

REGIONAL TOURISM BRAND – NEED OR NECESSITY IN THE ASPECT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF POLISH MOUNTAIN RURAL AREAS

Marcin Hyski

The Jerzy Kukuczka Academy of Physical Education in Katowice, Poland

Dorota Chudy-Hyski

Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa, Poland

Abstract. *The paper discusses the issue of the regional tourism brand, which is a significant differentiator of the area in the market and gives the opportunity to include tourism in the model of socio-economic development of the region. The analysis of regional branded tourist products includes mountain rural areas of Poland. These areas are an example of a region with unfavourable farming conditions, which makes the competitive position of these areas in a much worse position than other rural areas in the country. Due to the difficulties in the sphere of social and economic life occurring in mountain rural areas, they require other alternative development incentives. Tourism can be one of these, but to make the development through tourism effective, attention must be focused on building a strong regional brand, which is the competitive strength of the area. Mountain rural areas have their own specific potential, which allows them to build regional branded tourist products easily distinctive from lowland rural areas. The aim of the paper is to indicate the importance of the region's tourism brand on the example of mountain rural areas of Poland, including its constituent elements. The paper uses a descriptive and qualitative analysis method that allowed to identify problems of mountain rural areas development and the role of tourism and in particular the tourism brand in the development of such areas. The analysis includes literature in the field of economic sciences, including economies of regions, economies of tourism, and territorial marketing. The paper covers the issues of development of mountain rural areas with an indication of their main socio-economic development problems. Then, against the background of the concept of the region in economic terms, mountain rural areas have been presented as a tourist region where tourism can be an important factor of development. The text also covers selected issues related to the creation of a regional tourism brand, and characterizes the regional tourism brand of mountain rural areas, together with their constituent elements.*

Keywords: *brand, branded tourist product, mountain rural areas.*

Introduction

The subject of the paper is a regional tourism brand in the aspect of the socio-economic development of Polish mountain rural areas. The aim of the

paper is to indicate the importance of the region's tourism brand on the example of mountain rural areas of Poland, including its constituent elements. The paper uses a descriptive and qualitative analysis method that allowed to identify problems of mountain rural areas development and the role of tourism and in particular the tourism brand in the development of such areas. The analysis includes literature in the field of economic sciences, including economies of regions, economies of tourism, and territorial marketing. The paper discusses the essence and importance of tourism in the socio-economic development of problem areas. In particular, the importance of the tourism brand of the region's product was emphasized. In this approach, the tourist product of mountain rural areas is all tourist and para-tourist products, material and non-material, co-creating a comprehensive regional tourist product. The subject of the paper is current and very important. It acquires great significance for contemporary problems of local and regional development of less-favoured areas, which due to their characteristic economic conditions encounter a barrier to development. Two current socio-economic phenomena have been taken into consideration, namely the development of disadvantaged areas on the example of mountain rural areas and the development of tourism, including the creation of a regional tourism brand. For many years the issue of socio-economic development of mountain rural areas has been within the range of interest of countries within which such areas exist. This is evidenced by various EU directives and numerous publications in the field of economies of regions, regional policy, economic issues of rural development and agriculture, and on many other areas of socio-economic analysis.

The development of mountain rural areas by tourism is an excellent alternative to currently ineffective agricultural or forestry development. Although tourism can constitute a significant share in the region's economy reaching even 70-80 %, it also includes the participation of other industries. Thanks to this, the tourism development of the rural area is not monofunctional. This fact means that the local (regional) economy developing thanks to tourism is more resistant to unfavourable trends in the economy, which, after all, run with varying intensity in various industries. In view of the above, mountain rural areas that undertake a tourism development direction, should aim to create a strong tourism brand visible at the national, European and even world level. Only the right brand of a tourist product is a guarantee of effective sales of a regional product and full use of tourism as a stimulus in social and economic development.

