

Justyna Mokras-Grabowska
University of Lodz
Institute of Geography and Urban Studies
Department of Leisure and Qualified Tourism
justyna.mokras_grabowska@op.pl

FOLK CULTURE RESOURCES AS A COMPONENT OF TOURISM SPACE

Abstract: The paper concerns folk tourism – describes the mutual relations between folk culture and tourism and the main mechanisms of the commercialization of cultural heritage. Moreover it locates folk culture resources in tourism space and includes hospitality.

Key words: folk culture, commercialization, authenticity, folk tourism, tourism space, hospitality.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE NEW MEANING OF FOLK CULTURE

In times of change, many rural areas lose out on their cultural value, including folk culture. Its decline is largely connected with economic progress. So-called old folk culture, previously satisfying the everyday demands of village inhabitants, is no longer needed. Folk customs and rites, crafts and folk skills pass out of use and are preserved only fragmentarily. In their place appears commercialized folk culture.

The revival of folk culture in recent years (in Poland too after EU accession) has caused a rapid return of ethnic groups to their roots, but unfortunately mainly in the form of commercialized folk culture used as a tool for tourist promotion, and aimed at the improvement of the image of the region.

In rural areas, apart from their natural value, folk culture resources are the main tourist attraction. Above all, it is important not to change these resources, not to make 'folkloristic museums' (MADEJ 2008, pp. 234-40). Preserving folk culture only as 'folk ornament' is a significant threat to its authenticity.

2. FOLK TOURISM: DEFINITIONS AND RELATIONS

Folk culture means a group of cultural elements characteristic for the so-called lower layers of society, passed on between generations. These elements are based on original and individual models (OLECHNICKI & ZAŁĘCKI 1999, p. 262). J. Maciąg (JĘDRYSIAK 2008,

p. 83), who understands it as a sum of the elements characteristic for local rural society, gives a simplified definition of folk culture (JĘDRYSIAK 2008, p. 83). There are two types of folk culture resources: material and non-material.

Folk culture elements that still fulfil their original functions are specified as 'old' folk culture (original folk culture) and they are found as relicts or modernized 'old' folk culture (MOKRAS-GRABOWSKA 2010, p. 96).

Folk culture resources are used mainly in folk (ethnic) and in rural tourism. Besides, they are of interest to many forms of cultural tourism including sentimental, religious and culinary tourism (MOKRAS-GRABOWSKA 2010, p. 26).

Cultural tourism means all the actions of tourists connected with culture in its wider sense – the material and non-material cultural heritage of a region. *Sensu largo* cultural tourism means all travel connected with closer contact with natives and absorbing the atmosphere of a place (STASIAK 2007, p. 8).

According to A. KOWALCZYK (2008, p. 13) cultural tourism in its narrow meaning is defined as the entirety of tourist actions connected with authentic heritage interest. This way of understanding is a spatial phenomenon in a cultural landscape. The integral part of a cultural landscape is its cultural resource, including folk culture. The form of tourism that uses folk culture resources is folk tourism (ethno-tourism) (KOWALCZYK 2008, p. 48). In the academic literature it is also called tribal tourism, connected mainly with areas still inhabited by local tribes. Folk tourism

makes use of above all open-air museums, regional museums, cultural events, local sanctuaries, local dialects and culinary traditions.

Resulting from the definition of cultural tourism, the authenticity of folk culture raises many doubts. According to K. REMBOWSKA (2008, p. 19) 'tourism is a commercialized cultural experience'. Interest in the everyday life of natives and their culture (folk art, rites and so on) which has grown lately brings a danger of blurring the boundary between authenticity and an artificial tourist attraction.

The basis of authenticity is human spontaneity, with voluntary and authentic desires (ZOWISŁO 2011, p. 64). Opposite to this, there is an uncritical and automatic assimilation of external models and fashions followed by mediocrity and dispersion. It is strongly connected with post-modernism, with the human as a consumer and collector of experiences without principle (ZOWISŁO 2011, p. 77).

Referring to the commercialization of folk culture under the influence of tourism, authenticity can be considered both in terms of loyalty to ideals and models, as well as in terms of forms, where generational transfer plays a dominant role. The mass producer makes a business by simplification, breaking with tradition and values, and that is why the products often have artificial character. Authentic means compatible with reality, original.

The commercialization of folk culture (folklorism) is understood as one functioning on market rules, whose products are evaluated from the viewpoint of their utility and profitability (OLECHNICKI & ZAŁĘCKI 1999). Under the influence of tourism folk culture resources are always being commercialized. However, they can obtain the commercialized authentic or commercialized artificial form (MOKRAS-GRABOWSKA 2010, p. 95).

