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AGROTOURISM IN THE PODHALE REGION (VILLAGES OF BIAŁKA AND BUKOWINA TATRZAŃSKA EXAMPLE)

Abstract: Among numerous recreation forms practised in the Podhale region, that of rest at the highlander's farm shows a considerable tradition. The paper concerns the agrotourism developed in two Podhale villages, those of Białka and Bukowina Tatrzańska, and presents changes in the agriculture and settlement due to this type of tourism.

Key words: agrotourism, rural tourism, agriculture, organisation, Podhale

Introduction

Tourism is a traditional and basic function in Podhale, showing various forms in this region. Its development level is different in particular communities and villages.

In two discussed localities, those of Białka and Bukowina Tatrzańska, both the rural tourism and the agrotourism were developed. It is not easy to distinguish those activities without detailed studies and discussions on delimitation criteria. The tourist service, offered by a local society, should be confronted with natural values of the given area, its land use, technical infrastructure, man power resources in holdings and with agricultural production orientations.

For the enriching of the Podhale numerous villages, considerable has been the abroad work role – mostly in the United States. Those incomes were invested the housing, the land purchasing and the agricultural work mechanisation. Thus structural changes in the agriculture occurred. Due to the discussed incomes the tourist infrastructure was developed, houses were modernised, yards – ordered, bicycle tracks, tennis courts, ski lifts and even saunas were built.

In the 90s, in the period of Poland's economic transition, farmers from Białka and Bukowina Tatrzańska doubled their efforts in order to adopt their farms to tourists needs. Most of them offer nowadays at least 10 rooms, with 3 beds in each – in total, 30 places per farm. But this lodging stock, developed due to a considerable input, is actually used

only partially. All over the year, only several percent – maximum 20% – of those places is occupied, rather during week-ends. The tourists usually come on Friday to spend in the village Saturday and Sunday – but the third day afternoon most of them is leaving.

The rooms are fully used only during the weekend between Christmas and the New Year. Actually in Poland 2-week children holidays are organised in two separate terms, thus highlanders let their rooms twice, for 4 weeks of those holidays. This is the second period when all the rooms are occupied. After, the average use of the local lodging base amounts maximum 1/5.

1. Tourist Characteristics of Białka and Bukowina Tatrzańska

Białka shows the pattern of the mountains chain village type, but its houses are located only on one, western side of the Białka River. It is caused by history – in the past along the river passed the frontier. The Spisz Region, lying eastward of Białka, belonged then to Hungary. Białka is stretched at 7 km along the valley, with its farmsteads situated at altitude of 650-750 m, while the fields and forests of the village reach nearly 900 m a.s.l.

Physiographical conditions of Bukowina Tatrzańska are different. This village is not situated in the river valley as the previous one – but on crests, belonging to southern part of sub-Tatras region, called the Spisko-Gubałowskie Foothills (Pogórze). There are several farmstead clusters, like separate villages. Their site on the mountains crests, lower than ranges limiting the whole village from west, protects them from prevailing west winds. The altitudes vary at Bukowina Tatrzańska from 740 to nearly 1000 m. This is the area difficult to be built-up, and to be equipped with the technical infrastructure. The building of roads is considerably expensive.

Both discussed villages have a long tourist tradition. At Białka Tatrzańska live some 2000 people. There are about 500 houses, of which 420 (usually in the farmsteads) are populated. Nearly in 300 houses (70%) there are rooms for tourists. Each family has 20 places to let, in average. It means that in the whole village nearly 6000 tourists can stay the same time.

Bukowina Tatrzańska is the greater village, having 2800 inhabitants in 750 houses, situated mostly in the highlander farmsteads, too. Of those, 60% have more than 10 beds. According to the author's research, 400 farms have in average 20 places in each. Other families have less, usually several. Therefore Bukowina Tatrzańska can receive at least 8000 tourists at the same time – 2,5 times more than its population number. But, similarly like at Białka Tatrzańska, this abundant lodging base is used fully in the winter season only. The greatest attraction of Bukowina Tatrzańska is skiing. In the 90s about 20 ski-tracks were built, equipped with ski-lifts, artificial snow installations, etc. At Białka about 15 ski fields were prepared, also illuminated, and some of them snowed artificially.

