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MOUNTAIN HIKING IN TATRA NATIONAL PARK

Abstract: Tatra National Park is the most frequently visited national park in Poland. During the peak season (summer), it attracts both 'fully aware' tourists, properly prepared for mountain hiking, and 'casual' hikers, motivated mainly by the shallow desire to 'tick off' the most popular places in the highest Polish mountains. The article describes the specific character of mountain hikers in Tatra National Park during the summer season, with particular attention paid to the motivations and skills involved in active tourism.

Keywords: active tourism, specialised tourism, mountain hiking, Tatra National Park.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mountain tourism encompasses various types and forms of activity which take advantage of the natural assets of the mountain environment including hiking, skiing, biking, horse-riding or exploring caves (KUREK 2007, p. 317). The most popular form of mountain tourism, however, is hiking.

Mountain hiking and analysing the motivations for this kind of activity have been discussed by researchers since the early 20th c. (CZYŻ 2010, p. 242) with three main groups identified for high mountain hiking and Tatra climbing: cognitive, aesthetic and sporting. Typical features have always been selflessness and the pursuit of discovery, a desire to experience or even 'defeat' hardships and danger.

Mountain hiking has always involved aesthetic motivations, such as the beauty and harmony of the 'mountain world'. Mountains have a certain metaphysical or even mystical aura evoking different behaviours – some people are attracted and enchanted while others are consumed by a lack of confidence or even fear.

Research on tourism in such a popular area as Tatra National Park may reveal various attitudes. Visitors include 'regular Tatra climbers' and 'romantic vagabonds' – 'mountain people', for whom hiking is the essence of their life and the mountain environment a metaphor, an experience, or even a religious exultation (KRZYMOWSKA-KOSTROWICKA 1997, p. 44). There are also 'incidental' tourists, usually unprepared

both technically and mentally who treat mountains as an area in which they may raise their social status and prestige by reaching flagship sites. Many tourists choose to go to the Tatras 'automatically'; they are not guided by a need to have contact with mountains but are attracted by the well-developed infrastructure of Zakopane and current trends. In this case, the Tatras are treated as background or scenery for a wide range of entertainments (FRYDRYCZAK 2007, p. 105). Such tourists travel for 'pretty sights', which they already know from the mass media, usually in a simplified form.

The article presents a description of mountain hiking in selected regions of Tatra National Park. The author pays special attention to the tourists' motivations, as well as their skills as regards active tourism. The analysis is an attempt to define the special character of mountain hiking tourism in an area with a heavy tourist concentration.

2. THE VOLUME OF TOURISM IN TATRA NATIONAL PARK

In European terms, Tatra National Park is small but at the same time one of the most 'touristy' (POCIASK-KARTECZKA, BAŚCIK & CZUBERANT 2007, p. 272). The natural environment, easy access and a satisfactory

tourism infrastructure make it the most frequently visited national park in Poland. Moreover, tourism in the Polish Tatras is strongly focused in time (July, August) and space (Palenica Białczańska, Kościeliska Valley).

The number of people visiting national parks in Poland varies and ranges from ca. 10,000 to over 2.5 million (PARTYKA 2010, p. 13) with Tatra National Park the most frequently visited, followed by Karakonoski and Woliński National Parks. What is more, it is an area where, despite being most intensive in the summer season, tourism occurs all year round.

The tourism carrying capacity of the Tatra Mountains, as well as trail usage, is seriously exceeded. According to Tatra National Park statistics, over the period of 2000-14 it has fluctuated, reaching peak values in 2012 (2,947,949 tourists) (Fig. 1). In 2014 the park was visited by 2,791,837 tourists.

The attendance rate in 2014 was marked by clear seasonality – most visits were recorded in the summer months, mainly August – 567,929 tourists (Fig. 2). In 2015, the number of tickets sold increased and in August, the area was visited by 793,060 tourists. Such a tourism distribution is certainly related to the fact that in the summer the park is more easily accessible, and the holiday season is favourable for individual and group visits alike. The winter month with the largest number of tourists is February, which is related to the organization of the school winter break. It is worth stressing, however, that due to the rich skiing offer at the foot of the Tatra Mountains, many tourists do not visit the park at this time.

