

## **Cultural tourism trails as part of sustainable tourism – the tool of shaping the greenways and protection of ecosystems in Gorce**

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### **Introduction**

Gorce are part of Carpathians – Western Beskidy, Mountains. They are located in Southern Poland, ca. 25km north of High Tatra Mountains. They stretch on approximately 550km<sup>2</sup>. Gorce attract tourists with varying terrain and, most of all, some of the most beautiful open wide views of surrounding mountain chains. The relics of the original Carpathian Forest and the landscape of deeply cut mountain streams are also very valuable. Impressive rock outcroppings and not-yet-explored, numerous caves can also be found here.

The phenomenon of Gorce comes from the unique landscape, shaped by both nature and by man, originally for shepherding, then for agriculture, and nowadays – for cultural tourism. Natural-cultural landscape of Gorce is getting more and more appreciation. On the level of voivodship strategies the landscape it should be becoming the basis of understanding between tourism organisations, touroperators, inhabitants and ecologists. Said landscape should be protected in an integrated, wholistic and not particular, manner; according to the ideas of Jan Gwalbert Pawlikowski, Walery Goetel, Zygmunt Novák, Gerard Ciołek, Janusz Bogdanowski and Maria Łuczynska-Bruzda.

An example of combining protection and making the landscape available is the idea of creation of cultural tourism trails not through mechanical setting of trails, but by previously creating the conditions favouring the protection and safety of shared natural and cultural resources, by preparing the corridors of special usage and management of said resources.

### **Background/ Literature Review**

The subject's literature of this article can be divided into three main areas: connected with the natural, cultural and touristic aspects.

— Research on natural environment of Gorce was conducted by A. Medwecka-Kornaś (1970), S. Michalik (1967) et al. The changes in natural environment and the changes of upper montane zones halls are investigated by N. Tokarczyk. The problem of the importance of ecological corridors series is being researched by, among others, I. Kawecka.

The research on cultural values are focused on:

- Researches on forms of timber construction was carried out in the Gorce Mountains in the 60s by: E. Dąbska-Śmiałowska, A. Nikodemowicz, W. Sliwinski, and were related mainly to shepherd's huts. M. Kornecki described values of the late-gothic and baroque timber churches around the Gorce (Kornecki, Brykowski, 1984) Researches from the 2000s were continued by employees of the Institute Landscape Architecture – J. and K. Wielgus, within the framework of student internships and Project Leader+. Researches related to cultural heritage were conducted by Gorce National Park employees, including Marek Kurzeja.
- The research on Gorce landscape were started in the 1970thies by P. Patoczka and J.W. Rączka and continued under the Leader + project in years 2007-2008 by J. K. Wielgus.
- Research on tourism in the Gorce National Park conducted: M. Semczuk, K.Popko-Tomasiewicz, E. Strauchman. The issue of sustainable development of mountain areas in the Gorce was described by B. Zawilińska, M. Sobala, J.K. Wielgus.

Ten years ago in the Rural Cultural Centre in Ochotnica Górna, with the support of the local Branch of the Society of the Podhale Highlanders and the Institute of Landscape Architecture the concept of Wallachian Culture Trail was born. The main objective of this civic initiative is to reverse the commonly used practice of restricting only to the labeling and describing the trails, in favour of leading the tourists through the most interesting clearings, shepherding building monuments, places of pastoral grazing and rituals related to shepherding. The initiative combined a number of NGOs, which in 2010, during the I-st Carpathian Forum in Rajcza have signed the Carpathian Agreement „Carpathians Our Home”.

The initiative „Wallachian Culture Trail” has been awarded the main award for the Ochotnica Dolna District for elaborating the concept of Sustainable Development of Environment Friendly Tourism in the Development of Carpathians, the program as conducted by the UNEP/GRID Centre in Warsaw, Ecopsychology Society and ANPED Northern Alliance for Sustainability, with support of Island, Liechtenstein and Norway, and co-financed with the funds of MFEOG and Norwegian Financial Mechanism.

