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THE "RETURN" OF CZECHS AS TOURISTS TO THE CROATIAN COAST

UDK:338.484.(497.5)

Received: 19th October, 1995

Review

Tourist flows from certain regions of origin to certain destinations display a surprising amount of historical persistence in spite of profound changes in the type of tourism, touristic and transport infrastructure and touristic trends. This might be explained by geographic proximity, complementarity as regards leisure facilities, similarity of languages, cultural affinity etc. One of the most striking examples is the "return" of Czechs as tourists to the Croatian coast. The exceptional in this case is that a traditional flow has regenerated after four decades of almost a break, caused by the global political situation of a Cold War and an Iron Curtain.

Czechs, in the first line inhabitants of Prague and other urban centres of the Czech Lands, used to frequent the spas of the northern Croatian coast before World War I in large numbers. Baška on the island of Krk, e.g., owed its development to a seaside resort mainly to Czech interest and Emil Geistlich, a publisher from Prague, who set the first touristic initiatives there. In 1910 the resort was officially titled "Croatian-Czech seaside and health resort" and 3 out of 4 guests originated from the Czech Lands (SERŠIĆ 1994, p. 83). But there were other "national" Czech resorts too.

In the interwar period the influx from Czechia became less prominent, albeit it was still remarkable. Even in Opatija, although at that time under Italian administration, in 1929 Czech guests ranked second after German tourists. Yet, Opatija hosted more Czech guests than tourists from Austria or even Italy (Statistica delle stazioni di cura 1929).

During the communist period the flow of tourists from Czechia to the Croatian coast followed quite closely the ups and downs of political liberalization and rigidity oscillating between figures near to zero in the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s and relative highs in the late 1960s (Prague Spring) and in the mid- 1980s.

But immediately after the break-down of Communism in 1989 the flow of Czechoslovakian (actually mainly Czech) tourists to the Croatian coast increased significantly taking advantage of the (due to the wars in Slovenia and Croatia) low prices and easily available accommodation facilities. In 1994 tourists from the Czech Republic held the highest share in foreign overnight stays (Croatian Tourism Figures 1995, p. 24). Already in 1992 Czechoslovakian tourists had spent the relative or absolute majority of foreign tourist nights in 14 resorts statistically documented (Promet turista u primorskim općinama 1992,1993). Among them were Baška, Krk, Njivice, Rabac, Rab, Kampion and Medveja.

Key words: Tourist flows, Czech tourists, Croatian coast

1. INTRODUCTION

It is one of the most striking phenomena of Croatia's post -1991 tourist development that after a predominance of German, Austrian, Italian and British tourists over four decades tourists from Czechoslovakia (till 1992) and Czechia (since 1993) "return" in large numbers as commercial tourists to the Croatian coast, i.e. to its northern part, while the South has been avoided by tourists since the recent wars. Having obtained remarkable shares already in 1992 and 1993 the Czech Republic ranked first among the countries of origin according to overnight stays in 1994.¹

The question arises, whether this results from geographical proximity, cultural affinity and natural complementarity (landlocked Czechia versus Croatia, which offers the coast of a warm sea) and may thus by the start of a stable and prosperous development or must rather be regarded as a temporary symptom of crisis due to the staying-away of the formerly dominating tourist nations and a growing discordance between Western tourist demands and the Croatian coast's touristic offer.

2. CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN CZECH TOURISM OF THE CROATIAN COAST COMPARED TO THE COMMUNIST PERIOD

To evaluate the recent "return" of Czechs a reference to statistics is necessary.

In fact, in absolute figures and referring to the Croatian coast in total we may not speak of "return" after decades of absence. The total number of Czech overnight stays in seaside resorts of the Croatian coast² in 1993 (for which the most recent regionally subdivided data are available) was not larger than in the 1980s or during the "Prague Spring", i.e. around 1968 (Fig. 1).

In proportion to foreign overnight stays in total, however, shares of Czech overnight stays in recent years are really exceptional. Due to the very hesitating "return" of tourists from other nations after 1991 Czechoslovakians and Czechs stand out by far and gained the largest shares in overall foreign overnight stays on the Croatian coast since World War II: 16 % in 1992 and 22.5% in 1993 (Fig. 2).

There also occurred a remarkable regional shift of Czech tourism within the Croatian coast. While throughout the communist era the southern coast³, especially Southern Dalmatia⁴ used to be the main destination of Czechoslova-

1 Croatian tourism figures, ed. by Institut za turizam, Zagreb 1995, p. 24

2 Data from *Promet turista u primorskim općinama*, ed. by Republički (državni) zavod za statistiku, Zagreb, several volumes.

3 Dalmatia from the former commune of Zadar to the former commune of Dubrovnik.

4 The former communes Trogir, (Kaštela), Split, Brač, Hvar, Korčula, Vis, Lastovo, Omiš, Makarska, Ploče, Metković, Dubrovnik.