Socio-economic problems of mountain rural areas development

Mountain areas are rural areas, which are characterized by particularly difficult conditions for agricultural activity. For this reason, in relation to mountain areas the issue of rural development takes on special significance. Mountain areas belong to areas with unfavourable (less-favourable) natural conditions for agricultural production. The typical features of mountain areas that are important for this kind of production include: a shortened vegetation period, low temperatures and their large diurnal and seasonal differentiation, significant atmospheric precipitation, a low soil class with a high content of skeletal parts, varied exposure and a strong slope of fields. Dispersal and fragmentation of fields result in a longer travel time to them and the accumulation of field works in a short period of time, which means the shortening of time of use of agricultural machines, and thus the increase in average costs of their use. In addition, the higher costs associated with keeping livestock in harsher climatic conditions, as well as the increased costs of obtaining plant products, also significantly burden the efficiency of production processes in mountain farming. The whole of the factors resulting from the specificity of mountain areas determines the natural profile of agricultural production, a consequence of which there are limited possibilities of selecting effective directions of management and economic development of these areas. All this makes most of the mountain farms unable to survive without external intervention.

In Poland, on the basis of the Article 18 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1257/1999, mountain areas have been demarcated (Rozporządzenie..., 2004) because of their specificity, which requires increased expenditure of both labour, means of production and equipment, while significantly restricting their use. The areas located within the Polish part of the mountain ranges – the Sudetes and the Carpathians have been included in the mountain areas with unfavourable farming conditions (abbreviated as the mountain LFA – less-favoured areas). The Carpathians, in terms of natural conditions and their impact on the agricultural use of mountain lands, are similar to the Alps. However, in the Carpathians, comparable climate and vegetation floors have developed at lower altitudes than in the Alps. The difference in height between the location of the upper limit of a moderately warm floor in the Western Carpathians (650 m above sea level), and the location of this floor in the eastern Alps (920 m above sea level), is 270 m. This difference is mainly due to the fact that the Carpathian mass is located more to the north than the Alps, which is why Poland has set the lower limit of mountain areas at 500 m above sea level.

Less-favoured areas are the areas for which the European Commission has provided financial assistance to farmers. Financial aid for farms located in LFA

areas is aimed at ensuring the continuity of agricultural land use and maintaining landscape values of rural areas, and through the use of good agricultural practice (GAP) also promoting environmentally friendly agriculture (GAP includes the principles of farming, which mainly concern: rational management of both mineral and natural fertilizers, compliance with the principles of soil and water protection and preservation of valuable plant and animal species occurring in agricultural areas, including all activities related to the protection of agricultural landscape). These payments are aimed at counteracting the depopulation of rural areas and the loss of their agricultural character and the related social and economic consequences (Przewodnik..., 2005).

In individual member states of the European Union, for a number of different reasons, mountain areas occur in areas that are in a situation of socio-economic crisis (otherwise, these areas are defined as peripheral, requiring support, disadvantaged, handicapped, etc.). There are many reasons for the socio-economic crisis. In the case of Poland, mountain rural areas are considered as areas in the state of socio-economic crisis, among others, on the following grounds:

- peripheral geographical location;
- specific climatic and environmental conditions;
- occurrence of the effects of progressive civilizational and economic development, called the causes of increased social awareness and life aspirations of society;
- improper implementation of the socio-economic and ecological policy of the state, affecting the implementation of this policy at the regional and local level.

Therefore, mountain areas, as agriculturally handicapped areas, should be treated in a significantly different way than other agricultural regions of the country. Rural mountain areas constitute a socio-economic space for which it is necessary to implement development policy, understood as a set of interrelated activities undertaken and implemented to ensure sustainable development of the country, as well as socio-economic and territorial cohesion (Ustawa, 2006).

Postulated in the literature, the sustainable development of rural areas is conditioned by the enrichment of the diversity of these areas not only by expanding the scope of socio-economic activity, but also, especially with regard to mountains, by shaping and protecting the diversity of cultural and natural landscape, which is related to the preservation of biodiversity. It follows that the implementation of sustainable development of rural areas depends on the development of their diversity understood more broadly than multifunctionality (Stola, 2002). This should be reflected, among other things, in forms of business (not only agricultural) adapted to specific mountain conditions.

