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*Tourism and the appropriation of landscape: National symbols and
representation in the Karkonosze Mountains, 1918-1948*

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Resume

In my paper I describe the national appropriation of the Karkonosze region in now southwestern Poland via tourism between the world wars and after 1945. In Prussian times, especially since the foundation of tourism-promoting organizations and the following establishment of tourist infrastructure, traveling to the then called Riesengebirge Mountains became a mass phenomenon. After 1918 and the creation of an independent Polish and Czechoslovakian state, the "phantom of a Slavonic threat" overshadowed the regions development. The German opinion became more and more nationalist and tourism was only one of the battle fields. Tourism marketing and guide books focused on the Germanness of the region, claiming its heritage to be exclusively German. After 1945, the expulsion of the Germans and the incorporation of Silesia into Poland, a new period began: within the framework of the propaganda of the so-called "re-gained territories" tourism, regional studies and historiography aimed at a re-interpretation of the past and a new representation of the region.

The Karkonosze mountains (Riesengebirge, Giant Mountains) have been established as a major German travel destination by the end of the eighteenth century¹. After the incorporation of Silesia into Prussia (1742) the Schneekoppe (Śnieżka) became the country's highest peak, with a state border with Austria on the top. In the following decades literary works and especially the arts produced a standardized image of the region, characterized by romanticism². By the middle of the 19th century professional painters' organizations used these images in a commercialized manner³ and with the introduction of postcards they became even more wide-spread⁴.

¹ See in Details: M. Staffa *Karkonosze*, Wrocław 2006. For the inner-German aspect: K. Bobowski "Schlesien als Reiseziel der Berliner und Brandenburger", in: A. Herzig/ K. Bzdziach (reds.): *"Wach auf mein Herz und denke". Zur Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen Schlesien und Berlin-Brandenburg von 1740 bis heute*, Berlin 1995, 114-124.

² K. Bzdziach (red.) *Die imposante Landschaft. Künstler und Künstlerkolonien im Riesengebirge im 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1999. There especially the article by Gerhard Leistner. See also M. Staffa *op. cit.*

³ Bzdziach *op.cit.* The role of Germany's leading romantic painter C. D. Friedrich is to be high lightened.

⁴ For the role of photography see A. Cencora's article in the same volume.

The institutionalization and professionalization of tourism came with the emergence of tourist associations. The "Riesengebirgsverein" (RGV), first created on the Bohemian side of the mountains in Hohenelbe (Vrchlabí) in 1880 and then on the Silesian side in Hirschberg (Jelenia Góra), built up an infrastructure for tourism (e.g. hiking trails) and distributed information about the region through popular media⁵. As late as the end of the nineteenth century, traveling to the Karkonosze mountains became a mass phenomenon in Prussia. At the weekends, thousands of Berliners or inhabitants of the Silesian capitol Breslau (Wrocław), made a trip to the Schneekoppe and the surrounding hills⁶. Tourists' inns, hotels and alpine huts ("Bauden") combined with spas, which partly existed a long time before modern tourism begun, made the Karkonosze region a well developed travel destination mostly for Germans⁷.

After Germany's defeat in World War I, the resurrection of Poland and creation of Czechoslovakia, Silesia became a battle field. Polish and Czech claims for parts of the Prussian province and the radicalization of German public opinion influenced interwar tourism⁸. Not only popular media or politically influenced publications reflected the national conflicts, also guide books of the period speak of the "peaceful Germanization" by medieval settlers of Franconian origin, on both sides of the mountain, who brought "German culture" to the land⁹. The "Grieben" of 1933 complains about the Czech path marker system, different from the Silesian/German one, saying: "Besides figurative signs there are letters used. Because they are initial letters of the Czech names, they are hardly understandable for the German." ("Neben bildlichen Zeichen sind auch Buchstaben verwendet, die, da sie die Anfangsbuchstaben der tschechischen Namen darstellen, für den Deutschen nicht ohne weiteres verständlich sind.")¹⁰

The Czech administration of this region, inhabited mostly by ethnic Germans, intervened not only by replacing the path marker system created by the "Österreichische

⁵ For a brief history of the RGV see E. Szczepański: "Towarzystwo Karkonoskie (1880-1945)", *Śląski Labirynt Krajoznawczy* 1/1989, 75-86; or visit the website of the still existing association <http://www.riesengebirgsverein.de>

⁶ For a very interesting contemporary account see M. Orłowicz *Moje wspomnienia turystyczne*, ed. by Wanda Ferens, Wrocław et al. 1970, 519-521. Orłowicz, a Polish pioneer of hiking and tourism describes the Karkonosze as a mountain devastated by *petit bourgeois* German tourists.

