Ethnic and Regional Identity in Polish Part of Spiš Region (*On the Example of Jurgów Village*)

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ABSTRACT

In my study I am focusing on the issue of national and regional identity of Spiš region inhabitants. The researched Jurgów village belongs to territory situated on the frontier between two states and at the same time between two regions. In the study I analyze the question of stereotypes present in the locality concerning gorals from the neighbouring Podhale region and Slovak part of Spiš region. In addition to that I deal with analysis of importance and understanding of space and border for the identity of local population. On the basis of the empirical data analysis results I observe that the identity of the researched village population is shaped by the fact that it belongs to the frontier territory where cross-border cultural and social interaction occurs.

KEY WORDS: ethnic identity, stereotypes, space, Jurgów, Spiš region

Introduction

In Slovak ethnological science, the area of Slovak-Polish borderlands of Spiš region has been researched only to a small extent. However, on the Polish side of the border occurs quite the opposite. In Polish science there have been issued various publications

concerned with this region not only in the past but also in the present¹. Nonetheless, in my opinion, these researches do not deal with one of the most current topics – relationships between the Spiš region inhabitants and the inhabitants of the neighboring territories. In these relations, a specific cultural reality of ethnically mixed Spiš environment is reflected. Not only was the Spiš region a place of many historical turns and dramatic events but also the memory of these events is still living in many of the region areas and forms part of plenty narrations and collective memory.

I have made my research² in the Polish village of Jurgów³ that borders directly with the Slovak republic and with Podhale region from which it is separated by the river Białka. The village is particular for its border localization. The aim of my work is to find out what kind of representations do the inhabitants of the examined locality relate to the inhabitants of neighboring Podhale region and to the inhabitants of Slovak Spiš region. In addition to that, I will be dealing with the mutual relationships between the inhabitants of the Polish side of Spiš region and Podhale region. This means I will be also engaged in the research of stereotypes bound with “other” inhabitants of neighboring territories and in the research of selfpresentation of the given locality inhabitants. In Jurgów village members of two ethnic groups – Slovak and Polish live. I perceive an ethnic group as inhabitants that identify themselves or are identified by others as a group that separates itself from other ethnic groups.

There are two stereotype categories in the research of mutual relations between inhabitants of Polish and Slovak parts of Spiš region and Podhale. Both are manifestations of ethnocentrism (UHLÍKOVÁ 2001:49). According to Uhlíková we may define a stereotype as a positive or a negative judgment related to a conviction about qualities of a certain group of people or an individual. In case of positive judgment there is the category of auto-stereotype that means stereotypes about its own social group and in case of negative judgment there are the hetero-stereotypes that an individual shares mainly with his/hers own group about others, that is the other inhabitant groups. The origin of stereotypes is

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¹ Currently, the latest publication is: KRZYWDA-JANICKA U. (2012): *Kultura ludowa Górali Spiskich*. Kraków.

² I have made my research on the sample of twelve informants at the age of 24-82 years.

³ In the past the village was part of Austro-Hungarian Empire. After its dissolution the territory was disputed area between the Czechoslovak republic and Poland. In 1920, according to the international treaties, the Spiš region was divided between Czechoslovakia and Poland. At that time, Jurgów formed part of Poland. In 1939 after the occupation of Poland by German army, Jurgów became part of the first Slovak republic. After the termination of WW2 and the end of the first Slovak republic so called Munich Agreement was signed and Jurgów together with other twelve Spiš villages became part of Poland again.

social and is transmitted to individuals as the expression of public opinion mostly by family, respected authorities, social conditions, regardless the personal experience of an individual. Stereotypes defy the facts of reality or correspond with them only partially but always seem plausible. They can be very stable during long periods of time. That is because they are almost independent from the real experiences of people and based on mediated experience. For that reason they are resistant to logic arguments (KREKOVIČOVÁ 2005:58). Apart from stereotype categories, present social sciences distinguish the category of prejudices, that can be understood as fixed, uncritical created and adopted, strongly simplified opinion assuming some in advance acquired bias against an object or a subject of assessment of what is “one’s” and what is “else’s”. Prejudice often occurs in the function of a “model” that in terms of time overtakes the creation and adoption of a stereotype (KREKOVIČOVÁ 2005:20). As the majority of my collected data has the character of its origin in the past and directly relate to historical experience of the inhabitants with the Slovak State⁴ and private experience of the inhabitants with gorals of neighboring Podhale region, in the researched territory of Jurgów, mostly stereotypes exist. In this case it’s important to realize that many stereotypes result from differences between the Spiš and Podhale cultures, mutual misunderstanding and problems in interpersonal relations of the inhabitants living in these territories.