Mountain rural areas as a tourist region

For the economist, the region is primarily an area with a specific economic specialization, resulting from the use of internal and external economic resources and the flow of growth factors such as: capital, labour, technology, information and others (Filipiak et al., 2005). As both a geographical and economic category, the region is a territorial production and service complex, distinguishing itself from the surrounding areas by specific forms of development (Kupiec, 1999). In view of the above, economic, social, tourist, administrative and other regions can be identified. The universal character of the above-mentioned definitions of the region emphasizes the necessity to choose the criteria used for its delimitation. With regard to the tourist region, common characteristics that are fundamental for the development of tourism are emphasized.

In the literature, the tourist or tourist-recreational region is referred to as the region's type distinguished due to its specialization; this is an area where there is a large-scale service activity including tourist and recreational services (Korol, 2007). Or in other words, it is an area that performs a tourist function due to a certain homogeneity of features of the natural and socio-cultural environment as well as internal service connections (Kurek, 2007). Defining the tourist region, Kornak and Rapacz (2001) use the common understanding of the term region and indicate that it is an area (part of the country) that fulfils the following conditions and:

- has certain tourist values (leisure, sightseeing and specialist) whose number, structure and quality make it attractive for tourists; it is reflected in the size and intensity of tourist traffic;
- has a communication system that allows reaching the area;
- has specific tourism development, that is, facilities and equipment (e.g. accommodation, catering, sports and recreation, etc.) encouraging to stay in this area and use its advantages.

These conditions, being at the same time the characteristics of a specific area, determine the nature of the tourist region and the ways of its use by tourists. Each tourist region is characterized by different, generally non-uniform attractiveness. Usually only parts of the region, its fragments, are attractive to tourists, which causes a greater influx of tourist traffic. Other parts of the region fulfill other functions, usually not significant for tourism or leisure (Kornak & Rapacz, 2001).

Due to the existing natural, geographical and spatial or topographic conditions of tourism development, which is treated both as a tourist activity and as an economic activity, mountain areas constitute a tourist region delimited by using a geographical and historical (post-glacial formation) criterion. In face of

the situation prevailing in the mountain rural areas in Poland, an important goal of actions undertaken for the economic development of these areas is the sustainable balance of activities in economic, social, ecological and spatial terms. Mountain rural areas have almost ideal conditions for the implementation of such a specific goal. An unquestionable “golden mean” for the above-mentioned problems of mountain rural areas development is an alternative solution in the form of diversification of economic activity, which in this case consists in combining agricultural activity with tourist, recreational, service, processing and other activities. Then, these areas, treated as less-favoured in terms of the implementation of the agricultural function, may as a tourist region derive benefits from the possessed assets and develop thanks to the attraction of tourist traffic.

Creation of a regional tourism brand

A tourist product can be considered in territorial terms as a complex tourist product offered by a certain area or region. The concept of the product of the area became the subject of the scientists' discussion due to the fact that the geographical area itself is not a market entity offering its own products in a market. In view of the above, the tourist product of the area can be treated as a collection of naturally and artificially produced tangible and intangible goods and other elements included in the overall tourist product of the area (region), which is administered by tourist market entities (e.g. a local government unit, a city, a production and service enterprises, a museum, a sport and recreation facility, a ski resort, etc.) operating within the administrative boundaries of the analysed area.

A clear indication of the features of a tourist product is a guarantee of obtaining a distinction of individual character in the market, easily distinguished from the other products. The difference (a diversified nature) of a tourist product contributes to the positive development of its image, which then allows it to gain and maintain a market advantage over a competitive environment. The creation of a brand is defined as the activity consisting in creating a positive product image different from the substitutes, which is also a simple system of recognizing product features through their traceability.

