

PRACE GEOGRAFICZNE, zeszyt 111

Instytut Geografii i Gospodarki Przestrzennej UJ
Kraków 2003

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THE NEED TO ESTABLISH EDUCATIONAL NATURE TRAILS IN THE REGION OF PODHALE

Abstract: This article develops the concept of educational nature trails as one form of didactic tourism dealing, in particular, with their origins, and presents regional aspects of the notion as well as the need to develop educational tourism in Podhale. The author focuses on the role educational tourism ought to play in the region and presents its scope, functions and objectives. In this presentation, research of didactic tourism is highlighted along with the impact of such tourism on various fields: ecology, tourist geography, history of culture and art history. The aim is to emphasise the need of performing research in the field of educational tourism, simultaneously showing its practical usefulness leading to the design of educational nature trails.

Key words: educational tourism, educational nature trail, interpreting

Educational Tourism: scope, functions and objectives

For its increasing appeal and general acceptance as a form of satisfying human needs related to free time, tourism is not used sufficiently as an educational tool, intellectual stimulator or a culture-building force. One of the most vital issues of the modern world is that of a moral and intellectual match between the human being and the challenges of our civilisation. A multi-faceted personality development conditions man to be able to oppose moral, social, political and ecological crises. Tourism understood as a form of human activity, a human experience, is one of those factors which can contribute to developing one's personality and being better prepared for contact with other people, cultures and environments (Turos 1990).

Educational tourism has many roles. Education in tourism is a complex, multi-stage and multi-factor process making children, adolescents and adults ready for proper understanding and pursuing of tourism treated as a form of a cognitive activity. This education aims to provide knowledge about tourism, its origins, traditions, experiences, institutional and organisational forms, as well as about patterns in tourism,

allowing for combining various needs: cognitive, aesthetic, emotional, recreational and those related to relaxation.

The goal is to provide children, youth and adults with knowledge and patterns owing to which pursuing tourist activities can be rational or effective, and simultaneously develop one's personality and spur them towards self-perfection and self-education.

The educational function of tourism consists, first and foremost, in extending and confirming human experiences, teaching us how to learn about and respect other people and cultures, and showing us the cultural unity of the world. It teaches man discipline and co-existence in a group, builds a sense of responsibility and practical skills, allows us to personally visit sites of great historic events, monuments of civilisation and culture, as well as developing ecological awareness and comparative thinking and sensitisation skills. In this presentation, emphasis is also placed on research in tourist education and its importance for various fields: geography, history of culture and art history. The aim of this study is to present research needs in the field of educational tourism and its practical utility leading to the design of educational nature trails, since treating tourism solely in terms of economy, health or recreation results in a simplified understanding of the issue and overlooks its highly vital educational and culture-building functions.

The article is a summary of the issues developed in the author's MA thesis and continued in her study towards a doctoral dissertation. This presentation has come into being as the result of an analysis and attempt at perceiving tourist traffic as an educational and culture-building phenomenon, as well as arousing intellectual, cognitive and aesthetic needs that tourism can satisfy.

The notion of educational trails

The search for effective forms of educational tourism should pertain to both its organisers and participants. It is highly important for walks in tourist areas to arouse patriotic feelings in young people and extend their humanist and historical knowledge, as well as having an impact on their interests (Turos 1990). The notion of educational nature trails highlights their cognitive and didactic functions, where the attainment thereof takes place alongside the learning process.

In Poland, the first educational nature trails were instituted as a form of learning about nature. Extending one's knowledge about the natural environment became a need related to developing ecological awareness. Over the last thirty years, this need has appeared as a consequence of new risks, not just in regard to nature, but the entire environment of human life. The first descriptions of educational nature trails for the Kampinoski National Park were prepared in the 1970s by M. Ferchmin. At present, such forms of visiting nature have become very popular and have been established across Polish national parks (Ferchmin 1993).

