

## THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON THE SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE GORCE NATIONAL PARK AND ITS VICINITY

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### **Abstract**

*The paper presents the problems of tourism in terms of its relationship with the social as well as cultural environment. The purpose of the article was to examine how tourism affects the socio-cultural environment in the Gorce National Park and its vicinity. I examined whether tourist traffic in the Park brings about more benefits or problems, and whether changes taking place in communities visited by tourists are positive or negative? The impact of tourism on the socio-cultural environment has been analyzed on the basis of a questionnaire I conducted. At the end I present a balance of benefits and costs of tourism in the Gorce National Park and its surroundings in the social and cultural contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Gorce National Park, tourism, benefits of tourism, costs of tourism.*

### **1. Introduction**

Tourism occupies an increasingly important place in the modern world, being one of the fastest growing areas of life. The tourist traffic increases, and thus socio-cultural tourism develops, carrying numerous risks for the residents of the visited sites and the environment. It has been calculated that in the whole world about 650 million people travel every year. By 2020, the number of travels in world tourism will increase three times, and the revenue from it will have nearly quadrupled (Różycki, 2006, p. 120). Worldwide turnover coming from the services related to various forms of travel make tourism one of the leading economic sectors in the world. Let us consider, however, whether everybody is happy with this widespread phenomenon. Does its scope bring about fears and resistance? Information about damage wrought by modern tourism to communities in tourist regions constitutes only a small percentage

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of the knowledge that we would have if more implications of research and observation were brought out. Hence the idea to write this paper.

Its main purpose was to examine how tourism affects the socio-cultural environment in the Gorce National Park and its vicinity. It was important to examine how residents of the visited locations perceive tourists and reversely, how tourists perceive local residents. I was looking for answers to questions whether tourism brings more benefits or damage and whether tourists respect the cultural heritage of the Gorce mountains and by association with the Gorce National Park.

The question of changes taking place requires initial discussion. Basically, the question arises whether the changes taking place in communities under the influence of tourism are good or bad, positive or negative? Is incoming tourism a functional factor or a dysfunctional one?

Source materials that I used in the implementation of the work were mainly book publications. The materials related to tourism in the Park were obtained from the Park Directorate. The impact of tourism on the socio-cultural environment was studied by means of a survey and the conclusions therefrom.

The study performed used a questionnaire as a tool of choice. The survey is an indirect method of obtaining information by means of questions posed to selected people through a printed list called the questionnaire. "A survey poll, therefore, is a technique for collecting information to complete a test most commonly by specific questionnaires of a generally a high degree of standardization in the presence or often in the absence of an interviewer" (Plich, 1995, p. 86-87).

We refer to this method when we want to obtain information about what others know, think and how they see and evaluate phenomena and events of interest to us.

Due to the category of questions we distinguish two types of questionnaires (Zaczyński, 1997, p. 150):

- open questionnaire,
- closed (categorized) questions survey.

Questionnaires used in this work are specific, clear and focus on a single issue. Frequently, the questions are closed, i.e. the respondent cannot go beyond, but only selects among the possible answers, which are provided in a question form. Some questions contain a set of possible answers to choose from that include one point designated by the word "other", allowing the respondent to present their answers, if it is not in any proposed wording.

The respondents completed the questionnaire, which contained 16 questions, including 9 closed questions, 3 open-ended questions, 4 semi-open ones. The printed copy contained three questions that have generated the most

important information on the characteristics of the respondents. Their random selection, which I used, was in the selection of a specific population of people in such a way so as to make chance decide.

I was interested in conducting a survey among residents of five municipalities located in the Gorce National Park or in its near vicinity. Accordingly, each municipality has been tested, which gave a total of 54 respondents (Table 1). The survey was participated by 29 women, representing 54% of the respondents, and 25 men - 46%. The research was a pilot study. In the future, studies are planned involving a larger number of tourists visiting the Park. The age span of respondents was 16 to 59 years. The study was conducted in April 2014.

