



*THEmatic Transnational
church Route development
with the Involvement of
local Society*



Project THETRIS

PP 2: České Švýcarsko, o. p. s. (Bohemian Switzerland P. B. C.)

WP 3: Analysis focused on tangible and intangible culture heritage linked to regional churches

Bohemian Switzerland

3.3.1.

Regional SWOT Analysis

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1 Introduction and methodology

Definition of thematic fields was the first step in processing the SWOT report. They were defined in compliance to the joint methodology of the Thetris project and include four topics:

- socio-economic context and entrepreneurship,
- routes and location,
- heritage and preservation,
- local identity and commitment.

SWOT analyses were processed within these topics on the basis of expert assessments of several development factors of the Bohemian Switzerland region. The SWOT analysis is a classification method which is traditionally used in regional analyses and planning. SWOT sorts individual development factors into four categories:

- S = strengths,
- W = weaknesses,
- O = opportunities,
- T = threats.

These categories are classified and arranged according to the logic of the table below.

Table 1: SWOT analysis internal logics

	positive factors	negative factors
inner factors, presence, initial state	strengths (S)	weaknesses (W)
external factors, future, need for intervention	opportunities (O)	threats (T)

The SWOT analysis summarizes key results of the regional analysis and helps identify key factors and preconditions which should be taken into account in the regional strategy.

2 Socio-economic context and entrepreneurship

2.1 Strengths	2.2 Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High attractiveness of nature at some parts of the region • New jobs in the tourism industry • Relatively high percentage of SMEs in the total number of entrepreneurs • Long tradition of tourism in the region • Developed tourism infrastructure • Strong, positive image of Bohemian Switzerland • Good promotion of the region • High number of vacant areas for entrepreneurs • Industrial tradition of the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peripheral geographic location • Low quality of services for both local residents and visitors • Low number of well-qualified labour force in the region • High number of socially excluded inhabitants (not only Roma people) and their inflow from other parts of the country • Negative image of the Šluknov region • Absence of a big centre of economic activities (with the exception of Děčín, which is located eccentrically) • Low importance of research, development and other progressive branches of economy, high share of routine manufacturing • Decrease of the number of visitors, concentration of visitors to natural attractions occupying small part of the region • Strong seasonal pattern of tourism • High unemployment rate in most of municipalities • Low economic productivity, low wages • Structurally weakened regional economy, extinction of traditional industries • Low entrepreneur activity in service sector (with the exception of tourism and some services supplying German clients) • Very low real estate prices • High number of brownfields and other deprived areas



2.3 Opportunities	2.4 Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth of education quality with regard to the quality of services • Improvement of the entrepreneurial conditions on the national level • Development of cross-border cooperation (labour market, entrepreneurship, public services, etc.) • Proximity to Germany (good practices of local development, job seeking, possible impacts on tourism development) • Transfer of informal institutions (behaviour pattern) from Germany 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worsening of the fiscal condition of public budgets with negative impacts on financing regional and tourism development, heritage preservation, public services, etc. • Direct impacts of central government restrictions on unemployment rate and social problems in the region • Further economic recessions (e.g. connected to low competitiveness of local industry and business sector) • Escalation of social conflicts • Further decrease of social status of local population (increase of unemployment, brain drain) • Worsening appearance of the regional landscape as a result of low funding of settlement and land maintenance, decline of agriculture and rising number of brownfields

2.5 Summary: Socio-economic context and entrepreneurship

The Bohemian Switzerland region is both backward and structural weakened region in the economic point of view. There are several general factors influencing the bad economic performance of the region (borderland location, mostly rural settlement structure, etc.). Traditional industries developed in the 19th and 20th centuries have weakened or almost disappeared in the regional economy. Therefore, the region is confronted with many problems: high unemployment rate, low wages and low importance of progressive branches of economy. The bad economic situation in the region contributes to other negative processes (depopulation, ageing of the population, etc.). Social problems and conflicts and concentration of socially excluded people also support the economic problems and negative image of the region.

On the other hand, there are many unique nature and culture places in the region, which increase the tourism potential of the region, especially in the Bohemian Switzerland National Park. It helps improve both the economic situation, development of entrepreneurship, and the image of the region. Tourism industry can possibly become a new driving branch of the regional economy and could be supported by proximity of the German market and cross-border contacts, too.



3 Routes and location

3.1 Strengths	3.2 Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location of sacred sites in municipal centres • Proximity to several Trans-European transport routes (railway Prague – Dresden, motorway Dresden – Wroclaw) • Location at the important transport axe of the Elbe River in Bohemia • Proximity of long-distance cycle routes in Bohemia and Germany: Elbe (Elberadweg), Oder - Neisse (Oder-Neisse-Radweg); connection to the Czech-German cycle path along the Mandau River), Spree (Spree-Radweg) • Construction of the Ploučnice cycle path • Dense, extensive network of hiking trails, development of network of cycle paths • Integrated system of the public transport • Adequate number of border crossings and cross-border routes outside the territory of the Bohemian Switzerland National Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peripheral, borderland location • Low accessibility of many cultural sights (churches closed for visitors throughout most of the year for “random” visitors, etc.) • Difficult local transport connection to main routes • Traffic conflicts between roads, cycle paths and hiking trails • Most of local railways are obsolete and poorly maintained • Poor road connectivity to superior urban centres and motorways • Poor quality of the road infrastructure (esp. road surface) • Worse accessibility of the north-eastern part of the region • Low number of facilities for cyclists • Low number of border crossings within the territory of the Bohemian Switzerland National Park • Low cross-border transport connection