Figure 1. Croatian coast - Czechoslovakian overnight stays 1966-1993

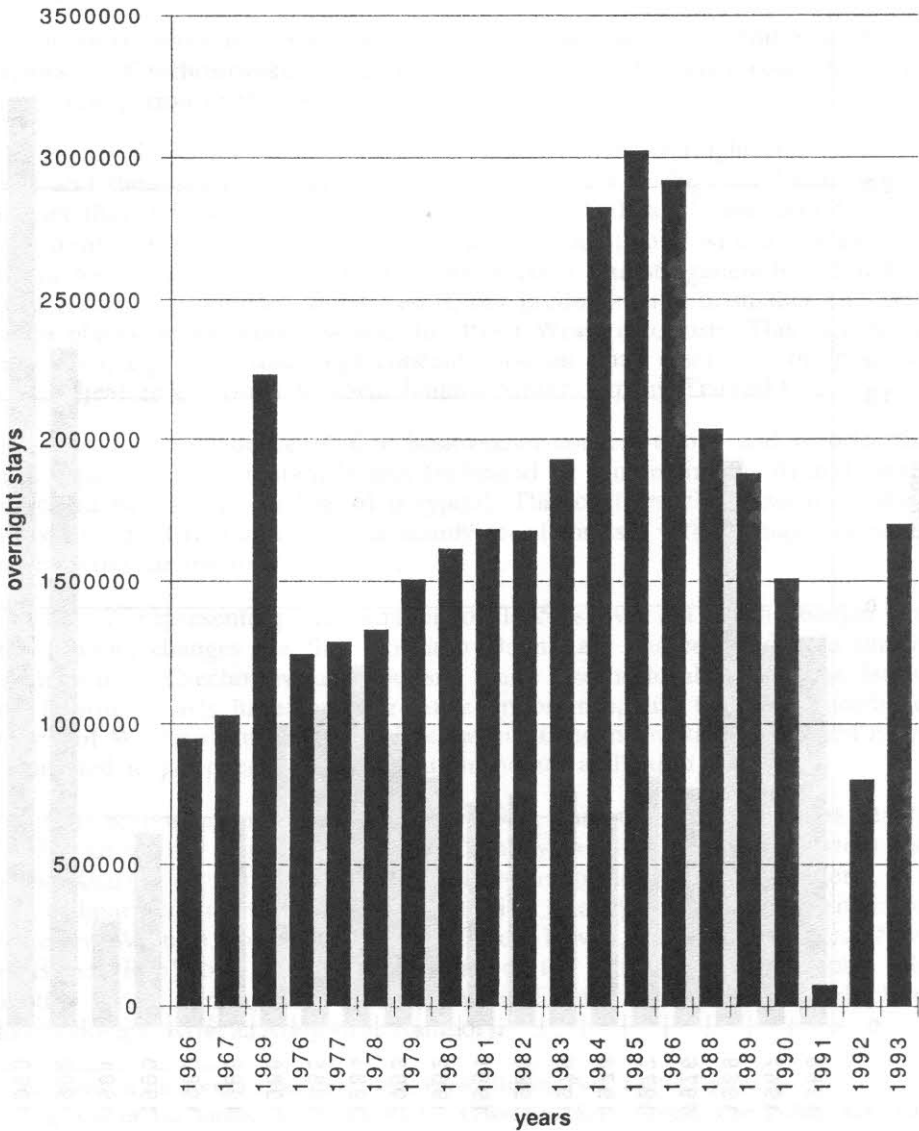
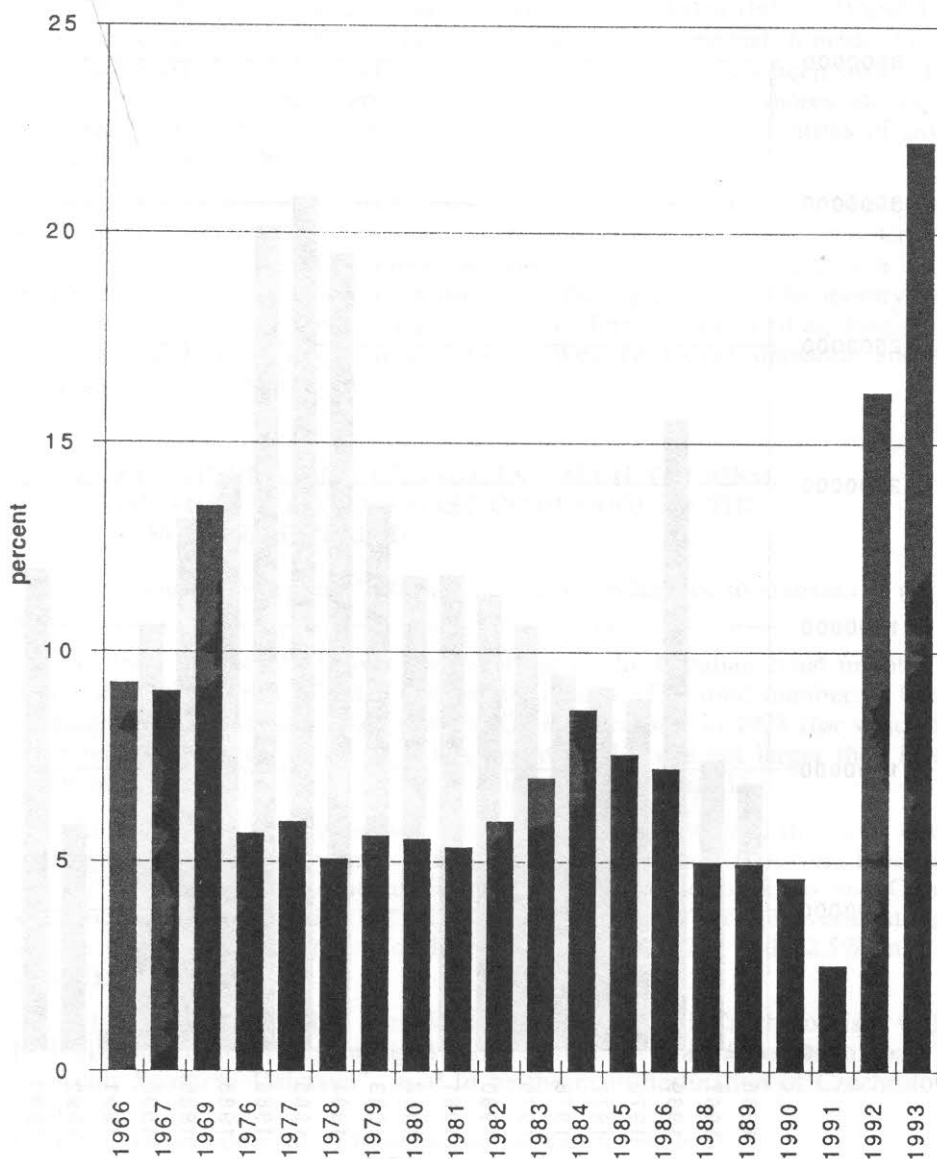


Figure 2. Share of Czechoslovakian in total foreign overnight stays
1966-1993 (in %)



kians, the situation has changed to the reverse since 1991: Istria⁵ became the main destination, the Kvarner⁶ ranking second (Fig. 3).

Czech mass tourism on Istria and in the Kvarner is in general a phenomenon unknown since World War II, as proved by the development of Czechoslovakian overnight stays in absolute figures (Fig. 4). Related to overall foreign overnight stays this becomes even clearer (Fig. 5).

A more detailed regional analysis reveals the change of additional characteristics of Czechoslovakian (Czech) tourism of the Croatian coast from the communist period to the present.

Fig. 6 shows the distribution of Czechoslovakian overnight stays over the coast and their share in total foreign overnight stays in the year 1969. Besides the fact that they were concentrated on Southern Dalmatia⁷ and only to a minor extent also on Istria⁸ and the interior Kvarner (albeit with a low share in overall tourism) it indicates the Czechoslovakian tourists generally did not so much reside in prominent tourist resort, but predominantly in smaller and peripheral places, which were less able to attract Western tourists. This can clearly be derived, e.g., from their high concentration on small resorts on the peninsula of Peljeac (e.g. Gornja Vručica, Janjina, Sreser, Trpanj, Trstenik).