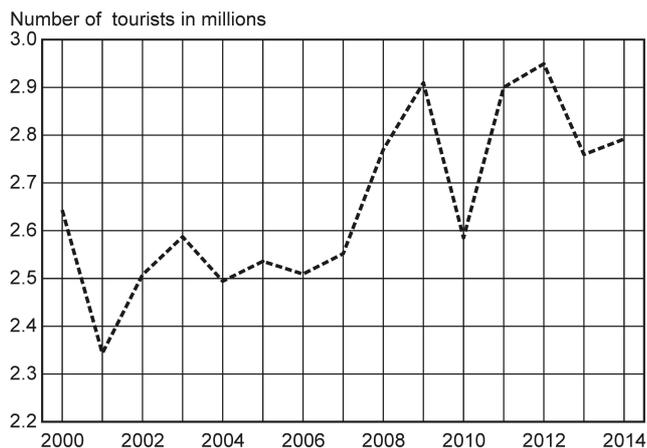


Fig. 1. The volume of tourism in Tatra National Park: 2000-2014

Source: author, based on Tatra National Park statistics

*Data does not include: admissions outside the season when ticket boxes are open, admissions of the inhabitants and people exempt from charge, unticketed admissions, as well as admissions of tourist shelters' residents

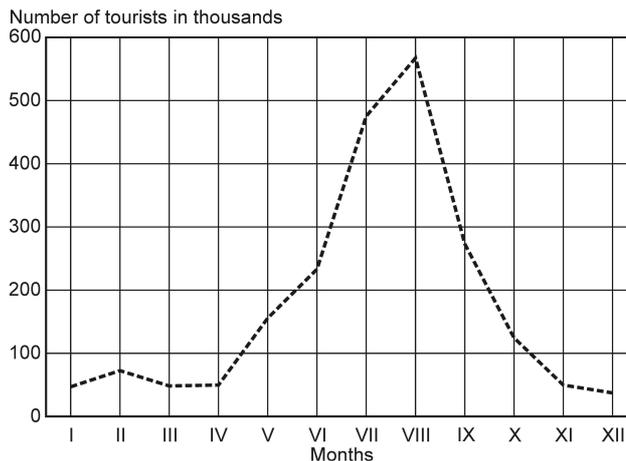


Fig. 2. The volume of tourism in Tatra National Park: in 2014 by month

Source: author, based on Tatra National Park statistics

*Data does not include: data of the Forest Community in Witów, PKL data, admissions outside the season when ticket boxes are open, admissions of the inhabitants and people exempt from charge, unticketed admissions, as well as admissions of tourist shelters' residents

The analysis also provides interesting information regarding admission to Tatra National Park at chosen ticket selling points (Fig. 3). We may observe a significant domination of the Łysa Polana (Palenica Białczańska) entrance, where in 2014, 722,164 visits were recorded based on the number of tickets sold. It is above all related to mass tourism on the Palenica Białczańska – Morskie Oko trail, where the number of daily visits during holiday weekends approaches 10,000. The second most frequently visited place is the Kościeliska Valley (447,925 tickets sold). Both places are regarded as the top attractions of the park where the most popular tourist trails cross (CIAPAŁA, ZIELONKA, KMIECIK-WRÓBEL 2010, p. 72)¹.

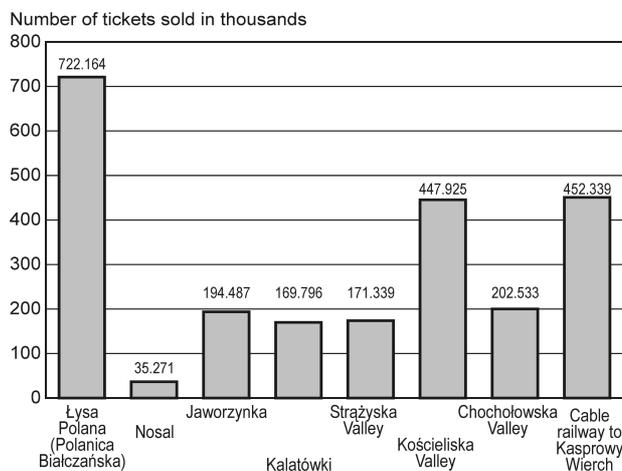


Fig. 3. The number of tickets sold to Tatra National Park in 2014 at selected ticket selling points

