

1. Contemporary aspects of shepherding – between economy and cultural heritage.

Some cases from the Silesian Beskids (Poland)

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1. Introduction

Cultural heritage, whether tangible or intangible, is always the heritage of someone. There is no heritage without awareness of its existence and the actions that result from it. The process of inheritance is a selective reception, during which the heirs accept what constitutes in their opinion a value, while other elements are depreciated, rejected. It is difficult to imagine a situation when all the goods created as the heritage of a generation could be accumulated and passed on to the next generation. Therefore, the process of inheritance should be interpreted as a medium of intergenerational communication through which social order and ideas about the world, as well as individual and group identities, are shaped (Smith 2016). It means that, the heritage does not belong to the order of the past, as it is usually interpreted, but to the present and future (Lubaś 2017, p. 17).

This statement shifts our interest to the process of heritage production, in which not only fragments of the past are reproduced but also given value. Consequently, steps are taken to transmit, preserve, defend and protect heritage. The result of these actions is a particular mode of cultural production in which something new is created by referring to the past (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998).

Behind these activities there are institutions with very different levels and scopes of tasks, whose purpose is not only to fulfill the duties of heritage preservation, such as archiving or popularization. An important aspect of

these activities is the development of tourism. The increased movement of travelling and discovering new places contributes to an increase in the tourist offer, which is unique. Local heritage has originality, desired by tourists, and therefore it becomes a destination.

The development of travelling, in fact of tourism, additionally intensifies the tension between globalization, which homogenizes the world, and the uniqueness of the local heritage, which in this context becomes a key identification element. These relationships result in the phenomenon of glocalization, which – on the one hand – makes the local heritage adjust to the standardization requirements of mass tourism, and on the other hand – triggers the need for its preservation and for emphasizing its uniqueness. Keeping balance between these areas is a challenge to all participants in the tourist market – both tour operators and the depositaries of the natural or cultural heritage who design the touristic offer (Salazar, 2010).

2. Aims of the research

The main aim of this article is to analyze the heritage resources related to the shepherding of highlanders living in the Silesian Beskids, which in the last decade have been used in the development of local tourism. For many years, the natural and cultural resources of the Silesian Beskids heritage, which are discussed in this study, have been an important element of the marketing strategies which drive the development of local tourism. What is more, highlighting the uniqueness of the goods which are to attract tourists gives an impulse to reconstruct or search for local identities of some places or to attribute new identifications to them.

My first working hypothesis is: the global growth of tourism has contributed to the return and use of many elements of ancient pastoral practices that were not used at all, or to a negligible extent. Tourist interest in these naturally attractive areas has brought about the need to expand

tourism offerings. The cultural resources of the pastoralist heritage have become an interesting tourist offer and increase the number of tourists.

The second hypothesis is: the development of tourism and the increase in the interest of tourists contributes to the growth of interest in own heritage among the local community. In compliance with the common belief that nothing enhances attractiveness more than other's desire, being in the scope of interest of touristic offers may be of key significance for the local identity. This might become either the basis for strengthening the bonds with the place and its cultural resources or a starting point for reflection on the attitude to the native heritage. Identified with tradition, this heritage is a specific axis around which an identity is shaped both on the individual and group level.

The commonly undertaken initiatives for the development of local communities which use the resources of cultural heritage are activities supporting the social capital and strengthening the identity. The presence of some elements of the heritage in a marketing strategy of a particular region (especially at the stage of brand building or developing cultural tourism) enables contemporary people to discover "anew" the essence of their culture (Węglarska, 2013, pp. 89–98).

It should be remembered that natural heritage cannot be understood merely as a product of past generations. This is a resource consisting of tangible and intangible correlates of the activities of past and present generations – and, as such a resource, it is unceasingly reconstructed, comes to being anew and is supplemented by the experience of consecutive depositaries. As a dynamic category, it changes forms, functions and contents – yet, owing to it, the continuity of intergenerational transmission is maintained.