⁷ For the development in the whole Sudeten region see J. Potocki *Rozwój zagospodarowania turystycznego Sudetów od połowy XIX wieku do II wojny światowej*, Jelenia Góra 2004. Overall information in T. Przerwa *Wędrowka po Sudetach. Szkice z historii turystyki śląskiej przed 1945 r.*, Wrocław 2005.

⁸ T. Przerwa "Die Schneekoppe – der höchste Gipfel des Riesengebirges", in: M. Czaplinski/ H.-J. Hahn/ T. Weger (reds.) *Schlesische Erinnerungsorte. Gedächtnis und Identität einer mitteleuropäischen Region*, Görlitz 2005, 12-28.

⁹ See *Schlesien. Riesengebirge – Grafschaft Glatz. Handbuch für Reisende von Karl Baedeker*, Leipzig 1923, XXI-XXV.

¹⁰ *Grieben Reiseführer Band 81: Riesengebirge. Kleine Ausgabe mit Angaben für Automobilisten und Wintersportler*, Berlin 1933, 14.

Riesengebirgsverein". Some German owners of huts have been forced to give other their property to Czechs, esp. to the "Czechoslovakian Tourists' Club" (Klub československých turistů, KČST), which prompted reaction. After such an action, in 1922 Germans collected money to build a "Schlesierhaus" opposite to the existent "Riesenbaude" (from 1847), on the Bohemian side of the Koppenplan, nearby the Śnieżka¹¹. Thus it may be little surprising that the Grieben of 1933 annotates if a hut is in possession of Czechs¹². Another form of repression was the forced partition of German hiking associations in the Czechoslovakian Republic, e.g. the Silesian location groups of the "Mährisch-Schlesischer Sudetengebirgsverein" had to create a separate "Schlesischer Sudetengebirgsverein" in 1922¹³. However, the German family of Pohl had no problem in running both huts at the peak itself until 1945.

One should also not forget, that the time between 1918 and 1939 was a period of modernization and democratization of tourism¹⁴. Especially after the creation of the "Kraft durch Freude" organization in Nazi Germany¹⁵, traveling became accessible for the 'little man', and recreation in "German" landscape¹⁶ became almost a patriotic duty. However, the nationalist peak has been reached after the forced incorporation of the Czech borderlands ("Sudetengau") into the Third Reich in autumn 1938: "In summer and fall Germans from all parts of the Reich wander through the mountain and the valleys on the northern and southern side, which, after the mighty deed of the Führer, are no more separated by an unnatural border." ("Im Sommer und Winter durchwandern Deutsche aus allen Teilen des Reiches das Gebirge und seine Täler auf der Nordseite und Südseite, die seit der Großtat des Führers im Herbst 1938 keine unnatürliche Grenze mehr trennt.")¹⁷

¹¹ Such a competition took place also in other parts of the Sudeten, see Przerwa *Wędrówka...* For a more detailed view on the activities of tourist associations see T. Przerwa 'Odkryli dla nas piękno gór'. *Trzy sudeckie organizacje górskie 1881-1945: Verband der Gebirgsvereine an der Eule, Waldenburger Gebirgsverband, Zobtengebirgsverein*, Toruń 2003 and M. Dziedzic *Morawsko-Śląskie Sudeckie Towarzystwo Górskie 1881-1945. Próba charakterystyki*, Wrocław 2006.

¹² Grieben..., 15.

¹³ Dziedzic *op.cit.*

¹⁴ See Christine Keitz *Grundzüge einer Sozialgeschichte des Tourismus in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, in: P. J. Brenner (red.) *Reisekultur in Deutschland: Von der Weimarer Republik zum 'Dritten Reich'*, Tübingen 1997, 49-72. For a general overview on tourism development: H. Spode *Wie die Deutschen "Reiseweltmeister" wurden. Eine Einführung in die Tourismusgeschichte*, Erfurt 2003.