Tourism globalization causes serious cultural damage by unifying and standardising traditions (REMBOWSKA 2008, p. 19). Many academic theories are connected with cultural transformation, e.g. conflict theory declaring that opposite in the reception area an artificial hospitality is created (commercialized hospitality).

This leads to acculturation and cultural assimilation. The acculturation process means evolution in the traditional way of living of inhabitants and taking over external models from tourists (ZARĘBA 2010, p. 26). Cultural assimilation stands for making cultures similar. Further socio-cultural damage under the influence of tourism includes the vanishing cultural landscape and architecture, disruption of local communities, development of consumer behaviour amongst natives and deterioration in the quality of life.

The products of commercialized folk culture become tourist products with a simplified and easily recognizable form. An appropriate example is a tourist souvenir that is intended as a symbolic recall of the visited region. Mass tourism looks for mass, cheap products, easy to transport as well as being exotic. The contemporary tourism industry offers products 'out of context' with unified and simplified forms as a 'representation' of the reality of a place (ISAŃSKI 2008, p. 28). Tourists deal in fake authenticity and the intentional 'agedness' of the products. This phenomenon can be considered cultural arrogance and manipulation (MIKA 2008).

All these examples are connected with fake folklore, with producing culture and its authenticity, with carnivalization and making cultural 'spectacles' for tourists (ISAŃSKI 2008, p. 34). To meet the demand of mass tourists, 'spectacles' are held and folk art workshops are arranged. There is trivialisation of religious values and the intrusion of mass tourism into the sacred zone. Tourists look for authenticity but what they really find is seldom authentic. They are often 'sentenced' to simulation and the reintroduction of local culture (ISAŃSKI 2008, p. 34). The real lives of natives remain 'hidden' from tourists (URRY 2007, p. 26).

The usage of the cultural potential in tourism has also its advantages – it helps preserve local traditions and the cultural countryside, improves standards of living, brings financial benefits and – most importantly – it develops regional identity. Many past rituals and traditions that are no longer needed in everyday life become alive and useful; for local communities this means new jobs, employment, investment and multi-cultural contacts. Therefore, tourism means a chance for development for rural regions (ISAŃSKI 2008, p. 38).

The real chance for preserving the authenticity of local culture is individual tourism. According to E. Cohen (URRY 2007, p. 24) as a result of giving up organized tourist offers and conventional tourist services, experiential, experimental and existential tourism is highlighted. The individual tourists' activities are focused on nature, culture and seeking adventures and challenges. Such a tourist respects local traditions, in contrast to a mass tourist who is passive and waits for 'interesting things to happen'. According to W. Schivelbusch, for the contemporary tourist 'the world is like a big supermarket with cities and landscapes' where all local cultures are presented in a trivial way (URRY 2007, p. 24).

3. THE MECHANISMS OF THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF FOLK CULTURE RESOURCES UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF TOURISM

The commercialization of folk culture resources under the influence of tourism is determined by many natural, historical and socio-economical factors. In different regions they have varied meanings, it is common that one of the determinants dominates and undermines the importance of the others. Amongst the most important factors are the richness of the natural environment, progress, historical conditions, the activity of craft and tourism institutions, the traditions of the usage of folk culture in tourism and the intensity of tourism (MOKRAS-GRABOWSKA 2010, p. 100).

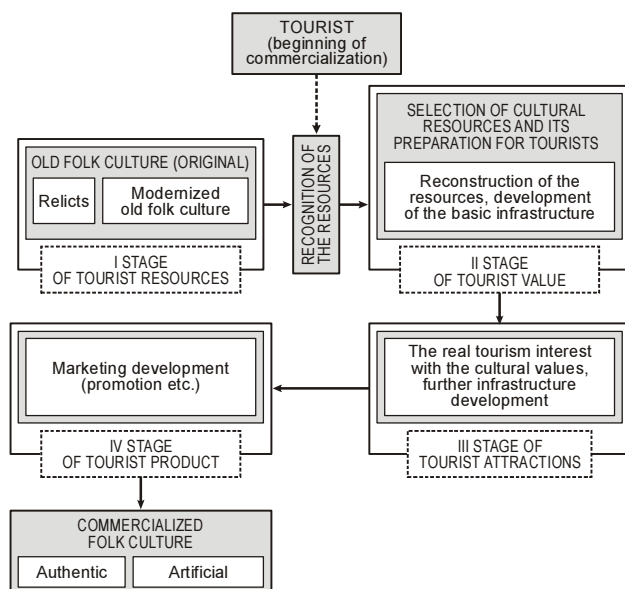


Fig. 1. The process of commercialization of folk culture resources under the influence of tourism

Source: author based on A. KOWALCZYK (2009)

The whole process of commercialization of folk culture under the influence of tourism starts with the tourists' interest (Fig. 1). At a prior stage the resources of folk culture function as relicts or modernized old folk culture. When the interest of tourists appears, the resources become tourist values and then tourist attractions, parallel with infrastructure development. The last stage of the process is the stage of the tourist product, marketing. That leads to commercialized folk culture that can have a dual character: commercialized authentic or commercialized artificial.