In many regions, cultural heritage and local uniqueness have currently become one of the key elements of the tourist strategy, which involves the strongly articulated community's need for identification with their own

culture. The practices analysed in this study seem to confirm those theses.⁴⁰

3. Shepherding heritage in tourism - sources

The heritage of shepherding culture is an object of tourism conducted in rural areas and is mostly aimed at the familiarization with the relicts of former agrarian culture or the experiencing of its still “living” aspects. This touristic interest ranges across almost all spheres of life – from types of economy, through cuisine, to intangible heritage. These resources are presented by open-air museums, museums or thematic routes, which involve individuals or private economic entities that offer recreation along with the presentation of the regional heritage.

Conducting such an activity provides chances for the continuation of farms, often inherited from one generation to another. The changes taking place in each sector of social life necessitate the search for new solutions – also for agriculture, which faces many challenges of the current reality. The globalized free market and the necessity to respect the legal normalizations hinders the prosperity of agriculture, especially in the case of small and medium size farms. At the same time, the society which is aware of many threats, enforces increasingly higher ecological and ethical standards that ensure a sustainable development of rural areas and agriculture. The difficult situation of farmers has been improved by the support of EU subsidies, which has been of key significance for the viability of shepherding (and not only) in the Silesian Beskids.

The combination of running a farm and tourism provides a possibility of developing both rural territories and the activities in production and

⁴⁰ For the needs of this article, the empirical material was collected during the qualitative field studies. It was obtained with the use of ethnographic tools – participant observation and unstructured interview. The research was carried out in 2015-2019 in Beskid villages - Koniaków, Jaworzynka, Istebna.

services, which may financially support the residents. It also becomes a particular way of travelling and spending leisure time in the country environment, the natural values of which improve health, physical and mental condition, as well as familiarize with the regional culture (Mikuta, Żelazna, 2004). As mentioned before, what is an important determinant of the development of such tourism is the potential of the natural and cultural heritage. Making use of its elements in running agrotouristic farms, e.g. traditional ways of food preservation, makes the offer more attractive. Such an element of cultural heritage, typical of a particular place or region and shaped by the tradition of many generations, becomes a recognizable brand or product and allows one to distinguish it from others. Including the suggestion for an educational path into tourist activity additionally increases these values. Pedagogical internships oriented towards the acquisition of knowledge in practice as well as interesting diversified curricula simultaneously enhance local agriculture, which becomes an interesting option, especially for the owners of small farms. An educational offer may be an attractive and really satisfying occasion to obtain income (it often becomes the main source of livelihood) and – in a broader view – may make the recipients (especially children) understand what country life is or may make them aware of what work ethos is and what the value of human work is. Among the tangible goals of such activities, the educational, recreational and touristic goals can be mentioned. Therefore, the addressees of the offer of educational farms are different groups: pre-school children, primary school children and individual tourists, mostly families with children. For adult participants, such a proposal additionally has an emotional dimension – it brings back childhood memories and images from the past (Marciniak, 2015, pp. 70-81).

The aforementioned circumstances sparked off the possibility to link shepherding culture with tourism. The natural heritage of the Silesian Beskids and its deeply rooted local practices formed (owing to Vlachs' settlement) by shepherding gave an impulse to undertake new challenges. What has become the field of activity is the heritage dating back to the

very early 14th century, when the Vlach population was moving westward from the Balkans through the Carpathian Arc, gradually coming to the region of Babia Góra and the Żywiec Beskids, finally to reach Silesia and Moravia in the 15th century (Dobrowolski, 1970, pp. 89-97).

The economy typical for Vlach nomads was based on cattle and mostly sheep shepherding in high mountains in summer. In winter, shepherds went down to lower territories with more friendly climatic conditions, where it was easier to find food and get in contact with the local people dealing with agriculture. Under the influence of the established relationships, shepherding was gradually transforming towards the limitation of migration. Shepherds settled in particular places – as temporary summer and winter locations, they chose the slopes of Cieszyn Silesia, populating such villages as: Łomna, Koszarzyska, Bystrzyca, Tyra (currently in the Czech Republic), Istebna, Koniaków, Jaworzynka and Brenna. The environmental conditions of the Silesian Beskids enabled the development of the conducted economy, which became the direct cause of the cultural separateness of this region and its inhabitants, lasting until World War I. The activities based on sheep farming and the processing of products made from sheep (cheese, leather and wool) dominated the local lifestyle (Kiereś, 2019, pp. 21-75). This pertained both to highlanders' material culture and its social and spiritual dimension (Malicki, 2004).