**Table 1.** Number of respondents in individual town and village communes

Commune	Kamienica	Mszana Dolna	Niedźwiedź	Ochotnica Dolna	Nowy Targ	Total
<b>Female</b>	4	7	8	5	5	29
<b>Male</b>	6	5	2	5	7	25

## 2. The role and character of tourism for the Gorce National Park

Gorce is a well separated mountain range located in the center of the Polish Carpathians, almost exactly between the Tatra Mountains and Krakow. They form a tall mountain massif with the highest summit Turbacz (1310 m amsl) (Róžański, 2006, p. 13). Central and north-eastern part of the massif is occupied by the Gorce National Park. The Park is located in the Malopolska province, in the districts of Limanowa (77.8% of the area) and Nowy Targ (22.2%). It is located in the macro-region of the central Beskids, the north-eastern part of mesoregion Gorce (approx. 13% of Gorce) (Loch, 1998, p. 27).

Tourism in Gorce National Park has an impact not only on the tourists, but it also affects the visited location. On the one hand, tourism contributes to the socio-economic development of these regions, and the consequence is usually the improvement of the living standards of the local population. The positive sides of influx of tourists are undoubtedly the development of the communication network, the production of consumer goods, and the enrichment of the society. One of the most important things is to create real jobs in the tourism services sector. 250 million people are employed in tourism worldwide.

According to the respondents, tourism in Gorce National Park and the surrounding area has many useful functions and benefits. It is reflected in the different areas of life: social, psychological, cultural, spatial and economic.

Usually, the respondents included the following positive effects of the influx of tourists to the Park: revenue growth (47%), infrastructure development (18%), employment (16%), promotion of the region (12%) and the opportunity to make new friends (7%). Useful features, according to them, are: education, provision of training, it was often stated that tourism provides the opportunity to meet new people and other cultures. The positive changes in attitudes and behavior of the local population affected by the opportunities that tourism brings were mentioned in terms of personal development and the acquisition of new experiences. Tourism incoming to the Park creates an opportunity for the local communities to make new contacts. Tourists are an important source of information and expanding knowledge about the world. People who have frequent contacts with tourists, compared to others, have wider horizons, are more hospitable and open.

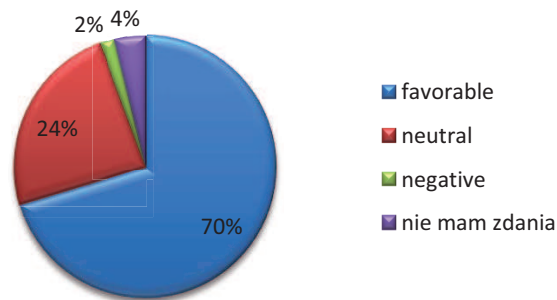
On the other hand, cultural values, both spiritual and material, are disappearing, which cannot be repaired by financial means. The threat of the commonly growing tourism is the commercialization of culture and presenting it to the needs of tourism, and the destruction of religious and local culture.

The impact of tourism on the socio-cultural environment relates primarily to the local communities living in areas of interest, their traditions, customs and habits, beliefs and values, family and friendships, social relations, etc.. These are the qualities determining the distinctiveness and specificity of a given community and the region, and their disappearance as a result of the development of civilization, which is also tourism, is usually irreversible. They defend themselves by rebuilding their vitality and identity after each tourist season, with increasing effort.

### **3. Residents' attitudes towards tourists visiting the Park**

In the area of research the differences between the communities of visitors and hosts are highlighted. This applies to the distance separating their economic but also cultural differences. This can produce a sense of dominance, superiority and can lead to many unpleasant situations. The financial status, behavior, attitudes of tourists who are highly visible, have formed a so-called demonstration effect, which is one of the essential elements of the impact of tourism on the host community.

70% of the respondents expressed a favorable attitude towards tourists, 24% considered their attitude towards tourists as neutral, 4% had no opinion, and only 2% of the population considered their relationship as disrespectful (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Local attitudes towards tourists

The trend towards concentration of tourism means that the inhabitants of a village or tourist region remain in close, spatial, psychological and social, as well as and personal, contact with the community of tourists. The trend towards concentration of tourism means that the inhabitants of a village or tourist region remain in close, spatial, psychological and social, as well as and personal contact with the collectivity of tourists. This situation must result in several changes.