¹⁵ See H. Spode *Ein Seebad für zwanzigtausend Volksgenossen. Zur Grammatik und Geschichte des fordistischen Urlaubs*, in: Brenner *op.cit.*, 7-48; and S. Baranowski *Strength through Joy: Tourism and national integration in the Third Reich*, in: S. Baranowski/ E. Furlough (Eds.): *Being Elsewhere. Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, Ann Arbor 2001, 213-236.

¹⁶ For landscape discourses in German history see T. Lekan/ T. Zeller (eds.): *Germany's Nature. Cultural landscapes and environmental history*, New Brunswick et al. 2005.

¹⁷ *Grieben Reiseführer Band 81: Riesengebirge. Kleine Ausgabe mit Angaben für Autofahrer und Wintersportler; 35. Auflage mit 6 Karten und 8 Abbildungen*, Berlin 1941, 10. The guide book also mentions a "temporal" path marker system created by the now enlarged RGV at the Bohemian side (11). Interesting in this context is the creation of hiking path from the Saar region in western Germany to Silesia, created 1933 to "symbolize the connection between the West and the East", *ibid.* 12.

The end of World War II meant a double revolution in Karkonosze tourism. The incorporation of Silesia and other former eastern provinces of Prussia into Poland, the forced migration of the German population and the resettlement of Poles within the new state borders¹⁸ was accompanied by the installation of a new political system¹⁹. After the first Polish "pioneers" and representatives of the new administration arrived in the Jelenia Góra district in May 1945²⁰, tourism was not the most important part of their activity, but nevertheless an important one. The adoption of tourist infrastructure, which has been little destroyed, even if sometimes devastated by plunderers after the end of the war, was one of the important tasks²¹. In a country, vastly destroyed by war and German occupation, the Sudeten tourist infrastructure served as a major starting point for the new socialist system, which aimed at ensuring vacations for the "working class"²².

Interestingly enough, the beginnings of "democratic tourism" in the Karkonosze region and in Poland overall have been carried out by non-state organizations: the Polish Tatra Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Tatrzańskie, PTT, found in Cracow in 1874) and the Polish Country Lovers Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Krajoznawcze, PTK, found in Warsaw 1906) and their local branches tried to save as much infrastructure as possible, take hotels and huts over from private ownerships and argued with the border guards about accession rights for tourists²³. Time after time, Stalinist centralization reached also tourists' organizations – the final point of this process was the unification of PTT and PTK in December 1950 as the "Polish Tourists' and Country Lovers Society" (Polskie Towarzystwo Turystyczno-Krajoznawcze, PTTK). By that point, however, the organization of vacations for the working class has been handed over to the new created "Workers' Vacation Fond" (Fundusz Wczasów Pracowniczych, FWP), a centralized institution runned officially by the Trade Unions' Council (Centralna Rada Związków Zawodowych, CRZZ), found in 1949²⁴.

¹⁸ Among numerous publications on this subject see e.g. W. Borodziej/ H. Lemberg (eds.): *"Unsere Heimat ist uns ein fremdes Land geworden..."*. *Die Deutschen östlich von Oder und Neiße 1945-1950. Dokumente aus polnischen Archiven; Band 4: Wojewodschaften Pomerellen und Danzig (Westpreußen), Wojewodschaft Breslau (Niederschlesien)*, Marburg 2004.

¹⁹ On the place of tourism in the ideology of the communist regime and its realization after 1945 see D. Jarosz *"Masy pracujące przede wszystkim"*. *Organizacja wypoczynku w Polsce 1945-1956*, Warszawa 2003. For the whole period of Polish People's Republic P. Sowiński *Wakacje w Polsce Ludowej. Polityka władz i ruch turystyczny (1945-1989)*, Warszawa 2005.

²⁰ For a very interesting collection of pioneers' memories see "Rocznik Jeleniogórski" XXIII-1985, special issue *Wspomnienia pionierów*, Wrocław 1985.

²¹ Z. Kulik *Przejmowanie niemieckiego majątku turystycznego w Sudetach i na Dolnym Śląsku po II wojnie światowej*, in: "Wierchy Rocznik poświęcony górcom. Organ Komisji turystyki górskiej Zarządu Głównego Polskiego Towarzystwa Turystyczno-Krajoznawczego" vol. 64, Kraków 1999, 193-212.