The decline of shepherding economy occurred gradually. This process determined the development of agriculture in sub-mountainous territories, which reduced the pasture area. At the same time, textile and weaving industry started to develop in the region. Mass production was related to the growing supply of wool and other raw textile materials, which were provided from both home and abroad, as local individual farmers were unable to fulfil the needs of industrial production. Cheaper factory materials replaced old ones and the technological secrets of their processing got disused. After World War II, the traditional type of shepherding ceased to be profitable, which in the next decades eliminated

shepherding from highlanders' everyday life. Only scarce presence of sheep reminded of their former significance in this region.

4. Contemporary shepherding in the Beskids

Reintroducing of shepherding in the Silesian Beskids took place over several last years, owing to the private initiative of local activists and some enthusiasts of the cultural heritage of the mountains. This idea was additionally enhanced by the regional policy of the European Union, supporting the local natural and cultural resources. The key point in the development of shepherding in the region was the programme prepared by the local government of the Silesian Voivodeship entitled "Program Aktywizacji Gospodarczej oraz Zachowania Dziedzictwa Kulturowego Beskidów i Jury Krakowsko-Częstochowskiej – Owca Plus [The Programme of Economic Activation and Preserving of the Cultural Heritage of the Beskids and the Polish Jurassic Upland – A Sheep Plus⁴¹"]". Its major goal was to restore shepherding in the Beskids through the following tasks: conducting extensive sheep shepherding in the upper parts of the Beskids, which favourably influences plant communities and the preservation of biodiversity; a revival of the professions of herdsman and shepherding assistant; the reconstruction and preservation of shepherding architectural facilities; cherishing the local heritage through wooden old shelters; the development of craftsmanship and the processing of sheep and goat products; the popularization of lamb, mutton and goat products and meals; the development of tourism, including broader offers of agrotouristic farms and local restaurants,

⁴¹ The programme of reintroducing shepherding into the Beskids "A Sheep Plus" had two stages: the first in 2007–2009 (Resolution of the Silesian Voivodeship Board No 1664/90/III/2007 of 12th September, 2007), and the second in 2010–2014 (Resolution of the Silesian Voivodeship Board No 635/360/III/2010 of 23rd March, 2010): <https://www.slaskie.pl/content/program-owca-plus> Accessed: 26.05.2017.

which might enhance the local community's activity⁴². In the Silesian Beskids, the undisputed leader of the undertaken revitalization is Piotr Kohut from Koniaków and the main point which integrates the undertaken initiatives is the Shepherding Centre in Koniaków.

The return of shepherding to the Silesian Beskids has resulted in many different activities, also related to the touristic development. Without a doubt, the improved infrastructure and building new facilities within "A Sheep Plus" project have enhanced hiking and biking recreation in the mountains. The growing presence of tourists triggered the necessity to develop the gastronomical and hotel facilities. What developed along with the accommodation base were the services associated with organizing leisure time which raised the attractiveness of a touristic stay. Among the places which provided a rich touristic offer, there is the above mentioned Shepherding Centre in Koniaków⁴³, which carries out various activities. One of them is organizing workshops – therefore, it is placed on the Route of Educational Farms of the Silesian Voivodeship. It consists of rural farms focusing on touristic activity, enriched with a special educational offer. The main idea here is not only a possibility to have a rest in the natural setting, but also the contact with animals, which can be cared for and fed. The farm conducted by the Kohut family is open the whole year and is a complex kept in the style typical of old-style architecture and construction in the Beskids. The complex consists of the *gazdówka* (a rich farmer's house in the Polish mountains), the "Na Szańcach [On the Ramparts]" shelter house, and obviously the Shepherding Centre⁴⁴. Its building is divided into two zones – there is a farm with sheep and lambs downstairs and a small conference room upstairs, where some photographs are exhibited to show the life on grazing pastures and the traditions of

⁴² Quoted in: "The Programme of Economic Activation and Preserving of the Cultural Heritage of the Beskids and the Polish Jurrasic Upland – A Sheep Plus", pp. 32–64.

⁴³ The website of the Centre for Regional Product in Koniaków: <http://seroscypek.pl/> Accessed: 22.10.2019.