A brand may be a name, date, symbol, design or combination thereof, created to identify the goods of a given seller or their group and to distinguish them from the competition (definition by the American Marketing Association), (Kaczmarek et al., 2005). A brand product is a product with a unique personality, something that sets it apart from others. The brand allows you to gain an advantage over the competition, highlight the product on the market and make it be chosen by customers. A brand related to a tourist product, and in

particular to an area treated as a tourist product (a tourist product of a region or a regional tourist product), can be understood as an idea of a specific value resulting from the image of the area. The brand referring to the area, and hence the territorial brand, can be considered from the perspective of:

- sender – as a projection of the region's identity,
- recipient – as the image of the region outside its borders,
- product – as a brand of the product produced in the region (Florek, 2017).

The use of a brand brings many benefits that can also be found in the tourist market. Brand management in the tourist services market is also taking special significance for reasons such as the growing importance of tourist services in the economy, the intangible nature of the tourist product, the important role of staff in shaping the quality of services, and the diversity of tourist products (freedom in shaping its structure). In the case of tourism, the essence of the brand acquires a bit different character. On the one hand, the brand may be products offered by entities providing tourist services (hoteliers, restaurateurs, farmers, etc.). On the other hand, using the broad understanding of the essence of a tourist product, the brand can be defined as regions or tourist destinations, or individual tourist attractions (Panasiuk, 2006). Therefore, the tourism brand should be identified with the branded tourist product and understood as the product features perceived by the buyers. From the marketing point of view, a recognizable and distinctive set of functional, material and emotional values, which is important for specific groups of buyers in the purchase process, can be considered as a tourism brand.

Interpreting the tourism brand, two shots should be taken:

- narrow, treated analogically as in the case of brands used in other sectors of the economy;
- broad, related to areas and tourist attractions, as a complex of activities directed to a local or regional tourist product.

Therefore, a tourism brand in a narrow perspective should be associated with the service offer of individual tourist market entities. In broad terms, it concerns regions, towns and individual tourist attractions. In this context, reference to the theory of territorial marketing justifies determining the place as a product (Florek, 2017). It should be added that tourist services, which are a brand in a narrow perspective, may influence the development of brands in broad terms. However, the brand of a given area “in itself” cannot exist. The market success of a given space is possible due to the smaller or larger share of sub-brands existing in a given area.

Branded tourist products can be created and developed:

- in individual categories (types), e.g. as a single service or a package of services (such as an agrotourist product of a selected farm), as a tourist trail (e.g. the Icon Trail), an object or an event (e.g. a harvest festival);
- in certain types of tourism, e.g. as urban and cultural tourism, recreational, active and specialist tourism, rural tourism, business tourism, border and transit tourism;
- according to various concepts of space in which they can be “embedded”, e.g. in the historical and cultural (Silesia, Podhale regions), geographical (Sudety, Bieszczady) or administrative (local government units of different levels) space (Panasiuk, 2006).

However, it should be noted that the share of particular sub-brands in the branding process of the area (region) should be determined individually and modified accordingly to current needs. The choice of the number and type of functioning sub-brands in the process of creation the region's brand depends on the goal that the creator, the originator of the brand's idea, intends to achieve.

Summing up, it should be emphasized that the processes of shaping the brand of a tourist product should occupy an important place not only in the activity of the supply side entities of the tourist market (e.g. agritourism farms, tourist operators), but also in the tourism policy of local, regional and central authorities. Creating a tourism brand of the region through the use of existing tourism sub-brands is one of the ways to achieve the goal such as increasing the competitiveness of the Polish brands in the European and global markets.

Tourism brand of mountain rural areas

Mountain rural areas have a number of favourable conditions for the development of business activity, such as tourism. In rural mountain areas there are many tourist products extremely spatially diversified, which increases their attractiveness. Tourist products of mountain rural areas may have a national, regional or local range. The potential of mountain rural areas and local communities in Poland is huge, but used with varying intensity. There are many tourist attractions around which tourist products with specific characteristics can be created, and consequently, they have a noticeable image and brand (e.g. architecture, especially traditional and wooden, folklore, customs, inns and regional cuisine, fortifications, narrow gauge railways), (Majewski & Lane, 2003).

