Ethnic Tourism From a Psychological Perspective

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Summary

In the article ethnic tourism is presented as a dynamic, multi-generational, social phenomenon undergoing transformation along with changes in the surrounding reality. Emotional threads of the journey to the „old homeland” were emphasized, however, the increasingly stronger cognitive aspects in the journeys of the generations born and raised abroad to the country of their parents or grandparents were indicated.

Keywords: ethnic tourism, sentimental tourism, social migrations, „little homeland”

In the scientific literature, the concept of ethnic tourism is not clearly understood. In its characterisation, Władysław Gaworecki refers to the concept of diaspora and distinguishes two sources of its formation: emigration and changes in state borders. According to this concept, ethnic tourism “includes tourism (mainly international) related to the place of origin, birth and former residence of the tourists themselves and their ancestors”. An important element initiating this form of activity is the feeling of one’s own origin and culture, and a sense of group bond based on a linguistic and historical community.

On the other hand, Mirosław Mika points to a two-fold understanding of ethnic tourism. In the first approach, it is treated as trips to acquaint oneself and establish contact with a culturally different population, in the second – as trips of people from the same ethnic group, also referred to as sentimental tourism.

A journey, the aim of which to get to know Indian tribes living in the Amazon or a trip to see the tribes in New Guinea, is contact with people who live outside the circle of Western civilisation.

Sentimental tourism is also sometimes referred to as “reflective tourism” or “returning to roots”. It is estimated that sentimental tourism covers 20-25% of the total international tourism in the world.

For further considerations, the notion of ethnic tourism in the sentimental form, indicating the emotional aspect of this form of tourism activity, will be useful.

Characterising “sentimental tourists”, Mika points out that “they may be members of emigrant groups, displaced or exiled persons, or members of ethnic groups formed in a particular country as a result of a change in the border lines.”

Sentimental tourism is an important factor in shaping a sense of common heritage and family ties. The great world migrations that took place in the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century included, among others, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy and Greece.

The Second World War and border changes in Central and Eastern Europe also caused population displacement. Their result is, for example, the arrivals of Germans to Gdańsk, Warmia and Mazury, Lower Silesia or the territory of the Czech Sudetes, as well as trips of Poles to the former eastern borderlands.

A type of sentimental ethnic tourism is Polish diaspora tourism, i.e. trips of people with Polish origin to our country, aware of their origin.

It is worth adding here that at the beginning of the 21st century, the Polish diaspora is estimated at around 20 million people and is the fourth largest ethnic group, after the Chinese, Germans and Italians, living outside their home country. The reasons for Polish emigration were twofold: a) political, being the result of persecution and the will to fight from outside, as in the case of the “Great Emigration” after the fall of the November Uprising, b) economic, that is in search of work.
Miroslaw Mika stated that the basic motive for undertaking sentimental journeys is “visiting the places of birth, origin or burial of family members”\textsuperscript{10}.

The above-mentioned motives relate to various situational categories, thus they will be analysed.

The landscapes of childhood and adolescence occupy a special place in our memory. They are especially marked with positive emotions.

From the perspective of past years, places related to our childhood and youth seem to be the mythical Arcadia, the land of eternal happiness. Looking from a different perspective, it can be stated that the identity of every person is in a way related to the place of his/her childhood or youth.

The landscape typical of a given region is an element of national identity. As John Urry claims, it is a special feature of the English, but we also observe this phenomenon in other communities\textsuperscript{11}.

“Alpine peaks and climate in Switzerland, fjords in Norway, Irish peat bogs, the wilderness in the United States, moors in Denmark, geysers in New Zealand\textsuperscript{12}” are cultivated as national icons.

In the discussed period of adolescence, a sense of identity is formed in terms of desires, plans and life goals\textsuperscript{13}. It also includes a sense of national identity, an individual’s conscious reflection on his or her national belonging\textsuperscript{14}. An emotional bond emerges with familiar land, tradition and culture. We feel “at home”, among “our own”, we freely function socially, because growing up in this environment, we assimilated its cultural scripts\textsuperscript{15}.

“When we think about Poland, we recall well-known, concrete, real landscapes: our own house, city or village, and a well-known landscape. It will be different in the imagination of each of our countrymen. The highlander will mention the Tatras Mountains, those from Gdańsk – the seaside beaches, inhabitants of Sandomierz – loess hills and ravines, and the Masovian – sands and forests on the Vistula, Bug and Narew rivers”\textsuperscript{16}.

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\textsuperscript{10} M. Mika, op. cit. p. 216


\textsuperscript{12} Op. cit. p. 207


Adam Mickiewicz pointed out this regularity writing in a letter to Ignacy Domeyko, stating that the Lithuanian landscape he longed for is related to a few specific places connected with the period of childhood and youth\textsuperscript{17}.

Due to the dynamics of social migrations, researchers became interested in the issue of ethnic identity, i.e. awareness of one’s own culture or ethnic affiliation.

As it results from research, the process of shaping ethnic identity is divided into several stages. Young children around the age of four have very limited awareness of their ethnic identity. As they grow up, their knowledge of cultural heritage clearly increases, developing further in adolescence and early adulthood. The awareness of the content related to the acquisition of one’s own culture leads to the emergence of cultural (ethnic) awareness\textsuperscript{18}.

The necessity to leave one’s own country places the individual in the position of a “stranger” who must act in a different reality. For Alfred Schutz, a profound researcher of this problem, a classic example of a “alien” is an immigrant who is forced to strive for acceptance in a new environment\textsuperscript{19}.

