

A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF THE LEISURE ACTIVITIES OF CARAVANNERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of quantitative research focused on leisure and sports activities among a specific target group – caravanners. These people pursue their caravanning activities in their free time and this activity represents a significant and important part of their lifestyle. Caravanning is a reemerging form of leisure activity which is becoming increasingly more fashionable as recent history has seen a general improvement in the standard of living, making such a choice possible. This form of motor tourism can be examined from the perspective of the issue of sports tourism, as well as an integral element of lifestyle.

This paper evaluates the preferred types physical activities pursued by this group of respondents, and examines their preferred destination and season. It also includes an assessment of the general profile of the Czech caravanners from the perspective of the fundamental characteristics of their socio-economic and demographic features. The last part of the paper is devoted caravanning events - their frequency, types, locations and the ways in which they are organized.

Key words: sport tourism, leisure activity, caravanning

INTRODUCTION

The issue of making meaningful use of one's leisure time is one of the major challenges of the 21st century. Leisure time is an opportunity for improving one's health, interpersonal relations and pursuing one's hobbies. It is a time when a person exercises their free choice to engage in activities which he or she enjoys and which are satisfying. With an increasing amount of free time, there are also new ways to spend it. In addition to traditional leisure activities which include, among other things, recreation, travel and sport for people with active lifestyles, new room has opened up for other physical activities. Physical activity is one of the basic prerequisites for a healthy lifestyle at all stages of human life. It induces a state of wellbeing, improves physical and mental health, helps prevent disease, contributes to the formation of social bonds and significantly affects quality of life (Hodaň & Dohnal, 2005).

At the same time, recreation also takes an irreplaceable place in one's life, it is an integral and necessary part of human life. Slepíčková (2005) characterizes recreation as physical and mental activity which people engage in in their spare time for fun, refreshment and relaxation.

Traveling is the most popular leisure activity. It takes various forms. One form is a sports and recreational tourism. This also includes caravanning as a kind of mototourism (Schwartzhoffová, 2010).

We consider caravanning to be a specific form of recreation with physical and social characteristics. It provides an opportunity for workers to regenerate and for sharing free time. It supports the adoption of social roles, and is an area of human activity with the potential to bring people together and actively promotes social and family relationships. Caravanning provides space for rest and recovery, entertainment, exercise, personal development, and brings joy and fun. In our subconscious caravanning is connected primarily with traveling. Travel, however, is only one of the five dimensions of caravanning. The others are exploration, the outdoors, physical activity and community. (Vaculíková, 2012).

By making use of motor vehicles, caravanning therefore addresses the issue getting somewhere, as well as of accommodation at the destination. This, however, also prepares the conditions for the practice of other sports, especially hiking, all kinds of water sports, skiing, etc. All these aspects give an answer to the question why mototourists are willing to spend their vacation and leisure in uncomfortable camping-style accommodation that they bring along with them. Caravanning is suitable for organized groups of enthusiasts and travelers as well as for individuals. From an individual point of view, caravanning is not only bound to one place where they spend all their time. From a social point of view, caravanning does not take up valuable space in the most attractive holiday areas; caravanners are in a particular place temporarily and then make that space available for others. It also positively influences active ways of spending free time, and effective use of free time. This mobility allows a caravanner to constantly explore new places, such as natural wonders, while the owner of a cottage is bound to only one place – i.e. the area where his cottage stands. It provides enthusiasts with a wide range of alternatives for spending their free time, and for participation in social life, whether in organized or unorganized mototourism. It provides many opportunities for getting to know other people and making new relationships.

History

Vehicles equipped for long journeys and adapted as accommodation are mentioned in the travelogue of Marco Polo, and we also find mentions of such vehicles in reports from ancient Egypt, but significant developments in this direction occurred in the 19 century. From the beginning of this period also come the first caravans of nomadic Gypsies (*vardos*), which were derived from covered wagons (wagons covered by canvas rooves stretched over curved frames). Such caravans are reminiscent of the covered wagons of the pioneers in the westward expansion of the United States in the same time period (Bodický, 1986).