**Table 2.** Phenomena related to tourist traffic cause most problems for the residents

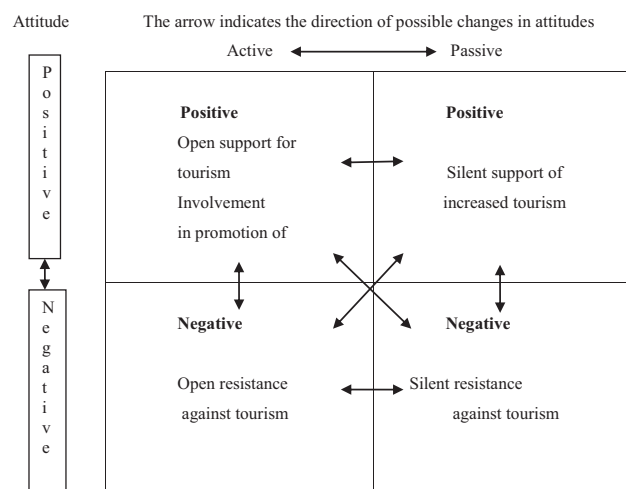
Phenomenon	Number of indications (in %)
Hooliganism, vandalism	2%
Alcohol abuse	5%
Violence	0%
Assaults and robberies	0%
Theft	2%
Disturbing the peace at night	39%
Intrusion into private matters (nosiness)	7%
Tourists' opposition to traditional ways of conduct and behavior	3%
Inappropriate behavior of tourists	9%
Overcrowding of the home town or village	26%
Other	3%

Most problems for the residents are caused by disturbing of silence at night - 39%, congestion - 26%, inappropriate behavior and conduct of tourists - 9%, meddling in private affairs - 7%, excessive alcohol intake - 5%, interference with traditional customs and behavior norms - 3%, none of the respondents noted problems with violence and assaults and robberies. The questions allowed adding other phenomena, and 3% of respondents (2 persons) reported littering (Table 2).

The presence of tourists disrupts the social order. Reservations cover: fear, anxiety, lack of citizen satisfaction, and later also reluctance along with noticing only negative aspects of tourism. Local people from the Gorce evaluate tourism negatively when its development is under the control of foreign entities, and the share in the economic benefits of local hosts is insufficient and often negligible. Nuisance related to tourism in the Park is felt strongly by these residents who do not have income from tourism.

One of the social consequences of the development of incoming tourism that change the attitude of residents towards tourists is shown in Figure 2.

That ratio depends on the individual or public perception of the positive and negative effects of its development. It is the basis to explain and describe the relations between the tourists and the hosts.



**Figure 2.** Attitudes of representatives of the local community towards the growth of tourism

Source: Mika (2008), p. 434.

According to this model, the attitudes adopted by the locals towards tourists may be positive or negative, and active or passive. Among the inhabitants of the Gorce area, two variants are characteristic of “passive” attitudes.

The biggest problem, however, lies in the fact that not all residents living around the Park achieve tangible benefits from the development of tourism. 11% of respondents fear for foreign ownership and employment of outsiders in the tourism sector. Thus, only certain social groups benefit from the tourist arrivals. Moreover, most of the money spent by tourists in the region does not remain there, but goes to “the wallet” of tourism operators from the outside.

**Table 3.** Reservations of the residents of the destination areas

<b>Reservations of the residents of the destination areas</b>	<b>Number of indications (in %)</b>
Changes to customs and behavior patterns	8%
Disappearance of the local culture	11%
Worsening living conditions in the home town or village	43%
External property and employment of external individuals in the tourist sector	11%
Conflicts with tourists	8%
Increase in crime and alcoholism	6%
Damage to historical sites	13%
Other	0%

Respondents mostly feared of worsening living conditions in their place of residence on the part of tourism - as many as 43% of them placed the devastation of historic sites as the second (Table 3).

#### **4. Balance of socio-cultural benefits and losses connected with increased tourism**

Tourism has an impact not only on the tourists but it also affects the visited destination. On the one hand, tourism contributes to the socio-economic development of a region, and the consequence is usually to improve the living standard of the local population.

