

# Ecotourism Potential and his Sustainable Development Oportunities in the Border Region between Slovakia and Poland

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to identify the current state of ecotourism in Slovak - Polish borderlands. The research aims to identify the eco-tourism infrastructure, the motivation for using these facilities (by nationality) and economic behavior of tourists both on the Slovak and on the Polish side. The studied geographic zone is the area of the Western Carpathians in the Kysucká vysočina (Slovakia) and Beskyd Żywiecki districts in Poland. Ecotourism has tradition in Slovakia since the 1960s. Unlike the Polish countryside, in Slovakia many agricultural activities have disappeared or transformed in the given period. This allowed the development of cottage tourism and rural tourism, which in Slovak conditions is, besides agrotourism, the most prominent representative of ecotourism. Slovakia, alongside Scandinavia, France, Italy and the Czech Republic, is among the leading European countries with a high share of second homes. After 1990, agro-tourism has been dynamized in Slovakia and Poland. For the studied area we consider the centers of Čadca in Slovak and Żywiec on the Polish side - including their recreational background. In research were used methods of statistical analyzes of public data, field recognition, mystery shopping, but also qualitative methods for determining the tourist and economic behavior of ecotourism clients of the area under research. The study should highlight the real motives of eco-tourists' participation, the economic potential of ecotourism in the area and the main shortcomings that limit the future development of ecotourism.

*Keywords: Ecotourism, Slovak – Polish border region, motives for eco tourism, tourists eco behavior*

## 1. Introduction

Ecotourism is a broad terminological, medotical and practical phenomenon. In Slovakia and Poland, the division of ecotourism into "agroturimus", "rural tourism" and application of "green tourism" as a tourist product are used in the hotel industry. [11] It is often associated with behavioralism called Corporate Social Responsibility. The beginnings of ecotourism, especially in Slovakia, reach in 60 years of 20th century. At that time significant socio-economic changes have taken place. The advent of Communist power brought with it the joining of agricultural parcels and the creation of large-scale state and cooperative farms. Together with the rapid industrialization processes of Slovakia, these changes have led to the depopulation of rural communities and the strengthening of urbanization. Rural exodus has released a number of rural homes for recreational purposes.

In Poland, even during the socialist phase, the land of small farmers in private hands remained. This resulted in a high share of employment in the primary sector - in the Slovak Republic, in 1951 there was 40.68% of workforce employed in primary sector; in

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1970 it was only 23.54%. [1, 3]

The development of the countryside and the conditions for the creation of ecotourism was therefore different in Poland and Slovakia.

However, the primary forms of ecotourism can be seen in both countries as rural tourism and, in particular, in Slovakia, widespread forms of cottage tourism.

## 2. Work Objectives, Research Territories, Hypothes and Methodology

The main objective of the work is to identify the forms of ecotourism development and their impact on sustainable development in the border areas of Kysucká Vysočina and Žywiecké Beskydy in the regions of Čadca and Żywiec.

The main methods include analysis of the perception of ecotourism products in the surveyed area in terms of their perceived quality, both on the supply side and on the demand side.

I. In the first part we have analyzed the forms of ecotourism in the given area. We tried to statistically analyze both statistical units at district level - NTS 4.

II. In the second part, through mystery shopping, we contacted public service and tourism services through the internet to find out:

- Offered ecotourism products

- Prices of Ecotourism products

- Quality of ecotourism products and quality of communication with the client.

III. In the third part, we were trying to verify the results of the second part (i.e. the offer of ecotourism products, their price and quality) with field surveys, mainly through interviews, surveys and observation, as well as the search for ecological products in tourism in the surveyed area and some consumer behavior (ecotourism tourism expenses).

Major research concerns include the identification of "objects of ecotourism". Official statistics databases do not register these objects separately, (Invalid hyperlink). So we had to make direct contact - by telephone or via the Internet - to find out which tourist infrastructure objects can be classified as "ecotourism".

On the Slovak territory, 46 tourist facilities were addressed, in Polish site it was 25 facilities. The number of respondents - tourists was on the Slovak side 264 and the Polish 222.

Qualitative research is also based on the following relevant resources [4] [5] [6] [7] [8].

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 The Offer of Ecotourism in the Studied Area

The offer of ecotourism in the studied area is heterogeneous. In Slovakia, the only travel agency "ecotourism products" is declared by NATRIX in Bratislava ([www.natrix.sk](http://www.natrix.sk)). After addressing them with question of organizing ecotourism in Kysuce, we find out that they do not. A similar situation is also on the Polish side. Travel agencies do not offer a priori eco-tours to the examined area. Therefore, ecotourism in the border region of Kysucké Beskydy has an individual character.

We have also researched how many facilities offer real organic products on Polish and how much on the Slovak side.

Eco products of accommodation facilities in the studied area Slovakia and Poland are

summarized in table 1 and table 2.

