Field Project: Crossing the Czech and Austrian Border

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Abstract
The trans-border region investigated by geography students from Masaryk University is delimited by the physical landscape between two rivers - the Danube and the Dyje/Thaya, and two basins, that is the Wiener Becken (Vienna basin) and the Brno basin (the Dyje-Sratka rivers Vale). The region is known in Austria as Nieder Österreich–Mährische Inselbergschwelle and in the Czechlands as the Lower Austria-South Moravia Carpathians. The field of interest is the spatiality of the Pálava landscape in examining the cultural landscape-ecosystem patterns whilst looking at the continuing ribbon between the villages of Klentnice (Czech) and Drasenhofen (Austrian). Interestingly, while the approach of the Czech side is enforced in a bottom-up fashion, the Austrian approach is quite the opposite, with grassroots approaches in place. Our understanding of spatiality follows Cloke, Crang and Goodwin (2005:611) that is the production of social space (Lefebvre, Soja). That, from a human geography point of view means that space is socially experienced rather than being an innate backdrop to the social life. Spatiality thus ought to be used in plural as spatialities, in order to stress the many different ways in which space can be constructed and experienced.

Key words: physical and cultural landscape change; trans-border Czech/Austrian region; field survey; historical milestones

Klentnice-Drasenhofen: General Landscape Spatiality and Early Temporality

The trans-border region investigated is delimited by the physical landscape between two rivers - the Danube and the Dyje/Thaya, and two basins, that is the Wiener Becken (Vienna basin) and the Brno basin (the Dyje-Sratka River Valley). The region is known in Austria as Nieder Österreich–Mährische Inselbergschwelle and in the Czechlands as the Lower Austria-South Moravia Carpathians. Its other term is geological: The Waschberg Zone situated north of the Danube River which is essentially an external (leading edge) Alpine-Carpathian orogenic unit consisting of strongly deformed older Tertiary Molasse beds and limestone klinpen sheared off from the Mesozoic-Paleogene Molasse base.

The Klentnice-Drasenhofen area is part of the Pavlov Hills. This name does, however, portray generic rather than specific terrain features. The landforms of three surface levels include the highest oblique limestone ridge of nappe overthrusts: rocky klinpen chain of crests/scars between the Dyje and Danube Rivers reaching up to 550m a.s.l. (Děvín in the Pálava Crest). Děvín stands out in the middle of an undulating surface of claystones/sandstones hills covered with loess deposits and lower valley floor with alluvial floodplains and higher terraces. The physical landscape called the Pálava consists of main crest/scarp and its piedmont is composed of two step-like levels as mentioned above. The climate is warm and dry and can be classified as Pannonian. The former vegetation of Pannonian oak forests changed into cultural forest-steppes with rich soils known as mollisols.
Contemporary cultural landscape forms spatially a palimpsest with relics of former phases starting with the Liechtenstein family’s (13th-16th century) effort to meliorate swampy tracks into a system of ponds and meadows between Mikulov and Drasenhofen. Subsequently the ruling Dietrichstein family was active in late mannerism of renaissance and introduced baroque park cultural landscape of fields, vineyards, orchards, gardens, game preserves, peasantry, follies, mills, ponds, columns of crucifixion, calvary statues, manors, chapels, altars etc. In the centre of such composed landscape was the town of Mikulov, serving the function of an urbanized segment with a suburban fringe encircled by rural landscape.

In the 19th century when the corvée (1848) was abolished, the farmers got hold of strips of fields and the landscape changed into ‘stripped landscape’. While the look of the landscape remained the same in the Drasenhofen area, it was completely changed in the Klentnice area during the 1950s and 1960s. There were two main political and social events that changed the cultural landscape here. These were the end of the Second World War (WW2) with ensuing transfer of ethnic Germans from then Czechoslovakia according to the Potsdam Agreement (1945) and also the fall of the Iron Curtain.