The tourist arriving to this part of Podhale in order to practice ski sports, usually choose rooms in the houses the closest to the ski-lift. They want to use this installation until late night hours – and to have a short distance to cover, to the farmstead where they have meals and rest. Thus the farmsteads lying close to the ski-lift are the most attractive and their rooms are always full during the children winter holidays and the winter week-ends. The remaining ones, more distant from the ski-lifts and the ski tracks, are less popular.

If one compares the situation of the 70s and 80s with the actual one, will find that the summer tourist season is nowadays much shorter. Before it began just after the 20th June (the end of the school-year) and lasted to the end of the summer children holidays. The rooms were fully used. In September came in the mountains pensioners, to use lower, postseasonal fees for lodgings in each room type. Nowadays the latter recreation form is too expensive for those people, thus the summer season is shorter at least at one month. One must add to it the above mentioned fall of a tourist frequency in summer.

2. Agrotourism in the rural tourism

In the detailed consideration on the tourism geography problems arises the question whether the discussed recreation service, offered by the local population, should be classified as the agrotourism. Of course, the tourist service has the long traditions in this part of Poland, but its actual forms are both effects of the socio-economic transition, lasting over the decade and of Western ideas of the new income source searching by the formerly agricultural population. In the market economy arising in Poland the agrotourism is not shaped yet. But the tourism activity at Białka and Bukowina Tatrzańska can be treated as the agrotouristic one. The basic criterion is that the discussed activity is led in the country and by farmer families. The agriculture also began to fit to the tourist needs and is continued with a greater care for landscape aesthetics. The yard and adjacent fields are well-kept, pastures are fenced, clods – made carefully, meadows – mowed in proper time, and a hay is dried on “ostvias”, wooden constructions typical for Podhale. There is no abandoned lands, from which thistle seeds could spread all over the green dominates.

The agricultural production no matters much nowadays. In both discussed villages soils are usually thin and stony, thus classified to the poorest quality classes. Nevertheless, they supply cattle and sheep with a sufficient quantity of the meadow hay, and horses – with oats from the arable lands. Potatoes are not sown because they are bought in other villages, situated in the lower, plain parts of Podhale.

In the small agrotourist farm the typical orientation of the agricultural production is the cattle breeding, that for meat. This orientation is the less labour-consuming one than the milk production. There are usually 1-2 (seldom 3) milk cows in the farm. The milking and the milk processing are the time-consuming activities, which had to be led systematically. Therefore the fattening type of the cattle breeding dominates actually.

Also the poultry breeding is less popular. The cereal output was reduced, thus the highlanders have no wheat grain – the basic hen feed. If there are 10-15 hens only, the fowl yard for them is not kept. The poultry should not have access to the yard, which must be clean because of the tourist staying in the farmstead.

Over 700 m a.s.l. only the cereals sown in spring are planted – mostly the oats. Its seed is the horses feed, a straw is used as a barn litter. In the rotation of the arable cultures the potatoes are seldom, because their cultivation is hazardous at this altitude – and is too labour-consuming. On the other hand, the reduced horse population cannot be used to cultivate space between potato rows. The farmer family, occupied with tourists, has no time to earth up manually the root crops.

Thus the inhabitants of Białka and Bukowina Tatrzańska buy potatoes usually at the villages of Gronków or Krempachy. Prices have been very low for several years. The crop rotation is actually very simple. Only the oats and the clover are sown, alternatively. The clover is the companion crop for the oats. After the year or two of the clover planting, the whole field is sown with the oats – for the next 1-2 years. This cycle is then repeated.

Vegetables planted close to the farmstead can satisfy the family needs and those of the tourists – but only partially. Because of the mountain conditions, these are only carrot, red beets, onion and garlic. The secondary role of the vegetables is also due to the fact that garden beds should be cultivated just in the period of work connected with the tourist stay.