Historical Experience as a Stereotype Formation Factor

According to Barth (2004:358) each man belonging to other ethnic group is perceived by other member of ethnic group stereotypically. Apart from that the cultural attributes of every group must be stable to keep the cultural differences also within the mutual close contacts between the ethnic groups. This thesis shows that from social sciences’ point of view stereotypes are a phenomenon that helps the society to run and different population groups to live together. Stereotypes are created by the individual projections of the experience, that are part of the social memory (KREKOVIČOVÁ 2005:55). The question I am trying to answer in my study is what kind of a function the stereotypes fulfill in the village of Jurgów.

The village borders directly with Podhale region, from which it is separated by the river Białka. That is why the gorals of Podhale are also called “the ones behind the river”. The inhabitants of Jurgów judge mainly the gorals from the closest neighboring villages

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⁴ Slovak state that existed in the years 1939-1945, during the Second World War.

Brzegi, Białka Tatrzańska and the town Bukowina Tatrzańska. However, they do not see their judgements as a local particularity of the inhabitants, but consider their behavior and character as typical for all gorals, some of them consider gorals as true Poles. This phenomenon is one of the basic features of a stereotype. In the researched territory the existing stereotypes are the result of many negative experiences with gorals of Podhale. In the past besides many positive also negative relations existed between the inhabitants of these regions. But it was the case of individual examples that are now in the community emphasized as substantial in proving the typical attributes of goral nature. In his case study, Paweł Schmidt states, that during the Second World War there were armed robberies of inhabitants of Spiš committed by the gorals of Podhale, as they were considered German collaborator being called *Slovioki* or *Spišoki*. With these names they wanted to point out their alleged treachery of Polish nation. However, situations of this kind were rare⁵. In many narrations of Jurgów inhabitants are references to such situations as Podhale gorals coming to their houses, inhabitants of Jurgów giving them food and goods (in Jurgów there was more because the village was part of Slovak State and its inhabitants were given regular aid from Slovak government for the basic necessities of life). Stereotypes concerning the gorals of Podhale can be then called a consequence of social conflicts from the past. Tendencies to rivalry are developing in circumstances of material shortage and stereotypes can represent in this case the mean of justification for the kept aggression or negativism against other group (CHODKOWSKA 2011:21). Old inhabitants of the village understand the Podhale inhabitants through the experience they had with gorals mostly during the WWII and the years after its end.

One of the most frequent negative hetero-stereotypes we encountered with on the territory of Jurgów village⁶ is the stereotype of Podhale goral as a thief and an outlaw. It is not caused only by the experience with gorals from the WWII period. One of the reasons

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⁵ I do not agree with Paweł Schmidt's opinion who claims that it is not possible to explain the armed attacks but only as a consequence of poverty and shortage in the region of Podhale. Schmidt says that also the upbringing "in the shadow of outlaw legends" could play an important part in this situation, the young gorals taking advantage of the circumstances when it was easy to get a weapon to experience an adventure because they knew that the Spiš region inhabitants would not defend themselves with weapons as the majority didn't have one (SCHMIDT 1998:169). I suppose that material shortage and plenty of restrictions concerning the breeding of domestic animals existing in the Polish Podhale during the WWII caused that the inhabitants were searching for other ways of providing their own and their families' means of subsistence.

⁶ My research in the villages Suchá Hora and Hladovka shows that the same stereotype about Podhale gorals exists also in this locality. Also Ryszard Kantor came to similar conclusion in his research between the inhabitants of Polish Orava region: KANTOR, R. (1977): *Przekonanie Orawców o odrębnych cechach własnej twórczości a ich stosunek do grup sąsiednich*. In: *Zeszyty naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace etnograficzne* 10. Kraków, pp 67-85.

