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# Children's Camps as a Tourism Product – A Case Study

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## Abstract

This article focuses on the issues of organized tourism, more specifically, on children's summer camps, in which Czech children spend free time during their holidays. The purpose of this paper is to present results of a pilot study on children's participation in summer camps. On the basis of the research carried out in the form of a face-to-face survey conducted with a sample of 479 pupils – grades five and seven, selected criteria, which characterize these camps, were analysed in relation to the choice of the camps and children's participation in them. The results show that the majority of school children participate in summer children's camps. The most popular camps are overnight camps and sports camps run by the organizations which children attend during the school year.

## Keywords

Children's Summer Camp, Overnight Camp, Junior Tourism, Family Tourism

**JEL classification:** Z83, Z32

## Introduction

One of the contemporary issues in tourism is a need to identify potential opportunities for further growth. There appear to be two ways of achieving this goal (especially from a marketing perspective): creating new products and finding new target markets. New products must be able to meet the new needs of tourists or to satisfy their existing needs better. The research for new markets focuses on both expanding their geographic extent and identifying new target groups. It is curious that some of the target groups that are often ranked among “traditional” participants in tourism are not subject to scrutiny in tourism research. One such target group is children and youth (age group 6 - 18 years). Travelling is part of life for almost all children, for example, school trips, holiday travel with their parents or stays in holiday camps for children. This is why children's camps are becoming an important tourism product. This article tries to describe children's camps as a tourism product in the Czech Republic and examine an interest in camps for school children in the form of a case study.

## Literature review

The issue of travel and tourism involving children appears to be relatively rarely represented in research and literature. Most research addressing children in tourism approaches it from the perspective of the so-called “grey areas” - child labour or child prostitution - e.g., the studies by Hall (2011), Johnson (2011, 2014), Magablih and Naamneh (2010), Montgomery (2008), Robertson (2008), and Tepelus (2008). Another issue concerning children and tourism is traveling with people who have special needs or require special care (Kim & Lehto, 2013; Ottolini, Rajnik, & Hickey, 2015; Polli & Polli, 2015). Some studies do explore the influence of children on decisions about travel and tourism within the family, such as Gram (2006, 2007), Kozak and Duman (2012), Liang (2013), Nickerson and Jurowski (2001), Thornton, Shaw, and Williams (1997), and Wang, Hsieh, Yeh, and Tsai (2004). Ryan (1992) identifies unique features of children as customers (especially in the case of cultural institutions). Such studies appear only exceptionally and therefore Small (2008) speaks about an absence of childhood in tourism research. Nonetheless, McCabe and Johnson (2013) report that traveling can be a factor which significantly affects quality of life and subjective well-being. They found that there were evident links between holiday taking and improvements in subjective well-being levels amongst social tourists. The influence of vacation on quality of life was the subject of research for Dolnicar, Yanamandram, and Cliff (2012).

What is unique about children's travel is that children cannot travel alone, but must be accompanied by an adult who in the broadest sense takes responsibility for the child. Children can travel either with their parents or other adult family members (or friends) or with any organization that arranges the travel and also takes responsibility for children. Until recently the topic of family tourism has been largely neglected in the professional literature. Exceptions to this include the study by Hazel (2005), or Mintel (2009). Obrador (2012) talks about “blindness” in academic tourism research on mat-

ters concerning the family. Recently, however, this lack of interest has been waning and research and publications have started to appear and deal with family travel and have approached this phenomenon from various angles – motivation, needs, safety, health, and marketing. Currently, Comprehensive examinations of family tourism are to be found in Carr (2011) and in Backer, Yeoman, and Schanzel (2012).