**Table 1.** Eco products of accommodation facilities in the studied area - Slovakia

Accommodation type	Small domestic animal breeding	Livestock breeding	Horse breeding	Supply of domestic food	Supply of domestic eco-products	Eco-facilities
Hotel	-	-	-	-	2	3
Pension	-	-	3	1	3	5
Camp						1
Private	-	-	-	-	-	4
Other	1	-	1	-	-	-
Total	1		4	1	5	13

Source: own field research

**Table 2.** Eco products of accommodation facilities in the studied area - Poland

Accommodation type	Small domestic animal breeding	Livestock breeding	Horse breeding	Supply of domestic food	Supply of domestic eco-products	Eco-facilities
Hotel	-	-	-	4	7	7
Pension	-	-	5	5	6	12
Camp						1
Private	-	-	-	-	-	3
Other	4	-	1	-	-	-
Total	4		6	9	13	23

Source: own field research

Research of Ecological products offer showed that there are "ecological facilities" in 13 Slovak (out of 46) and 23 Polish (out of 25) hotels, which include solar panels, energy management, own waste water treatment or other technological ecological facilities. Especially the breeding of horses is considered to be an organic product. There are 4 Slovak and 6 Polish resorts available.

Other organic products, such as agro-tourism farms, have not been confirmed in the studied area.

### 3.2 Mystery Shopping Survey

In the Mystery Shopping Survey, 11 facilities were contacted on the Slovak side, and 14 on Polish. It was a catering and accommodation facility in which we interviewed a series of questions through a controlled interview to find out what they have to offer, whether they are offering organic products, what is their cost. We also evaluated the quality of communication with the client (mystery shopper). We ranked the results in the rating scale from 1-5 (5 - excellent, 4 - good, 3 - sufficient, 2 - with shortcomings 1 - inadequate). In Slovakia, we made interview in Slovak language and we use Polish in Poland, so we did not find the language competence of the workers in tourism. The results of mystery shopping are summarized in table 3.

**Table 3.** Mystery shopping results

	ČADCA	ŽYWIEC
Number of offered eco-products catering	2	3
Number of offered eco-products accommodation	3	3
Number of accommodation ecological products offered	3	4
Quality of communication with the client	2	3

Source: own field research

### 3.3 Economic Activity of Tourists

The economic activity of tourists is conditioned by their economic background and tourist markets. For comparison with our research, we have used fieldwork [10] activities in the Slovakia - Austria border region and the Polish - Slovak border region in the Eastern Tatras region [9].

**Table 4.** Comparison of expenditures of Slovak and Austrian tourists in the Slovak Republic and Austrian borders in 2013

Bratislava region	Tourists from Austria	Tourists from Slovakia	Others tourists
What amount did you plan to spend in euro	230	430	592
How much you really spent in euro	233	369	308
Lower Austria region			
What amount did you plan to spend in euro	465	727	789
How much you really spent in euro	414	559	767

Source [10]

**Table 5.** Comparison of expenditures of Slovak and Polish tourists in the SR and PR surveyed territory of Eastern Tatras in 2017

	Slovak tourists – planned/ real expenses in euro	Polish tourists – planned/ real expenses in euro
Bukowina, Nowy Targ	600/632	380/420
Ždiar, Matliare	400/380	500/485

Source: own field research

**Table 6.** Comparison of expenditures of Slovak and Polish tourists on ecotourism in border regions of the SR and PR surveyed territory in 2018

	Slovak tourists ecotourism expenditure planned/ real in euro	Polish tourists ecotourism expenditure planned/ real in euro
Żywiec	230/250	200/320
Cadca	300/360	250/330

Source: own field research

In the field of economic behaviorality, we found that in Slovakia the planned expenditure of Slovak ecotourists in Slovakia was higher than expected by 20% - i.e. 360 EUR compared to the planned 300 EUR. The planned spending of Slovak ecotourists in Poland was higher by 8.7%, namely 250 EUR compared to the planned 230 EUR. The planned spending of Polish eco-tourists in Slovakia was up 32%, namely 330 EUR

compared to the expected 250 EUR and their spending in Poland was 35% higher, namely 32 EUR compared to the expected 200 EUR.

Overall, the highest spending was recorded by Slovak ecotourists on the Slovak side of 360 EUR and the lowest spending was declared by Slovak ecotourists on the Polish side of 250 EUR. In comparative studies, we recorded the largest spending of 767 EUR in tourists in the Lower Austria region (still in 2013). Determinant of economic behaviorality is also the offer of services, the price of services and the number of overnights during the stay.