In order for educational nature trails to function properly, several elements are required. A guide is necessary, who leads groups along specially marked sections of a trail. A guiding brochure should be drafted for each trail and should include general information as well as the trail's profile featuring a description of particular assets appearing along the trail. A well-edited guide ought to include the following: information

regarding accessibility, a map featuring a plan of the trail run, information on the difficulty level, information on the natural assets featured on the trail, a description of the trail containing a detailed depiction of successive stops, drawings, photographs and a glossary of difficult terms. Natural assets lying along the trail should be marked with plaques displaying their descriptions. A trail's attractiveness will be enhanced if special didactic features are present. These can be: topographical exhibitions, soil outcrops, rock viewing points or vantage points.

The duration of a walk along a given trail should be within a lesson unit, i.e. 45 minutes (and multiples thereof) but not more than 3 x 45 minutes, as the visitor's absorption skills are limited.

It is vital that a theme trail be well designed, which facilitates the learning process. The selection of a trail and its theme are the key elements determining the character of a trail. An enhanced interest in nature trails has given rise to the idea of popularising trails relating to other subjects, i.e. the history of architecture, culture, art, or achievements of great persons. Teaching regional history is inherently linked to learning about sites, human history and achievements. Each walk in a given area can result in new interesting insights and sensations. Educational nature trails are an option for individuals and groups of tourists: schools, history teachers, art historians, naturalists and lovers of a given area.

The practical organisation and design of an educational trail in Poland comprises the following stages (Ferchmin, 1990):

1. Collection of start-up materials related to a given area and absorption of specialist literature;
2. Field sighting: appreciating the natural and cultural assets of an area and local principles governing nature protection (a detailed penetration of the area);
3. Mapping the natural assets (placing them onto a detailed map, their spatial placement, and developing the preliminary outline of a trail);
4. Verifying the run of a trail;
5. Developing the trail's final design and its guide publication.

Depending on the themes featured, educational nature trails bear such names as natural, ecological, cognitive, landscape, biographical, etc.

Trail themes can be divided into two main groups: natural (forest, botanical, dendrological, faunistical, geological, geographical, or landscape trails) and historical-cultural (historical, archaeological, cultural, or biographical trails).

Interpreting

The origins of Polish educational nature trails lie in *interpreting* (English), developed on the basis of research performed in the USA since as early as 1916.

According to the definition developed by the National Park Service of the USA, *interpreting* is a wide-ranging educational activity the aim of which is to expose the importance, existing interdependencies of and between research problems, issues and interests, through the use of organisms and elements of the inanimate environment, which exist naturally in a given area (without harmful interference) and through an active, direct experience by means of pre-defined, best-selected *interpreting* techniques (e.g. an educational trail) and an interpreter (e.g. a guide) (Tilden 1976).

In 1977, F. Tilden's book "Interpreting our Heritage" laid the foundation for and explained the principles of the art of *interpreting* as an element of ecological management, design, planning, protection, and, primarily, an educational activity performed in protected areas and, eventually, American national parks (Tilden 1976).

Tilden was the first to use the term *interpreting* and explained its meaning by writing that "*interpreting* is the addition of a vital meaning to the recipient's experience." He stressed the fact that "we need *interpreting* as people are losing the meaning, importance, and, most importantly, respect towards nature, cultural heritage and the surrounding world" (Tilden 1976).

Freeman Tilden fought for ideas of sustainable development and broadly understood ecology, then in its infancy, as well as making us realise that, without understanding and respecting nature and cultural heritage, we lose the meaning of humanity and the ability to ensure its continuity.

Tilden summarised work and research conducted in the USA since 1916 relating to education in national parks, ecological protection and the beginnings of the art of *interpreting*.

Interpreting creates a type of group or individual education having the aim of active environmental education based on the protection, comprehension and appropriate use of natural and cultural resources present in a given area.

Rather than transferring pure information, an interpreter's goal is their personal, individual interpretation of an issue through the active involvement of the audience and forging an excellent rapport with them, and making optimal and flexible use of the resources present in a given area to that end.

Interpreting must include an element of an "active, pure experience".

The key characteristics of the art of *interpreting* are its flexibility and "environmental empathy" (or a deep understanding of the environment and existing interrelations). *Interpreting* is thus a type of craft, an art rooted in wisdom, passion, love, understanding and harmonious co-existence with nature. *Interpreting* is not an end in itself, it draws on what it is based on: *interpreting* came into being owing to nature and for nature.