4. THE SPACE OF FOLK TOURISM

Amongst many definitions of tourism space the most common is the one put forward by S. LISZEWSKI (1995). According to the definition tourism space is a part of geographical space, containing elements of natural environment, permanent elements of human activity (economic and cultural) and the social environment (WŁODARCZYK 2009, p. 74). The main requirement is the occurrence of tourism. The significant elements of tourism space are cultural heritage (material and non-material) and a human (both as a visiting tourist and an inhabitant).

The space of folk tourism can be consequently understood as a part of geographical space, consisting of cultural heritage. Its basic requirement is that in tourism space, tourism must be found. The element that determines tourism space is the natural environment – folk culture is connected with natural resources. The other elements connected with folk tourism space are the social environment and the economic effects of human activity. These factors together form folk tourism space.

It is significant that tourism space has an evolutionary and revolutionary character – it changes rapidly under the influence of tourism. In the case of folk tourism space such rapid evolution leads to deformation of the original character of folk cultural resources and offers tourists only commercialized forms.

The character of tourism, and the scale of its transformation of geographical space, is the basis from which five types of tourism space are distinguished (LISZEWSKI 1995, p. 95): tourism exploration, penetration, assimilation, colonization and urbanization. The same types can be distinguished taking into consideration folk cultural resources (folk tourism space).

Exploration tourism space is a type of folk tourism space on a small scale in coexistence with the cultural environment. There is no developed tourism infrastructure. Visitors explore the space individually, and they discover the area and its cultural resources in a non-aggressive way. Small villages situated alongside the eastern border in Poland are examples of this kind. Their isolation and peripheral location in terms of urbanization, influences the preservation of folk cultural resources.

Its interesting aspect is that there is also an unperceived, unknown tourism space (WŁODARCZYK 2009, pp. 93-94), in which the lack of information about a region means less intense tourism. In such places the inhabitants still cultivate their customs and traditions in a natural way, their contact with tourists is authentic (spontaneous) and initially does not cause folk culture transformations. The development

of tourism leads to the following types of tourism space and the natives start to elaborate a hospitality formula.

Penetration tourism space is mainly for sightseeing (short term visits). It can be used by mass tourism, but the infrastructure is still not well developed. Generally, folk culture resources have a form of tourist values, attractions and also products.

Assimilation tourism space means rural areas with well-developed agrotourism where visitors have good contact with natives. This is where tourism causes little damage. It is the most 'friendly' in terms of the use of folk cultural resources. However, very often the hospitality formula is being intentionally elaborated as a commercial operation (WŁODARCZYK 2009, p. 163). This leads finally to transformations in the cultural heritage of the rural areas.

In colonization tourism space a permanent tourism infrastructure is characteristic – stylized country houses or whole housing estates are very common. It can happen that houses are brought from the other ethnographic regions, too.

The last type is urbanization tourism space, developed from the last stage of colonization tourism space. It is typical that city dwellers settle there, previously being just the visitors to the region. An appropriate example is the Podhale region in Poland (particularly Zakopane), where new settlers move to a region mainly because of the cultural heritage.

Tourism space is dynamic and evolves from exploration, through consequent stages of development (a continuum of tourism space). Particular stages lead from pre-tourism space, through stadiums (new, mature and old tourism spaces) to a stage of post-tourism space (Fig. 2).

In the case of folk culture resources in tourism and their transformation, pre-tourism space does not have a clear tourism function – this is usually an area not visited by tourists. The cultural heritage has natural character – it exists without the tourist interest. Despite rapid globalization, there are still places (in Poland as well), where folk culture has its original meaning (religious, cultural, useful). However elements of cultural heritage are being gradually noticed and they will be soon used in tourism – they will be evolving from resources, through attractions that have value for tourists, to tourist products. It is significant that pre-tourism space is unperceived and unknown.

A new tourism space (stadium A) is the beginning of the development of tourism space in general. Tourists start to explore, folk culture resources are being discovered and evaluated. They are given the character of tourist resources.

