



Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program

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“Discovering” the Carpathians: Episodes in Imagining and Reshaping Alpine Borderland Regions

Topic of research

An examination of the “discovery” (the beginnings of popular consciousness, on the part of outsiders) of three distinct regions of the Carpathian Mountains (including territories found in present-day Poland and Ukraine) over the last two centuries and the concomitant development of tourism in these multiethnic yet “backwards” borderland alpine territories.

Relevance and contribution to field

While much has been done on the general topic of tourism in the Polish lands (not always by historians; much more by alpine-club amateurs), this project represents a new approach to that topic in a number of ways. First, it augments the work of Polish scholars by including an examination of the Eastern Carpathians under the Second Polish Republic. This was a topic that could not be undertaken during the communist period: the change of borders after World War II that placed the Eastern Carpathians under Soviet rule necessitated a “forgetting” of the Polish connection there. Perhaps this is one of the main reasons why no one has drawn a connection between these various

periods of “discovery,” as I am now doing. Second, it pays greater attention to some of the underlying conflicts that emerged during the encounters: conflicts between those who thought of themselves in national or non-national terms (a recurrent—if still not always fully acknowledged—problem) as well as between various peoples and nationalities. Third, it strives to acknowledge the persistence of non-national identities and the importance of cross-border interaction. In this way, I see my work as also making a contribution to the literature on regionalism, as well as probing the interaction between local and national identities, between the concepts of Heimat and Fatherland, which have been discussed in the case of Germany and many other countries. Importantly, I hope it will serve as a counterweight to the still prevailing nationalist focus of the history of East-Central Europe (and other parts of the world) by reminding people that there are various ways to conceive of one’s identity, and that not all of these need to be cast in national terms. Sometimes the ties that bind transcend political borders and can be more important. Witness the emergence since 1989 of new regional entities, such as the Carpathian and Tatra Euroregions, which include territories covered by this study. Lastly, my work should also serve as a reminder that—despite Marxist predictions—“progress” is not always linear, as the clash between development and preservation or the privileging of nation-states over other entities makes clear.

As a writer and scholar, I hope that my book—and its offshoots--will bring to life episodes in the past that demonstrate issues of universal relevance: the relationship of man to the environment; the encounter with the “other” and the reactions it inspires; the ways in which cultural and economic issues are often closely intertwined with politics. This work, ultimately, represents what I hope is an interesting and unique history that combines tourism and preservationism, geography and ethnography, politics and culture. It also has real implications for the present-day development of the Carpathian mountain region.

While in Poland I gave two presentations dealing with my topic, which have helped to publicize what I am doing. The first was a popular talk for an audience of hiking enthusiasts in Bielsko interested in the Eastern Carpathians. The second was an academic lecture for the Academy of Arts and Letters (Akademia Umiejetnosci) in Cracow. Both were very well attended and received. I may yet publish (as I have been invited to publish) both talks in Polish periodicals: the first in Plaj, the second in Kwartalnik Historyczny or in a periodical of the Academy of Arts and Letters.

A concise summary of your approach and research methodology including a list of research sites.

As a historian, I have sought to ask questions of the documents housed in the archives that will shed light on the motivations behind these “discoveries”—that is, how these regions and peoples captured the popular imagination at these particular moments in history--as well as their consequences. I explored the central governmental archives, branched out to investigate the branches of regional and local government, as well as a plethora of social organizations. I also looked for brochures and other small publications, as well as the personal papers of those involved in these endeavors.

Research sites included:

Warsaw: Archiwum Akt Nowych (Archive of New Documents), Związek Harcerzy Polskich (Union of Polish Scouts), Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe (Central Military Archive), Biblioteka Narodowa (National Library)

Rzeszow: Archiwum Panstwowe w Rzeszowie (State Archive in Rzeszow)
Sanok: Archiwum Panstwowe w Rzeszowie/Oddzial w Sanoku (State Archive in Rzeszow/Branch in Sanok), Muzeum Historyczne (Historical Museum)
Skolyszyn: Archiwum Panstwowe w Rzeszowie/Oddzial w Skolyszynie (State Archive in Rzeszow/Branch in Skolyszyn)
Przemysl: Archiwum Panstwowe w Przemysle (State Archive in Przemysl)
Zakopane: Muzeum Tatrzańskie (Tatra Museum)
Grudziadz: Muzeum Etnograficzne (Ethnographic Museum)
Gdansk: Muzeum Etnograficzne (Ethnographic Museum)
Torun: Muzeum Etnograficzne (Ethnographic Museum)
Krakow: Archiwum Panstwowe w Krakowie (State Archive in Cracow), Biblioteka Jagiellonska (Jagiellonian Library)
Wroclaw: Ossolineum (ms division)

A summary of your research findings and preliminary conclusions addressing the questions and issues raised in your research proposal.