### **Goals and objectives**

The goal is to create an alternative tourism, guaranting the preservation of natural values and the mountains' identity. According to the assumptions, the path of self realization of the tourist in the environment doesn't come from its

use, but by co-existence with it. Mountains are treated non-subjectively, as an environment for education, enchantment and entertainment (3xE in the Mountains) and not subjectively, as a backdrop, or even „field training”, a tool to fulfill the tourist’s egoistic ambitions.

The idea of the trail is to allow the tourists to travel across an authentic landscape, shaped from the Middle Ages, across the preserved shepherding trails. The idea of the route refers to achievements, identity and culture of the Central and Eastern European pastoralists who, migrating, became the bearer of values. Today it is reflected in the common characteristics of highlanders Carpathians, in naming, architecture, music, in the landscape, as well as in the implementation of cooperative activities today, referring to the organization of the Wallachian common management. For the tourist, on the other hand, the trail is supposed to be a safe, marked route of the highest educational value.

The trail’s idea, in accordance with the provisions of the Carpathian Convention, the Landscape Convention and the idea of sustainable tourism fits in well with the activities of the Gorce National Park in terms of sharing and education. Noteworthy actions include the Park’s actions to counteract the dispersion of tourist traffic while improving the standards of tourism infrastructure. The Wallachian Culture Trail also refers to elements of small architecture and visual identification system to the elements used in the GPN. It is of great landscape importance, give the tourist a sense of security and comfort of using the trail it counteracts his dispersion and, at the same time, prevents his excessive channeling – limiting him to the routinely chosen tourist trails with great amount of tourist traffic

The trail, in its idea, fills the hole in the touristic trails in Gorce, as a way of balancing between mass tourism of main Gorce trail and tourism taking place outside of the field road trails; it is attempt at creating an alternative for the rapidly developing exploration via quads, motocross and off-road cars in areas protected *de iure* by, for example, the Nature 2000 protection, but *de facto* devoid of any protection due to the property law interpretation.

## **Methods**

The basis for the delineation of the trail was the fieldwork involving inventory logs of meadows with shacks, view openings, the forest analysis, also in terms of invasive and pioneering species overgrowing the clearings. Aggregation and valorisation of data using the method of the analysis of the architectural-landscaping enclosures (WAK Methode) responding the meadows and settlements of the historic rural structure. Determination of value and specification regarding the enclosures allows for the determination of value

and processes of changes. In wider context, a system of meadows was analyzed as a series of natural-cultural open spaces with the most beautiful mountains panoramas in Poland, which can be interpreted as sequences of architecture-landscape enclosures. The problem of Wallachian Culture Trail was also the subject of a numerous students' works and master thesis of the 1st and 2nd degrees. These works were regarded as a great workshop, which aimed to improve the methods of a recognition of processes taking place in the landscape and determining the actions leading to the improvement of landscape.

## **Results**

Gorce is a part of Western Carpathian Mountains. Carpathians are the largest European mountain range going through the territories of seven countries – Romania, Ukraine, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Slovakia and Czech Republic. It stretches for 1500km, and the area it takes is 210 thousand km<sup>2</sup>. The Carpathian Corridor runs through Gorce. It goes from Bieszczady, through Pieniny, and to the Tatra. The need for setup and maintenance of ecological corridors aims to protect the valuable Carpathian forests from defragmentation and isolation. The forests creating the Carpathian Corridor consists mostly of *Fagus Carpaticum* and *Lower Alpine Forest*, creating a unique forest landscape. Ecological corridors are not only migration routes of animals, but also a shelter and a place to obtain food. Animal migration corridor does not mean a continuous wide belt of trees – animals need a mosaic of diverse habitats that would be intertwined together to form a bio diverse path. In this diverse landscape the game has the ability to feed and move freely. The main factors limiting the continuity of ecological corridors are the areas of high density of buildings, transport infrastructure and insufficient forest density between the corridor's areas.