Gradually, the home which was mobile due to "necessity" was transformed into a "recreational" vehicle. Individuals with sufficient resources started to have vehicles customized in various ways and began to travel with them. These were still, however, primarily vehicles designed to be drawn by horses. The impetus for the wider public to become interested in this type of recreation, however, came with the development of the automobile and the boom in related industries around the turn of the 20 century. In subsequent years, various types of motor vehicles were equipped with folding beds and mini kitchens, and later trailers with camping equipment started to be produced. Such vehicles became progressively larger and better. Technical progress and the expansion caravanning was again interrupted by the Second World War. This interruption lasted until about the middle of the 1950s, but was followed by a literal boom. Interest in caravans and mobile homes grew, even though the price still made them inaccessible to many. New manufacturers appeared, but people also made use of their own resources and began to build their own homemade versions. Czechoslovak mototourism started to develop in a significant way in the early sixties of the last century. The interest in new ways to spend one's free time created the conditions in which travelers sought to satisfy their desire to travel. Caravanners began to organize themselves and share their travel experiences. Many of them also started to work together to construct their own caravans. Starting around 1970, the foundations begin to be set for the caravan clubs which would bring together caravanning enthusiasts. The period after 1989 was marked by stagnation in caravanning in the Czech lands.

The growing interest in caravanning in recent years had been influenced by the development of caravanning infrastructure and facilities, technical improvements in the caravans themselves, and the fact that a larger proportion of the population have the financial resources to afford caravans. Currently, the most attractive destinations for caravanners are Scandinavia and the Atlantic coast of France (Feřová, 2013).

Activities and events

The activities of caravanning clubs allow participants to travel, to explore and actively spend their free time in a natural environment in a circle of people attuned to the same values. Caravanning combines educational and social activities with elements of sports, and all this under the open sky. In the Czech Republic there are 23 local caravan clubs. They can be found in almost in all Bohemian and Moravians regions. They are organized in the Czech Caravan Clubs Association (ACC AČR) which belongs to the Czech Motoclub. Czech Caravan Clubs Association is a member of European organization Comite Rallye Europe. Regional Caravan clubs regularly organize many events for their members such as: rallies, open-air caravan club meetings, in order to strengthen relations between caravan club members and facilitate active leisure.

The environment is an important element of caravanning events and contributes to the positive mood and attitude of participants towards the event in general and thus promotes their involvement in the program. Caravanning events offer participants a wide variety of physical and outdoor activities. Their programs include a wide variety of activities that appeal to the diverse age groups of participants and are focused enjoyment, learning and physical activity. These include cycling and walking tours, games and competitions for children and adults, social and dance nights.

The aim is to provide participants with active recreation, which will enrich their experiences, entertain them and thus allow them to recharge. The events serve to promote initiative, spontaneity, a sense of community and the making of new friendships. At club events, an individual is not only a member of the audience but also an organizer or co-organizer and active participant. In this way, caravanners extend the scope of their knowledge and experience and uncover and develop new sides of their personality. Regular Events Caravan Club is organizing events – an open-air caravanner's meeting intended to strengthen relations between caravanning clubs and organize active leisure activities, National event, events Transmission challenge cup.

METHODS

The research sample consisted of 186 caravanners, 97 were women and 89 men, which are, organized and unorganized in the caravan clubs endorsed by the AČR. For data collection, a questionnaire was created in which respondents were asked to choose from several options of provide their own answer. The data obtained was divided into three areas.

- The goal of the first area was to determine the socio-demographic profile of Czech caravanners.
- The second area was aimed at analyzing the activities pursued in the context of individual or organized leisure activities.
- The third area was devoted to the analysis mototourism events organized by clubs.

RESULTS

Sociodemographic profile of caravanners

The sample consisted of 52 % women and 48 % men. Although this is only a slight difference, it can be explained by the fact that in the majority of these cases the respondents were female companions of a male caravanner. We know from experience that the act of driving the caravan is a male affair.