Source: author, based on Tatra National Park statistics

As J. POCIASK-KARTECZKA, M. BAŚCIK & S. CZUBERNAT (2007, p. 272) report, the most important factors of such a large concentration of tourism at these places include not only unique natural assets, but also easy access, fashion, as well as a very low level of difficulty as regards hiking on trails (e.g. the asphalt road to Morskie Oko).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research on tourism in Tatra National Park was conducted during the summer months of 2015 (July, August)², in the vicinity of five mountain shelters: PTTK (Polish Tourism and Sightseeing Society) 'Murowaniec' shelter in Hala Gąsiennicowa, PTTK shelter in Hala Kondratowa, PTTK shelter in Roztoka, PTTK Mountain Shelter in Polana Chochołowska and PTTK Mountain Shelter in the Five Ponds Valley.

As a method of study, the author used a questionnaire survey in order to conduct an in-depth analysis of the behaviour of mountain hiking tourists visiting selected regions of the Polish part of the High and Western Tatras. The research technique was *in situ* individual questionnaire interviews. The survey was carried out near the mountain shelters.

The survey included a total of 540 respondents; 120 interviews were conducted near each shelter, with the exception of the PTTK shelter in Roztoka which has a different character – it is not located at a node of tourist trails and therefore it is not a good springboard for hikers (only 60 interviews were conducted at that shelter). The researcher used a systematic sampling method, based on a numerical system – every tenth tourist was approached.

4. THE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF RESPONDENTS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE TRIP

In the analysis of the socio-demographic structure of the respondents, the percentages of both sexes were quite balanced, with the exception of the 'Murowaniec' shelter, where the majority of tourists were men (55%). In contrast, at the shelter in Hala Kondratowa, there were significantly more women (65.8%). With respect to the age structure, two cohorts could be clearly distinguished: tourists aged 26-35 and 36-45. The smallest groups consisted of those below 16 years of age and the elderly (above 55), with the lowest percentage recorded in the area of the Five Ponds

Valley shelter (1.6%). This distribution may be related to the fact that this facility is the most difficult to reach among all the shelters included in the study (the highest such shelter in the Polish Tatras). As regards education, most tourists had completed university education.

As for the respondents' permanent place of residence, the most numerous group in all three areas were inhabitants from the Masovia Province (Polana Chochołowska – 20.8%, Hala Kondratowa – 25%, the Five Ponds Valley – 19.1%). In the case of tourists approached near the shelter in Roztoka and 'Murowaniec', they mostly came from the Małopolskie Province (25.3% and 24.1%, respectively). Moreover, the provinces which were represented by relatively large numbers included Łódzkie, Lubelskie, Wielkopolskie, Pomeranian, Świętokrzyskie and Silesian. The respondents were usually inhabitants of large cities. Foreign tourists made up only a small percentage and they were not present at all in the study sample near Polana Chochołowska shelter. In Hala Kondratowa, there were tourists from England and Sweden (5.8%), at 'Murowaniec' – from the Netherlands and Scotland (9.1%), in the Five Ponds Valley – from France, Ireland and Germany (2.5%) and in Roztoka – from England (1.6%).

The average length of stay was 4-7 days (Hala Kondratowa – 67.5%, Polana Chochołowska – 60.8%, the Five Ponds Valley – 54.1%). A shorter stay (up to 3 days) was most often reported by tourists who were staying at the shelters which are high mountain climbing bases: 'Murowaniec' (57.5%), Roztoka shelter (41.6%) and the Five Ponds Valley shelter (30.8%). Stays lasting longer than two weeks were rare and reported mostly in the area of Roztoka shelter.

The most popular form of tourist accommodation in the Tatra Mountains was a guest house or private B&B (78.1% in the Polana Chochołowska area). However, the respondents relatively often indicated several options and another popular type was a mountain shelter. This was indicated most frequently near the one in Roztoka (75%), relating to the fact that this shelter came first in the 4th Ranking Competition of Mountain Shelters published by the Mountain Tourism Magazine (*Jak liczyliśmy...* 2015, p. 22). Thus, many people arrived at this shelter in order to check its gastronomic and accommodation offers after recent redecoration. Sleeping 'under the stars' was mentioned most often near 'Murowaniec' (3.3%) and the Five Ponds Valley shelter (5%), due to the fact that both facilities are situated in the Orla Percé climbing area, where many tourists who go high mountain climbing spend the night 'under the stars' because there are no vacancies in the shelter.