Lastly the vegetables became available all the year round – and are rather cheap. It is easy to buy them in the cities of Nowy Targ or Zakopane – also at Bukowina Tatrzańska there is the grocers' shop. But an origin of those vegetables is not always clear. Wholesale dealers purchase them in the vegetable stock in Cracow. They are grow up and well-shaped, being planted probably in the plantation lying in Cracow suburban zone, in those of Igołomia-Wawrzeńczyce. This area has the fertile soils and the long tradition of the vegetable farming – but lies close to the Sendzimir Steelworks, in the west wind corridor. Therefore the tourist from Cracow resting in the Tatras are probably fed with the vegetables originated from the same polluted area as those they eat at home, during the rest of the year.

In the future the vegetables originating from the “organic” farms, marked by the special certificate, will be more and more demanded in Poland. Such the farms are organised also in the mountains, in the zones free of the industrial pollution. For the time being, the solution can be the vegetable planting under plastic tunnels. But it is rather improbably, especially at Białka, where simply lacks the space by the farmsteads. Nearly all plots within the settlement zone are built-up. Each family tries to build the second house, with the rooms for tourists. New settlement belts would need the branch roads to be traced, the operation uneasy in the mountains.

3. Agrotourist farmsteads

An average agrotourist holding in both the discussed villages covers some 3 ha, of which the built-up plot does 10-15 a. There are the house and 3-4 farm buildings. For the arable lands falls no more than 1 ha – 1/3 of the total holding area, while the rest is consisted of the meadows or pastures. Only some highlanders have forest – usually several tens a.

Such the holding is divided into several plots – sometime 10 or more. Most of them forms the belt, 8-10 m wide and even 1 km long, being a remnant of the primordial field pattern, while the remaining plots are dispersed all over the village.

The main crops are oats and clover, the secondary one – the potatoes. In the field closest to the house the vegetables are planted. Winter crops can not be sown on those altitudes.

The farmsteads of the agrotourist farms are similar to others. But the houses are greater, containing the tourist rooms. Nearly 2/3 of those houses are built of brick – the traditional wooden ones are less and less like in the whole Podhale region. Roofs are made of sheet, tile or eternit.

The house dimension depends on its age. The houses built in the 70s and 80s show nearly square projection, being 10 m long and 9.0-9.5 m wide. Thus their floor area amounts 90-100 m².

Nowadays some of the rich highlanders build greater structures, used as lodging houses. Their families are specialised in the tourist service. Such the house is the additional building in the farmstead, built just for the tourists, with rooms, on 3 floors. Its owner lives with his family in the separate, older house.

But most of the houses is used both by inmates and tourists. The ground floor, or one wing is used by the owner's family – or they live in the adjacent, old houses.

In a basement there is a kitchen, with the dining room nearby. On the first floor, between the tourist rooms, there is the recreation room, with a table, TV set and comfortable armchairs. The tourists rest there, read, play games, watch TV. According to the room standard, on the 2nd and 3rd floor there are bathrooms of the common use, with WC. In some houses those facilities are built in the particular rooms.

Tourist requirements are different, of course. For one important is an inner wooden architecture, the room equipment, a window and balcony exposition – for other matters more the own bathroom. The common bathrooms are well-equipped and much more greater than the individual ones, squeezed in the room corner.

The new house has usually 8-10 rooms for tourists, 1-3 beds in each. Only in the greatest rooms there are 4 beds, but often those are let to 3-person families. The tourist number per room depends on the family size.

Also the owner family part of the house is arranged carefully. The well-to-do family does not have to spare and keeps the proper living standard. In the new house the owner occupies the most comfortable part. If the old house is rebuilt, the first ready section is that for the inmates. Often the various outhouses are added, or a loft is adapted to the residential function. Sometimes the old building is disfigured, but due to an additional space the family improves its housing conditions and has more rooms for the tourists. Thus the farmstead physiognomy is changed, together with its spatial pattern, created by past generations. The new house is not of the classical highlander style, the outbuildings are in discordance with the old structure, and a beauty of the traditional farmstead and its environs is lost. In such the way the economic factors spoil the aesthetic values of the landscape of the countryside.

Beside 1-2 houses in the agrotourist farmsteads there are the farm buildings, due to them the discussed farm is similar to the remaining ones in the village. But there is no great buildings, necessary in the specialised, market agriculture. There is usually a cow-shed, for several heads of cattle or sheep kept in such the farm, with the separate part for the horse. Moreover, there are: a wooden barn, a garage and a cart-shed.