⁴⁴ The accommodation facilities are being built as well.

shepherding. There is also an educational path dedicated to the processing of sheep fleece and wool. The permanent exhibition is a background for the workshops that are held here, which are aimed mostly at school children and youth. The themes are focused on two dominating motifs: wool (the cycle What do sheep give us? Sheep wool – valueless or invaluable?) and cheese (the cycle Who has sheep has cheese). While those meetings, one can familiarize not only with many aspects of shepherding, but also with the folk costume and the dialect of Silesian highlanders, because the speakers are recruited from the local community. In the neighbouring Highland Shop, one can buy sheep milk products, local handicraft and tourist souvenirs.

What has been more and more popular as a tourist attraction over the years in the Beskids is an innovative idea of reconstructing the customs and rituals associated with sheep shepherding. Among them, there is the mixing of sheep (sheep owned by different farmers are merged into one big herd) and taking them to grazing pastures (in Polish called *redyk*⁴⁵). Another important custom is the return of sheep and shepherds from pastures (in Polish called *rozsod*, *rosod* or *lossod*), which takes place not later than on St. Michael's Day (29th September). Customarily, this was the time when sheep farmers took their sheep and paid due money to their herders and shepherds (Kiereś, 2019: 21-75). Today, these events are important for touristic development and for the local community. They are the magnet which attracts not only guests but also autochthonous residents. The events take place alongside the shows presented by folk groups and folk bands, some prayers led by priests, popular science lectures and many shows presenting how cheese and sheep milk whey (in Polish *zentyca*) are produced as well as how local handicraft is made.

⁴⁵ This custom is associated with setting both the distribution of cheese and the costs of commonly run undertaking. Depending on the weather, it takes place between the 25th April and 25th May. Currently, its organization, if only possible, is associated with the so called “long May weekend”.

Apart from these shepherding celebrations, there are some cyclic events organized for tourists during holidays, all of which are aimed at the promotion of the Silesian Beskids heritage. The most popular among them are the Shepherding Fair, the Lace Days or “Carpathian Tastes – Time for bryndza [sheep milk cheese]!”, which all take place in Koniaków.

What seems to be an important element of tourism in rural areas is the multidimensionality of touristic experiences. This refers not only to a particular sphere of life (e.g. plant growing), but also to its other more or less related aspects, such as terminology (or language as such or its dialectal varieties), clothes, dishes, etc. Quite frequently within a touristic offer, one can get a dose of folklore, religiousness and rituality. The multidimensionality of such an experience enables reaching the goal – tourists’ feeling the daily life of local people during their participation. It seems interesting that this feeling is so strong and intense that it enhances the sense of discovering something new and absolutely unknown. It is this perspective in which the “exoticism” of a particular place is perceived. Therefore, cuisine is an intrinsic element of the touristic offer. The main attractions are sheep or cow milk products, including *zentyca*, *bundz* (cheese based on sheep milk, produced in a similar way to *oscypek*, but not smoked), *bryndza* (cheese which after a period of maturing is conserved with salt), *redykałki* (sheep milk cheese in the shape of animal figures) and *oscypek*, which has become a synonym of the culinary unity of Carpathian shepherds. Mutton and lamb dishes are increasingly popular, as well as some others commonly associated with highland cuisine – grilled *oscypek* with cranberries, *kwaśnica* (sour cabbage soup with smoked meat), highland ribs in cabbage, potato pancakes with *wyrzoski* (pork rinds), etc. What can be observed here is the process (present also in other forms of popularizing the cultural heritage of the Carpathian Arc) of unifying this legacy, also as regards cuisine. The same offered dishes are available in various mountainous places and they are accepted by tourists as typical of Polish mountains. Similar dysfunctions are noticed by Monika Golonka-Czajkowska in the archaizing and circumlocution-based styling in the names of highland dishes and meals.

In her opinion, “the well-developed menu of regional restaurants is an interesting reading itself, which can amaze both tourists and highlanders, not to mention linguists and culinary experts” (Golonka-Czajkowska, 2007, pp. 321-338). Thus, a new idea, to the implementation of which The Shepherding Centre is preparing, is the organization of a degustation kitchen in which workshops will be conducted of preparing traditional and innovative dishes based on Silesian highlanders’ heritage and local products.