The immigrant lives in a different reality, in a different dimension, which leads to changes in his/her functioning. We call this the acculturation process. According to Paweł Boski, “we talk about psychological acculturation when a person originating from a specific cultural system (A) and shaped by it finds him/herself in the field of relatively long and intense influences of another culture (B), which force and/or initiate spontaneous adaptation processes leading to changes in psychological functioning with different levels of absorption”\textsuperscript{20}.

Not everyone has the ability to easily linguistically and culturally assimilate in a foreign environment. The level of change can be highly adaptive and is associated with the effectiveness of behaviour and life satisfaction, it can also be dysfunctional, at high personal costs. Then the memory of the family home becomes a moment of oblivion, an oasis of peace.

Visiting one’s homeland, especially after a long time, becomes a reestablishment of broken family ties, a return to the time of adolescence, “immersion” in familiar reality. These experiences are accompanied by intense emotional sensations such as affection, excitement, an-
participation, joy, contentment, reflection or nostalgia. The intensity and quality of these states depends on the personal characteristics of an individual.

Particular emotional experiences accompany visits to home sites that, as a result of the change of borders, find themselves in another country. Characterising visits of the former Danzingers to Gdańsk, who currently live in Germany, Magdalena Lemańczyk states “The feelings of the Danzingers from the visit to Gdańsk are mixed with the memories of pre-war Gdańsk. The joy of seeing a former school or home is intertwined with emotion and crying. (...) When you observe the Danzingers’ visits to the seat of the Association of the German Minority, one gets the impression that they fulfil the function of catharsis”21.

Similar feelings may accompany the visits of the former inhabitants of this city to Lviv.

We should look at the phenomenon of ethnic tourism in a slightly different way, with generations born and raised in a foreign country, who come to visit the homeland of their parents or grandparents. They know the image of heritage only from their parents’ stories, and they do not associate it with personal experiences or memories. It may be assumed with a high degree of probability that the decision to visit the “old homeland” is mainly based on cognition, confronting the stories of parents or grandparents with reality. Therefore, in literature on the subject, there are classifications in which ethnic tourism is distinguished as a form of cognitive tourism22.

A specific form of ethnic tourism are visits to Poland by young people from Israel, treated as a form of school education. They are aimed at acquainting young people with the cultural heritage of the Jewish nation, learning about its history and martyrdom. These types of trips can also be treated as a form of cultural heritage tourism.

The considerations presented so far, allow to demonstrate a diverse emotional context related to sentimental tourism.

The most emotionally marked are the experiences of people who visit the land of their youth, which, as a result of change in borders, found itself in the territory of another country. They lost their home, the atmosphere of the environment in which they grew up, which they remember, has changed irrevocably. The passing of time means that the described sentimental journeys of the Danzingers were drastically reduced, similarly less and less people remember pre-war Lviv.

The situation of people who left their patrimony for economic reasons is slightly different. The country of their youth has changed, but has not lost its attributes defining the identity of its inhabitants. Visitors’ feeling of nostalgia may be associated with the past years of youth, but not with lost patrimony.

It seems that both groups of tourists can be classified as sentimental, because the emotional thread here, plays a dominant role.

Travels to the country of ancestors, parents or grandparents have a different emotional background. Tourists go to a place they do not know directly. Their experiences are related not to the nature of this place, but to relationships with their loved ones. Therefore, the cognitive theme becomes dominant in their journey.

A question arises: in the world of great social migrations and progressing globalisation, including global citizenship, will ethnic tourism in its sentimental variant retain its current form?

According to Józef Rotblat, physicist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, loyalty to the world’s community and not to national identities, should be developed. As he stated, “Fantastic advances in connectivity and transportation have transformed the world into a closely interconnected community in which all its members are interdependent in their quest for well-being. (…) We need to use numerous new communication channels to become closer and create a truly global community. We must become citizens of the world”23.

However, the essence of sentimental tourism is not as closely related as earlier mentioned, with the broadly understood notion of homeland or nation. It is narrowed down to the area with which we have a personal relationship, i.e. our place of our birth, childhood and youth24. Stanisław Ossowski called this area a private homeland25, now the term “little homeland” is used.

One can be a citizen of the world, as Rotblat postulates, while maintaining an emotional bond with one’s homeland.

Of course, there are some exceptional situations. Among the hundreds of thousands of millions of people migrating around the world, the group of homo ex patus, corporate nomads who follow work, may be distinguished. Wandering around the numerous branches of a given concern, with its headquarters all over the world, is a condition for professional advancement. The descendants of these nomads are said to be children of the third culture, as they lack a sense of being rooted, they do not remember the landscape of their childhood years, wandering around the world with their parents.

It seems that despite the dynamic changes visible in present day, and remarkable human mobility, sentiment towards the land of our adolescence remains in human consciousness. It serves as a motive prompting us to visit our homeland in order to rediscover our lost youth.

21 M. Lemańczyk, Mój Heimat to Gdańsk – nostalgiczne podróże Danzingerów [Eng. My Heimat is Gdańsk – the Danzinger’s Nostalgic Journeys], (m:) D. Rancew· Sikora, Podróż i miejsca w perspektywie antropologicznej [Eng. Travel and Place from the Perspective of Anthropology]. Wyd. Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk, 2009
22 M. Mika, op. cit. BRAK STRONY
23 J. Urry, op. cit. p. 242
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