Apart from travelling with their families, most children's travel takes place in the context of formal education where trips are arranged by their school – these include field trips, school trips, and skiing courses. Another possibility is a travel arranged through specialized institutions which provide travel opportunities – these may be youth centres, leisure centres, sports clubs and travel agencies. The most significant form of travel outside of the context of family and school are children's camps. Children's travel without their family has mostly been ignored in literature. An exception is Carr (2011), who focuses on child-only holiday experiences, including the sleepover and the summer camp. History and importance of summer camps in the US in particular is described by Van Slyck (2003, 2006), and Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, and Henderson (2007), incentives to participate in camps are examined by Alexandris and Kouthouris (2005). Henderson, Whitaker, Bialeschki, Scanlin, and Thurber (2007) deal with the effects of children's participation in the camps from the perspective of their parents. The same subject is dealt with by Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, and Henderson (2007).

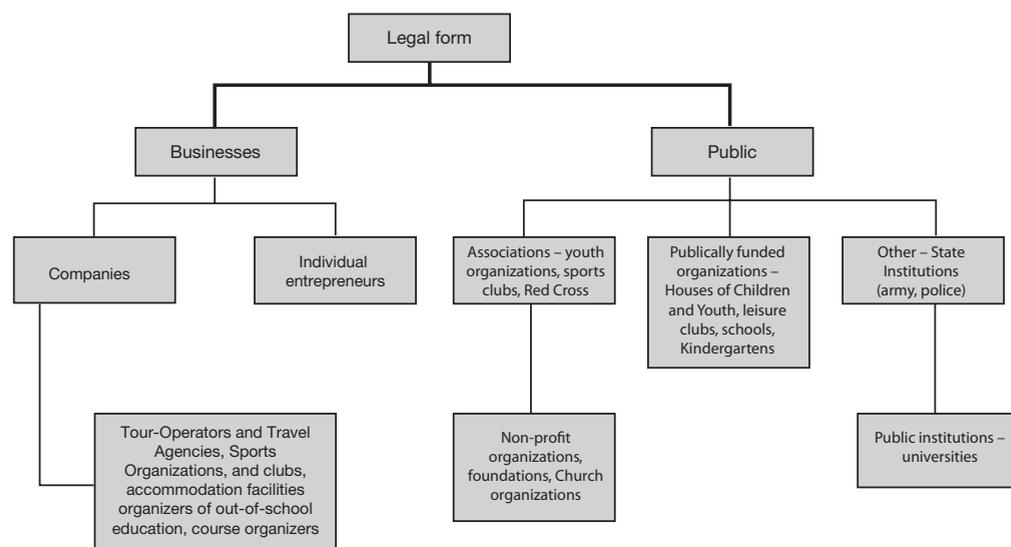
## Children's camps as a tourism product

The history of children's camps in the Czech Republic dates back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is closely associated with the name of Svojšíka (Šantora, 2012), who organized the first Scout camp in 1912. During the interwar period camps were organized by a number of organizations and associations (*Junák* - Czech Scouting, *Sokol* ["Falcon" – a Czech gymnastics association], *Orel* ["Eagle" – a Czech Catholic sporting association], or the YMCA). In the 1950s, summer camps expanded greatly to offer a wide range of summer vacation options, even though camps in this period also took on the task of ideological education and children's opportunity to participate in camps was heavily influenced by political factors. Starting in 1955, the *Revoluční odborové hnutí* (ROH – Revolutionary Trade Union Movement) became the main organizer of the Pioneer socialist youth movement camps. In the mid 1960s, the ROH enabled 300,000 children to participate in summer camps and children could also make use of the services of other camp providers (Knapík, 2016). From the 1970s, the most widespread type of the camp consisted of Pioneer camps, which were organized by trade unions at the state-owned enterprises and institutions for children of their employees. Children's camps were also organized by the Pioneer and Youth Houses, Pioneer groups at primary schools, *Svazarm* (the Union for Cooperation with the Army) and physical education organizations. In the 1990s, the goals and organization of camps changed radically. The length of children's camp stays was significantly reduced, but the number and the type of organizations that run the camps increased proportionally.