Gorce, thanks to their unique geographical location, posses unique scenic and landscape values. Characteristic in Wallachian settlement is the formation of numerous isolated farms in higher parts of the mountain. It has created a distinctive cultural landscape of Gorce: grazing halls, farmland extending from the bottom of valleys towards the peaks, small fields near to houses. In higher parts of the mountains in a pastoral landscape shaped by Wallachian settlers are dominating wooden buildings associated with the functions of grazing sheep, cows and oxen, water intake, huts. Common grazing was characteristic for the economy Gorce. In the mid-nineteenth century it was enough area for agricultural and pastoral purposes and the process of creating new clearings stopped. Around 1840 it was established last clearing in Gorce - Podmostownica. It is an important year, which ends the over 400 year long process of formation of agricultural-shepherding landscape.

The grazing clearings are habitats of about 130 species associated only with clearings. All of the Gorce clearings' vegetation are related to the shepherding and mountain man culture. Forests cover about 65% of the Gorce. Characteristic of Gorce is the presence of a multi-storey forest formation, but only in their natural parts. The multi-storey forests are immune to unfavorable climate conditions, weather, and pest attacks. A part of Gorce Mountains are guarded by the Gorce National Park Established in 1981.

### **Discussion**

Urbanization and transport of mountain areas, especially in valleys is a danger to animal migration. The share of rural households profits come from tourism: agricultural households, maintenance of tourism trails [Sustainable Carpathian Tourism Development Strategy 2014]. The profits from tourism reach from 30 to 100% of all the profits of a household. When it comes to Gorce the biggest problem are not the big district or voivodeship roads, but the many trails going through the forest, which are often used by tourists not following the trails. The tourists penetrate going by foot, but also increasingly often using the motorcycles, quads, sometimes even off-road cars. They have a heavy negative influence on the forest areas and also disturb the animals in their natural habitats. The implementation of a trail in a form of mowed clearings creates not only a harmonious landscape, but also makes animal migration easier. The Wallachian Culture Trail becomes a possibility of not only maintaining the historical landscape characteristics, but also for an increase of natural and rural living standards.



**Figure 1. Modern shack on the Magurki clearing, create according to principles of the Wallachian Culture Trail, 2014 [ fot. J. K.Wielgus]**

Ideological approach to protection and sharing of landscape varies from closing the mountains for tourists to of deglomeration and voluntarism of tourist traffic. The correct systems of connecting and bordering the valuable areas of Gorce by the holistic serving for a nature, for inhabitants and tourism by the green, natural and cultural trails seems to be the key to dissolving this critically problem .

## **Conclusion**

A mountain Commune of Ochotnica – the largest village located 600 years ago by the Wallachian Law – became “a great laboratory” of the idea of the sustainability, realizing by the trail of the cultural tourism. On the Magurki-Borsuczyny massive development has begun in the form of ecological mowing and, lately, pasturage, implemented by the gazda (“The master farmer”) from Ochotnica – Józef Królczyk, and his family. They are really the “Gorce Pioneers of the sustainable management and tourism”. In June 2010 a first herd of sheep since 60 years ago was allowed to one of the traditionally mowed clearings, Magurki-Borsuczyny, which has initiated an actual implementation of the Wallachian Culture Trail idea. A marked trail fragment was chosen, and on it three shacks were built "Wallachian Cultural Trail" is therefore a method of building a sense of own heritage in a broader cultural context. It allows to compare even small local activities to the European scale.

Projected effects of the implementation of the Wallachian Cultural Trail are as follow: disperse tourism by uniform coverage of mountain areas with tourist attractions, promotion of municipalities and development of services, growth and consolidation of income for the residents involved in handling tourism, support and restoration (where necessary) of traditions, customs, handicrafts, activation of youth; commitment and concern of young generation about the place of birth and residence, restoration of traditional activities in selected areas, grazing sheep and cattle, rebuilding shelters, recovery overgrown glades – it is beneficial to ecosystems, biodiversity and local products, equipping hiking trails with the correct forms of landscape elements: small architecture, terraces, towers, tables, information points, educational materials, etc., in order to make it more attractive for tourists [Środulska-Wielgus 2012]. Realized in 2015, 19 km long section in Ochotnica Dolna is the pilot trail and the subject of research on the relationship between landscape and tourism. It as a creation of tourism space with preservation of natural and historical values. It is made more important by the fact that in the year 2016 Ochotnica celebrates the 600-th founding anniversary.

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