The respondents also noticed positive effects of incoming tourism (Table 4) mostly including financial benefits (47%), infrastructure development (18%), employment growth (16%), promotion of the region (12%), while 7% of the respondents felt positive about the effect of the influx of tourists as an opportunity to make new friends.

27% of respondents saw the negative effects of incoming tourists (Table 5) including excessive traffic, an important issue for them was also the environmental impact of tourism (23%), and littering, which was indicated by 20% of responses. In fourth place came noise and disturbing the peace, noticed by 16% of respondents, while the last comes the destruction of the cultural environment (14%).

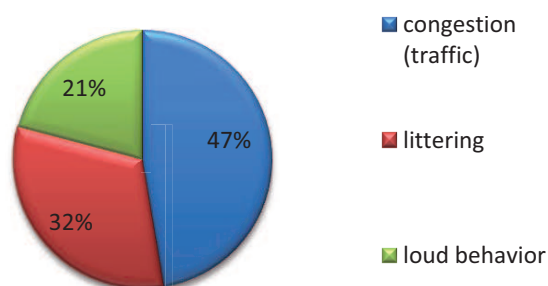
**Table 4.** Positive effects of incoming tourism

Positive effects	Number of indications (in %)
Financial benefits	47%
Infrastructure development	18%
Rise in employment	16%
Promotion of the region	12%
Making new friends	7%

**Table 5.** Negative effects of incoming tourism

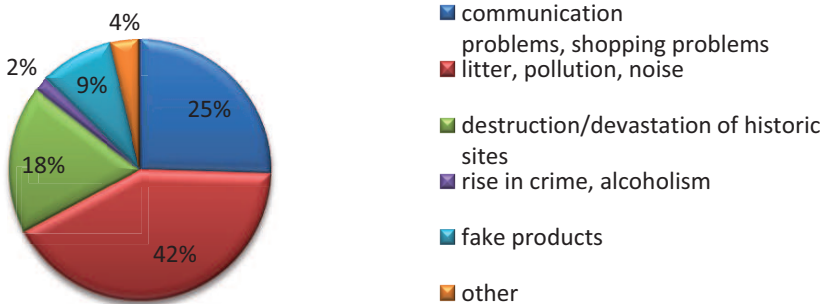
Negative effects	Number of indications (in %)
Too much traffic	27%
Pollution	23%
Littering	20%
Noisiness, noise offences	16%
Destruction of the cultural environment	14%

Respondents believe that tourism directly affects them by congestion (traffic jams) - 47% of respondents, another group reported littering - 32% of respondents, while 21% answered that tourists behaved too loud (Figure 3 ).



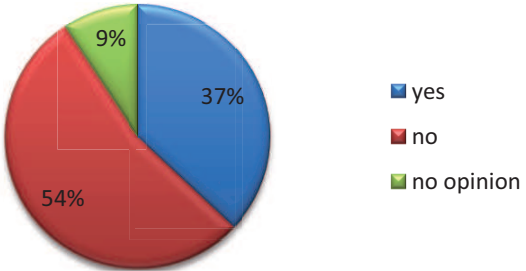
**Figure 3.** Difficulties in the performance of daily tasks of the residents due to increased tourist traffic

42% of those surveyed for damage caused by tourism in the Gorce National Park mentioned litter, pollution and noise. A major problem for the residents were traffic problems (25%), destruction/devastation of historic sites in the Park occupied the third place, because this answer was marked by 20% of respondents, imitation was noted by 9%, 4% of respondents cited other damages, namely, littering, and 2% of respondents noticed the damage in the form of crime and alcoholism (Figure 4).