why the negative stereotypes remain in the consciousness of population is that many narrations concerning the experiences with gorals come from even more distant past. When the inhabitants meet they talk about the experience with gorals their parents or grandparents had. These narrations concern robberies as well because they occurred quite often when the people were returning from marketplace. The robberies were done mostly by young people that could get good sum of money or goods doing so. One of the characteristics of these narrations is that all negative acts done by these groups are assigned to gorals of Podhale, what can be considered as typical feature of an existence of stereotype, too. According to the narrations, these groups attacked only the groups of Spiš inhabitants. Nowadays the confirmation of such events is impossible. But the truth is that thanks to these memories the stereotypes characterized by strong convincingness are created. In lower level a discussion or doubts are allowed on this matter (PIETRZAK 1997:204). Thanks to such memories and stereotypes created from these narrations also a well-known proverb was made "*Saying every willow there is a saint in Poland and for every cottage there is a robber!*"⁷

All the above mentioned stereotypes concerning the gorals from Podhale are typical of attributing them with qualities that the inhabitants of Spiš consider lacking in their own community but typical of all the gorals. In this case, ethnic or regional identity is connected with value standards determined by culture (BARTH 2004:364). Apart from the above mentioned qualities the gorals are also considered brawlers. To this day in the memory of the inhabitants there are many situations confirming this opinion. Besides others they mention one goral who killed a Jurgów inhabitant during a wedding or they mention plenty of brawls that occurred in the village and were caused by gorals, who unlike the young men from Spiš, were brawling with knives.

Given the above mentioned information, the inhabitants proclaim that they think of gorals from Podhale as of "other" and "wild nation". The Jurgów inhabitants declare on the basis of these stereotypes shared in collective memory of their population their own individual identity. That is one of the basic functions of stereotypes. It is possible to agree with the view that people find their own identity in comparison with others, which means that differences in other people's culture cause profound identification with its own (BENEDYKTOWICZ 1979:218) and simultaneously this confrontation enables the awareness of its own "otherness" in encounter of other world views and human natures.

The above mentioned shows that the majority of stereotypes comes from historical experience and narrations of such historical experiences from the Jurgów village are still

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⁷ I have recorded the same proverb during my research in Suchá Hora village.

living to this day and not only among the old generation. Also despite the fact that the young people confirm that they are viewed as *the others*, *Slovioki* or *Spišoci* in Podhale, no new prejudices about the inhabitants of Podhale are made and the process of creation of new stereotypes almost doesn't exist. The most important thing for the young people is that they live in Spiš region and they do not perceive the inhabitants of Podhale stereotypically, but on the basis of mainly positive experiences. The young generation usually doesn't get their opinion about gorals from Podhale through the stereotypical point of view but through the objective background and their own experience, which is different than the stereotypical point of view. Naturally, I do not claim that the young people aren't influenced by collective consciousness where stereotypes exist. But they accept them considerably critically and confront them with their own experiences. Among the older generation that acts in the village as the keeper of collective memory about historical events concerning the gorals of Podhale an opinion is held which says that in the past gorals were "wilder" but now thanks to the development of tourism they are "more civilized". With this view they confirm that the qualities of one ethnic or cultural group can change in the eyes of the other. In some cases the qualities of "other" groups prevail and in other examples certain qualities lose some of their significance (BARTH 2004:353). This is relevant for the understanding of the process of creation and preservation of many stereotypes in community's collective memory.

The stereotypes we noticed in the researched locality as such don't necessarily have to affect the life of its inhabitants. It is certain though that if they do exist, they affect interpersonal relationships between the inhabitants of Spiš and Podhale. At the same time many acts performed by the community where in collective memory stereotypes towards other community exist, are directly or indirectly affected by these stereotypes.

Regional versus Ethnic Identity

Above described stereotypes are formed in opposition to other group which means they are part of identity. Thanks to them Jurgów inhabitants separate themselves out from Podhale gorals. Through this behavior the inhabitants define themselves as different from gorals of Podhale. This means that they declare their identity which is chiefly in ethnically mixed Spiš environment affected by various significant factors.

In my research I am focused on concrete speeches of Jurgów inhabitants that are connected with their relation to the region or ethnic group. In this case, ethnic identity must be seen as identical to the identification of a region. However, often it is not an official nationality, but declared. Despite the fact that the local character is losing its weight in many regions (BAUMAN 2001:10), in case of Spiš it is possible to observe that the

situation is different. Regional affiliation is one of the core values for the inhabitants of Jurgów and also their identity is based on it. Podhale gorals represent living and attractive culture (SCHMIDT 2002:174) and I agree with Schmidt that they are the basic social group defining the Spiš inhabitants, forming their own collective identity and my presented empirical material is evidence for this.