In his book, Tilden presents six main working principles of *interpreting* (Tilden 1976):

1. *Interpreting* must be performed in as natural as possible conditions, it is a "pure experience";
2. information is not interpretation, interpretation is "spelling out the truth" based on information; interpretation contains just an element of information;
3. *Interpreting* is a craft combining numerous other factors and techniques and its important, yet not only, aim is to educate;
4. The main goal of *interpreting* is to provoke (foster curiosity, thinking, comprehension skills); *interpreting* must be a "spark", which will inspire a man to search and create;
5. *Interpreting* should embrace the entirety of a given issue and not focus on details as, according to John Burnet, in order to be wise, one needs more than extensive and detailed knowledge: the ability of holistic understanding and empathy are crucial, and
6. as a flexible art, *interpreting* must be tailored to its recipient (interest group, age group, absorption faculty) and the current capabilities, absorption and capacity, of a given area.

Interpreting is not art for art's sake but art for the environment's sake, thanks to the environment and for man who lives because of nature. A challenge for an interpreter is to guess the reasons, motives, hidden dreams and ambitions of tourists, as well as to design an interactive task on the basis of the above. A participant must feel a direct dependence, a link with the area they are visiting, the issue at hand, and he/she must be given a chance to assume the role of a participant of a given experience, thus satisfying any hidden ambitions. An ideal adjustment to the participant's expectations and interests, as well as getting them involved, are conditions of an excellent presentation. An interpreter should thus be an expert, enthusiast and psychologist in one.

At present, the art of *interpreting* is most advanced and practised in American national parks. It is there that all *interpreting* techniques are utilised, from traditional, perfectly designed, marked and composed educational trails with a guide (interpreter) and a brochure, to longer, individual or guided, educational trails visited on foot, horseback or a bicycle, as well as specialist trails and those employing audiovisual tools.

The interpreting activity is a result of thorough and detailed work and research conducted in a given area. Before an educational trail is laid out in a national park, the following tasks are performed (Dawson 1995):

1. Stocktaking of the area and defining goals;
2. Drafting a plan and report (cost analysis, preliminary assessment of environmental impact);
3. Design:
 - a) selecting best *interpreting* technique
 - b) tourist facilities provision
 - c) staff training and preparation of appropriate materials, and
4. Monitoring, analysis and assessment of environmental impact, assessment and modifications of the draft.

The table shown below includes the main types (techniques) of *interpreting* for an educational trail along with key strengths and weaknesses (Tab 1.).

The need to establish educational nature trails in the Podhale region

Interpreting is a new, conscious, wise and mature, approach towards educational, natural and sightseeing tourism. In Poland, although educational tourism is becoming an increasingly attractive and generally accepted form of environmental education, it is still not employed sufficiently as a factor of conscious, profound intellectual activation (with the exception of a few national parks). The next stage should be the use of broad American experiences and the attempt to introduce the art of *interpreting* in our country and eventually in the area being the subject of this presentation's research interest, i.e. Podhale.

Podhale (a sub region of the Tatras and Podhale) covers the Tatra Mountains, Spisko-Gubałowskie Plateau, Orawsko-Nowotarska Valley and Pieniny Jurassic Limestone Belt. Podhale is an historical-ethnographic land located in southern Poland, in the catchment area of the upper Dunajec River, excluding areas lying on the right banks of Białka and Dunajec rivers, below the mouth of the Białka. Podhale covers the middle section of Podhale Valley, entering the Tatras in its southern part (called

Tab.1. Educational trail as an *interpreting* technique

Educational Trail	Technique (type) of <i>interpreting</i>	Main advantages	Main disadvantages
„Personal” Techniques	An educational trail with an <i>interpreter</i> throughout the trail	The interpreter’s personal contact with the audience	It calls for thorough staff preparation
„Impersonal” Techniques	An educational trail with an <i>interpreter</i> present at defined stops (“ <i>interpreter on demand</i> ”)	The <i>interpreter’s</i> personal contact with the audience	No continued contact with the audience; less control
	Brochure, Guide with a map	It may be used during before and after visiting the trail	No control, no contact, no proper interpreting! a brochure = piece of rubbish
	A brochure and specialist explanatory marking on the trail	An effective technique for individualists and specialists	No control, no contact, no proper interpreting! a brochure = piece of rubbish
	Detailed and explanatory marking on the trail	See above large accessibility of particular sites, visit flexibility	No control, no contact, no proper interpreting, possible vandalism
	A trail with audiovisual features	An improvised trail with an interpreter, good quality	No flexibility (a vital aspect of good <i>interpreting</i>), costly, possible vandalism

