

The Recreational Function of the Dunajec River and the Pieniny Mountains in Transformation Dynamics of Natural and Social Environment

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Abstract

The article focuses on the recreational function of the Dunajec River and the Pieniny Mountains in regard to their use for sustainable tourism under the Slovak-Polish cross-border cooperation. Based on investigation and implemented research, it reflects on the debated topic in the dimensions of Slovak-Polish relations with the focus on tourism, pursued by the authors in their educational activities, research and publications. Their joint presentational output is a comparison of past and present recreational and related activities, proposing possible methods in tourism development in this tourist destination.

Key words

Recreation, Pieniny, cross-border cooperation

JEL Classification: O52, P29, Q56, R11

Introduction

The European Union supports the development of tourism in cross-border regions through a grant system of the European Regional Development Fund which stems from the Agenda for a Sustainable and Competitive European Tourism. The aim of the EU participation in subsidizing such cross-border cooperation projects is the regions' economic and social development in the scope of environmental protection and cultural values preservation.

Pieniny and the Dunajec are a unique cross-border tourist destination not only on a local or regional level, but also on a European, even world scale. This was also evident at the World Expo 2010 Shanghai (May 1 – Oct. 31, 2010), where Slovakia presented the best it has to offer in tourism. The opening promotional short film featured rafting on the Dunajec on a wooden raft – an activity advertised also in Poland with the slogan „Every Pole's duty is to raft the Dunajec at least once in their life!“ The Polish promotion of the Dunajec can be found in Europe's prominent tourist destinations (e.g. the Parisian metro). A World Expo 2010 statistic states that it had approximately 70 million visitors from 200 countries, therefore it can be assumed that the Slovak-Polish cross-border microregion appealed to many potential visitors.

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The Poland–Slovakia Cross-border Cooperation Operational Programme stems from the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation Between Territorial Communities or Authorities (signed in Madrid on May 21, 1980) and the Treaty between the Governments of the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Poland on Cross-border Cooperation (signed in Warsaw on Aug. 18, 1994). Notable implements for the Slovak-Polish cooperation include the Development Strategy of Slovak-Polish Cross-border Regions for the years 2000 – 2006, which contains the Declaration of the Participants of the Conference on Transfrontier Co-operation Between the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic, held under the auspices of the Council of Europe on May 29-30, 2000, in Dolný Kubín, Slovak Republic and Szczawnica, Poland. The co-author of the article, Darina Eliašová, attended the conference.

The aforementioned strategy was followed by the Poland–Slovak Republic Cross-border Cooperation Operational Programme 2007-2013, which is nearing its completion and evaluation. In the scope of the problems researched by the authors, the article reflects on the changes in Pieniny's and the Dunajec's recreational function in connection with the damming of the river's upper stream and opening of borders between the two EU member states. The presented output is a comparison of past and present recreational and related activities, proposing possible methods in tourism development in this tourist destination.

1 Nature and Man

The synergy of nature and man is significant especially in national parks (in this case they are: Pieninský národný park in Slovakia and Pieniński Park Narodowy in Poland) when exploiting the area for recreational purposes. Man's changing attitude expresses his relationship with nature: at first humans conformed to the environment's conditions, while today the environment is adjusted to suit human needs. Though it is subject to evolutionary changes, the interaction of man with nature cannot, for the sake of preserving nature's potential for future generations, ignore ecological principles.

Municipalities in the Pieniny region – both on the Slovak as well as the Polish side of the Dunajec – and their inhabitants have always been connected to the river. At first it was perceived as the „breadwinner“ (agriculture, pasturage, business, downstream drifting of logs, fishing, mining of rock, gravel and sand) and subsequently as a source of recreation, mainly for visitors. The Dunajec and Pieniny have also experienced the effects of civilization and technological invasion, including the damming and the power works of the river's upper stream (Stankiewicz, 2008), which changed the region's natural as well as social environment. Even though business activities cannot be ruled out from the area, while executing them, interests of the cooperating subjects from both sides of the border must be respected in the process of European integration and establishing good relations between the neighbouring countries.

1.1 The Pieniny Mountains and the Dunajec River

The origin of the name Pieniny is explained by an expert on the history of this region, Vlastimil Kovalčík (Kovalčík, 1998). He adopts the opinion of linguists and ety-

mologists, who believe the name of the mountain range is derived from the Celtic word *pen*, meaning head, peak. This root is the same for the Apennines in Italy and the Pennines in Northern England and Southern Scotland. So the toponym is proof that this region was, at all time, an integral part of Europe. Slovak official terminology continues to use the incorrect term Pieniny, a result of the influence of Polish nomenclature. A more correct name would be Peniny, which has several times been called for; in addition the name exists in the local dialect as Pininy. The Pieniny mountain range was first recorded in writing in 1282 as *Penyn*.