While analysing the current situation of shepherding in the Silesian Beskids, a few aspects of its presence can be indicated, among which the economic potential and economic growth are quite significant. The reintroduction of shepherding in the Beskids gave birth to a reflective approach to shepherds’ heritage. A good economic climate for cultural tourism triggered a whole series of events – designing touristic products and services related to ecology and/or the unique heritage of the region. After all, a package combining holidays in natural surroundings with learning the natural and cultural values of the place is a well-tested way of spending free time (Marcol, 2016, pp. 119-141). Developing tourist needs generate other attractions and services and, in the context of the discussed shepherding, the list of the offered “products” is constantly growing. Today, they consist of the following: the Carpathian Mountains as a territory of (also mountainous) tourism; products from sheep milk, products made of wool, leather and wood; guiding services (Karpacki Gazda [A Carpathian Herder]); a cycle of events; facilities (shelter houses, inns); a tourist route (The Oscypek Route) and philosophy focused on cultural heritage, cultural ecology or slow life style (Sendyka, 2015, pp. 73–92).

As the above mentioned examples show, agrotourism largely contributes to restoring the former, natural environment and image of rural areas and, first of all, to the protection, preservation and promotion of the natural and cultural heritage. As a unique set of cultural goods (such as cuisine, costumes, architecture, rituality, etc.) supported by natural assets, it constitutes a value which in the globalized world should become a

determinant of the place – the place the advantages of which are undoubtedly appreciated in the current unified reality.

5. Beyond tourism

Both the natural and cultural heritage of the Silesian Beskids has always been a reservoir of diverse resources. Therefore, it is no surprise that emphasizing the cultural specificity and uniqueness of this place gave an impulse to intense educational, promoting and marketing activities. The surge of Vlachs' settlement, spreading through the highlands here in the 16th century, introduced the so far unknown shepherding and highland shelter economy, as well as separate artistic culture. For many decades, the legacy of sheep herding and the related symbiosis with the natural environment imposed the rhythm of Silesian highlanders' daily routine. A gradual reduction of this type of economy and civilizational changes decreased that influence.

Some invigorating trends towards a return to the values associated with shepherding industry and cultural heritage of mountain folk culture took place alongside the political transformations in Poland at the turn of the 20th and 21st century. At first occasional and non-formal initiatives turned into structures of economic entities, among other things the foundation "Pasterstwo Transhumancyjne (Transhumance)" came into being – its most spectacular activity was The Carpathian Redyk Transhumance 2013. The main goal of this project, which comprised many single tasks, was creating a social ecosystem – a network of collaboration among people who devoted their whole life to sheep herding and the cherishing of family customs that were passed down to next generations. From a broader angle, the project was a return to pastoral traditions of Vlachs' roaming along the Carpathian Arc, which resulted in the populating of the

mountain territories and in the rise of common mountain shepherding culture bringing the Carpathian communities together⁴⁶.

The leader of the movement for restoring shepherding in the Silesian Beskids is the already mentioned Piotr Kohut from Koniaków, whose activity resulted in the implementation of the project. The main point of this multi-stage undertaking was a journey of shepherds with a herd of three hundred sheep, with dogs, donkeys and horses through the territories of Romania, Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. This journey referred to the original route of Vlachs⁴⁷. The slogan of the project „The Carpathian Mountains connect⁴⁸” reflects the motives of the participants’ integration and their references to the community of highlanders – an imagined community. The narration built around

⁴⁶ Among many fulfilled tasks, the Foundation "Pasterstwo Transhumancyjne [Transhumance]" carried out the project: "Lato spotkań z kulturą i tradycją Górali Śląskich na pograniczu polsko-czeskim – LATO 2012 [The summer of meetings with the culture and tradition of Silesian Highlanders in the Polish-Czech Borderland – SUMMER 2012]", co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund through the Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia. A report from the events:

[http://www.redykkarpacki.pl/index.php?menu=projekty&j=POL&tyt=LATO GÓRALI ŚLĄSKICH 2012](http://www.redykkarpacki.pl/index.php?menu=projekty&j=POL&tyt=LATO_GORALI_SLASKICH_2012) Accessed: 14.09.2015

⁴⁷ The redyk lasted from the 11th May to the 14th September and the shepherds with their herds covered the distance of about 1350 km.