Rocky Podhale), and the Gorce and Podhale ranges to the north. The Podhale region featured human settlement already in the early 12th century, mainly in the north, where Vallachian, Ruthenian, Slovak, Hungarian and Polish influences merged. The nomadic Vallachian element played an important role, having arrived in the region from the east along the arch of Carpathians and assimilated over time. Podhale saw the development of a separate shepherds’ folk culture of native highlanders. Almost the entire area was the property of the crown (Nowy Targ and Czorsztyn districts). In the 1500s, starosts (local governors) established granges in Podhale, which resulted in the vehement opposition of Podhale highlanders: 1630-1, under the command of Marshall S. Łętowski (against starost M. Komorowski); an uprising in 1651 under A. Kostka Napierski and then in 1670. The second half of the 1800s saw a new interest in Podhale by artists and scientists, which influenced the region’s recreational and tourist functions. Podhale features age-old rich original folk culture with its dialect, costumes, literature, music, glass painting, wooden construction, rich decoration of household furniture and elements, customs, mainly connected with shepherds’ activities. The culture of Podhale has fascinated and inspired many artists and writers, as well as composers, sculptors and painters.

As regards its nature and culture, Podhale is highly unique in comparison to other regions of Poland. The richness of the area is the result of various factors and conditions.

Areas featuring valuable nature and culture have a special significance for national and international tourism.

In this case, it is necessary to skilfully reconcile environmental protection and the principles of sustainable development. Sustainable development in tourism reconciles the needs of present-day tourists as well as those of the natural environment and local communities in tourist-penetrated regions while simultaneously protecting and reinforcing opportunities and prospects of further development. This pertains mostly to the management of all the resources present in a given area in such a way so as to ensure the attainment of social, economic, aesthetic and educational goals without disrupting the cultural integrity, necessary ecological processes, biological diversity and life-supporting systems of tourist regions. Sustainable tourism, a form of which lies in educational trails functioning in harmony with local natural, social and cultural environment. In this way, the Podhale region will not fall prey to tourism development but will, in fact, be a beneficiary thereof. The conscious drafting of a tourist development plan in accordance with the principles of sustainable development will contribute to deglomering tourist traffic from areas where natural absorption and tourist capacity have been exceeded (the Tatra National Park) as well as to attaining the above-specified goals.

Region-specific aspects associated with the development of educational tourism in Podhale are absolutely necessary for the protection of this naturally and culturally valuable area and for the skilful management thereof, as well as for ensuring its sustainable development and promotion.

Podhale lies in the southern natural and tourist zone (Weigle 2001) which, along with similar areas in other countries, is a constituent part of the European System of Natural and Tourist Zones. That is why the appropriate development thereof may be an important activity in the field of broadly understood protection and rational use of biological diversity. One of the objectives of establishing a southern natural-tourist zone is education aimed at enhancing the public's awareness as regards natural and cultural assets and the necessity of protecting and strengthening them, as well as protecting local natural richness, promoting it and making it available (including laying out and developing the area for various forms of sightseeing and nature-exploring tourism) (Weigle 2001). A detailed delineation of these zones should be closely linked to the Ecconet European Ecological Zone, which is in the process of being created, as well as to other international-cooperation programmes being implemented. The Podhale region is also of supra-regional importance as it lies within the "East Carpathians" International Biosphere Reserve.