The toponym Dunajec is related to the same root as the toponym Danube, its original meanings being rushing stream, river, water. Today its name variations in different languages come from the Gothic versions *Dūnavi* or *Dūnaujos*, derived from the Latin-Celtic name *Dānuvius* (root word *dānu* – water). The Dunajec's earliest name was recorded in 1308 as *Dunoyos*. Later, Latin documents use *Donavich* (1313), *Donavy/icz* (1314), *Donitz* (1314), etc. We only cite the oldest written records, as newer versions include *Dunavetz*, *Dunavich*, *Danavich* and others.

Pieniny and the Dunajec are recorded in historical documents, analysed in scientific and specialized publications, popularized through maps, tour guides and brochures, and are also included in every picture publication about Poland and Slovakia, and in top catalogues promoting tourism.

Among a multitude of belletristic works we would like to highlight the epic poem *Svatopluk*, written in the years 1927 – 1830 by the Catholic priest, poet and translator Ján Hollý (1785 – 1849). While in the first half of the 20th century the poem was regarded as the author's figment of imagination, subsequent archaeological and historical explorations verified Hollý's theory about the Tatras being a significant, central place and that after arriving to Europe, "pilgrims" from India "headed to the famous and sky-high Tatras" and the descendants of the first pilgrims (in current language of the migrants) dispersed within Europe in every direction (Fordinálová, 2010). So Slavs came from a "Slovak birthplace", "when they procreated bountifully" (*Svatopluk*, VI. canto). In the fifth canto of the poem (verse 371) *Svatopluk* says: "Near powerful streams, the Dunajec and the smaller one, the Poprad." Thus Hollý shows us the cultural and intellectual heritage of this region.

Ján Evanjelista Nálepka (1792 – 1858), a native from the former Spiš village of Nižné Lapše (now Łapsze Niżne, Poland), Roman-Catholic priest, poet and musician, writes in his *Sláwospew* (Dithyramb): "Where the Tatras' colossal walls veer, / The Váh and the Drawa jawp down the valley, / The Poprad and the Dunajec rush towards the Vistula, / Your praise rises to the sky" (Kovalčík, 2007). The citation is that much more valuable because it comes from a native of the researched region. The character of Nálepka's works places him among Hollý's fellow writers and followers.

Among books of travels, probably the oldest historical record is an entry from the memoir *Itinerarium* (Itinerary) of Daniel Krman (1663 – 1740), superintendent of the Augsburg Evangelical Church, where he states that in May of 1707 he travelled by raft from Sącz to Opatowiec, "where the Dunajec river, on which we rafted up to this point, flows into the Vistula", as a member of a legation, delivering a message to King Charles XII of Sweden, during the Great Northern War (Kovalčík, 2007).

From among Poland's many writers we would like to mention Jan Wiktor (1890 – 1967), who was known for his glorification of Pieniny's beauty. He is credited with the

popularization of the mountain range in books of travels and in belletristic literature. From all of his books we can mention the opus *Pieniny i ziemia sądecka* (Pieniny and country of Sandeck). Many of his works were created during his stay in the spa town of Szczawnica, where the Polish raft route ends.

Another authors and their works: Kazimierz Sajsse-Tobiczyk – *Dunajec, rzeka Tatr i Pienin* (Dunajec, the river of Tatra and of Pieniny), Jan Jerzy Karpiński – *W Pieninach* (In the Pieniny), Stefania Baszak – *Gawędy pienięskie* (Gawędy of Pieniny). Pieniny in the Polish literature was described by Jakub Żmizdiński in his work *Pieniny w literaturze polskiej* (Pieniny in the Polish literature, 2010). The current publication is the work *Pieniny* (Pieniny) scripted by Slovak and Polish authors Jacek Kołbuszewski, Dionýz Dugas, Jan Bartomiej Brzeziński, Marek Strżakowski, Andrzej Szczocarz, Stefan Danko.

Miroslav Zigmund and Jiří Hanzelka, well known Czech travellers, visited Pieniny and the Dunajec in the mid 1950s. Those who remember the visit say the travellers had said this about the mountains and the river: "We've travelled almost the entire world, but we had never found such beauty". It is important that the expanding tourism on both sides of the border does not ruin this beauty.