5. FORMS OF SPENDING LEISURE TIME DURING A STAY IN THE TATRA MOUNTAINS

As regards ways of spending leisure time while staying in the Tatra Mountains, the respondents indicated mountain hiking for up to 10 hours as the predominant activity (Fig. 4). The smallest number was noted in the area of Hala Kondratowa shelter due to the fact that this facility is easily accessible from Zakopane, and is often the ultimate trip destination, or possibly a resting point on the way to a seemingly easy trail to Giewont. This is confirmed by the fact that respondents from this study area often (47.5%) mentioned shorter trips, lasting 8 hours maximum, as well as going high mountain climbing least often as regards the areas studied (1.6%). It is also where the highest percentage of respondents (17.5%) admitted using cable cars and horse-drawn carts during their trips.

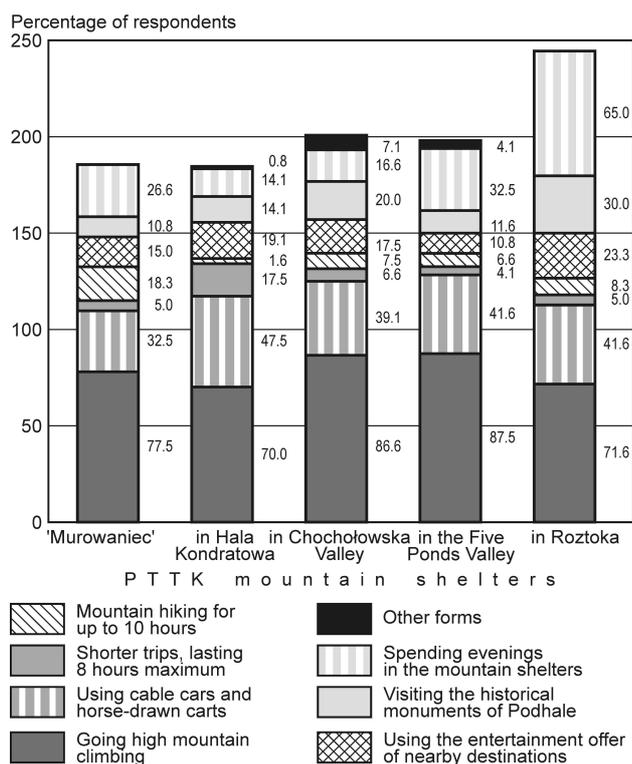


Fig. 4. Forms of spending leisure time by respondent and area of study

Source: author, based on field study

Most people going high mountain climbing were found near 'Murowaniec' (18.3%), which highlights its special character as a springboard to the mountainous trails of Orla Perć. The area was also one of the three (after Roztoka - 65% and the Five Ponds Valley - 32.5%) where the respondents usually spent evenings in the mountain shelters (26.6%).

The tendencies presented above are also stressed in the respondents' answers which concerned using the entertainment offer of nearby destinations, as well as visiting the historical monuments of Podhale. The smallest number of tourists interested in these forms of leisure activity was recorded near 'Murowaniec' and in the Five Ponds Valley area, which stresses their interest in mountain hiking (including climbing) rather than in the historical monuments.

Other forms of activity (most of which occurred near the shelter on Polana Chochołowska - 7.5%) included attending church services, spending time with children or cycling excursions. Attending church services is connected with the fact that many people visit the Pope's Trail (Jarząbca Valley, sites related to the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1983). They are both individual tourists (including monks) and Oasis movement groups.