In mature tourism space (stadium B) the resources are being optimally used and are being transformed into tourist attractions and a tourist product. In old tourism space (stadium C) the exploitation and degradation of tourist products takes place – products pass out of use, they are perceived as old-fashioned.

Post-tourism space is one that for many reasons is no longer a tourism space. It could happen that cultural resources were over-exploited, lost their authenticity and passed out of use. However, it can be transformed into a tourism space again.

5. THE HUMAN AND HIS ROLE IN FOLK TOURISM SPACE

The role of the human in tourism space is very varied – its creator, consumer (tourist), stimulator of the choice of space and finally its inhabitant (WŁODARCZYK 2009, pp. 130–2). In the space of folk tourism the most important is the inhabitant (native). As host of the space, he/she represents it, creating an appropriate hospitality formula and finally hospitable space. Hospitality plays a fundamental role in the space of folk tourism and it finally determines tourism development.

However the inhabitants are also the 'tourist attraction' themselves, which is important in bringing out the folk culture resources – the space of folk tourism does not exist without the human and his/her skills. She/he becomes the main reason for tourist arrivals, leading to the development and transformations of the cultural heritage. The inhabitants (mainly folk artists) are the 'actors' of tourism space. In some

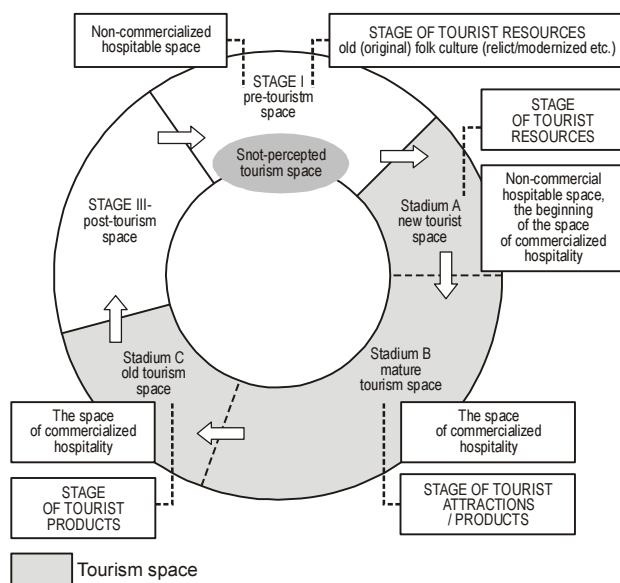


Fig. 2. Continuum of folk tourist space

Source: author based on B. WŁODARCZYK (2009)

regions tourism development is determined by the culture and everyday life of the natives. It should be mentioned that the usage of elements of their culture leads to both intentional and unintentional transformations. Intentional, planned activity leads to irreversible transformations in the cultural heritage of regions – commercialization, commodification and depriving heritage of its authenticity.

The key issue is the issue of hospitality. Sociologically, hospitable space (natural, non-commercial hospitality) and the space of commercialized hospitality are singled out. Both types of space are mutually connected and interpenetrating. Taking into consideration the space of folk tourism, at the initial stage of its development the predominance of the first (hospitable space) can be noticed. The features of hospitable space are the natural attitude of the hosts and spontaneous reactions. Gradual tourism development leads usually to elaborating the commercialized hospitality formula. That means new models, usually with no authenticity. The hospitality formula is however a constant element of tourism space – creating a space of commercialized hospitality usually gives a competitive advantage. In the case of the space of folk tourism the most hospitable are exploration and assimilation tourism spaces.

In the space of folk tourism non-commercial, natural and authentic hospitable space has a very important meaning. It exists usually at the stage of pre-tourism space and at the first stage of tourism space (stadium A) (Fig. 2), when we deal with non-market kinds of service and the tourism investment is not well developed. It is characteristic in that type of space that the hosts have a very friendly attitude to their guests, the hospitality is spontaneous. Apart from non-commercial hospitable space, the space of commercialized hospitality is highlighted in which the hospitality formula is very common. The phenomenon of commercialized hospitality occurs in all the stadiums of tourism space (new, mature and old).

6. SUMMARY

Folk tourism as a kind of cultural tourism plays a significant role in rural development. It is determined by the preservation of the folk culture resources. Amongst many mechanisms of commercialization, historical conditions and the traditions of folk culture in tourism are fundamental. The evolutionary character of tourism space leads to a decline in the authenticity of folk culture and creating new, artificial

forms. The space of folk tourism transforms very easily – in the place of natural, cultural resources and non-commercial authenticity, tourism products appear with no connection to original traditions. Therefore, tourism is certainly a stimulating element of regional culture, but it is also a factor that threatens the authenticity of place.

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