⁴⁸ This slogan is the title of the project: "Karpaty łączą – mechanizm konsultacji i współpracy dla wdrażania Konwencji Karpackiej [The Carpathian Mountains connect – the mechanism of consultation and collaboration for implementing the Carpathian Convention]" carried out in 2012– 2016 by Switzerland within the collaboration with new member states of the EU. The Carpathian Convention was ratified by Poland in 2006 and it was the second document in the global arena which protected a single mountainous territory. The main aims of the project were the following: protection of biological and landscape diversity, sustainable development of tourism, providing better access to information, creating a network for information exchange, ensuring social participation in implementing the Convention. The project was directed to local communities: self-governments, entrepreneurs and farmers, scientists, tourists, state services for protection of the natural environment and cultural heritage. See the project website: <http://karpatylacza.pl/> Accessed: 20.04.2016.

shepherding is full of emotions and nostalgic longing for the past rhythm of life and the heritage, which used to mark every day. Sheep are here just a pretext for a meeting that, as a consequence, integrates mountain people – shepherds, farmers, craftsmen, artists. This addresses deep relations of humanity with nature and the revival of highlanders' culture, which depends on its conditions. Mountain folk culture does not only consist of some popularized elements of the folk costume, language or cuisine, but it is a sort of deep philosophy in the spirit of post-humanism – the philosophy of functioning in tight integration with nature and animals. At the same time, this is a continuation both of the cultural heritage and of the honour for ancestors. On the basis of material media, the philosophy is reborn of the human living according to and in compliance with laws of nature. The unique set of cultural goods (cuisine, costumes, architecture, rituality, etc.) along with the natural wealth determine the place and become a value which in the globalized world is appreciated in the unified reality both by the local community and by visitors. Yet, this does not mean only the popularization of values of the regional heritage but also ensuring a sustainable development of mountain territories. In such activities, several platforms are combined but, among them, the most important ones seem to be those of useful character, which are aimed at restoring the possibility to earn through shepherding (animal products trade or tourism). Another goal of the activities consists in building a social capital based on the common shepherding culture. Shepherds appear here as a family, a lost community, dispersed over the time and divided by borders, and now it seems to merge anew, uniting through the same experience and toil of sheep herding and through the rhythm of mountain hiking. For modern shepherds, the ancestors' heritage is the imperative in their all activities, because they are aware that they are its heirs not owners. It is particularly significant that a contemporary sheep farmer does not only turn to the past, but also reacts to the challenges of modern times, making use of new technologies and ways of virtual communication. The experience of the toil of shepherding but also the benefits from being with sheep via the Internet makes shepherding an

element of the global world, similarly to the way tourism does this. Owing to shepherding, mountain territories have become an attractive destination for many tourists searching not only for the contact with nature and the legacy of the past, but also for a slow life.

6. Discussion

The cultural tourism develops as well, drawing from the tangible and intangible heritage. However, this process is determined by many factors resulting in a particular product the construction of which is based on some selected elements of the cultural heritage of a particular place, not on the reconstruction of the heritage approached as a whole. The (often arbitrarily selected) fragments of the reality, which have natural or cultural value and are attractive to a potential tourist, are attributed symbolic meanings. What is built on the basis of these elements are various social practices. This generates a very special relationship of ambivalent valorization between the depositories of the heritage and its tourist recipients. On the one hand, tourism brings about tangible material benefits, which – for a local community that “possesses” the desired attractions – may be a chance for increasing the living standards. Yet, on the other hand, intensive tourist explorations means interference into the cultural and environmental landscape, which often results in huge devastation of places and degradation of the social tissue (Graham, Ashworth, Tunbridge, 2000; Hoffman, 2012, pp. 153–166). The development of tourism focused on the participation in a particular community’s heritage brings an important effect – the ancestors’ legacy, which is a destination, comes to life and becomes a part of the reality experienced here and now. This is not disturbed by the fact that the heritage is mostly viewed in the categories of the past, archaism, and authenticity shaped in the distant times. The process of sharing and exploring the heritage for the needs of tourism elicits many aspects of its essence, such as: lasting and change or linking the past with the future.

The dynamics written into the constructive sense of cultural heritage is revealed in the act of its adapting to and interpreting for new needs related to tourism.

