

The Current Problems with the Historical Existence of Chalets in the Core Zone of the Krkonose Mts. National Park, Czech Republic

Petra Stastna

Krkonose Mts. National Park, Czech Republic

pstastna@krnap.cz

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Introduction

The farming period of the 17th to 18th century plays an important role in the history and in the present appearance of the Krkonose Mts. The first importance of these mountains had been mainly in sources for mining of ores, ironstone and for timber mining. At the end of the 16th century these activities went down because the sources were running out, The Thirty Years War ended and the historical conflicts of the land's border were finally solved. The local people were then forced to look for a new "daily bread" and the farming became the most important way of living. Settlers started to graze cattle, founded meadows and made hay. First shelters for animals, for people working in forest openings and close the timberline were built during that time. First shelters were later rebuilt into seasonal dwellings or year-round chalets; this way of colonizing land was supported by the owners of noble origin too. Important changes in agricultural usage of this land have happened. The grazing became later very intensive, but typical and valuable florid meadows of Krkonose have arisen in that period (Stursa 2003, Sykora et al. 1983).

The first visitors were coming to the Krkonose Mts. since the end of 16th century. They were mostly scientists, priests or notable people around the monarch. Later, at the end of the 18th century, more and more people came to visit the mountains following the ideas of J.J. Rousseau declaring a comeback to nature. Locals quickly reacted to the new situation by supplying hospitality to pilgrims. The majority of mountain chalets were rebuilt to tourist lodging houses, villages in valleys

changed into tourist centers during the 19th century. The visit rate was quickly increasing: at the beginning of 19th century ca. 2,000 visitors/year, 20th century ca. 0,5 million visitors/year (Stursa 2003) and at the beginning of 21st century ca. 5,4-6 million visitors/year (Kolpron 2003) are reported. Many of the mentioned historical chalets are furthermore run as hotels or pensions today and are very valuable from the historical view. The Lucni chalet (since 1623) is also considered to be the oldest in the Krkonose Mts.

To save this unique place, the National Park of Krkonose Mts. was founded in 1963. Soon, however, the ideology of the Communist politics gave higher priority to the demands of working people's leisure time than to the protection of nature phenomena. Several new monumental objects designed for the mass recreation of "working people" were built within that time – luckily in the current core zone only the Labska chalet arose. The existence of other bulk objects in the most valuable parts comes from the beginning of the era of tourism; the objects were also often rebuilt to e.g. barracks or a meteorology station according to situation of certain era. After the change of the political regime in 1989, the park area was divided into zones with a specified extent of protection. The core zone is mostly made up of the upper parts of the mountains due to the existence of the tundra-alpine biotope. These problematic chalets very soon became private. Without any previous experience nobody could have foreseen their future development at the beginning of the new age. For example, the Labska chalet (a typical Communist monu-

ment) was even closed for a certain time, the object dilapidated and its demolition was considered. But after several years almost all chalets found their investors and owners. The chalets set in the core zone show a huge conflict between nature protection and money making today. The administration of the national park cannot reduce the capacity and functioning of these chalets because the objects are private and our law system doesn't allow it. Their existence facilitates a safe tourist flow in these upper areas, tourists can refresh or spend a night there (Stursa 2002, Stursa 2003). The biggest actual problems are: 1) historical chalets are often very monumental and their running is very expensive, while the state system stopped supporting them financially, 2) chalets can hardly earn a living themselves today, much of the money must be reinvested into restoration or improving of the comfort, 3) current owners are not locals but often people who come with the idea of fast enrichment, 4) the status of the national park has its strict rules of the nature protection hindering the commercial development.

Methods

The core zone has many restrictions but the administration of the national park made certain exceptions for the owners: e.g. possibility to use park roads for logistic transport and collective transit of accommodated visitors provided by owners – the upper parts are connected by non-primary routes at several places and the traffic there is prohibited except for several subjects. The administration of the national park runs a grant program enhancing the management of the neighboring parcels of several chalets, makes publicity for the site and so on. The localities in the core zone have generally one disadvantage: there is no other kind of entertainment (except beautiful nature). The demands of the present visitors have changed very much – the unique nature is not enough? Current visitors thus prefer accommodation in the lower parts of the mountains. There they have the possibility to come all the way by their own car and it is easy to visit various kinds of entertainment. Owners of chalets set in virgin nature feel harmed and raise demands for the release of strict park restriction.

The ways of attracting people to spend their money in chalets situated high are various. The most problematic for us is the Lucni chalet today. Its last owner tried to rebuild the object into apartment flats for sale. This change would not have meant just several owners of one property but mainly more cars going through the national park and their parking in the core zone. Such situation was luckily stopped at its beginning. In these days the same owner organizes evening concerts in her chalet (see www.lucnibouda.cz). The concerts themselves would not present any problem, but the offered private transport by a snow mobile or a car becomes a big problem. The use of chalet owners' vehicles has also some restrictions and the transport of 300 evening guests at one time up and after two hours back every two weeks is not acceptable. Moreover the snow vehicle used does not correspond with the width of the road and damages the neighboring shrub pines. Such a thing does not correspond with the idea of a national park. This conflict is being solved in an administrative way during these days and no more concerts are permitted till the conflict has been solved.

The actual situation is very difficult for both sides. The administration of the national park tries to enable the existence of these objects (often in accord with the nature) but on the other hand there are some rules set. The administration of the national park also organizes meetings for chalet owners and park people (twice a year), where they can present their demands for change. The park staff can also notice a concern of particular owners to course of events. A true fear is that during some time these areas could change to places with mild nature protection. It is a real apprehension because the current political and social climate is alien to nature protection more than a few years ago. Currently some people have become rich quickly and they want to invest their money. The easy solution doesn't exist in these days. From the view of nature protection the best vision would be tops of the mountains without any large objects; just some small refreshment places could stay there, but canceling such historical buildings would bring down the major displeasure of the Czech society.

Results

In these days the employees of the national park try to achieve some compromise and support owners who respect the rules. Some of the rules are not popular and their following is not yet common in this country. The observance of given rules or even changing people's priorities will certainly take a very long time in this country.

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