In the Czech Republic, children's camps are the most common way in which children spend their free time over the holidays. They are not, however, the only way parents arrange for their children's leisure-time activities over the holidays. In the year 2016, 1, 132 camps from 190 organizers were registered in the Czech Republic (České Tábory.cz, 2016). From this data it is evident that, as a group, children attending camps represent an interesting and attractive category of consumers of tourism products. Most camps can be categorized as either stationary or mobile, while the day camps represent a special category. From the perspective of tourism theory, children's camps can be classified as a guided tour if its length exceeds 24 hours. The longest camps last three weeks, day camps generally last five days, from Monday to Friday, from 8.00 a.m. to 16.00 p.m. Children can participate in them the entire week or just a few days. Children's camps may have a different thematic focus – such as dance, sports, or languages. The current trend among children is to prefer more general experiences. As a result, the so-called whole-camp games and adventure camps are more popular than a set program. The organizers of children's camps are entities which can be classified according to various criteria. Camps are organized by non-profit organizations as well as commercial entities. Businesses that organize camps are most often tour operators or travel agencies. In addition, there are also companies that offer accommodation or hospitality services which organize camps, as well as some leisure centres which take the legal form of a corporation. Camps can also be organized by individual entrepreneurs. Other camps are offered by non-profit organizations, both state-owned and non-governmental. These include schools, educational facilities, universities, Houses of Children and Youth (a traditional youth organization operating independently in many Czech cities), leisure centres, sports clubs, cultural and religious organizations and youth organizations such as Scout, Boy Scout and Pioneer. The following section seeks to describe contemporary children's camps in the Czech Republic as tourism products and presents interests in children's camps for school-aged children by a case study. Their categorization in legal terms is presented in Figure 1.

## Methodology

Primary research (Králová, 2016) on the participation of children in children's summer camps and their preferences was conducted in the fall of 2015 (after the end of summer vacation) in the form of a face-to-face survey carried out on a sample of 497 respondents. The respondents were students of elementary schools in the district of Ústí nad Orlicí. Out of the total number of respondents, there were 239 girls and 258 boys. Deliberate selection was used focusing on 10- to 11-year-old children (fifth graders) and 12- to 13-year-old children (seventh graders). Another question examined was whether the children's place of residence: urban or rural area. The age and place of residence of the respondents were determined in accordance with the international HBSC (Health Behaviour of School Children) study, in which the Department of Recreationology of Palacký University in Olomouc participated. The pilot study was conducted in the context of

**Figure 1** Categorization of camp organizers according to their legal form

Source: author's own

this study at one of the partner schools. The questionnaire itself was designed to include three questions about socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and nine closed and semi-closed questions related directly to the camps. The basic research question about children's participation in organized tourism through camps was if the children participated in a camp, the number of camps they participated in, who made the decision to attend the camp, how they learned about the camps, the type (theme) of their camp, the duration of the camp, the organizers of the camp, and their satisfaction with the camp. The proportion of the respondents according to each of the variables is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Proportion of the individual variables in the sample of the respondents

	Younger children		Older children		Total
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	
City	58	61	61	63	<b>243</b>
Countryside	59	67	61	67	<b>254</b>
<b>Total</b>	245		252		497