Also the coincidence of Czechoslovakian concentrations and resorts with large capacities of recreation homes (indicated by squares in Fig. 6) and camps (indicated by triangles in Fig. 6) is typical. This confirms that Czechoslovakian tourism to the Croatian coast was mainly social tourism without major revenues and benefits for the local economy.

Fig. 7, representing the situation of 1985, shows not much change. The only (minor) changes are that Northern Dalmatia⁹ has emerged as a further destination of Czechoslovakian tourism, while Czechoslovakians on the Istrian and Kvarner coasts have lost in relative importance, due to the extraordinary growth of Western tourism there. Everywhere Czechoslovakians remained mainly confined to peripheral place, recreation homes and camp sites.

Fig. 8, portraying the situation of 1993, shows a quite different reality. Czech tourism has shifted to the North, mainly to Istria, to a minor extent also to the Kvarner region. It is of great relative importance there. In general, it is now ordinary commercial tourism penetrating already some of the former fortresses of Western tourism (Novigrad, Poreč, Rovinj, Rabac, Crikvenica, Njivice, Baška, Rab), but still bypassing some of the most prominent resorts (like Opatija, Vrsar, Umag, Mali Lošinj) and inclined to prefer peripheral places (like Medveja, Krnica, Kraljevica, Kapor).

5 Composed of the former communes Buje, Poreč, Rovinj, Pula, Labin, Opatija.

6 Composed of the former communes Rijeka, Crikvenica, Senj, Gospić, Cres-Lošinj, Krk, Rab, Pag.

7 See note 4.

8 See note 5.

9 The former communes Zadar, Biograd na Moru and Šibenik.

Figure 3. Czechoslovakian overnight stays by regions 1966-1993

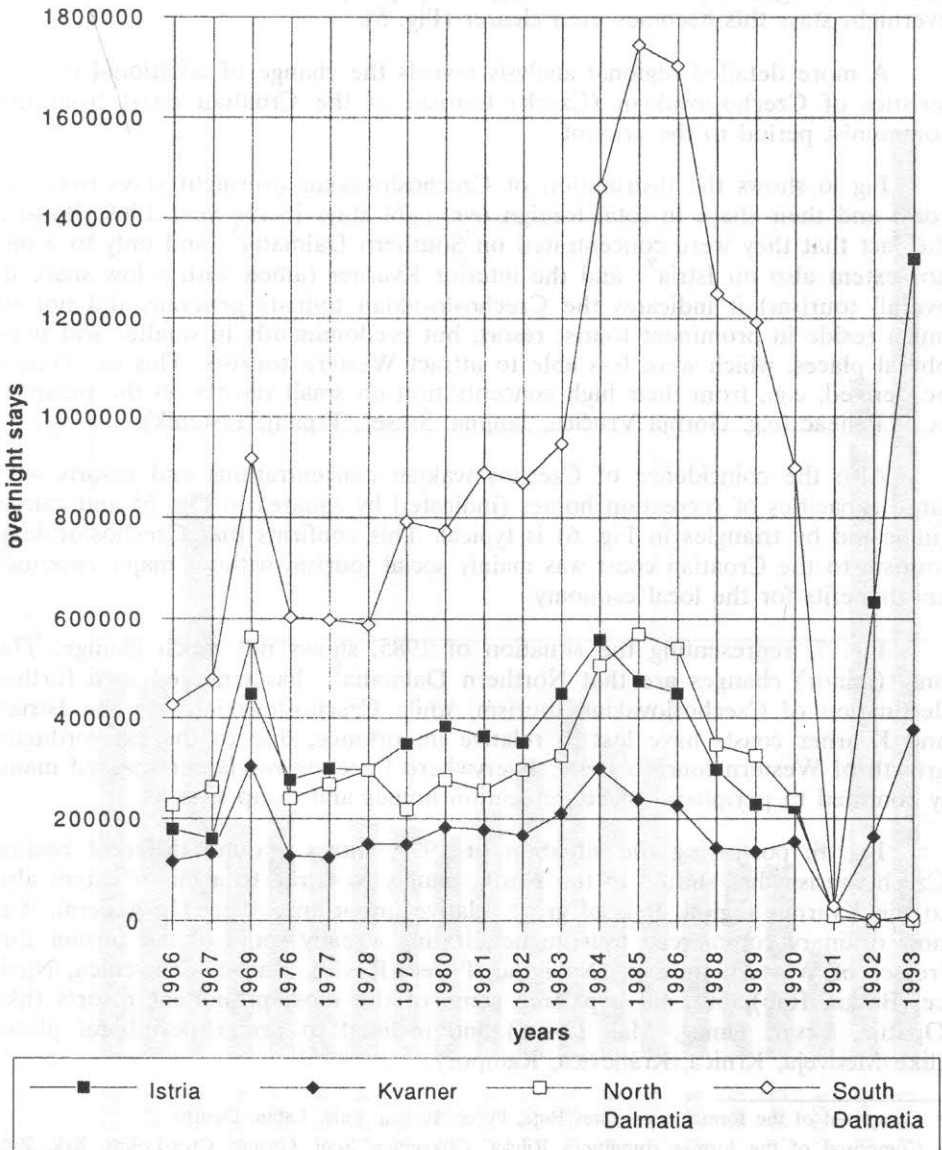


Figure 4. Czechoslovakian overnight stays on the northern Croatian coast
1966-1993