In terms of educational attainment, caravanners are predominantly people with secondary education (65 %). The proportion of university graduates and people with vocational qualifications is then approximately the same, with 16 % and 17 % respectively. In terms of place of residence caravanners are inhabitants of cities, 73 % of the respondents, while the rest are residents of rural areas, 23 % of respondents. Thus, the result confirmed our assumption that the caravanning is becoming primarily a leisure activity of the urban population.

In terms of organization, the results indicate that 42 % of respondents are members of a caravan club. Similarly, 42% of respondents said that they are partners of a club member. The remaining 16% of respondents are not part of organized groups.

We were also interested in who caravanners most frequently travel with, whether this is just a hobby for individuals/couples or if it is a family activity. In most cases, the respondents engaged in caravanning with a partner, 62 %, as well as with children or grandchildren, 31% of responses. In 6 % of cases, caravanners are accompanied by their parents or family. In only 1 % of cases in our research did caravanners participate in events alone.

A very interesting finding was that, overall, 62 % of respondents considered caravanning an activity that can be done throughout the year. At the same time, 38 % of respondents preferred caravanning in the summer. The relatively high proportion of those who travel throughout the year can also be attributed to new possibilities and the constantly improving equipment of the caravans themselves, and the fact that many Czech camps are also operated year round. So in the winter caravanners go skiing with their caravans or engaged in other winter activities.

Leisure time and caravanner's activities

Another part of our investigation was focused on the ways in which this group of respondents spent their leisure time. The results show that 57 % of respondents prefer an organized form of leisure, i.e. group activities. A smaller portion, that is 43 % of respondents prefer individual leisure time activities.

In addition, their main way of spending free time is caravanning itself and activities related to it, caravanners often spend their free time during their stay in the camp in the following ways and activities: sports activities (65 %), wellness activities (24 %), cultural and 11 % of them preferred social activities (especially reading and watching TV). These results correspond to the results that illustrate how caravanners prefer to spend their leisure time. Most caravanners spend their free time outdoors (76 %) then in sports center (15 %) and cultural facilities (9 %).

One of the questions our research was focused on physical activity. Caravanners most often practiced cycling then a walking. Surprisingly, 8 % of respondents participated in dance and 5 % of respondents in-line skating. Another of the activities that were reported were ball games, tennis and running (Table 1).

Biking	59 %
Walking	23 %
Dance	8 %
in-line skating	5 %
Other	4 %

Table 1 Preferred sport activity

Caravanning events

In terms of organization, we also asked respondents how often they participated in events organized by caravan clubs in the Czech Republic. The results show that respondents regularly participate in these events, in most cases even more frequently than five

times a year (Table 2). The question was aimed at the events held over the weekend. Here, however, it should be noted that the survey was conducted among caravan club members.

1 x per year	3 %
2 x per year	4 %
3 - 5 x per year	39 %
more than 5 x per year	54 %

Table 2 Participation at club events

The results of our study also showed that caravanners are satisfied with these actions and their organizations. Likewise, they are also satisfied with the information they receive about these events from the clubs.

While attending these events and meetings, caravans are mainly involved in learning and social activities (33%). This involves getting to know other caravanners, becoming familiar with new types of vehicle, trailers and equipment. Sport and physical activity remains a major way in which caravanners at these rallies spend their free time (Table 3).

Kind of activity	
outdoor activities	19 %
Learning and social activities	33 %
Relaxation	2 %
entertainment	13 %
individual sport	18 %
team sport	15 %

Table 3 Activities at caravanning events

CONCLUSION

An important aspect of the lifestyle of modern man is active movement. While caravanning as part of mototourism can be considered passive motion, the results of the study show that caravanners prefer physical activities and that other activities they participate in tend also to be active ways of spending free time. The increasing interest in caravanning in recent years has also been encouraged by developments which continue to contribute to its popularity. Caravanning has, thus, truly become a broad base for family mototourism and appears likely to continue to develop in this direction.

In terms of their profile: A typical caravan is a woman aged 45-55 years with secondary education and lives in a city. She is a member of the caravan club, whose events she participates in more than five times per year. She participates in caravanning with her partner or children and does so year round. While attending these events and meetings, caravanners are mainly involved in learning and social activities. Sport and physical activity remains a major way in which caravanners at these rallies spend their free time

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