The natural and sightseeing value of Podhale is complemented by elements of its landscape and culture. Its natural assets are the region's unique landscape, diversity of its geology and topography, a number of natural attractions, the presence of protected areas (Tatra National Park, the Bór nad Czerwonem reserve). Apart from the earth sculpture (alpine, karstic), the region's attractiveness is influenced by its vegetation, while a complete catalogue of mountainous flora may be seen within the Tatra National Park. The flora of the Tatras is rich in relics of the pre-glaciation and glaciation ages and many species are endemic. Podhale's landscape curiosities also include preserved fauna including the chamois, the marmot and the grizzly bear.

Among the cultural elements, one should note shepherds' traditions, folklore, and monuments of local culture and history. The sub region is inhabited by highlanders of Podhale, Orawa, or Spisz, who cultivate shepherds' traditions. The most interesting manifestations thereof can be found in museums in Zakopane, Niedzica or Szczawnica, and the open-air folk museum in Zubrzyca Górna. The area's most treasured monuments of architecture are the wooden churches of Dębno, Grywałd, Harkłowa, Łopuszna and Zakopane, and castle ruins in Czorsztyn or Niedzica. The characteristic style of Witkacy should also be mentioned, represented by regional villas in Zakopane as well as retained old settlement layouts of Podhale villages with one of them, Chochołów, a valuable monument of folk construction skills. Many locations in Podhale have been visited by famous people (Goszczyński, Staszic, Chałubiński, Kasprowicz, Karłowicz or Makuszyński). Podhale was also the location of an active resistance movement; there are many commemorations to human tragedy (e.g. Palace in Zakopane).

Podhale features many tourist trails, the most interesting being those running within the Tatra National Park, Chochołów Uprising Trail and Kostka Napierski Trail, numerous paths connected with the lives and activity of eminent people or a kayak tourism trail on the Dunajec River.

It is crucial that, in the area in question, abounding in unique natural and cultural assets and having many tourist functions, the overloaded locations, where capacity and absorption indexes have been exceeded, be eased through appropriate tourism development and design of educational trails. The tourist use of Podhale must be adjusted to the region's optimal capacity. This regulation must include the division of the area into zones, isolated on the basis of their sensitivity to various types of pressure, channelling tourist traffic along prepared trails and routes, as well as within reception facilities, and limiting the number of visitors according to their capacity.

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O potrzebie tworzenia ścieżek dydaktyczno-krajoznawczych na Podhalu

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia koncepcję ścieżek dydaktyczno-krajoznawczych jako jedną z form turystyki edukacyjnej a szczególnie genezę ich powstania (sztukę *interpretingu*) oraz prezentuje regionalne aspekty rozwoju turystyki edukacyjnej na terenie Podhala.

Autorka koncentruje się na roli turystyki edukacyjnej jaką powinna ona pełnić w regionie, przedstawia jej zakres, funkcje, cele.

Ważne miejsce w niniejszym opracowaniu zajmuje problem badawczy turystyki edukacyjnej i jej znaczenie dla poszczególnych nauk: ekologii, geografii turystycznej, historii kultury i sztuki.

Celem artykułu jest podkreślenie potrzeby badawczej w zakresie turystyki edukacyjnej na Podhalu i ukazanie zarazem jej przydatności praktycznej, która prowadzi do projektowania ścieżek dydaktyczno-krajoznawczych. Idea ścieżek dydaktycznych jako forma turystyki edukacyjnej łączy w sobie bowiem ochronę cennych przyrodniczo i kulturowo terenów z ich aktywacją i promocją, oba te aspekty realizowane mogą być na terenie Podhala w ramach szeroko pojętej edukacji środowiskowej i rozwoju zrównoważonego.

Podczas pisania artykułu posłużono się materiałami i literaturą anglojęzyczną z dziedziny sztuki *interpretingu* i edukacji środowiskowej (*Camozzi A. 1994, Dawson L. 1993, Tilden F. 1976; Gross M., Trapp S., Zimmerman R. 1994;*) oraz polskich opracowań dotyczących zrównoważonego rozwoju (*Borejszko E. 1999; Jędrzejczyk I. 1995, Kalinowska A. 1992*), projektowania ścieżek dydaktycznych, turystyki edukacyjnej (*Ferchmin M. 1993, Turos L. 1990; Zarząd Zespołu Parków krajobrazowych Krosno 1999*).

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Translated by LETTERMAN Ltd Translators and Interpreters