#### 4. Final Evaluation – Conclusion

The main research results are as follows:

- In the cross-border zone of the Polish-Slovak border in the Żywiec Beskydy and Kysucká Vrchovina regions, ecological forms of tourism are heterogeneous, as confirmed by other studies in Polish or Slovak territory [12,13]
- In Slovakia, ecotourism is dominated by forms of second homes (cottages), in the territory of Čadca there are 2 245 cottages and second homes, which is the average of 3.2 statistical households. On the Polish side this indicator is almost two times lower - only 7.2.
- In the district of Čadca, we investigated 13 ecotourism facilities, in the Żywiec district it was 23
- Mystery shopping has confirmed from medium to low level of services offered, as well as client communication in the given area is rather average
- The price sessions of the territory and the offer of tourist services are lower compared to the comparative territories of Lower Austria and the Tatras.
- Slovak tourists declared economic activity in Lower Austria at the level of 308 EUR, Slovak Tatras 380 EUR, in the Polish Tatras 680 EUR, and in our surveyed area it was 360 EUR in Slovak and 250 EUR on the Polish side
- Polish tourists declared economic activity in Slovak Tatras 485 EUR, in the Polish Tatras 420 EUR, and in our investigated area 330 EUR on Slovak side and 330 EUR on the Polish side.
- Finally we identified ecocenters on the Polish and Slovak side

**Table 7.** Eco tourism centres in research area - Żywiec

Accommodation type	Small domestic animal breeding	Livestock breeding	Horse breeding	Supply of domestic food	Supply of domestic eco-products	Eco-facilities
Hotel	-	-	-	-	Radziechowy Żywiec, Zwardoń	Żywiec, Rychwałd, Korbielów
Pension	-	-	Żywiec, Rychwałd, Milówka	Zwardoń	Zwardoń, Milówka, Lipowa, Jeleśnia	Żywiec, Zwardoń, Węgierska Górka, Przybedza, Ciecina
Camp	-	-	-	-	-	Żywiec
Private	-	-	-	-	-	Żywiec, Węgierska Górka, Rychwałd, Milówka
Other	Rychwałd	-	Żywiec	-	-	-
Total	1	-	4	1	5	13

Source: own field research

**Table 8.** Eco tourism centres in research area - Čadca

Accommodation type	Small domestic animal breeding	Livestock breeding	Horse breeding	Supply of domestic food	Supply of domestic eco-products	Eco-facilities
Hotel	-	-	-	Čadca, Svrčinovec, Makov, Nová Bystrica	Čadca, Svrčinovec, Dlhá, Vysoká, Turzovka, Olešná, Nová Bystrica	Čadca, Svrčinovec, Makov, Klokočov, Krásno, Dlhá, Vysoká,
Pension	-	-	Čadca, Svrčinovec, Krásna, Raková, Makov	Dlhá, Vysoká, Turzovka, Olešná, Nová Bystrica	Čadca, Svrčinovec, Makov, Skalité, Svrčinovec, Krásno	Čadca, Svrčinovec, Makov, Klokočov, Krásno, Dlhá, Vysoká, Klokočov, Korňa, Turzovka, Olešná, Nová Bystrica
Camp	-	-	-	-	-	Makov
Private	-	-	-	-	-	Čadca, Makov, Klokočov
Other	Makov, Krásna, Vysoká, Stará Bystrica	-	Raková	-	-	-
Total	4	-	6	9	13	23

Source: own field research

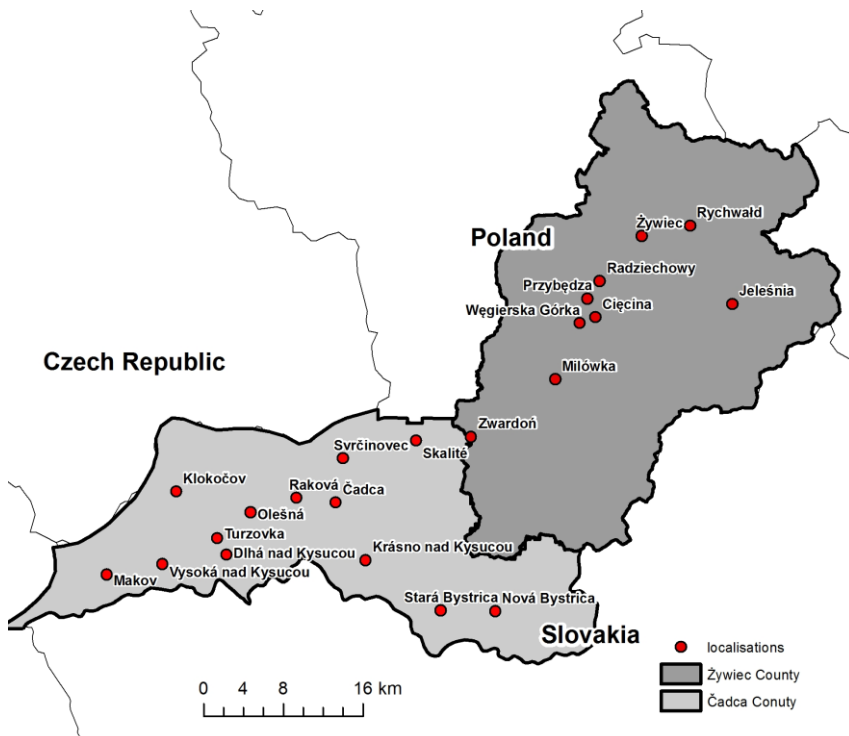


Fig. 1. Map of eco tourism centres in field research

Source: own field research

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