A comprehensive product of mountain rural areas can be defined as a mountain tourism brand, which is easily identifiable by potential tourists and that stands out from the market offer in a competitive environment. The

mountain tourism brand of Poland is co-created by sub-brands of mountain rural areas, among which both tangible and intangible goods as well as elements of the tourist attractiveness of the area can be indicated. In view of the diversity of the product of mountain rural areas, it is possible to indicate equally diverse types of sub-brands co-creating the Poland's mountain tourism brand. Poland's mountain tourism brand includes the following sub-brands of mountain rural areas:

“Traditional and regional products” – a wide sub-brand constituted by a variety of tourist products, e.g. cheese and other dairy products – bunc, oscypek, żywiecka bryndza (these are kinds of cheese), goat's cheese called “Wołoski” both white and smoked, ready meals and dishes such like kwaśnica or żur łemkowski, etc.

“Mountain tourism” – this sub-brand refers to the characteristic terrain and tourist infrastructure necessary for the implementation of tourism, recreation and sports activities in the mountains (e.g. ski stations and their equipment as part of ski resorts and areas; sports and recreation facilities, hiking, biking, horse-riding tourist routes marked out for diverse needs of tourists; accommodation, gastronomic and a paratourist base, i.e. commercial and service facilities, car parks, medical service points, pharmacies, security issues, etc.).

“Spa values” – a special sub-brand that encompasses resources improving health, such as healing waters, therapeutic muds, thermal springs and other riches occurring in the analysed area.

“The natural and landscape abundance of the mountains” – a sub-brand including such well-known branded tourist products as the Bieszczady National Park, but also Pieniny National Park, Tatra National Park or Karkonosze National Park.

The sub-brand “mountain forests and their functions” – e.g. excellent areas for the organization of hunting, species-differentiated wild game. Mountain forests are also an area of research, an area providing products and semi-finished material in the form of wood, undergrowth, honey. This sub-brand covers all other functions of forests, ranging from economic, educational, environmental, social, recreational and with tourist function ending, all which are fulfilled by mountain forests in Poland.

“Wooden architecture” – this sub-brand occurs in the socio-cultural environment and has living functions for the indigenous people or is covered by legal conservation, e.g. the Museum of Folk Architecture in Sanok (an open-air museum), etc. The sub-brand “wooden architecture” is also co-created by secular and sacred building of different religions.

The sub-brand “Polish hospitality and folklore” includes both hospitality, especially mountain or rural but also customs, habits, religious rituals, costumes and dialects, songs and dances of the Polish mountain village.

“Traditional agriculture” – a sub-brand that is characteristic especially in the mountains. It consists of picturesque agricultural landscape (so-called checkerboard of fields), as well as mountain pastures with the purpose of breeding herbivorous animals that are an attraction for tourists, as consumers of agritourist products.

“Organic farming” – a sub-brand initiated in the early 90s of the twentieth century, has gained recognition both among Polish society, as well as outside of Poland. The general conviction about the high taste, nutritional, health and healing values of some Polish herbs, fruits, vegetables, etc., existed for many centuries among foreigners, and it was based on the exemplary integrity of the Polish farmers and their poverty, which in a natural way excluded the use of artificial agrochemical and agrotechnical procedures (fertilizers, mechanization) in agriculture.

“Agrotourism in the mountains” – is also a well-known tourism brand, both in Poland and abroad. The specificity of this economic activity carried out in Poland differs significantly from the nature of agritourism e.g. in Austria or France. However, this different character, manifested in, for example, smaller than in other countries, the degree of commercialization of products offered by the mountainous village, has a positive impact on the image of Polish agrotourism in the international market. The good position of agritourism in the competitive market has also been shaped by hospitality deeply rooted in Polish society, and above all the culinary arts of the mountainous village, which is a perfect complementary element for the remaining parts of the agritourist product offered by Polish mountain farming.