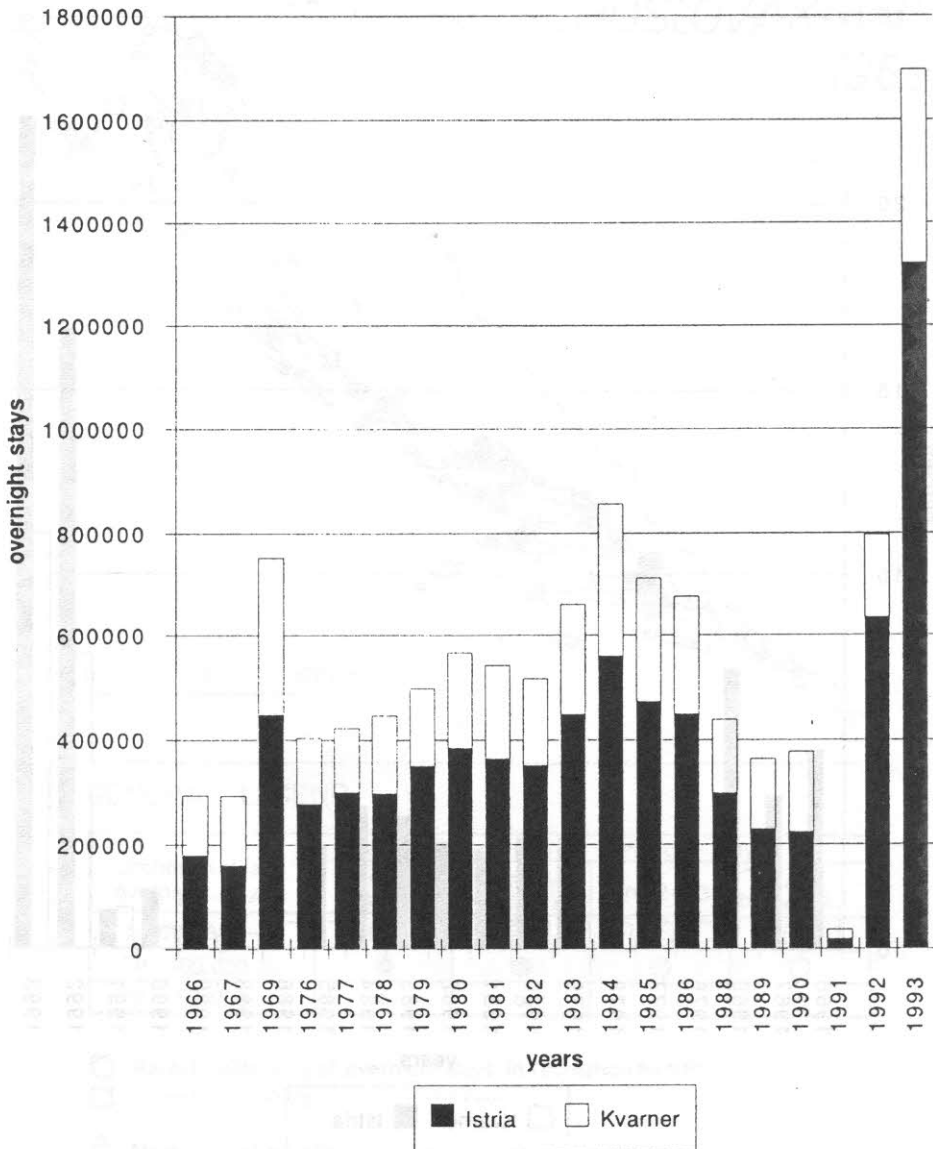


Figure 5. Northern Croatian coast: Share of Czechoslovakian in total foreign overnight stays 1966-1993

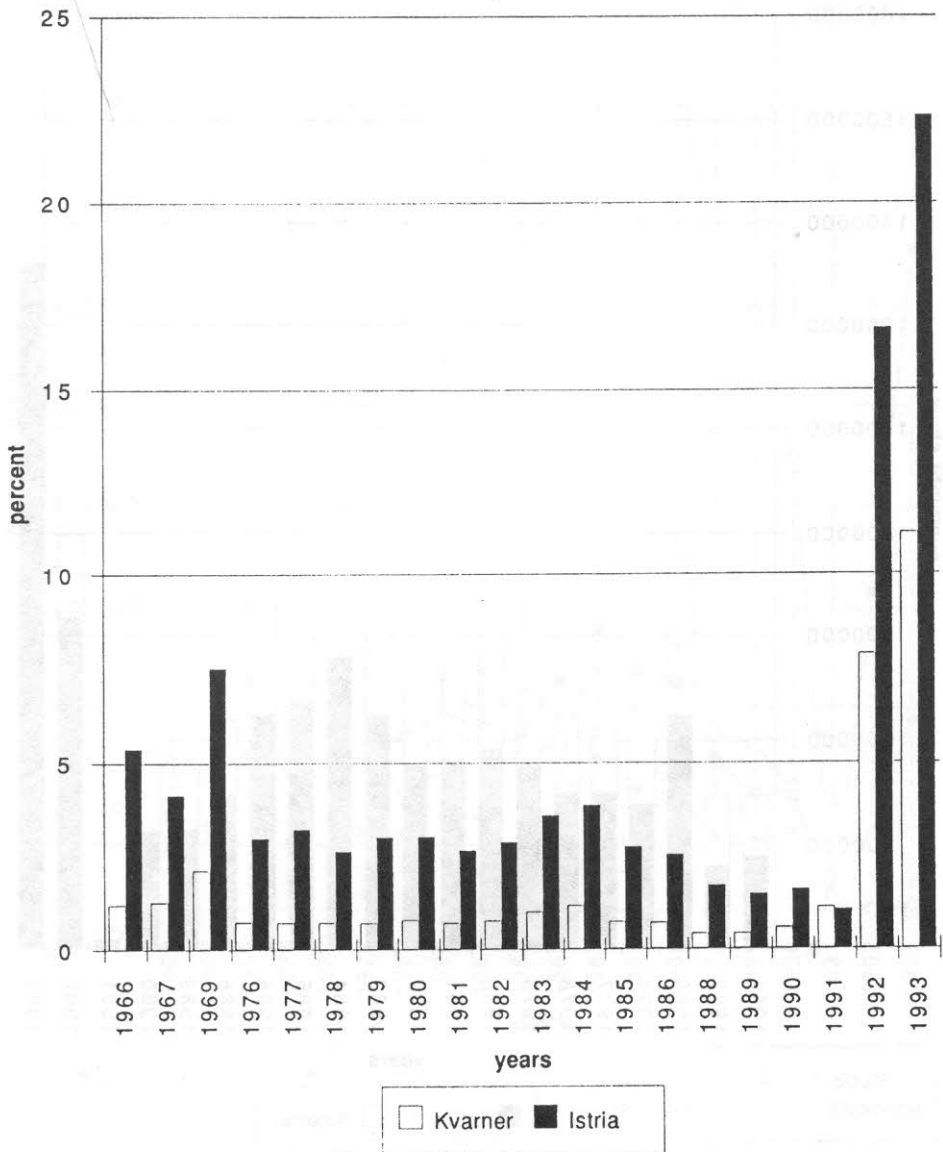
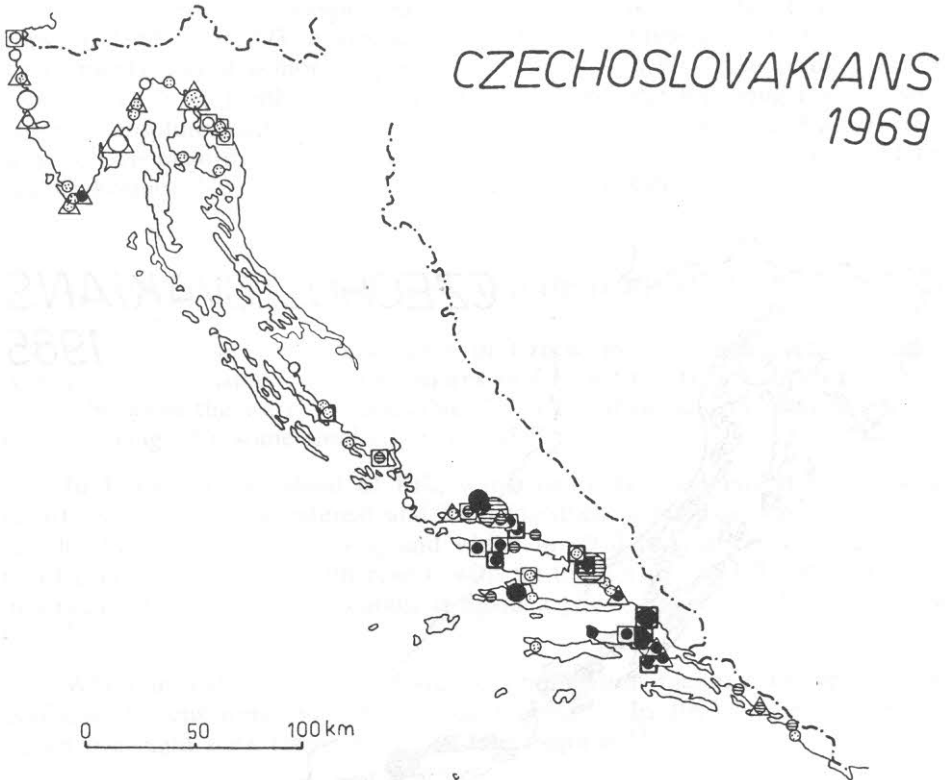