²² According to Sowiński *op.cit.* in 1956 the accomodation capacities of the post-German territories made up to 75% of the overall FWP tourist infrastructure, of which the Sudeten covered the greatest part, 24 and 39.

²³ W. Skowron *Czy można było dokonać więcej? Ostatnie – powojenne lata działalności PTK 1945 – 1950*, http://khit.pttk.pl/index.php?co=tx_powojnie_00 [26/10/2006]. For the local context see Z. Kulik *Organizacja turystyki w Regionie Jeleniogórskim w latach 1945-1950*, in: J. Janczak (red.) *Historia turystyki w Sudetach*, Wrocław 1986.

²⁴ For further information on the overall development see Jarosz *op.cit.* and Sowiński *op.cit.*

Finally, one should not forget that since 1945 tourism and tourism promotion in southwestern Poland took place within the broader framework of the propaganda of the "re-gained territories" (Ziemie Odzyskane)²⁵. Tracing Polish past in the new western provinces of Poland as a justification of the Oder-Neisse border became a patriotic duty, carried out not only by political propaganda. Mieczysław Orłowicz, the aforementioned "founding father" of Polish tourism, who has been very active in rebuilding its postwar structures, appealed in the first issue of PTK's journal "Ziemia" 1946: "Visit the regained territories! (...) Polish tourism will appropriate this beautiful mountains [i.e. the Sudeten] and thus link them with the rest of Poland into a unbreakable unity". ("Turystyka polska obejmie w swe posiadanie piękne te góry, czym silniej zwiąże je z innymi ziemiemi Polski, zespalaając wszystko w jedną i nierozzerwalną całość").²⁶

Among the publications that claimed for the Polishness of the region, tourist material played a very important role. "First Polish guide books of the Karkonosze and other places in the Jelenia Góra district played an important role in taming of the landscape. These publications served as specific 'road signs' in search of the Polish character. Most of the guide books were dedicated to a city's or region's history, where all 'Polish traces' were high lightened. A very characteristic phenomenon is the minimalizing of information about the German past, when certain periods in history were completely omitted"²⁷. Tourism publications were among the first publications in Polish language in Lower Silesia and one of the vital questions of the new hosts was to reclaim thus the landscape for them²⁸.

Conclusion

In both German and Polish times a national appropriation of the landscape was carried out generally by social organizations, which aimed at popularizing the Karkonosze region. They acted according to national policy and were hence supported by official administration. The strategies used to reclaim a landscape as "German" or "Polish"²⁹ were similar though: a general popularization through publications and appropriation through infrastructure.

²⁵ G. Strauchold *Myśl zachodnia i jej realizacja w Polsce Ludowej w latach 1945-1957*, Toruń 2003; and J. Tyszkiewicz *Sto wielkich dni Wrocławia. Wystawa Ziem Odzyskanych we Wrocławiu a propaganda polityczna ziem zachodnich i północnych w latach 1945-1948*, Wrocław 1997.

²⁶ M. Orłowicz *Zwiedzajmy Ziemie Odzyskane*, „Ziemia” 1946, issue 1-2, 5.

²⁷ Joanna Nowosielska-Sobel *"Na barkach nieśli krajobraz" – z problemów osvajania zastanej przez osadników przestrzeni na przykładzie powiatu jeleniogórskiego drugiej połowy lat 40.*, in *Trudne dziedzictwo. Tradycje dawnych i obecnych mieszkańców Dolnego Śląska*, red. J. Nowosielska-Sobel/ G. Strauchold, Wrocław 2006, 114-115. Nowosielska-Sobel also high lights the role of fairy tales and legends, which have been 'Polonized' either, see page 117.

²⁸ See e. g. the memories of Józef Sykulski in "Wspomnienia pionierów" *op.cit.*, 27; he was author of numerous publications on the region, using voluntarily translated versions of German place names and invented Rubezahl's Polish name "Liczyrzepa"; *ibid.* 29. Tourist materials until 1947 had to face the problem, that place names were to be officially settled by a governmental commission and thus there were different versions in use, including the German ones.

²⁹ I did not touch upon the Czech aspect, which requires further research.