In this process, the group of recipients of a particular heritage is broadening. Obviously, using/interpreting/communing with it does not mean that tourists become depositaries of the heritage of the place which they “experience”. Yet, tourists take part in its reconstruction (in many cases on a long-term basis and with a lot of engagement) and, in this way, have influence on its forming. Thus, what is dealt here is a performative act in which both people presenting “their” heritage and the recipients of this product have influence (to a different extent) on its contents and form. The genuineness of the experienced reality, perpetuated in memories and souvenirs brought from trips, is an effect of the synergy of two types of factors: the authenticity frameworks constructed for tourists’ needs and the individualized needs of those to whom touristic impressions are directed.

The content-related setting, which is an immanent part of the touristic offer, is an important element of commercial strategies. The information which constitutes a kind of background for the suggested attractions enriches the tourist in an “appropriate” way with wildlife and historical or cultural knowledge of a particular place. This “appropriate” way must fulfil some rigid conditions of the message, which can be called a touristic one, as it is directly related to the designed ways of participation. The transferred knowledge should be relatively holistic, in the sense of taking into account the broadest range of factors which characterize the place or its selected aspects. At the same time, the message should be condensed. Its main quality ought to be attractiveness – the method of narration is to attract and highlight these accents which determine not so much the essence of the place but rather its intriguing tourist values. This is not a knowledge which always comes in parallel. What is dealt with in many cases is a configuration of facts which make up a tale, created for tourist needs, about the place. The reading of various guide books, leaflets or

other advertising media is an excellent material for the analysis of these issues.

There are no places without a heritage, but there are such places the heritage of which has not been told by anyone. Tourism is one of the activities which both uses the well-known narrations and finds the unique, so far undiscovered ones. It also gives an impulse for creating quite new narrations about places which might become a desired destination for contemporary people. This is the same in the Silesian Beskids – many aspects of their heritage constitute a field for tourist exploration and sensations, addressing both those who live near and those for whom this area seems to be terra incognita. Over many decades, the natural value, especially the mountains, and the shepherding heritage have attracted residents of the neighbouring territories.

7. Conclusions

The preservation and promotion of natural and cultural heritage is a duty of many institutions and, as numerous examples show, may become a task for agrotourism. This activity combines a possibility of ensuring conditions for sustainable development of rural areas with the protection of natural resources and preservation of the cultural heritage of many generations. At the same time, such a form of economic activity can ensure – and so far has ensured – the possibility to maintain agriculture in rural territories.

Additionally, the dissemination of the educational offer by rural farms is a promising direction in the activity which unites or supplements the functioning of agrotourism. This popularization fulfils the goal of increasing the income sources of villagers and the development of tourist and other services, which substantially influences the prosperity of local communities. In a broader perspective, this increases the level of education. In the current situation – when growing numbers of children (and often adults as well) have no or rather vague idea about the sources

of food and its obtaining, educational agrotouristic farms may bring about better understanding of the country and, in the future, may raise ecological awareness. This involves the need for protecting biodiversity, for sustainable exploration of rural areas and for activities aimed at preserving the natural and cultural heritage for future generations. Without a doubt, these are tasks which necessitate conscious management of this heritage.

Unfortunately, the educational and cultural activity conducted by agrotouristic farms involves reconstructing the model vision of the traditional rural culture, adjusted to commercial animation, often arranged by dilettantes. One of the products of such initiatives are the practices aimed at stimulating the process of revitalization of the regional identity based on the created interpretations of the legacy of many generations. The question can be raised what identity is meant here. Modified versions of folk culture, detached from the context or set in a new light, are a common phenomenon today. After all, in the mountains, one looks for highlanders, sheep and smoked cheese – no matter that the mountains are not the same...

While facing such a reality, it is hard to state that country tourism or, more broadly, agrotourism fulfils the tasks of documenting the heritage of the place which determines a regional identity. In my opinion, it does not have to do this. However, the reality created for the needs not only sometimes forges the image of the local culture, but also consolidates the effect of this forgery. The forms of spending leisure time in the countryside (with attractive natural values) combined with activities of cognitive and educational (!) values are popular destinations for schools and families with small children. In this situation, it is easy to omit the subtle borderline between the wish to preserve and promote the regional heritage and all that which results from entirely commercial reasons.

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