Figure 6. Czechoslovakians 1969

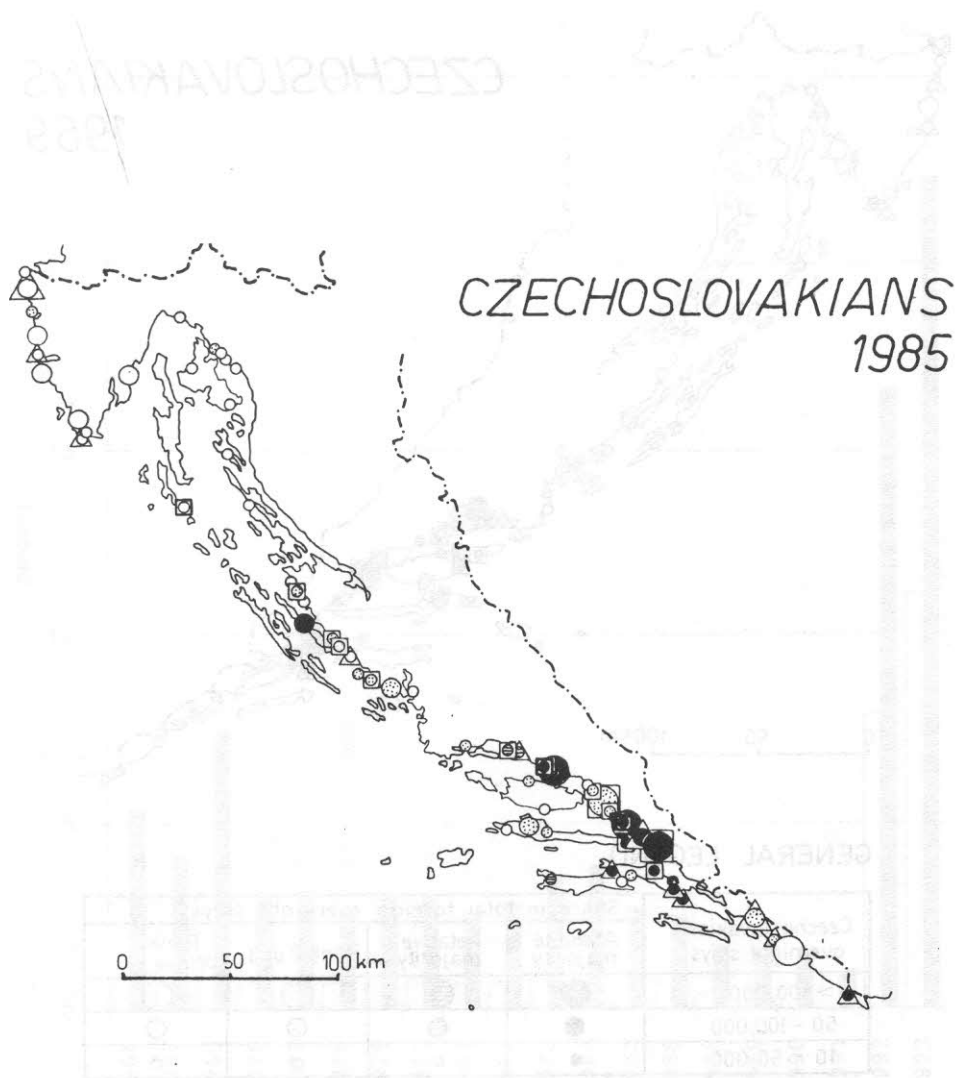


GENERAL LEGEND

Czechoslovakian overnight stays	Share in total foreign overnight stays			
	Absolute majority	Relative majority	Rank 2 or 3	Ranks below 3
> 100,000	●	⊘	⊙	○
50 - 100,000	●	⊘	⊙	○
10 - 50,000	●	⊘	⊙	○

- ⊠ Resort with $> 1/3$ of overnight stays in recreation homes
- ⊡ — " — $> 1/2$ — " —
- △ Mainly a camp site

Figure 7. Czechoslovakians 1985



3. THE NEW IMPORTANCE OF CZECH TOURISM FOR THE NORTHERN CROATIAN COAST

It is illustrative to compare the relative importance of Czech tourism (proportion Czech/overall foreign tourism without Slovaks) on the northern coast between 1985 and 1993 in greater detail (Fig. 9). While in 1985 Czechoslovakian tourists played a more important role besides in Novigrad (rank 3 among countries of origin) only in smaller resorts, in 1993 the following major resorts reported absolute majorities of Czech tourists: Rabac, Njivice and Kampor. Relative Czech majorities were documented for Novigrad, Poreč, Tar, Pula, Malinska, Crikvenica, Novi Vinodolski, Punat, Baška and Rab.