3.3 Opportunities	3.4 Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of environment-friendly public transport in the region as an alternative to individual transport • Completion of the D8 motorway (Prague – Dresden) • Completion of the motorway connection Liberec – Dresden • Reconstruction of main railways • Opening of the local cross-border railway Dolní Poustevna – Sebnitz (– Bad Schandau – Děčín) • Completion of the Elbe cycle path • Improvement of the cross-border transport connection • Making the sights accessible for disabled (possible financial support from subsidies, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worsening of the public transport (abolishing of local railways, reduction of train and bus links) • Worsening of local road conditions



3.5 Summary: Routes and location

Due to the peripheral location of the region, there are a few main transport axes in the region. Motorways run along the region but are not far from some parts of Bohemian Switzerland. The transport corridor along the River Elbe is a great opportunity for the region. It represents the Prague – Dresden railway corridor, shipping and cycle path (incomplete in Bohemia yet). The Bohemian Switzerland area features a dense network of local cycle paths as well as an integrated system of public transport.

The technical condition of many transport routes (local roads and railways) is problematic, especially due to a long-term under-financing. The region also shows some conflicts between road transport, cycling and hiking, or specific transport routes. The permeability of the Czech-German border has increased recently, however, there are still several parts of the region where cross-border connection is difficult. The region also shows insufficient infrastructure (especially ancillary) for some specific groups of population (e.g. cyclists, disabled).



4 Heritage and preservation

4.1 Strengths	4.2 Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich New Age sacred heritage as a result of counter-reformation and location (the region is surrounded by Protestant areas, therefore Catholic sites were built to promote Catholicism) • Dense network of parish churches built in the Middle Ages usually extensively rebuilt later in the Renaissance and Baroque style • Existence of church routes in Bohemian Switzerland • Architectural unique pilgrimage Loreto chapel with the cloister and pilgrimage chapel of the Holy Stairs chapel in the former Capuchin monastery in Rumburk • Pilgrimage chapel of the Nativity of Our Lady with the cloister in Česká Kamenice • 14 Stations of the Cross located throughout the Šluknov region incl. 5 pilgrimage chapels of the Holy Sepulchre • Unique concentration of 6 pilgrimage places in the Šluknov region and pilgrimage places in the region of Česká Kamenice, pilgrimages are still held in all these places and are also visited by Germans and by descendants of the former German residents) • Existence of sacred sites of all Churches (Catholic, Evangelic, Orthodox, Jewish) • Many minor sacred sites (crosses on the sandstone and granite base, manually forged iron crosses, rock niche shrines, wayside shrines, conciliation crosses) in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor base for regional cultural heritage preservation • Low number of worshippers (therefore low income of the Church collected from believers' donations and low political demand for sacred heritage preservation) • Low regional socioeconomic status (therefore lower municipal tax base and low willingness of the local inhabitants and businessmen to support the preservation of the regional cultural heritage) • Long term poor maintenance and under-financing of the regional cultural heritage preservation – both secular and religious • Low financial resources for reconstruction of the cultural heritage • Weak marketing activities towards local community • Many sacred buildings separated from the community life (they only function as a historic sight) • Unsolved restitution of former church property



4.1 Strengths	4.2 Weaknesses
<p>Bohemian Switzerland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive, unique landscape and environment • Existence of the Bohemian Switzerland National Park, the Elbe Sandstones and the Lusatian Mountains conservation areas (preservation of the natural but also cultural heritage), proximity of the Saxon Switzerland National Park (Sächsische Schweiz) and the Landscape Park of Lusatian Mountains (Germany- Naturpark Zittauer Gebirge) • Existence of a group of regional experts and enthusiasts for revitalization of local cultural life • Existence of coordinated marketing of cultural sights targeted to certain visitor groups • Tradition of non-material cultural heritage of sacred sites (renewed Easter rides, making accessible of Nativity scenes during Christmas, tradition of manufacturing of Nativity scenes) • Profound tradition of liturgical music in the region, re-discovered works of regional German composers, regional music groups • New traditions in sacred sites (St. Martin's lantern procession, Live Bethlehem, Advent and Christmas concerts, liturgical concerts, festivals of organ music) • Participation of 30 sacred sites from the region in the national event – the Church Night (May / June) 	