1.2 The Dunajec – Dividing and Bringing Together

Looking back into history we may ask, hypothetically, what could have the Dunajec and Pieniny been like in the past. Though we do not know the answer, geological explorations and registers show that the river is older than the mountain range.

The Dunajec and the Białka were a natural historical border between Slovakia (Hungary) and Poland (Galicia as a part of Austria) in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The right bank was guarded by the Dunajec Castle (Niedzica Castle), a part of the frontier fortification system Plaveč – Ľubovňa – Dunajec – Orava Castle. Situated on the opposite left bank was Czorsztyn Castle, and located beneath – until the construction of the dam began – was the main raft dock, as this was the starting point of the recreational raft route. In present day, the valley between Niedzica and Czorsztyn Castles is under water in the reservoir system Czorsztyn – Niedzica / Sromowce Wyżne.

In the past, when the entire Spiš region was a part of the Upper Hungary, the shared stream of the Dunajec, which divided the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the empire, was not considered a border in the strict sense. As a frontier river, it entered the modern history when Czecho-Slovakia and Poland were formed after WW I, in the years of the Slovak Republic during WW II, and in the post-war arrangement of the Czechoslovak Republic and the People's Republic of Poland. Paradoxically, during the years of socialist internationalism, both countries – friends according to the rhetoric of that time – closely guarded the Dunajec, since the borderline stretched through the middle of the stream. Swimming to the other side was considered an illegal crossing of border under the threat of "rebuilding Warsaw" in the post-war era or paying a fine in later years. Customs offices were set up on both sides, and in the 1960s they were replaced by one customs office in Lysá nad Dunajcom, which was closed down when Slovakia and Poland became members of the EU on May 1, 2004.

Currently, the 21-kilometers-long shared stream of the Dunajec makes up a part of the Slovak-Polish border, its beginning situated near the lower dam wall. When the two countries entered the EU, the border crossings were shut down. This allowed for free flow of capital, goods, services and persons with major multiplicative effect on tourism in the cross-border region. A significant "joining" feat is considered to be the building of a footbridge across the Dunajec (inaugurated on August 12, 2006), linking the villages of Červený Kláštor (Red Monastery) and Sromowce Niżne. We expect further stepping up in the cooperation within the framework of the Euroregion Tatry, since tourism undeniably enables the development of cross-border, social, economic and political contacts on a local and regional level.

2 Tourist Destination

The Pieniny mountains and the Dunajec are an object of permanent scientific research and realization of practical activities focused on nature, history, religion/the spiritual, culture, art, etc. From our research topic's perspective this is an important target destination and is now starting to be threatened by mass tourism. Visitors often behave irresponsibly and are too loud in this temple of nature, characterized by its grandness. The search for balance between this destination's autonomous development and environmental protection can be, perhaps, considered a fundamental principle of tourism development within the bounds of sustainability (Sienkiewicz, 2008).

Considering the fact that this destination belongs to cross-border regions with the highest unemployment rate, tourism eliminates this economically unfavourable situation at least during summer season. Tourism activities can be studied especially within the framework of this destination's recreational function.

2.1 Recreational Function

According to some experts, the beautiful canyon of the Dunajec is a place for a one-day trip. However, other experts and enthusiasts claim that it is a valuable recreation destination for a longer stay. Due to text limitation, our article focuses mainly on typical tourist activities in the scope of this region's recreational function.

Rafting the Dunajec

Since rivers were the first communication channels in the old days, the Dunajec was used for transportation. According to Jozef Kútnik-Šmálov (Kútnik, 2005), in the 9th century, the Benedictines from the Benedictine Abbey at Zobor made their way through the valley of the Poprad and the Dunajec rivers, christianizing Spiš and the region around the upper stream of the Vistula. Monks – a toponym preserved in Pieniny (Seven Monks), proves their presence in this region.

Rafting on old-time wooden rafts is a unique tourist attraction. It originated when wood from the area was drifted downstream on the Dunajec (logs were tied together forming a raft, a method still existent in the 1960s) via the Vistula to the Baltic Sea. The beautiful scenery was the reason why the river was used also for recreational pur-

poses in as early as the 18th century. It is said that the first tourist, Jakub Buchholtz, rafted the Dunajec sometime in the second half of the 18th century (Kovalčík, 1998). The development of rafting on the river's rapids is recorded in period reports and in twenty-four sketches by Józef Szalay (1802 – 1876), duplicates of which were until recently exhibited in the Museum Červený kláštor (Red Monastery). The originals are in the Pieniny Museum in Szczawnica. It is necessary to mention that Józef Szalay initiated the digs for the medicinal hot springs and the building of the spa in this Pieniny town.