The respondents were also asked to indicate which regions of the Tatra Mountains they had visited or were going to visit during their current stay. The question included suggestions of places, some of which can be regarded as 'obligatory', and some as less popular and hard to reach (Orla Perć, Kasprowy Wierch, Rysy, Wołowiec, Starorobociański Wierch, Kościeliska Valley). The places which turned out to be most frequently visited were Kościeliska Valley and Kasprowy Wierch. In both cases, most indications were given in the areas of Hala Kondratowa and Polana Chochołowska, which again implies that they are visited by 'less specialized' tourists, treating mountain hiking more lightly. Orla Perć was visited by the largest number of respondents from the area around the 'Murowaniec' and Five Ponds Valley shelters (56.6% and 43.3%), which results from their location (an ideal springboard to the high mountain trails of Orla Perć). The area was mentioned least often by respondents from Hala Kondratowa (20.8%) and Polana Chochołowska (19.1%). Rysy was chosen mainly by the tourists visiting the shelter in Roztoka (35%), due to its location, as well as popularity among the more specialized tourists. As regards the Western Tatras, they are most often visited by respondents from the Polana Chochołowska area shelters (Wołowiec - 56.6%, Starorobociański Wierch - 21.6%). This area is significantly less popular or even ignored by those visiting the remaining four areas, where it is often referred to as 'unknown'.

6. MOTIVATION AND QUALIFICATION ASSESSMENT OF RESPONDENTS

One of the aims of the research was to define hikers' motivations to visit given parts of the Tatra Mountains. The respondents were asked to rate on a scale

Table 1. Motivation for respondents' tourist activity

| Motivational dispositions | 'Murowaniec' Shelter | Hala Kondratowa shelter | Polana Chochołowska shelter | Five Ponds Valley shelter | Roztoka shelter |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| | mean value | | | | |
| Activity-motivational | | | | | |
| Satisfying the need for physical activity, negative energy release and rest | 4.07 | 3.6 | 3.8 | 3.9 | 3.8 |
| Cathartic-motivational | | | | | |
| Escape from everydayness (escapism) | 4.06 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4.5 |
| Sense of freedom and independence | 4.2 | 4.1 | 4.1 | 4.1 | 4.3 |
| Health-motivational | | | | | |
| Improvement of health, fitness and good feeling | 4.2 | 4.1 | 4.1 | 4.03 | 3.8 |
| Socio-motivational | | | | | |
| Opportunity to make new friends | 2.4 | 2.6 | 2.1 | 2.3 | 1.8 |
| Emotional-motivational | | | | | |
| Strong impressions, emotions (risk, challenge) | 3.1 | 2.9 | 2.6 | 3.1 | 2.9 |
| Testing yourself, fighting your own weaknesses | 3.6 | 3.4 | 3.4 | 3.8 | 3.5 |
| Ambition-motivational | | | | | |
| Rivalry, competition, tourist feats | 1.7 | 1.6 | 1.5 | 1.8 | 1.4 |
| Respect from others, desire to be 'up-to-date', to make yourself distinguished | 1.1 | 1.1 | 0.9 | 1.01 | 0.7 |
| Trying to reach a set target | 3.8 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 3.8 | 3.6 |
| The need to obtain mountain tourism badges | 0.8 | 0.8 | 1.2 | 0.5 | 0.2 |
| Cognitive-motivational | | | | | |
| Discovering and learning about the region | 3.6 | 3.4 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 3.4 |
| Contact with the natural and cultural environment of the region | 3.7 | 3.9 | 3.9 | 3.7 | 3.8 |

Source: author, based on field study.

from 0 to 5 the significance of the individual dispositions listed in the questionnaire. They were chosen on the basis of the recreational activity classification by R. Winiarski, where the author distinguished seven main groups and the activity motivations related to them (WINIARSKI 1988, p. 53). Mean values (arithmetic mean) were calculated from individual dispositions which allowed the author to define their average significance for respondents in each of the areas studied.

As shown in Table 1, at all the research sites the most important was cathartic-motivational disposition, including escapism³ (the mean assessment rate oscillated around 4.5 in each case). Motivations included relaxation and a sense of rest, as well as the fulfillment of emotional needs thanks to mountain hiking. During mountain excursions, especially those made in the company of close friends or relatives, particularly favourable conditions for 'syntony' - 'joyous tiredness' are created (FENCZYN 2000, p. 4). Only rated slightly lower, within the same disposition, was the sense of freedom and independence. The cathartic motivation is based on needs related to the lack of rest and the desire to make a psychological escape from everyday problems.