4. COINCIDENCE OF RECENT AND HISTORICAL PATTERNS

If one compares the distribution of Czechs in 1993 with places having a "Czech touristic history", i.e. high shares of Czech tourists before World War I and/or between the wars¹⁰, remarkable Czech initiatives and investments in tourism etc. (Fig. 10), some similarity is revealed.

In Baka, on the island of Krk, which owes its development to a seaside resort mainly to Czech interest and Emil Geistlich, a publisher from Prag, who set the first touristic initiatives, and which in 1910 was officially titled "Croatian-Czech seaside and health resort" with up to World War I 3 out of 4 guests origination from the Czech Lands, is again a place, where Czech tourists rank first.¹¹

When in 1912 the first private accommodation facilities in Njivice were available, Czechs were the most frequent guests.¹² In 1993 Njivice had 83.402 Czech overnight stays forming the absolute majority.¹³

Throughout the 1930s Malinska reported Czech shares in overall foreign tourism of over 70% and in some seasons nearly 90%.¹⁴ In 1993 Czechs were

¹⁰ Even more than before World War I Czech(oslovakian) tourists played a dominant role in the Croatian coast's interwar tourism. After the worldwide economic crisis of 1929 - 1932 they occupied rank 1 in Yugoslavian international tourism for years. Due to Czechoslovakia's favourable economic performance in the 1930s Czechoslovakian tourists achieved a similar position also in Austria (JORDAN, P.: Die Entwicklung der Fremdenverkehrsströme in Mitteleuropa (1910 - 1990) als Ausdruck politischer und wirtschaftlicher Veränderungen. In: Mitteilungen der österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft, vol. 132, Wien 1990, pp. 144 - 171). Besides, also Bavaria, Switzerland, northern Italy and Hungary became major destinations of Czechoslovakian tourists (TLUST, V.: Der tschechoslowakische Fremdenverkehr gestern und heute. In: Jahrbuch für Fremdenverkehr, vol. 16, 1968, pp. 49 - 78.

¹¹ SERŠIĆ - IVICA, J.: Turizam u Baški do 1. svjetskog rata. In: Krčki zbornik 29, Počeci i razvoj turizma na otoku Krku, vol. 2, Krk 1994, p.83.

¹² FRAGAČIĆ TOMIĆ, B.: Njivice. Počeci i razvoj turizma. In: Krčki zbornik 29, Počeci i razvoj turizma na otoku Krku, vol. 2, Krk 1994, pp. 197ff.

¹³ Promet turista u primorskim općinama 1993., ed. by Državni zavod za statistiku, Zagreb 1994, p.24.

¹⁴ ANTIĆ, V.: Turistički razvoj otoka Krka, Raba i Paga. In: Radovi instituta JAZU u Zadru, vol. 3, Zagreb 1957, p. 385.