The original floating docks for the rafts were located opposite each other – in Sromowce Niżne, on the Polish bank, and in Červený Kláštor, on the Slovak bank, in a place called Pod lipami. Because of the dam construction, the Polish dock was re-located under Czorsztyn Castle, to the village of Kały. The Slovak dock, Pod lipami, was closed down and replaced by docks in Spišská Stará Ves (Nokle), Majere and Červený Kláštor (Kvašné lúky). Visitors also raft the Dunajec on kayaks and inflatable rafts.

The dam has affected rafting with its regulation of the river's flow, which causes a fluctuation of the water level. On the other hand, the confinement of water in the reservoir, the Czorsztyn Lake, has created conditions for activities such as waterbiking, sightseeing boat cruises, boating, surfing, etc. A recreation centre has emerged in the vicinity of the lake with investments directed towards building of accommodations, restaurants and facilities providing additional services. The multiplicative effect resulting from the construction of the dam has mainly impacted the locals.

Bathing, Swimming, Sunbathing, Recreation

These activities belong to the natural uses of the Dunajec. The oldest written record is from a journal of Ladislav Rákoczi (Lengyelová & Várkonyi, 2009) in which he states that "he bathed in the Dunajec at his estate but when in Pressburg, he bathed in the Danube with several of his friends". Where exactly took this bathing place cannot be deduced from the entry but records demonstrate his relationship with this region: on May 22, 1651 Ladislav Rákoczi gave Carthusian books from the Lechnický Monastery to the Franciscans in Šebeš, and in 1655 he obtained a confirmation from the king of the right to organize Sunday markets and four annual fairs in Stará Ves (Antiqua Villa).

Bathing and swimming in the Dunajec took place within the areas of individual Slovak and Polish municipalities. The river's fairly swift and in the summer months warm flow was ideal for bathing in a natural stream and later also for floating on inflatable mattresses. The riverbank provided sufficient space for sunbathing, ball and meadow games, gatherings of families and friends, etc. Walking on pebbles with bare feet also fulfilled a salutary purpose.

The nicest natural swimming area was considered to be Jánošíkov (Zbojnický) skok. With the deepest water, this narrowest gorge in the Pieniny mountains offered excellent swimming and sunbathing opportunities. In the present, bathing is limited by the changed quality of the river and busy raft traffic. Nowadays, there is also a photographer stationed here, photographing tourists on rafts; thus even this place has succumbed to commercial activities which, however, is something we must anticipate in a market economy.

Since the creation of the Czorsztyn – Niedzica reservoir, swimming conditions on the Dunajec have worsened. Because water is released from the bottom part of the lake, the Dunajec is murky and cold in its border section. Cleanness of the water, recesses and riverbank has also suffered; they are polluted by drifted waste from the Dunajec and its tributaries. The PIENAP (Pieniny National Park, Slovakia) has undertaken a noteworthy task of post-seasonal cleaning of the river with the help of elementary school students. The establishment of wastewater treatment plants with the help of EU funds partially relieves the Dunajec's self-cleaning process, removing contaminants from wastewater and sewage networks of neighbouring towns and villages.

It can be definitely said that bathing and swimming has moved from the Dunajec to the Czorsztyn Lake, where there are seaside-like conditions and well covered tourist services. The still waters of the lake get warmed up by the sun more easily and visitors, influenced by the changing lifestyle, prefer less strenuous sports and recreational activities even when it comes to bathing, swimming and sunbathing. The preference of the tranquil reservoir over the river's flow is apparent.

Recreational Fishing

Fishing in the Dunajec's basin used to be a means of livelihood for the locals, however, it has been marked by disputes over fishing rights in individual sections of the river. Fishermen had clever ways of catching trout, the huchen, grayling and other fish from the bank, stream, even from wooden rafts. Until the damming of the Dunajec, swarms of salmon and sea trout would swim upstream during spring months to this location from the Baltic Sea. The creation of the Czorsztyn – Niedzica reservoir has affected the life of fish in the Dunajec because it eliminated conditions for the natural reproduction of species which, in the past, swam upstream to the springs in the Tatras. Present artificial fish populating only promotes recreational fishing, with the exception of a fish preserve in central part of the Pieniny National Park where fishing is strictly prohibited.