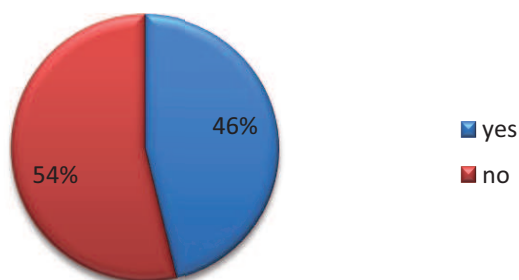
**Figure 4.** Damage to the Gorce National Park caused by tourism

54% of respondents answered that tourists did not respect the cultural heritage of the Park and its environs, while 37% said that tourists respected the cultural heritage. 9% of the respondents had no opinion on the subject (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Tourists' respect to the cultural heritage of the Gorce National Park

Among those surveyed, 54% reported seeing damage in the Gorce National Park and the Gorce caused by tourist traffic or tourists themselves, the remainder of respondents, i.e. 46% have not noticed any such damage (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Damage of cultural sites in the area of the Park resulting from tourism or caused by tourists

The presentation of the work carried out on the impact of tourism on the socio-cultural environment stresses the need for balance in the final assessment of the situation.

Tourism has become, in the past century, something inseparable from contemporary culture of living societies. Domestic tourism, growing faster in countries with adequate tourist attractiveness, covers large numbers of the public sphere, dynamically transforming the face of the visited towns, regions and the entire country (Gaworecki, 1997, p. 346).

At the same time, with the development of tourism, there have been a growing number of critical voices against it. Considering the functions and dysfunctions of tourism, many questions can be raised.

It is a fact that doubts arise as to the consequences of analyzing tourism development for the various spheres of modern life. One thing is certain and confirmed: the development of modern tourism cannot be stopped. If so, this is where one can present the balance of benefits and costs of tourism in the Gorce National Park and its social and cultural surroundings. These are only examples because all of the advantages and disadvantages cannot be listed.

#### **Socio-cultural benefits**

- 1) Increased diversity of economic activity, especially using local resources and products,
- 2) Investment,
- 3) Utilization of existing infrastructure,

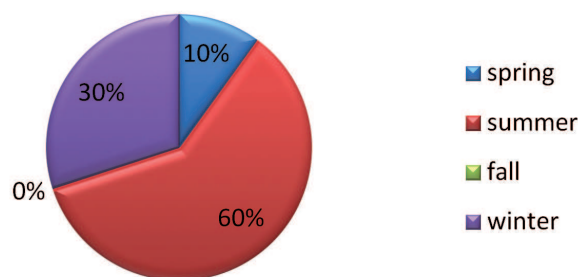
- 4) Utilization of existing tourist infrastructure by the local residents,
- 5) Increased job offer (increased employment),
- 6) Protection of cultural resources,
- 7) Breaking barriers, e.g. languages, social ones,
- 8) Encountering different sociological and cultural patterns by the local people, mixing of civilizations,
- 9) Valuing one's own as well as other socio-cultural norms.

#### **Socio-cultural costs**

- 1) Seasonality,
- 2) Failure to make alternative use of local resources and their destruction,
- 3) Overloading of the ecological system by tourism,
- 4) Commercialism in culture, arts and crafts as a result to try to match the tastes of tourists, and thus loss of identity,
- 5) Pathology and distortion of the material and spiritual culture,
- 6) Conflicts, the lack of mutual understanding, artificial behavior,
- 7) Consumerism,
- 8) Pathologies: alcoholism, crime,
- 9) Destroying the natural and cultural environment,
- 10) Communication problems, shopping problems, pollution, noise,
- 11) Urbanization of rural areas.

### **5. Possibilities to limit the negative effect of tourism on the Park's socio-cultural heritage**

Mass tourism causes excessive concentration of people in areas shared by tourists and hosts. Tourist traffic overload occurs when the number of tourists exceeds the number of permanent residents. This is due to the seasonality of tourism and its strong concentration in the summer months. 60% of the tourists come to the Gorce National Park in the summer (Figure 7). It would be worthwhile to start marketing activities in order to balance the demand throughout the calendar year, so that the Park is not overloaded with tourists in the summer season only.



**Figure 7.** The season when the tourists arrive to the Park

The key task of protecting the socio-cultural heritage of the Gorce National Park and its closest surroundings is to encourage all tourists to use these goods in a manner as little detrimental to the population and heritage, while the local population must be convinced of the advantages and benefits of development of tourism and understand its meaning and essence.