The next was health-motivational disposition, followed by cognitive- and activity-motivation while the remaining were rated much lower. Interesting observations regarded risk and challenge, which in the literature are usually treated as features of active tourism, including specialised, adventure and extreme tourism (WEBER 2001, pp. 360-361, POMFRET 2006, p. 115). This motivation was rated rather low but highest by respondents from the areas of 'Murowaniec' and the Five Ponds Valley shelters (the average rating was 3.1 in each case), which may be related to high mountain climbing.

Within the scope of ambition-motivational disposition, as broadly understood, the most important motivation is the attempt to reach the target set, while the least significant was the need to obtain mountain tourism badges (the lowest average rating - the shelter in Roztoka: 0.2). As it turned out, respondents do not attach significance to this motivation; they often regard collecting tourism badges as an anachronism, usually associated with tourism organized by PTTK. Tourist feats, combined with rivalry and competition, were also rated low; although it often appears in the literature on the subject as a significant feature of specialised tourism (ŁOBOŻEWICZ 1983, p. 8).

Table 2. Respondents' skills concerning mountain hiking

| Skills | 'Murowaniec' shelter | Hala Kondratowa shelter | Polana Chochołowska shelter | Five Ponds Valley shelter | Roztoka shelter |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| | mean value | | | | |
| Ability to choose and use tourist equipment and tourist clothes | 3.8 | 3.5 | 3.4 | 3.7 | 3.7 |
| Using maps and guidebooks bought before the trip | 3.9 | 3.9 | 4.2 | 4.2 | 4.2 |
| Searching for information about the area individually | 3.9 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 3.9 | 4.3 |
| Planning routes, having sense of direction | 3.8 | 3.5 | 3.8 | 3.7 | 4.2 |
| Checking weather conditions and the situation on tourist trails before setting out | 4.2 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.6 |
| Preparing mentally and physically for departure | 3.3 | 2.9 | 3.3 | 3.2 | 2.8 |
| The ability to cope with the hardships of a mountain hiking trip | 3.8 | 3.9 | 3.8 | 3.9 | 3.7 |
| Knowing the code of conduct on the trail and in tourist facilities | 4.4 | 4.4 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.6 |
| Knowing the safety regulations in mountain hiking tourism | 4.5 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.5 |

Source: author, based on field study.

Motivation among those high mountain climbing (8.3%), a large part of whom (47.8%) were tourists, approached in the area of the 'Murowaniec' shelter, seems to be very similar. However, they rated the activity-motivational disposition higher (average rating - 4.4); second after cathartic motivation. In turn, attempts to reach a set target were rated much lower there than by the remaining respondents (2.3). As it turned out, risk and challenge are of only medium significance to mountain climbers (3.5) while rivalry, competition and tourist feats were rated even lower (1.9). It is noteworthy that those high mountain climbing stressed the autotelic character of their activity, admitting at the same time that aspects related to competition or prestige are of no importance to them.

In the evaluation of the respondents' skills, they were asked to rate on a scale from 0 to 5 their mountain hiking skills. Individual skills were chosen as those typical for specialised tourism and most frequently mentioned in the literature on the subject (ŁOBOŻEWICZ 1983, MERSKI 2002). Similar to motivation, mean values (arithmetical means) were calculated which enabled the researcher to define their significance for respondents in each of the areas studied.

Table 2 shows that all skills were rated quite highly which may result from the respondents' high assessment of their own and a kind of daring approach to mountain tourism. The skill rated the highest in individual areas was the ability to behave properly on the trail and in tourism facilities (the highest - in the Roztoka shelter - 4.6). An equally highly rated skill was knowledge of safety regulation (the highest - in 'Murowaniec' and Roztoka shelters - average rating: 4.5).

The highest skills were characteristic of respondents from the area of the Roztoka shelter, which means that this particular place is visited by more tourism-conscious tourists, experienced in mountain hiking. The location of the shelter away from tourist trails is the reason why 'incidental' tourists do not reach it, often not knowing of its existence.