Source: author's own

## Results and Discussion

A total of 68 % of the respondents said that they had attended a camp at least once in their life. 32 % of them said they had never been to a camp. 11 % of those, however, said they would like to go to camp. These were primarily younger children. The responses to these survey questions did not differ significantly by sex or age. In terms of the frequency with which children participate in the camps, it can be stated that the Czech children are used to attending a camp and participate in this form of organized tourism regularly. From the numbers above, 336 children attended a camp at some time in the past, 28 % of them attended it once and 72 % replied that they had already attended a camp more than once. The former group of the respondents were typically younger and just started attending camps. While the younger school-aged children attended 2 - 3 camps, older children on average attended their fourth camp. When choosing a summer camp, in 59 % of cases children decided together with their parents, and in 42 % of cases children themselves made their own decision as far as their leisure time during holidays is concerned. But if compared by age, it holds true that among older children there is a clear trend for children to decide which camp to attend on their own (65 %), while among younger children it is a joint decision with their parents (35 %). In response to the question about where respondents get their information about what types of camps are available, children were given a choice of five possible answers. The research shows that the main source of information children cited, identified by 34 % of the respondents, was scouting troops or clubs they attended during the school year. The second source of information, identified by 33 % of the respondents, was a recommendation of their friends. The next most common source, identified by 26 % of the respondents, was the internet and 7 % learned about the camps through traditional advertisement. The overnight camps remain the most popular type of camps among children. Out of the total number of the respondents who participated in the camp, 83 % reported that the one they had attended was an overnight camp and 17 % had been to a day camp. 28 % of younger children reported attending a day camp, while among older children it was only 7 %. In terms of camp's focus, sports camps are most common. 32 % of children chose a sports-oriented camp. Moreover, 28 % of the children indicated a preference for the outdoor camps, and 23 % preferred a general camp experience. These were followed in popularity by educational camps, but the respondents did not express as much interest in art (dance, music, musical theatre or film) camps. The most commonly reported type of sports camps were the ones which focused on athletics, tennis, horseback riding and inline skating (which is currently very popular). Among younger children the prevalence of particular types of camps is fairly equally distributed, i.e. sports, overnight, and general camps are equally popular. On the contrary, older children prefer sports camps. The focus of the camp is also determined by the orientation of *the organizer* of the camp. In particular, scouting organizations were cited by 16 % of both younger and older respondents. The other camp organizations the respondents attended included sports clubs (proportional to the above mentioned sports disciplines), Houses of Children and Youth or leisure centres (15%). Considering that this was an

open question and the list of organizations appearing in the responses was quite diverse and the table presents only the most common results. Most of the children attended camps that lasted 14 days. This was true for 45 % of the children, especially pupils of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The second most commonly reported length of stay was a 7-day camp, which was reported by 30 % of the children. The next most common duration was five days, reported by 16 % of the children, which was typical in the case of the day camps. The most common *type of accommodation* at camps was in a cabins and tents, representing 35 % and 34 % of the respondents respectively. 13 % of the children were accommodated in permanent structures such as hotels. This relatively low number of camp participants who stayed in permanent structures is a result of the type and focus of the camps in which the respondents participated. These were primarily sports and wilderness camps, where it is assumed that participants will stay in cabins or tents. While the type of accommodation does not vary much according to the age of the children, the difference between genders is noticeable. 21 % of the girls compared to 10 % of the boys chose dormitory accommodation, while 50 % of the boys compared to 33 % of the girls prefer to stay in the tent. *The price of the camp* was probably the biggest problem the children had when filling in the surveys. More than 20 % of them did not know how to answer this question. The most commonly quoted price (from the price ranges offered by the researchers) was in the range of 2,000 – 2,999 CZK and this was chosen by 33 % of the respondents. The next most common choice, reported by 21 % of the children, was the price range of 3 - 4 thousand CZK and another 19 % of children reported that they had paid from one to two thousand CZK for their camp. However, this price range was most often reported by the younger children. These children typically attend the day camps which are cheaper, and this is a fairly common price range for this kind of camp. The final question was intended to obtain an *evaluation of their satisfaction with their stay* at the camp. The respondents were asked about the facts concerning their participation in the camp rather than their wishes. Satisfaction with the camp was enhanced, as well as the repeated participation in the same camp. In total, 71 % of the respondents enjoyed their camp and would like to go again and 19 % of the respondents liked the camp, but would prefer to try something else. Some of the respondents did not enjoy their stay at the camp they attended, but still wanted to return and would not consider changing it, and six percent did not enjoy their camp experience and did not want to attend any camp again.