There was a new concept of sustainability introduced in the 1970s, resulting in the declaration of the Pálava Protected Landscape Area (1976) on the Czech side. Ten years later, it became the third place in the today’s Czech Republic to be listed as a UNESCO biosphere reserve, part of the Man and Biosphere Programme. Subsequently it was included into a Special Protected Area category based on the Birds Directive within Natura 2000. Between July 8–11, 2003, the Committee of the International Coordination Council of UNESCO's "Man and Biosphere" program in Paris approved the extension of the Pálava Biosphere Reserve to include the Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape and associated floodplain forests at the confluence of the Morava and Dyje rivers. The newly designated area was renamed as the Lower Moravia Biosphere Reserve (BR).

Following a description of the characteristics of the area, the study looked at the spatiality of the Pálava landscape in examining the cultural landscape-ecosystem patterns and the continuing ribbon between the villages of Klentnice and Drasenhofen. Whilst the Czech approach is enforced in a bottom-up fashion, the Austrian approach is quite the opposite, with grassroots approaches in place. Our understanding of spatiality follows Cloke, Crang and Goodwin (2005:611), that is spatiality as a socially produced space. That, from a human geography point of view means that space is socially experienced rather than being an innate backdrop to the social life. Spatiality thus ought to be used in plural as spatialities, in order to stress the many different ways in which space can be constructed and experienced.

The Transfer of Ethnic Germans after WW2 and the Countervailing Slavic Immigration

After they lost the WW2 to the Allies and in accordance with the Potsdam Agreement, Germany and Austria had to take back ethnic Germans, Hungarians and other enemies who were not able to prove active fight against Nazi regime and lived within the then Czechoslovakia. The decree of the Czechoslovak president Beneš from July the 20, 1945, referred to their land property confiscation in favour of Czech, Slovak and other Slavic peasants.

The above policy also concerned the village of Klentnice where almost all inhabitants were ethnic Germans. The village was populated after the transfer of Germans in 1945 mainly from five districts: Uherské Hradiště, Uherský Brod, Kyjov, Hodonín and Šternberk and,
additionally, from various places in west, east and middle Moravia. Soldiers from the former Czechoslovak army fighting in the war, especially the Volhynian Czechs, took also part in populating the South Moravian borderland. The process of transition was organized by national legal guardians who were supposed to redistribute the land of transferred ethnic Germans. Small farmers and workers, allowance labourers, resistance fighters, soldiers, captives, partisans were also included.

Table 1 indicates the degree of loss of residents within the Mikulov-town district lost during the post-WW2 transfer and transition:

Table 1: Demographic Changes in the Mikulov-town District after the WW2 (1947)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
<th>Population density (km$^{-2}$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1946/47</td>
<td>absolute relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53,563</td>
<td>37,662</td>
<td>- 15,901 - 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1946/47</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1946/47</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over 50 per cent of residents in the administrative district of the Mikulov-town were engaged in agriculture, fishery and forestry. The process of transfer and transition was simultaneous so as to continue the process of agricultural production and acquisition of skills. Those coming from similar climatic conditions and soil areas were preferred for allotment. Interestingly, both the transferred and the newcomers stayed for a certain time together, developing personal bonds. For instance, one Czech family asked special benefit for a German family and only later was quite unpleasantly surprised by its former deep Nazi blindness. It can be said that land-use patterns after 1948 in the area were similar to those pre-1938.

Divergent Course of Events in the former Czechoslovakia and Austria in 1948-1989

While Czechoslovakia became part of the Soviet Bloc in 1948, Austria, until 1955 under the Soviet administration and going through a difficult period of denazification and economic reconstruction, emerged eventually as one of the Western democracies. This political divergence produced very different effects on both sides of the common border.

Fassmann (quoted in Lichtenberger 2000: 340-352) recognizes the following periods of economic development in Austria:

1945-1952: Reconstruction according to the Marshall Plan with industry as the engine of growth

The 1950s: The Austrian economic miracle

The 1960s: Integration into the world economy and improved technical infrastructure

1970-83: ‘Austro-Keynesianism’

After 1983: More monetarist policies

Drawing on Fassmann’s criteria, one can distinguish between the following periods with respect of the Czechoslovak side:

1947-1948: General reconstruction and the Sovietization of economy and society

1949-1953: The creation of heavy industry including weapon production, the collectivization of agriculture and installation of politically authoritative regime – (‘dictatorship of proletariat’, Marxist-Leninist ideology)