Let me preface this part of the report by stating that I have yet to process all of the materials I was able to collect during my six-month stay in Poland. Parts of it (some collected books and archival materials) are yet to be received by me; thus this is truly a preliminary report, as far as any conclusions are concerned. That said, I was able to locate and consult important sets of materials for the book. These had to do with the various actors in the “discovery” of various segments of the Carpathian Mountains. Let me review some of what I was able to accomplish during my trip; this account will give some indication of my research findings as well as some preliminary conclusions.

Upon my arrival in Warsaw, I set about collecting more information on the Society of Friends of the Hutsul Region (Towarzystwo Przyjaciol Huculszczyzny), which I had researched the previous year in Ukrainian archives, at the Central Military Archive (Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe or CAW) in Rembertow. As I mentioned in my application, this archive was paradoxically an important source of information for a work on tourism and the mountains, given the fact that its first head was Brigadier General Tadeusz Kasprzycki. While his personal file at the CAW did not bring any revelations, other files within the archive carried information on the Society. What I found there has led me to strengthen my conclusions as to the nature of the Society. There are more indications that the Society of Friends of the Hutsul Region was not your average alpine tourist society: rather, it did seem very closely connected to Pilsudski through the person of Kasprzycki, and its military connections are likewise quite evident. (I had formerly accessed the organization’s papers in Stanislawow—today’s Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine—which, as being the branch in the field, did not allow me to see the full connection with the military and Pilsudski.)

In Warsaw I also perused the papers of the Union of Polish Scouts (Zwiazek Harcerzy Polskich), which are housed at the scouting headquarters (Julia Tazbirowa, archivist). There I learned that there were no materials on the interwar period, as regards scouting activities in the Eastern Carpathians. However, there was plenty on a major period of interest for me: the period of the late 1970s and early 1980s of the so-called Operation “Bieszczady-40” (Akcja “Bieszczady-40”). This was the summer program of the elder scouts (late teens, for the most part) in the Bieszczad Mountains. They established camps throughout the region, some of which were turned into more permanent campsites, open to the public, and helped with the development of the region. The

name “Bieszczady-40” comes from the fact that their work in the mountains was to be completed for the 40th anniversary of socialist Poland. The papers from “Bieszczady-40” gave me more insights into the challenges encountered by the scouts as they labored in the highland region as well as a better sense of what they were trying to accomplish, which will allow me better to situate them within the regional picture. Taken together with their publication, Stanica, these papers from “Bieszczady-40” also afforded me a better understanding of the relationship of the scouting operation to the Polish (party) authorities. For this was clearly a government-inspired program, as seen from the fact that a high-ranking party official proposed the idea of working in the Bieszczady to the scouts in 1973.

A counterweight to these activities was provided by yet another set of materials I consulted while in Warsaw. These were the publications of the Student Clubs of Beskid Guides (Studenckie Kola Przewodników Beskidzkich). I made contact with a former member, Andrzej Wielocha, who is now the editor of a respected journal on the highlands, Plaj. He lent me some published materials that are extremely hard to find otherwise. I supplemented them with a range of published materials I was able to read in the National Library and the Main Library of PTTK in Warsaw: Magury, Poloniny, and Plaj. From these I have a better sense of how college students were engaged, as of the mid 1950s, in the “discovery” of the Bieszczad Mountains. Although also supported by the communist government (who wasn’t in these times?), they found their activities—such as the fair in Komancza in 1971—meeting with only momentary support by the local authorities. As of the 1980s, a number of students began to take a visible interest in the legacy of the Bieszczady: that is, in its Lemko and Bojko heritage (Lemkos and Bojkos being the indigenous East Slavic peoples who had inhabited the region until their expulsion—“repatriation” to the USSR or resettlement elsewhere in Poland as a result of Operation Vistula—following World War II).

For more materials on the “discovery” of the Bieszczady, I visited a series of archives in the subcarpathian province (województwo podkarpackie). These were located in Rzeszów, Sanok, Przemysł, and Skolyszyn. All state archives, they contained materials that would give me a sense of government engagement in the “discovery” of this region in the decades following World War II. I have not yet had the time to process these materials, thus cannot produce any preliminary conclusions at the moment. I likewise consulted materials contained in libraries and museums in that region. Most fruitful was a trip to the Historical Museum in Sanok. It contained, for example, materials on the Highland Congress (Zjazd Górski) in Sanok from 1936, one of a series of events held during the interwar period. While I had read published materials about this event, the archive gave me a much better sense of its course. Again, I have yet to process all these notes. There was also a collection of newspaper clippings on the Bieszczady region that looked promising and which I photographed. All in all, my understanding of the “discovery” of the Bieszczad Mountains is much deeper since my trip to this region.