4.3 Opportunities	4.4 Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of church entrepreneurship (in compliance to church restitutions) as a way of increasing utilization of religious sites and raising money for church heritage preservation • Increasing the role of the Church within the regional society (could increase willingness of local inhabitants to take part in sacred heritage preservation) • Strengthening cross-border cooperation in cultural heritage preservation as a part of tourism industry development • Strengthening marketing of regional cultural heritage as an alternative target of tourism (so far focused on the regional natural heritage) • Creative revitalization of regional cultural heritage sites targeted on its polyfunctional use and investment subsidies from the EU funds • Inscription of the region into the UNESCO World Heritage List • Development of environment- and local-community-friendly tourism • Widening of the Cohesion Policy support in the field of cultural life and public education and enlightening • EU financial support for cross-border cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible problems of the sacred heritage preservation as a result of church restitutions under current conditions • Continuous budget cuts in cultural heritage preservation (result of the macroeconomic situation and low demand for cultural heritage preservation) • Decline of the regional socio-economic status (decline of tax income, willingness of the local population and businessmen to contribute to the cultural heritage preservation) • Worsening of the regional image as a result of regional social tensions – lowering its tourism attractiveness • Unsustainable strategy of cultural heritage preservation (resources spread over too many heritage sites –not sufficient to secure proper preservation) • Natural disasters (floods, wildfires), necessity to solve urgent local problems caused by disasters • Big infrastructural projects not friendly to cultural and nature preservation (tourism infrastructure, Elbe weirs) • Impossibility of long-term, strategic planning of cultural heritage preservation at the local level, changes in the system of financing • Low absorption capacity in terms of national and EU subsidies

4.5 Summary: Heritage and preservation

The region is located at the border of various cultures (especially Czech, German, Wend and Polish) and confessions (especially Roman Catholic and Evangelic). Therefore, many specific cultural places are spread throughout the region. Bohemian Switzerland is also unique because of a combination of cultural sites and attractive landscape. There are several unique sights of national or even European importance, e.g.:

- Architecturally unique pilgrimage Loreto Chapel in Rumburk
- Concentration of 14 Stations of the Cross located throughout the Šluknov region, including pilgrimage shrines of the Holy Sepulchre
- Concentration of pilgrimage places in the Šluknov Hook and in the region of Česká Kamenice
- Many minor sacred sites (crucifixes on the sandstone and granite base, forged high iron crosses, rock niche shrines, conciliation crosses)
- church paths as relics of older routes connecting municipalities

The region has developed a tradition of specific non-material cultural heritage (i.e. renewed Easter rides, Nativity scenes made accessible during Christmas and Advent, tradition of manufacturing the Nativity scenes).

One of the main problems is a long term underfunding of both sacred and secular cultural heritage preservation. Consequently, the technical condition of many sights is often poor. Low numbers of worshippers result in lower income of the Church from taxes and donations and a low political demand for the preservation of sacred heritage. Many sacred buildings are separated from the community life and they function purely as a historic sight. On the other hand, there are several local initiatives the objective of which is to renew and revive the cultural and religious life.

5 Local identity and commitment

5.1 Strengths	5.2 Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management structure meeting the needs of the local and regional development (Bohemian Switzerland Public Benefit Corporation) • Repeated visits of a part of visitors to the region • Existence of many associations and fellowships on the local level and their involvement in renovation and revival of sacred sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicts of different local activities (business and tourism development is sometimes not friendly to cultural preservation) • Decrease of inhabitants in most municipalities, population ageing • Generally low education level of the local population • Interrupted identity of the region (result of displacement of the local German population after WWII) • Low involvement of the local inhabitants in regional development • Unclear vision and public consensus of development of the region • High number of socially weak or excluded inhabitants • Weak informal contacts between entities (associations, fellowships...) on the regional level

5.3 Opportunities	5.4 Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement of conditions for cross-border cooperation (legislation, funding, etc.) • Continuation of the EU Cohesion Politics funding after 2014 • General trend of development of community life in municipalities, strengthening of local identity • Integration of socially weak or excluded population into the society (work with children and teenagers, leisure activities...) • Strengthening of positive attitude of local inhabitants towards local identity by improvements in education programmes for children and activities of local NGOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and ethnic conflicts in the north-eastern part of the region (socially excluded population, racial extremism, economic problems) • Young, well-educated people leaving the region, brain drain • Inflow of people with a low social status without links to the territory, spatial concentration of social problems • Social segregation of the population, difficult social ladder change • Growth of real estate speculations, misuse of social benefits (e.g. housing benefits) • Public services abandoned in small villages • Worse cooperation between local and regional authorities

5.5 Summary: Local identity and commitment

The regional identity of Bohemian Switzerland was strongly influenced by history of the region in the past centuries. A long-term influence of the German culture (due to the colonisation of the Czech borderland by ethnic Germans since the Middle Ages) was interrupted after the WWII, when most of the German population was displaced. Then the territory was re-settled by newcomers from other parts of the then Czechoslovakia. Their ties to their new home region were poorer than in most regions in the Czech Republic. Therefore, the local identity is in process of renewing. Several socio-demographic factors of the local population (ageing, depopulation, low education level, high number of socially weak or excluded inhabitants) make it difficult.

There are some regional initiatives and organisations which help accelerate the process of the identity renewal and local increase of the commitment. A management structure for local and regional development represented by

Bohemian Switzerland P. B. C.. and several associations and fellowships on the local level (usually not regional) are the institutions helping strengthen the local identity.