Figure 8. Czechs 1993

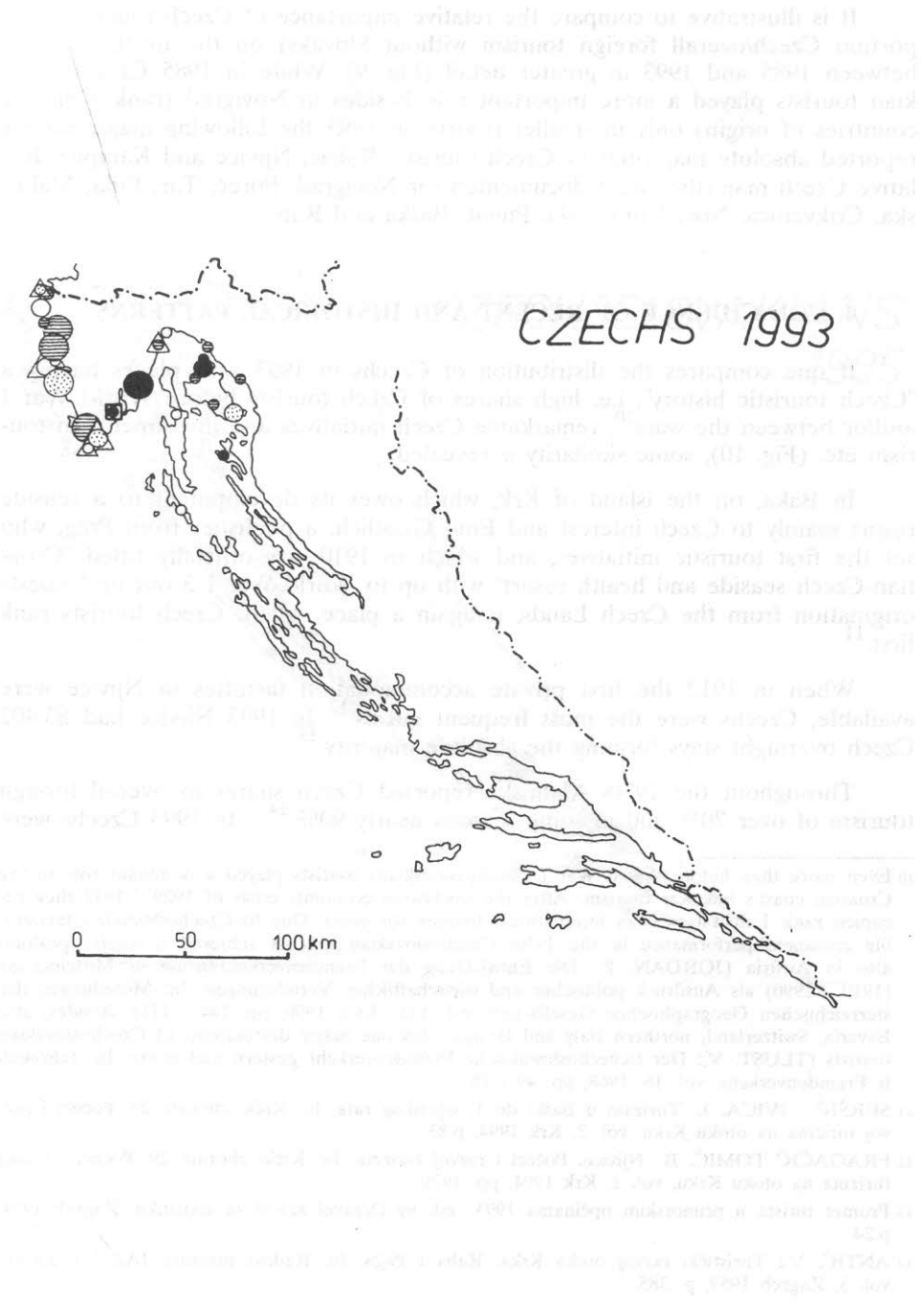
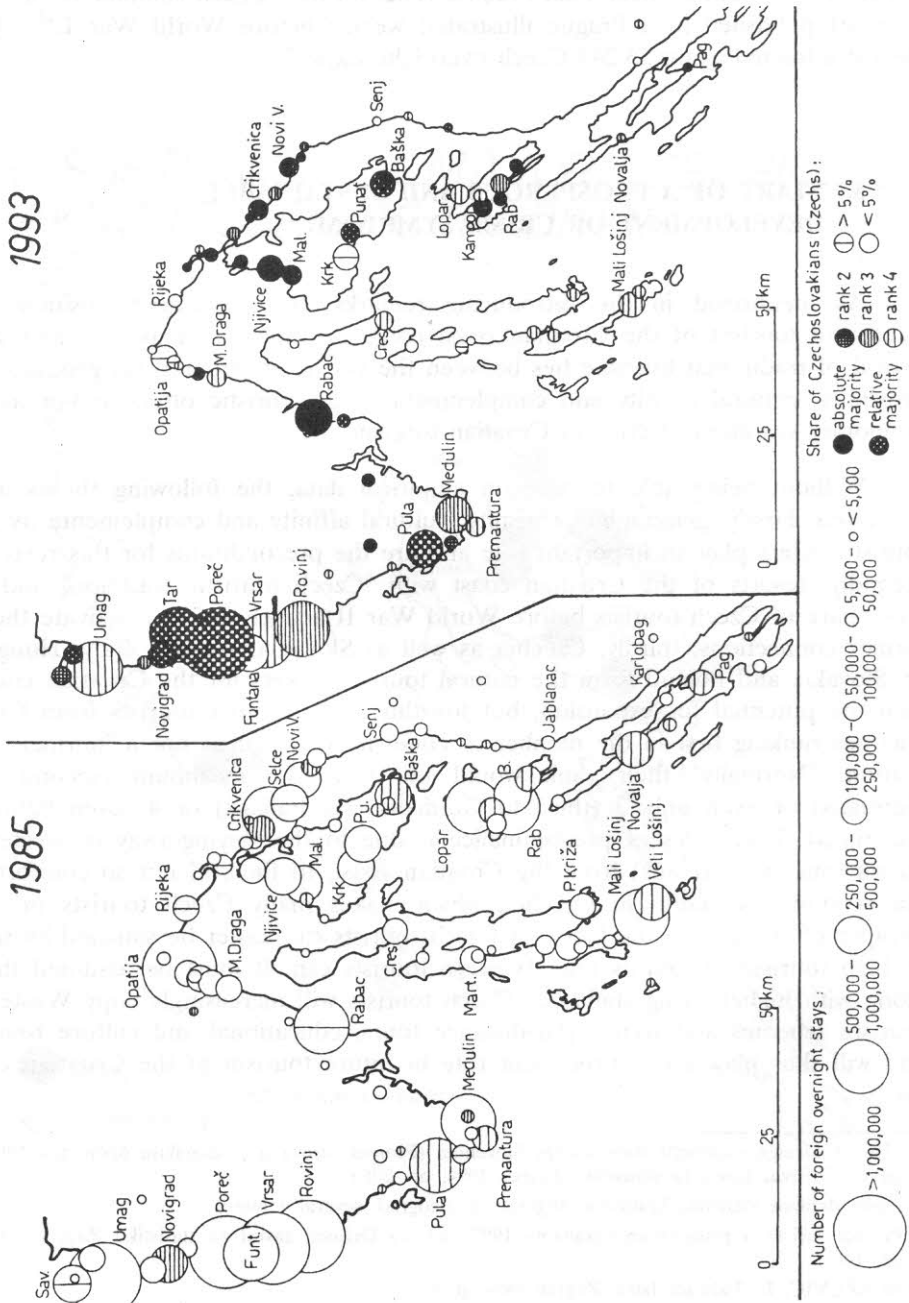


Figure 9.



again ranking first.¹⁵ Crikvenica and Selce had relative and absolute majorities of Czech guests in the 1930s.¹⁶ In 1993 Czech tourists rank first and third respectively.¹⁷ Medulin near Pula became reknown as a Czech summer resort by a report published in a Prague illustrated weekly before World War I.¹⁸ In 1993 it attracted again 53.243 Czech overnight stays.¹⁹

5. START OF A PROSPEROUS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OR CRISIS SYMPTOM?

As mentioned in the introducing remarks, the prominent position of Czechs in tourism of the Croatian coast could be interpreted as the "natural" revival of traditional touristic ties between the two regions based on geographic proximity, cultural affinity and complementarity of touristic offers and/or as a temporary symptom of crisis in Croatian tourism.

Without being able to base on empirical data, the following theses are suggested: Firstly, geographic-proximity, cultural affinity and complementarity of touristic offers play an important role and are the preconditions for this revival; secondly, resorts of the Croatian coast with "Czech touristic tradition" and a high share of Czech tourists before World War II actively try to reactivate their former connections; thirdly, Czechia as well as Slovenia, Austria, Italy, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland form the natural tourist markets for the Croatian coast with the potential for expansion; but fourthly, the fact that tourists from Czechia are ranking first in the number of countries of origin is not a "normal" situation. "Normally" their rank would be 2 at the maximum (second to Germans) or even only 3 (third to Germans and Italians) or 4 (even behind Austrians). Their present predominance is due to the staying-away of western guests (mainly Germans) from the Croatian coast, to the still not so comfortable economic situation in Czechia, which makes many Czech tourists prefer cheaper offers, and to the fact that Czech tourists can easier be satisfied by not so high touristic standards than Western tourists can. It must be assumed that along with higher living standards Czech tourists will increasingly copy Western tourism schemes and trends (far-distance tours, educational and culture tours) and will thus play a less prominent role in future tourism of the Croatian coast.

¹⁵ 22% of foreign overnight stays except Slovenian (Promet turista u primorskim općinama 1993., ed. by Državni zavod za statistiku, Zagreb 1994, pp. 20f.)