The 1960s: integration only within the Soviet bloc, extensive development, economically loosing compared with Austria; the Prague Spring and Soviet/Warsaw Pact Armies invasion

The 1970s-80s: Extensive command and the retardation of economy, politico-social ‘normalization’ and the dullness of life.
As the timelines above point out, Czechoslovak agriculture changed in a completely different way than Austria’s. Perlín (1998) distinguishes between two processes which took place in rural areas: the collectivization in 1949-1953 and socialization in 1952-1970. With respect to Lichtenberger (2000), the Czechoslovak agriculture was governed as command economy in the form of cooperative and state farms. Cooperative farms were founded by ruthless procedures as collectives of producers from previously private-owned farms. In respect of the Mikulov district, there was a cooperative farm in the village of Klentnice and a state farm in Mikulov. While the proprietor of all agricultural land in state farms became the state, in cooperative farms the proprietors were the former farmers. A general trend during the period in question tended to embrace agricultural large-scale production which was ideologically based on Soviet concepts of kolkhoz and sovkhoz. The only intermezzo in this occurred shortly during the 1960s and was associated with political thaw accompanying the Prague spring: Some inspiration from the US agriculture was accepted. Gradually, small-scale agricultural production was transformed into large-scale one, with a peak of organisational concentration of production during the 1980s.

The resistance of farmers whose land was expropriated eventually weakened and cooperative farms were not only respected economically but began to be accepted socially due to strong local political control by the Communist party. Interestingly, in many cooperative farms former kulaks (i.e. former great private farm-owners) were reinstated as chairmen after their earlier oppression or even incarceration. Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasized that Czechoslovakia became self-reliant in food production during this period. State farm workers were paid in salaries regularly and cooperative farmers were dependent on their own production, though this has been subsidized by state. An important point is the agricultural effect on the environment during the Communist Era. There were existing active scientists and activists warning against the deterioration of the state of environment. In fact, the landscape was worsening and they partially succeeded in nature/landscape conservation. In the borderland area, the town of Mikulov was declared a city monument preserve and the surrounding Pálava landscape a protected landscape area (see Table 2 and Figure 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1976</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vojenský topografický ústav, Dobruška</td>
<td>Vojenský topografický ústav, Dobruška</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Changes in the Land-Use Patter of the Village of Klentnice 1938, 1976

Table 2: Breakdown of Land-Use in the Klentnice Area (in %)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use/Years</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1966</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arable</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassland</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchards/vineyards</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardens</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woods/shrubs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settlement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion: Dismantling the Iron Curtain in 1989 and development after the Velvet Revolution**

Dismantling the structure of the Iron Curtain in 1989 brought with it millions of tourists from central-eastern Europe crossing the bottleneck border between Mikulov and Drasenhofer in their trips to previously unreachable Austria. Also, the Austrians were curious neighbours and began to explore the other side of the border. Curiosity was thus a driving force of tourist exchange and the Austrians had many advantages over Czechs in the promotion of their region for tourism, starting with their hard currency, social and economic experiences, images, media and so on. Emergent economic transition in Czechoslovakia/the Czechlands after 1989 looked rather meagre when compared with rich Austria. This difference has been however narrowed as Austria entered the phase of stagflation in 1996 and has remained in it up to this date.

As for agricultural production with high added value, both sides strive to achieve natural organic quality of wine production by the use of bio-control and the introduction of resistant sorts of viticulture. Moravian wines are produced in private cooperatives, a change from former strong state farms. The Czech Wine Act was accepted in the 1990s and was appreciated by producers and consumers. This has been one of a few successful examples of Czech governance. Both Klentnice and Drasenhofer have changed after 1989 into more residential, wine-producing and recreational villages with newer buildings (see Figure 2). The village of Klentnice is a part of the self-governed microregion of the Mikulov-town, which comprises 17 municipalities and is primarily intended to attract EU funds (for example in projects such as LEADER).
Acknowledgements
I acknowledge my son Nik and students: B. Svozil, J. Travnicek, J. Trojan, O. Herzan, L. Patockova, D. Strnadova and J. Janura for their active participation in this field project.

References