**Table 2** Results of both age groups in each of the criteria of camp evaluation

Criteria		Total		Younger children		Older children	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Participation	Yes	336	68	167	68	169	67
	No	107	21	35	14	72	29
	No, but I want	54	11	43	18	11	4
Number of camps attended	One	94	28	50	30	44	26
	More than one	242	72	117	70	125	74
Decision	With parents	196	59	136	82	60	35
	On their own	140	42	31	18	109	65
Source of information	Word of mouth	113	33	70	42	43	32
	Scout troop	112	34	58	35	54	25
	Internet	95	26	27	16	68	40
	Leaflet	16	7	12	7	4	3
Type of camp	Overnight	278	83	121	73	157	93
	Day camp	58	17	46	28	12	7
Focus	Sports	105	32	50	30	55	68
	Outdoor	95	28	51	30	44	28
	General	79	23	52	31	27	16
Organizer	Scout	53	16	27	16	26	15
	Sports club	50	15	25	15	25	15
Camp length	14 days	152	45	65	39	87	51
	7 days	101	30	48	29	53	31
	5 days	55	16	43	26	12	7
	Other	28	8	11	5	17	10
Price	1-2 thousand	62	19	39	24	23	14
	2-3 thousand	112	33	59	35	53	31
	3-4 thousand	70	21	15	9	55	33
	I do not know	70	20	50	30	20	12
Accommodation	Cottage	119	35	51	31	68	40
	Tent	115	34	47	28	68	40
	Hotel, pension	44	13	23	14	21	13
	Other	58	17	46	28	12	7

Criteria		Total		Younger children		Older children	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Satisfaction	<i>Would go to the same camp</i>	240	71	120	72	120	71
	<i>Would go to a different camp</i>	65	19	37	22	28	17
	<i>did not enjoy, but would not go to another</i>	11	3	5	3	6	4
	<i>I would not go to another</i>	20	6	5	3	15	9

Source: author's own

It should be pointed out that in Table 2 under the category of organizer we have not included respondents who identified other organizers such as language schools, religious organizations, Centres for Free Time or House of Children and Youth. The results of the research investigation confirmed that the spectrum of the organizers was indeed varied. However, other than the organizers listed in the table, no other represents a majority. The responses of both age groups were very similar on this issue. In addition, the results of the research confirmed that the variety of organizers is quite broad. Except the organizers listed in Table 2, none of the other institutions identified by the respondents (Houses of Children and Youth, language schools) were mentioned enough to be considered significant. There was more diversity in the focus of the camps reported by younger children than by older children. There was also a distinct preference for sports camps. Other types of camps such as educational or artistic are not listed in Table 2. In the case of sports-oriented camps, teaching and training sport is the focus of the camp rather than a mere component part of the program.

Although more than 20 % of the respondents were not able to estimate the price of their camp stay, depending on the type and length of the camp, this currently fluctuates in the range of 2 - 3 or 3 - 4 thousand CZK. This corresponds with the results of the study conducted by GE Money Bank in 2009 which showed that in the Czech Republic the standard price for a one-week stay at an overnight camp was in the area of 2,700 - 4,000 CZK and compared with other selected countries included in this study, the Czech Republic along with Slovenia and Japan ranked among the countries with the lowest price for children's camps. It is assumed that in the cases where the respondents reported the price of their camp at 1,000 - 2,000 CZK, they were participating in the day camp. Although the day camps do not require the overnight accommodation and food consists only of lunch and snacks, in many cases their prices are comparable with the traditional over-night camps.

In addition to the comparison of the results obtained from younger and older children, a comparison was also made of the responses according to the place of residence (urban or rural). Due to the location in which the data was collected (a limiting factor in the study), the measured values cannot be considered relevant. Nonetheless, when

comparing these two groups of the respondents, significant differences can be identified in some of the criteria. One of the differences can be found between the children from the city and from the countryside in terms of the likelihood they will participate in a camp, more specifically, among those children who would not attend the camp, but would like to. This was mainly true for children from the countryside.

In May 2014, the STEM/MARK Research agency conducted an online survey on children's summer camps. In contrast to this research, which was primarily focused on discovering the basic criteria which the parents (or children) use in choosing the camp, this study focuses on the actual evaluation of these variables by the participants themselves. Nonetheless, in terms of the types of camps and sources of information about them, this pilot study corresponds with the results published by STEM/MARK (2014) examining a sample of the online population - the group of parents with children aged 6-15 with 277 respondents. The results of this research also showed that 42 % of the parents of 6 - 15-year-old children had intended to send their children to the camp and further 19 % had been considering it. In 32 % of cases where the child did not attend camp, the decision was made by the child himself/herself.