¹⁶ Opšta državna statistika kraljevine Jugoslavije, Beograd, several volumes

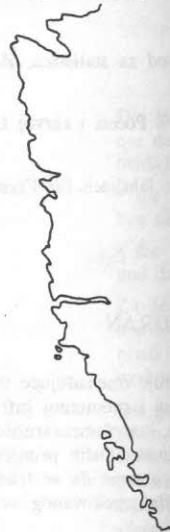
¹⁷ Promet turista u primorskim općinama 1993., ed. by Državni zavod za statistiku Zagreb 1994, pp. 16f.

¹⁸ BLAŽEVIĆ, I.: Turizam Istre. Zagreb 1984, p. 97.

¹⁹ Promet turista u primorskim općinama 1993., ed. by Državni zavod za statistiku, Zagreb 1994, pp. 20f.

Figure 10. R

RESORTS
(VAKIAN)

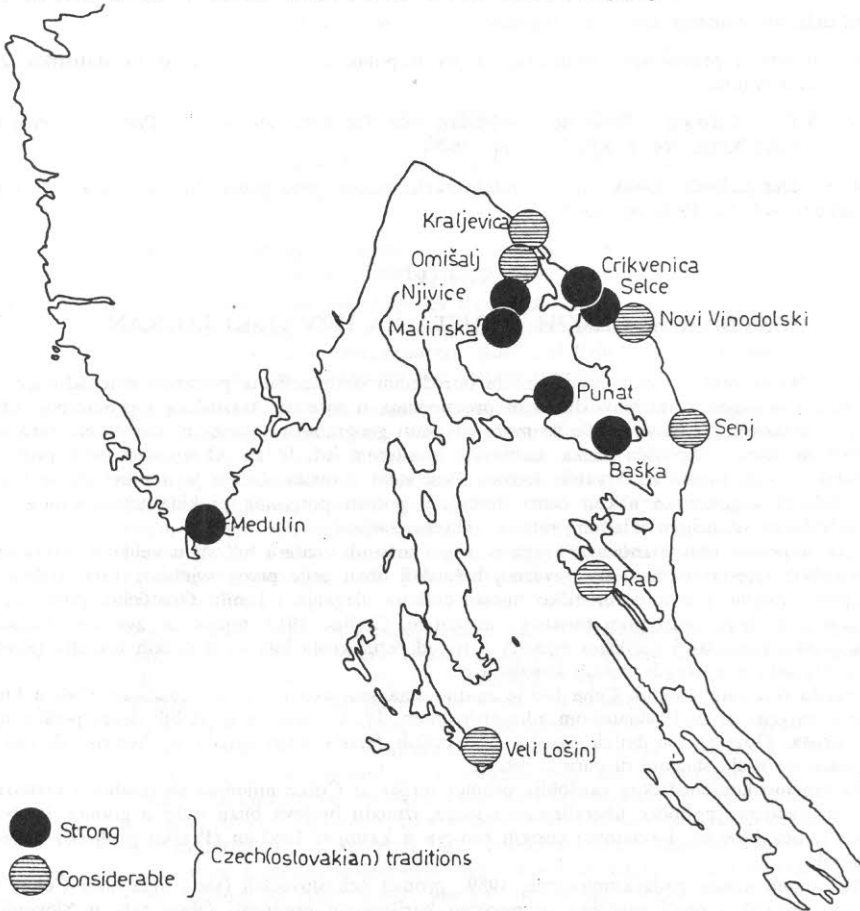


● Strong

◐ Considerable

Figure 10. Resorts with a major Czecho(Slovakian) touristic tradition

RESORTS WITH A MAJOR CZECH(OSLOVAKIAN) TOURISTIC TRADITION



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Sažetak

"POVRATAK" ČEŠKIH TURISTA NA HRVATSKI JADRAN

Turistički promet iz nekih regija prema određenim destinacijama pokazuje iznenađujuće veliku povijesnu postojanost usprkos dubokim promjenama u turizmu, turističkoj i prometnoj infrastrukturi i turističkim trendovima. To se može objasniti geografskom blizinom, komplementarnošću pogodnosti za odmor, sličnošću jezika, kulturnim afinitetom itd. Jedan od iznenađujućih primjera je "povratak" čeških turista na hrvatski Jadran. Posebnost u ovom slučaju je u tome da se tradicionalni dolazak regenerirao nakon četiri desetljeća gotovo potpunog prekida uzrokovanog sveopćom političkom situacijom "hladnog rata" i "željezne zavjese".

Česi, u prvom redu stanovnici Praga i drugih urbanih centara bili su u velikom broju česti gosti turističkih mjesta (toplica) na sjevernoj hrvatskoj obali prije prvog svjetskog rata. Baška na Krku zapravo duguje razvoj u turističko mjesto češkom ulaganju i Emilu Gristlichu, publicisti iz Praga, koji je tu uspostavio prvu turističku inicijativu. Godine 1910. mjesto se zvanično nazivalo "Hrvatsko-češko kupalište i lječilišno mjesto", a tri od četiri gosta bila su iz čeških zemalja (Seršić, 1994:83). Ali, bilo je i drugih "čeških kupališta".

Između dva rata dolazak Čeha bio je znatno smanjen iako još uvijek značajan. Čak u Opatiji, iako u to vrijeme pod talijanskom administracijom, 1929., češki su gosti bili drugi poslije njemačkih turista. Opatijski su hoteli ugostili više čeških turista nego turista iz Austrije ili čak iz Italije (Statistica delle stazioni di cura ... 1929.)

Za vrijeme komunističkog razdoblja promet turista iz Češke mijenjao se (padao i rastao) u skladu s oscilacijama političke liberalizacije i stege, između brojeva blizu nule u godina 1940-im, 1950-im i ranim 1960-im, i relativno visokih brojeva u kasnijim 1960-im (Praško proljeće) i sredinom 1980-ih.

Ali odmah nakon pada komunizma, 1989., promet čehoslovačkih (sada uglavnom Čeha) turista prema hrvatskoj obali značajno se povećao korištenjem prednosti (zbog rata u Sloveniji i Hrvatskoj), niskih cijena i vrlo pogodnih smještajnih usluga. Godine 1994. turisti iz Češke Republike bili su na najvišem mjestu stranih noćenja (Croatian Tourist Figures 1995:24). Već u 1992. godini češki su turisti ostvarili relativnu i apsolutnu većinu stranih turističkih noćenja u 14 mjesta koja su statistički obrađena (Promet turista u primorskim općinama, 1992, 1993). Među njima bili su: Baška, Krk, Njivice, Rabac, Rab, Kampion i Medveja.

Ključne riječi: turistički promet, češki turisti, hrvatska obala