The cow-shed, usually made of brick, is 7 m long and 6 m wide, thus its area amounts 35-40 m². The barn has a rectangular shape (12x9 m) with the wide, 4-meter



Fig. 1. Site of the discussed villages

gate. Nearby there is the cart-shed, which dimensions were adopted to those of the cart, with the entrance-gate 3.5 m wide. Actually many of the cart-sheds were rebuilt into the garages with fire-proof floor for cars and tractors.

But the building spatial pattern is still traditional, considering the road course in relation to the farmstead and to the prevailing wind direction.

Of 10-15 a farmstead plot, 3-5 a is covered by the buildings, the farm ones and the house. The rest falls for the yard. The owner keeps it ordered, with the considerable lawn share. The inner roads and the building bypassing are covered with gravel – or, lastly, by pitches. Within the yard there is a small play ground for the tourist children, with seesaw and other facilities for the youngest children – but there is no pontoon plastic basin for children bathing because of the water deficit in both discussed villages, not canalised yet. There are also flower beds. At Białka due to the common work of several families, the recreation bicycle tracks from agrotourist farms to the Białka river were prepared.

Conclusion

Most of the tourists arriving to the agrotourist farms are those who have come since many years to the same highlanders. They are more and more numerous, because they recommended the place they visited in summer or in winter to other family members, to their neighbours or to their colleagues. Only 20-25% of tourists are the accidental ones, who hope to find the free room in such the village.

The tourist service promotion is just starting here. The first folders on those villages and the particular agrotourist farms are published. But the inhabitants should co-operate, to organise and to popularise the agrotourism and the rural tourism together. The folders published every year inform not only the regional tourist market but the national one. Another opportunity are tourist fairs, due to them the tourist information reaches urban consumers, in Poland and abroad. But the common activity needs a proper economic conscience. For the time being, in most of the cases those actions are individual.

The first attempt to the co-operation was the action of Białka inhabitants made in order to enrich the winter tourist offer of their village. None of over ten ski-lifts fulfilled the more advanced skier needs because the ski tracks were too short and too gentle. Thus many such tourists left this village and move to that of Kluszkowce, where the new ski-lift was built on the longer slope, with the ski tracks of a greater denivelation. The ski fields at Białka could satisfy only beginners. To improve this situation, nearly 50 highlanders organised a company to build the expensive chair-lift, 1.5 km long, from the village centre to Mt. Kotelnica. Along this lift the long ski track, showing the 220-meter denivelation was opened – and satisfied the advanced skier requirements. The total cost of this project, realised in 2001 – the artificial snow installation included – amounted several million zlotys.

Another tourist attraction often suggested by the highlanders from both discussed villages are horses. During the past 20 years their population decreased considerably, but the horses are still numerous, especially at Bukowina Tatrzańska. In this village the highlanders transport tourists with their carts to the Morskie Oko Lake. The carts cover the road from Łysa Polana to the vast parking, served to the 90s by buses and situated near the lake. This 7-km road, showing the 400-meter denivelation between Łysa Polana (Palenica Białczańska) situated about 1000 m a.s.l. and the Włosienica parking, doing some 1350 m, the tourist can cover on foot only – or by the highlander cart. The discussed track is served just by highlanders teams from Bukowina Tatrzańska, Małe Ciche, Murzasichle and Brzegi – in total by some 50 carts, equipped with movable awnings, each drawn by two horses. A two-way passage last 1.5-2.0 hours, thus the given team can make several tours a long summer day. But the horses must be changed because of the considerable denivelation. At Bukowina Tatrzańska there are several tens of such drivers, working in shifts. Most of them admits that this is the good additional income. In spring, 2001, a fare costed 20 zlotys per person. Usually over 10 tourists are transported by one cart. The driver is obliged to buy a licence in the City of Zakopane, administration defining his duties. He is obliged, for example, to clean the road.

In both discussed villages the horses of the agrotourist farms are used also on the spot. Very attractive for the tourist are the passages by highlander carriages and the carts, and for children and youth – the riding on horseback. The riding horses are kept by the greatest agrotourist farm owners, where 50-70 tourist is admitted at the same time. At Białka there are about 20 such objects, being rather the lodging houses than the typical agrotourist farms. In some of them there are even the saunas. But this facility is seldom – there are only several saunas in both the villages.