From the review of literature, it is clear that children's camps have so far fallen outside of the frame of interest of tourism research. In Europe there have not been any published studies that dealt with children's camps as a part of the tourism industry. For this reason, it is not possible to compare the results of this study with some international findings. Tourism among children and youth is a subject of research in the Calypso program, which is focused on social tourism in Europe and defines one of its target groups to be families (children, parents and/or grandparents) which are certified by their country's authority as facing difficult social (financial, personal and/or disability) circumstances. Individual Country Reports from the Calypso program, however, do not contain specific details concerning children's participation in the camps (Gombitová, 2010).

## Conclusion

Travel is a significant part of children's lives and they are an important segment of the tourism market. Even if the children are not themselves direct customers (those who buy the product), as writers such as Gram (2006, 2007) have confirmed, they often participate in making decisions concerning tourism. Despite this fact, research relating to children in travel and tourism is quite rare. As Small (2008) states, it is possible to say that children's travel is mostly absent in tourism research. Children's camps represent a special category of tourism products for young clients. For children they represent an opportunity to spend a part of their holidays away from their parents in the company of other children under the supervision of adult camp counsellors or instructors. The offer of children's camps is constantly expanding and they are becoming an interesting entrepreneurial activity even if they are organized by commercial as well as non-profit organizations. In response to the lack of research dealing with this topic, the pilot study was organized to evaluate children's summer camps from the perspective of their partici-

pants – school children from the Ústí nad Orlicí Region – and the results are presented in this article. The research was conducted on a total of 479 school-aged children. The results show that summer camps are very popular among children, and more than two-thirds of the children have attended a camp at least once. One fifth of the children did not attend any camp, but wanted to. Only 10 % of the sample never was to the camp and did not want to go. The children's level of satisfaction with their camp experience was also high. Only 10 % of the children did not enjoy being at the camp. The results also confirm that there is a great "diversity" among the organizers of children's camps – both commercial and non-profit organizations. The children most often took part in the camps organized by the scouting organizations or sports clubs. In both cases, these were institutions that the children participated in during the year. This demonstrates a link between their all-year-round leisure activities (especially participating in groups or clubs as parts of children's organizations, leisure centres and sports clubs) and their participation in the summer camps. Children's camps are also extremely diverse from the point of view of their thematic focus, which predominately focuses on sport and physical activities. Services provided at children's summer camps differ significantly from the services provided to other target groups of tourists. Children are mostly accommodated in the tents and cabins. Most of the camps children attended lasted two weeks. Children's and parent's main source of information about camps is information provided directly by the organizations in which the children participate. This is then followed by the recommendations of friends.

This pilot study examining the information about the summer camps provided by their participants, 10- to 13-year-old students in elementary school classes in the District of Ústí nad Orlicí, demonstrates the importance of children's camps as a tourism product. These products have a number of unique features in terms of their providers (organizations), their focus, services and duration, as well as how they communicate with potential participants-children. As a target group, children represent a market of segment which has been up to now neglected in tourism research, and it is the topic that is currently quite significant and offers great potential for further research.

According to the data from the Czech Statistical Office, in the school year of 2015/2016, a total of 880,000 children were enrolled in elementary schools, and these can be considered the main target market for children's camps. It is clear that this is a market that offers great potential. For the organizers of the camps it is important to take into account the specific qualities of children as a target group: first, it is the issue of children's satisfaction with the camp, along with their safety. For some families the price of children's camps poses a barrier to participation. "Social tourism" and "tourism for all" includes families with children in the category of groups often excluded from tourism. In this context, programs should be established so that they could allow all children to participate in tourism. Support for children's participation travel in the Czech Republic, including the participation in children's camps, can be described as marginal and unsystematic. Support for children's travel, however, should be approached in the same way as it is with the travel of the elderly. The presented case study is only a pilot study and cannot aspire to present completely representative data covering the entire target group.

The issue of children's participation in the camps as one of the typical forms of tourism is extremely important for the understanding of the current state of tourism. Thus, it is important to collect data on the participation of children in the tourism sector which can offer results leading to further comprehensive research on children's travel.

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