A much higher evaluation of their skills was made by tourists high mountain climbing. Similar to the remaining respondents, knowing the code of conduct on the trail and in tourism facilities, as well as knowing safety regulations were rated highest (average rating in each case - 4.6). The ability to choose and use tourist equipment was also rated highly (4.5), as well as the ability to use maps and guidebooks (4.5), plan routes, and having a good sense of direction (4.5). Mental and physical preparedness for setting out is rated much higher (3.5), which is certainly related to greater demands, specialization and difficulty of the activity itself. Also the ability to cope with the hardships of mountain hiking is greater in mountain climbers (4.5).

An important aim of the study was to verify mountain hikers' familiarity with the concept of specialised tourism. As it turned out, not many of them could explain it. It is interesting that the largest number of tourists who were unable to provide any definition were found in the area of the Five Ponds Valley (85%), regarded as the springboard for specialized tourists (often referred to as 'real tourists'). The respondents usually claimed that they had never heard this term.

The most tourists who knew the meaning of specialised tourism were found in the area surrounding

the Roztoka shelter (51.7%), which confirms the findings presented above (the shelter was mostly visited by those more experienced in mountain hiking). Specialised tourism was most often defined as professional, safe, prepared, specialized, advanced, demanding or extreme. It was also identified with PTTK membership, obtaining a guide's licence and collecting shelter stamps. There were also those claiming that this is tourism organized exclusively by the PTTK (hiking tours, camps, etc.).

As the term 'specialised tourism' was introduced in the 1950s by the PTTK milieu, it is worth looking more closely at the tourists who declared PTTK membership (only 5.9% of the respondents). The percentage of active members oscillated around 5% in individual research areas. The small percentage of PTTK members results from the contemporary tendency towards individualizing tourist journeys (PRÓSZYŃSKA-BORDAS 2013, p. 65). Mountain trips are usually organized by tourists themselves - using organizers' (including PTTK) services less often.

The motivational dispositions of the discussed group of respondents are as follows: cathartic-motivational (including escapism), health-motivational and cognitive-motivational. It is interesting that the need to obtain mountain tourism badges was rated very lowly (1.4 on average). However, the respondents quite highly evaluated their skills, with knowledge of the code of conduct on trails and tourism facilities and of safety regulations rated the highest (4.8 each). Also the mental and physical preparedness for a hiking trip was rated higher than other skills (3.6).

7. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of tourism in selected areas of Tatra National Park at the peak of the tourist season shows differences as regards the motivations and skills of tourists mountain hiking. The greatest motivation is typical of tourists visiting the areas of the 'Murowaniec' and the Five Ponds Valley shelters, which is the springboard for tourists walking along high mountain trails. These areas are also characterized by the highest skill levels in tourists. In this respect, a high position is also occupied by the area of the Roztoka shelter, visited by tourists who are more tourism-conscious and experienced in mountain hiking. The shelters on Polana Chochołowska and Hala Kondratowa are the springboards to excursions to the 'gentler' parts of the Western Tatras, which is why they are more frequently visited by tourists who are less 'specialized' and undertake a simpler and more accessible form of active tourism. This is also shown in the forms of

spending leisure time by the respondents during their stay in the Tatra Mountains.

In terms of motivation, the most significant is the cathartic-motivational disposition, including escapism, followed by the health-, cognitive- and activity-motivational dispositions. Less significant are risk and challenge, obtaining mountain tourism badges, rivalry and competition. These motivations are of no great importance even in the case of tourists going high mountain climbing, who by definition can be called specialised tourists.

Thus, the research shows that mountain hiking in Tatra National Park in the summer season has mostly a 'gentler' form. It is undertaken as specialised tourism by people associated with the PTTK or those who go high mountain climbing. However, even among specialized tourists, many features believed to be required in specialised tourism, such as mental and physical preparedness, looking for information about the visited area, as well as trying to reach the set target or the need to obtain mountain tourism badges, are of little importance.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Other areas considered the most popular in the Polish Tatras include the trail from Kuźnice to Giewont and to Hala Gąsiennicowa, as well as the Chochołowska Valley Trail to the shelter in Polana Chochołowska (CIAPAŁA, ZIELONKA & KMIECIK-WRÓBEL 2010, p. 72).

² The choice of the date of study was intentional - the interviews were conducted in each region for subsequent four days (week days and weekends), in the holiday season, when the attendance of visitors is the largest in the year.

³ A psychological need to escape from 'everydayness'.

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