Hiking and Outings

Pieninský národný park (Slovakia) and Pieniński Park Narodowy (Poland) provide plenty of opportunities for hiking and walks along marked tourist trails. The most notable one is Pieninská cesta which stretches along the Dunajec's right bank, connecting Červený Kláštor and Szczawnica. What is most unique about this path is that tourists can enjoy nature in a corridor of inexpressible beauty, accessible to all ages including the disabled, thanks to its undemanding terrain. Every visitor to the Pieniny mountains experiences at least some part of Pieninská cesta. This trail remembers the footsteps of raftsmen's families and their carriages, and of many important people – politicians, artists, travellers, etc., enchanted by the beauty of the surrounding nature.

The opening of the border crossing and free flow of people in Pieniny has negatively impacted tourist outings on Pieninská cesta. Mass bicycle touring radically disrupts the tranquillity and reverence of this locale. The canyon, unparalleled by any other in Europe, is practically smothered by droves of cyclists. While for bicycle rentals (on Slovak and Polish side) this business activity is a source of income, for the Pieniny region itself it not only presents no financial or other benefit but it undermines the previous ecological balance between man and nature. For example, tourists pay for the view

from the Three Crowns peak, situated on the Polish side. Pieniński Park Narodowy uses this revenue for maintenance of its trails.

Many tourists – Pieniny enthusiasts and first-time visitors, especially families with young children – demand a ban on the entry of bike tourists on Pieninská cesta, which can be bypassed via other bikeways. Cyclists restrict the free movement of hikers for whom this trail is chiefly intended – they have insufficient knowledge of the use of the rented bicycles, and shouting at hikers, they ride too fast and noisily in groups, stretched along the trail's entire width, endangering others. In addition, it is impossible to ride a bicycle and enjoy Pieniny's beauty at the same time. From the perspective of environmental protection, it is necessary to preserve the Dunajec's recreational function and not turn this trail into a corridor for mass transportation of bike tourists.

2.2 Cultural Function

The cultural function is one of the most prominent activities in Pieniny in connection with the activities of monastic orders of the Carthusians and Camaldulites in Červený kláštor (Monastery red). Their cultural pursuits are presented in the Museum Červený Kláštor – the target destination of the local as well as foreign visitors. The current custodian of the premises organizes small cultural events in the restored church, expanding the number of products available within cultural tourism.

The culture of this region has been captured in many films, paintings, literary works and in folk art. During the Zamagurie Folk Festival (35th annual festival in 2011), the amphitheater under the Three Crowns attracts many people who get the opportunity to combine the beauty of folk art and dance with the resplendence of the Pieniny mountains. Live folklore and Christian festivities are kept to this day in the villages on the Polish side of the Dunajec. Both countries work together in the area of folk dance which can be seen in joint performances of local dance companies, whose activities have been supported also by EU grants.

Another museum worth mentioning in this locale came into existence thanks to the construction of the Czorsztyn – Niedzica dam. During excavations near the Niedzica Castle, many valuable archaeological discoveries were made and they are now installed in the dam exhibition hall – Pawilon Wystawowy Okragla. One of the most noteworthy finds are the skeletons of a mammoth and a cave bear which, however, were immediately transported to the National Museum in Warsaw. Leaving the exhibits in the place of their discovery would increase the visitors' knowledge of the region's historicity.

2.3 Sport Function

The Dunajec river and the Pieniny mountains also fulfill a sport function. International Pieniny Slalom – the no longer existent sports festival – was considered to be a holiday on the Dunajec. This significant sporting event came to an end due to the lack of finances needed for its realization after the revolution in 1989. Water sportsmen also note that since the existence of the dam, the river's flow in the racing sec-

tion has slowed down considerably, thus artificial barriers would be needed for water sporting events.

A new event within the framework of Slovak-Polish cooperation is the Pieniny Biathlon, organized on the initiative of Polish and Slovak entrepreneurs and The Pieniny International March of boosting cheer.

Conclusion

The aforementioned changes in the Pieniny environment, triggered by the creation of the reservoir on the Dunajec's upper stream, have had a negative but also a positive impact on the region's nature, topography, people and mainly tourism, which is the major source of income for the locals on both sides of the Slovak-Polish border. We see that a part of the Dunajec's recreational role has shifted to the artificial lake, which offers a good recreational background with many possibilities for swimming and water sports, and innovated tourism products corresponding with developmental trends in tourism and recreation.

Slovakia's and Poland's membership in the European Union has enabled better interconnection and accessibility of tourist and recreational opportunities for citizens of both countries and foreign visitors to Pieniny and the Pieniny greater area. The joint action of the subjects participating in sustainable tourism in this destination can be supported only if the principles of economic, social and environmental responsibility are upheld.

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