Analysing the potential of mountain rural areas, one could indicate further types of branded tourist products (sub-brands). Nevertheless, to sum up, it should be pointed out that mountain rural areas are undoubtedly the strong brand of the Polish tourist market.

Conclusions

Mountain rural areas stand out by a specific combination of features that are characteristic both for rural areas and mountain areas. The combination of these features means that these areas are classified as less-favoured areas with unfavourable farming conditions. This situation means that the profitability of agricultural production is in doubt and the population dealing with agriculture is often forced to migrate to seek other sources of livelihood. Thus, mountain rural areas are threatened by depopulation and loss of agricultural character. Hence, the need to support their socio-economic development is underlined.

It should be pointed out that, in addition to direct support programmes for agricultural activity, there is another alternative path to the development of

mountain areas. It involves the use of positive externalities generated by tourism and stimulation of tourism development by local government units. When tourism becomes a development factor, then the given area, apart from the agricultural function, also starts to perform other functions in a wider scope. The agricultural population, thanks to the support of tourist traffic, has the opportunity to obtain additional incomes, which makes it easier to run farms and reduces the propensity to migrate.

For tourism to be able to constitute a strong factor in socio-economic development, local and regional tourism policy should aim to create branded tourist products. One can dare to say that only a strong and recognizable brand is able to ensure that regional tourist products will have a strong competitive position and will constitute a significant stimulus attracting tourist traffic. Creating a strong regional tourism brand is the easier, the more characteristic and specific tourist value that distinguishes the region. Precisely such values exist in mountain rural areas.

The tangible and intangible values of culture and nature, as well as the specific and characteristic tourism development constitute the basis for the functioning of the Polish mountain tourism brand. It is not a homogeneous brand. Partial regional tourist products can be distinguished within it, that was made in the paper. Each of them is a distinctive product in the tourist market, and all together create the strength of the Polish mountain tourism brand.

References

- Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 of 17 May 1999 on support for rural development from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) and amending and repealing certain Regulations (OJ L 160, 26.6.1999, p. 80).
- Filipiak, B., Kogut, M., Szewczuk, A., & Ziolo, M. (2005). *Rozwój lokalny i regionalny, uwarunkowania, finanse, procedury*. Szczecin: Fundacja na Rzecz Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego.
- Florek, M. (2017). *Podstawy marketingu terytorialnego*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej w Poznaniu.
- Kaczmarek, J., Stasiak, A., & Włodarczyk, B. (2005). *Produkt turystyczny*. Warszawa: Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne.
- Kornak, A. S., & Rapacz, A. (2001). *Zarządzanie turystyką i jej podmiotami w miejscowości i regionie*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej we Wrocławiu.
- Korol, J. (2007). *Wskaźniki zrównoważonego rozwoju w modelowaniu procesów regionalnych*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- Kupiec, L. (ed). (1999). *Gospodarka przestrzenna, tom II, Ekonomika regionu*. Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku.
- Kurek, W. (ed). (2007). *Turystyka*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Majewski, J., & Lane, B. (2003). *Turystyka wiejska i rozwój lokalny*. Warszawa: Fundacja Edukacji dla Demokracji.

- Panasiuk, A. (ed), (2006). *Marketing usług turystycznych*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Przewodnik. Wspieranie działalności rolniczej na obszarach o niekorzystnych warunkach gospodarowania (ONW)*. (2005). Warszawa: Ministerstwo Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi.
- Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 14 kwietnia 2004 r. w sprawie szczegółowych warunków i trybu udzielania pomocy finansowej na wspieranie działalności rolniczej na obszarach o niekorzystnych warunkach gospodarowania objętej planem rozwoju obszarów wiejskich. *Dziennik Ustaw*, 2004, 657, amended.
- Stola, W. (2002). Górskie obszary wiejskie Polski. Wybrane zagadnienia. *Problemy Zagospodarowania Ziemi Górskich*, 48, 59-66.
- Ustawa z dnia 6 grudnia 2006 r. o zasadach prowadzenia polityki rozwoju. *Dziennik Ustaw*, 2017, 1376, amended.