While in Zakopane, I availed myself of the archive of the Tatra Society (Towarzystwo Tatrzańskie). Indeed, I am the first person to peruse that archive in its entirety, according to the archivist, Wojciech Roszkowski. What I sought was general information on the Society, as seen through its correspondence, as well as more specific materials dealing with the branches of the Society that were active in the Eastern Carpathians. Both were in ample supply in those files. Although I cannot draw any genuine conclusions here, what I can say is that the materials I collected should enable me to flesh out the section of the book that will deal with the Tatra Society, particularly with its

activities in the Eastern Carpathians. There were materials on all three eastern branches of the Society: the Stanislawow, Kolomyja (Czarnohora), and Lwow branches. Only one of these—the Kolomyja branch—maintained its activities throughout the entire period that interests me. I was able to learn a good deal about what it took to make for a successful branch: that is, what a difference a few particularly engaged activists could accomplish more or less by themselves. My knowledge of these activities was supplemented by my perusal of the yearbook of the Tatra Society, Pamiętnik Towarzystwa Tatrzańskiego (for the early period), which was followed by the publication Wierchy (from 1922).

In Wroclaw, I consulted materials in the archive of Stanislaw Vincenz, housed in the manuscript division of Ossolineum. These materials have only been recently released to the public. In particular, I was interested in reading some of Vincenz's correspondence with colleagues abroad such as Hans Zbinden, who were regular visitors to the Hutsul region and popularizers of the region internationally. The materials I ordered via Xerox I have not yet seen, however, thus it is more difficult for me to draw conclusions here. What I hope is that they will help me to flesh out the interwar years in the Eastern Carpathians, where Stanislaw Vincenz and others resided.

In Krakow I was able to look at materials on the early years of skiing in the mountains that are stored in the state archive. I still need to return to that city to work further in the manuscripts of the Main Center for Alpine Tourism of the Polish Association of Tourism and Hiking (Centralny Ośrodek Turystyki Górskiej PTTK), where I have not yet gone through the post-World War II materials, only the interwar materials.

Throughout my stay, I collected images for the book as well as considered the visual side of the "discoveries." In this I was assisted by various people. The head archivist of the Central Military Archive, Andrzej Czeslaw Zak, compiled for me a CD of images from his archive. In Sejny, at the Borderlands Foundation (Fundacja Pogranicze), I was able to photograph images from their extensive postcard collection (here, on the Hutsul region in particular). I have also been able to access images on display at the Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw, where there was a temporary exhibition of images of the Hutsul region this past fall. Some of those images already made their way into a popular lecture I gave in October 2006. Yet another excellent resource for iconography of the Hutsul region proved to be the private collection of the Gasiorowski family, now for the most part housed in Torun. I was able to photograph much of this personally. While in Gdansk, I also made contact with a historian who has written extensively about art in the Tatra Mountains as well as in the Eastern Carpathians, Grzegorz Niewiadomy. He has given me direct access to his writings and to the images he has compiled over the course of his work. My contacts in the Tatra Museum (Muzeum Tatrzańskie) should also prove helpful with identifying and accessing other images of the Tatras.

Suggestions for future research.

There is an archive, somewhere in Warsaw (likely in some [former] student's apartment), of the Student Club of Beskid Guides that is doubtless worth a full research project (dissertation or master's thesis?) of its own. I have only scratched the surface in researching that organization. Likewise the topic of the Polish return to the Eastern Carpathians in recent years (that is, the influx of hikers into the region) would make an excellent topic for someone (say, an anthropologist) wishing to work on the post-1989 developments.

Recommendations for the US policy community.

The Carpathian mountain region, particularly the further east one goes, needs greater support for the development of market economies. There is so much that can be done to help the people of the alpine borderlands, in places still quite impoverished, to develop the types of ecotourism or green tourism that would allow them to make a living while giving outsiders access to the beautiful natural resources. Part of what the locals need is the proper context in which to view their region, to compare it to other alpine regions across Europe. I believe that some of my episodes from the past can provide instructive lessons for those making these types of decisions in the present, and I hope to continue to share this information with people in the field.

Need I say that the strategic significance of the Carpathian mountain region is now more keenly felt, given that part of the region is within the European Union and part outside of that supranational entity. To what extent the Tatra and Carpathian Euroregions will be able to transcend political boundaries is yet to be seen. What can surely be said is that the European Union opens the door for greater regionalism for some (certainly for the Tatra Euroregion, comprised of European Union member states) and, perhaps, hinders the development of what might be called common-sense regionalism, based on natural affinities, for others (for example, the territories that comprise the Carpathian Euroregion). Again, various types of regionalism have been encouraged or discouraged in the past—something that my research clearly demonstrates. This history and its ramifications for development in the Carpathian mountain region can be instructive even today.