Tourism is a part of modern culture and a carrier of many cultural values. At the same time, its development can be a source of adverse consequences for culture. 54% of the respondents answered that tourists do not respect their cultural heritage. 46% of them noted damage to cultural objects in the Park and its surroundings caused by tourist traffic or tourists themselves. The respondents admitted (31%) that the awareness of the meaning of cultural sites should be promoted among tourists. 26% of the respondents would consider placing valuable information about objects important for culture, and even some of them (16%) wanted to punish tourists financially for the damages caused (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Ways to increase tourists' respect towards cultural heritage

Ways to increase tourists' respect towards cultural heritage	Number of indications (in %)
Spread information about valuable cultural sites	26%
Spread awareness and disseminate their importance among tourists	31%
Form desirable behaviors in tourists	9%
Promote eco-tourism	7%
Introduce more prohibitions and obligations	0%
Increase the number of Park service employees	11%
Fine tourists for damages caused	16%
Limit the accessibility of the most precious sites to tourists	0%
Other	0%

However, in my view, positive attitudes depend largely on the personal involvement of individuals, their attitude and preparation for contact with tourists.

## **6. Conclusion**

Tourism can be seen in social terms - because it is the human being who is involved in it, cultural - because it is a manifestation of culture, economic - because it is accompanied by the circulation of capital. Its essence is the movement of people, however, in order to meet the needs of leisure and personal development. This phenomenon has its cause, but it produces certain effects for both tourists and the areas to which they come as well as permanent residents (Przeclawski, 1997, p. 61).

Tourism, and especially mass tourism, is considered to be an important factor in social and cultural changes in the areas of its development. The trend towards concentration of tourism means that the inhabitants of a village or tourist region remain in close, spatial, psychological and social, as well as personal, contact with the community of tourists. This situation must result in several changes.

The conflict situation also arises from the different attitudes and needs - tourist-oriented entertainment and leisure and the residents immersed in daily tasks, work, and satisfying the needs of guests.

The presence of tourists disrupts the social order. Reservations arise: fear, anxiety, lack of citizen satisfaction, and later also reluctance along with noticing only negative aspects of tourism. Local people from the Gorce evaluate tourism negatively when its development is under the control of foreign entities, and the share in the economic benefits of local hosts is insufficient and often negligible. Nuisance related to tourism in the Park is felt strongly by these residents who do not have income from tourism.

It should be noted that the effects of increased tourism may also deserve a negative rating when accompanied by some pathological phenomena, for example devastation of the environment (23%), and cultural traditions (14%). There is no denying that the respondents feel they are affected by the disturbing of their peace at night (16%), complaining about the sound of quad bikes, motorbikes and other vehicles, and the congestion of their place of residence by excessive tourist traffic (27%). They also say they have trouble getting fast to a certain place or shopping without standing in queues. A serious problem for them is litter (20%) which tourists leave behind.

The survey shows that tourism reduces the quality of life of residents. Increased noise limits the right to peace and quiet.

As another example of the adverse consequences of tourism, one can indicate the disappearance of traditional values, changes in customs, moral and religious views, along with deterioration of family ties. Residents of neighboring communes surrounding the Park are most afraid of worsening living conditions (43%). It can be said that the influence of mass tourism is followed by solid and rapid changes in the lives of the local population, accompanied by emphasis on imitation of the patterns of behavior of tourists.

The Park's cultural environment is an important attraction for the tourism industry, also representing the cultural goods in the form of museums, monuments, log cabins, wooden chapels, crosses and pastoral huts, which are also vulnerable to destruction caused by visitors and high tourist traffic.

Tourism cultivated by most people is usually associated with a very superficial interest in learning about cultural regions. The tourists' lifestyle is comfortable and passive. Close and sincere relations with the local population are rare. Newcomers behave differently than residents of the tourist destinations and do not try to adapt to local traditions. The encounter of two different cultures can lead to irreversible changes in habits and patterns of behavior (Zaręba, 2006, p. 27).

Unfortunately, having collected all the positive and negative effects of socio-cultural development of tourism in the Gorce National Park, I can say that it carries more negative changes for permanent residents.

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