It is worth to add that at Bukowina Tatrzańska over 10 enterprises built in the 70s great holiday centres for their staff. Most of those objects is still used but some are nowadays a private property.

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Agroturystyka na Podhalu (na przykładzie Białki i Bukowiny Tatrzańskiej)

Streszczenie

Tradycyjnie główną funkcją gospodarczą Podhala jest turystyka. Przybiera ona na tym obszarze różne formy. W poszczególnych gminach i miejscowościach ma też zróżnicowany poziom rozwoju.

Białka Tatrzańska i Bukowina Tatrzańska upowszechniały dotąd zarówno turystykę wiejską jak i agroturystykę. Dokładne rozgraniczenie tych działalności nie jest łatwe. Wymaga to podstawowych badań i dyskusji kryteriów delimitacyjnych.

W pomnażaniu dochodów wielu wsi podhalańskich przeznaczanych w dużej mierze na rozwój zaplecza turystycznego nie małą rolę odgrywały od dawna rozpowszechniane tu wyjazdy zarobkowe za granicę – głównie do Stanów Zjednoczonych. W latach dziewięćdziesiątych w dobie transformacji gospodarczej kraju zarówno rolnicy Białki jak i Bukowiny Tatrzańskiej podwoili swoje wysiłki w przystosowywaniu swoich zagrod do przyjmowania turystów. Poszerzone w drodze poważnych nakładów zasoby mieszkaniowe nie są jednak obecnie dostatecznie wykorzystane. Pełne wykorzystanie kwater jest tylko w okresie od Świąt Bożego Narodzenia do Nowego Roku oraz podczas zimowych ferii w szkołach.

Porównując sytuację z lat siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych z tym, co jest obecnie trzeba zwrócić uwagę na wydadne skrócenie letniego okresu wypoczynkowego.

Dawniej zaczynał się on tuż po 20 czerwca i trwał, najczęściej z pełnym wykorzystaniem kwater, do końca wakacji szkolnych. We wrześniu przyjeżdżali w góry emeryci, korzystając z obniżonych posezonalnych opłat we wszystkich rodzajach kwater. Obecnie emerytów nie stać już na sfinansowanie tej formy rekreacji. Dla kwaterodawców oznacza to skrócenie, co najmniej o 1 miesiąc, czasu przyjmowania gości w swoich domach w sezonie letnim. Do tego dochodzi jeszcze ogólny spadek frekwencji w ruchu turystycznym o tej porze roku.

Choć tradycje wypoczynku na wsi w tej części kraju nie są nowe, to jednak współcześnie kształtowane formy tej rekreacji są wynikiem przemian gospodarczych kraju ostatniej dekady lat i wpływu przejmowanych z Zachodu wzorców poszukiwania dodatkowych źródeł dochodu przez ludność związaną dotąd z rolnictwem. W nowej rzeczywistości gospodarki wolnorynkowej agroturystyka poszukuje dopiero miejsca do swego rozwoju. Na tej drodze kształtować się będzie jej współczesne oblicze. Działalność turystyczną w Białce i Bukowinie Tatrzańskiej można nazwać agroturystyką. Główną motywacją w tej kwalifikacji jest to, że podejmowane przedsięwzięcia związane są ze wsią. Organizatorami agroturystyki są rodziny rolników. Samo też rolnictwo rozwijane jest pod kątem potrzeb przyjmowanych w zagrodzie gości. Działalność rolnicza prowadzona jest jednak w głównej mierze w trosce o estetykę krajobrazu. Dzięki temu otoczenie domostw i sąsiadujące z nimi pola są uporządkowane. Produkcja rolnicza odgrywa w tym układzie drugorzędną rolę.

Większość wypoczywających w gospodarstwach agroturystycznych to stali goście, którzy od wielu lat przyjeżdżają do domów tych samych gospodarzy.

Reklama usług turystycznych dopiero się zaczyna. Potrzebna jest współpraca między rolnikami. Do zbiorowego działania niezbędna jest jednak odpowiednia świadomość ekonomiczna. Na razie, w większości przypadków są to indywidualne starania.

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