable elements of architecture and life style heritage (in particular in Dolní Kocába region). It is necessary to support various cultural actions and publicity on sport events (e.g. concerts in summer cinema, biking race "Cobra's Revenge" in Hostomice micro-region).

Finally, one may draw the general conclusion that very good landscape conditions and vicinity of various tourist resources give the two micro-regions considerable potential at the edge of Prague metropolitan area to develop further their significance for tourism and recreation. The main limits are in slow development of infrastructure and service sector, weak publicity, lack of physical planning and master plans and also in bad tax policy that does not make it possible for municipalities to raise more money from second homes taxes. However, one can anticipate that in near future the two micro-regions will become modern multifunctional areas with dominant recreational function orientated not only on traditional second home activities, but also on other activities of domestic and foreign tourists.

### References

- Automapa České republiky. 1 : 600 000, Euroverlag, 4. vydání, 1994.
- BIČÍK, I., FIALOVÁ, D. (1997): Second Homes: Case Study Kocába Region. In: *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Geographica*, XXXII Suppl., pp. 247–55.
- BIČÍK A KOL. (2001): Druhé bydlení v Česku. KSGRR PŘF UK. 166 p.
- FIALOVÁ, D. (1992): Současný stav a perspektivy rekreačních lokalit v těsném zázemí Prahy. Diplomová práce. PŘF UK Praha, 70 p.
- FIALOVÁ, D. (1995): Příspěvek k výzkumu rekreačních objektů v zázemí Prahy – výsledky dotazníkového šetření In: *Zmiany w przestrzeni geograficznej w warunkach transformacji społeczno-ekonomicznej (na przykładzie obszarów wiejskich)*. Uniwersytet Warszawski, pp. 173–5.
- Harmonizace regionálního rozvoje povodí Kocáby. Závěrečná zpráva. Grantový úkol MZ ČR a NAZK č. RE 5507. PŘF UK Praha, 1997.
- HARSTHORN, T. A. (1992): *Interpreting the City. An Urban Geography*. New York.
- VÁGNER, J. (1994): Současný stav a perspektivy rekreace na Berounsku (se zaměřením na individuální krátkodobou rekreaci a region Hostomicko). Magisterská práce. PŘF UK Praha, 96 str.
- VÁGNER, J. (1995a): Příspěvek k hodnocení rekreačních procesů na mikroregionální úrovni na příkladu regionu Hostomicko. In: *Sborník ČGS*, 100, č. 1, s. 16–24.
- VÁGNER, J. (1995b): Druhé bydlení v zázemí hlavního města Prahy – region Berounsko a Hostomicko. In: *Zmiany w przestrzeni geograficznej w warunkach transformacji społeczno-ekonomicznej (na przykładzie obszarów wiejskich)*. Uniwersytet Warszawski, s. 149–53.
- VÁGNER, J. (1997): Rekreace a cestovní ruch. Dílčí zpráva. Harmonizace regionálního rozvoje povodí Kocáby. Grantový projekt. PŘF UK Praha, 9 str.
- VÁGNER, J. (1999): Geografické aspekty druhého bydlení v České republice. Dizertační práce. KSGRR PŘF UK Praha, 201 p.



## Résumé

Příspěvek se zabývá diskusí pozice, vývoje a možnými perspektivami rozvoje vybraných regionů na okraji Pražské metropolitní oblasti. Především je kladen důraz na stav, vztahy a možnosti rozvoje vybraných forem cestovního ruchu s hlavním zřetelem na druhé bydlení. Druhé bydlení je nejen významnou formou cestovního ruchu a rekreace v zázemí aglomerací, ale též velmi specifickým souborem jevů a činností, spjatých se životním stylem jednotlivců i společnosti v různých vývojových etapách. Článek reaguje na změny politických a společensko-ekonomických podmínek a na jejich promítání do geografické sféry. Je založen na komparativní studii dvou mikroregionů – Dolní Kocába a Hostomicko. Ukázalo se, že i přes mnohé společné geografické faktory, polohu a potenciál, jsou možnosti rozvoje rekreačních funkcí jako součásti funkce suburbánní odlišné a podmíněné mnoha endogenními i exogenními faktory. Je podána SWOT analýza obou regionů a nastíněny perspektivy lokálního a regionálního rozvoje sledovaných území v širším kontextu s ohledem na jejich vnitřní heterogenitu, danou především jeho různorodou exponovaností vzhledem k hlavnímu městu a dopravním osám.