Jurgów inhabitants define themselves as *Spišoki*, the inhabitants of Spiš region - one Spiš region, neither Polish nor Slovak Spiš region. Such division is not important for them and they consider it incorrect. One older woman words speak volumes about that: „*Spisz był zawsze tylko jeden i powinien być dalej*“.⁸ Some of the substantial criteria for the definition of local inhabitants' identity are for example the criteria of origin and relationship with the history of the region but mostly with the history of state border's modification that occurred in 20th century as I have already commented. It is important to emphasize, in case of the first one, that the criteria on the basis of which the inhabitants designate their regional identity are denominated essentialist in social sciences. Essentialism is a theory, according to which the regional ethnic identity is strongly connected with culture and ethnic or regional group are seen as separate cultural units. These units can be recognized thanks to their typical cultural features that are considered objective. Culture of such group is distinguishable from other cultural unit (FERENCOVÁ 2005:34).

Essentialism shows itself mainly regarding the question of origin of those who consider themselves Spiš region inhabitants. It is thought in the region that no one can freely become Spiš region inhabitant by choice or by marriage. The affiliation to this regional group is conditioned only by the origin of ancestors: „*Spizak siedzi na tej ziemi od dziada-pradziada*“.⁹ Thus according to majority, the true Spiš inhabitant is only the one who was not just born there, but also his parents and other ancestors come from the place although it doesn't matter if the Spiš region concerned is on the Slovak or Polish side of the border. This is also reflected in their relationship with Spiš inhabitants from the other side of the border. Jurgów inhabitants define the relationship with them as more heartfelt and more amiable than the relationship with gorals from Podhale. In connection with these positive relationships, strong stereotypization of Slovakia and the living conditions there is present in the village. Slovak culture is considered to be more developed than the Polish

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⁸ The text is in local Spiš dialect. The translation is: „*There has always been just one Spiš and that is how it must remain.*“

⁹ The text is in local Spiš dialect. The translation is: „*The inhabitant of Spiš region resides in this place since his great-grandfathers.*“

one, which stays true mainly for the older generation that is expressing the nostalgia of Jurgów being part of Slovakia during the Slovak state. Also the conviction that Spiš region is just one and no borders matter in this case is present. Despite the fact the Jurgów inhabitants think of Spiš region inhabitants as *soulmates*, exists a stereotypical opinion on inhabitants of Spiš region goral village Lendak in Slovakia. According to some Jurgów inhabitants the people from Lendak probably came to Slovakia in the past from Podhale because they are equally wild and fond of brawls as the gorals in Podhale region. This view confirms the fact that what is common for the cultures emphasizes their mutual affinity and connection. However, what is different between the cultures, specific highlights the distinctiveness of the cultures (KOSOWSKA 2012:201) and this also in case of the same region inhabitants. Regional identity is unique for the inhabitants of Spiš as well as the integration in a community.¹⁰

Other side of Jurgów inhabitants' identity is more contradictory and very often provokes emotions among the local population. It is their identity as Slovaks. Many, the old inhabitants in particular, declare themselves Slovaks. This means that in the region we come across people having official Polish citizenship, who feel more like Slovaks because their parents or grandparents felt as Slovak, too and they were raised with this conviction. There is an interesting thesis which says that ethnicity and change of identity can be a prediction of new, unknown free self-identification (BAUMAN 2001:12). Freedom of self-identification works in this locality to a certain extent. However, this freedom is regulated by the community itself. In case a man who declares all his life that he is Slovak becomes under various circumstances a "convinced Pole", the true Slovak part of the population will view this in a very negative way. Since that moment when a man wants to auto-identify himself raises potential disagreement between our own identification and the one that the community is attributing us (O'BRIEN 2001:51). Also in this case it is necessary for every auto-identification of an individual to be accepted by the majority of the community that legitimizes his possible new identity. Reasons for such identity change may vary. According to Barth certain culture mechanisms must exist to enable the adoption of life principles on the basis of which new members can be accepted to an ethnic or regional group. As an individual decides for an identity change also some advantages must exist for him resulting from this change (BARTH 2004:361). The man getting married into the

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¹⁰ There is a very interesting case of a man who was living all his life on the territory of the town Bukowina Tatrzańska in Podhale in a place called Wierch Spiski. This man insisted all his life that he is Spiš region inhabitant (*Spišiak*) and he lives in Spiš region. His relationships with local gorals the contemporaries described as non-ideal. On the other hand, his relationships with people living behind the river, in the Spiš region, were very good.

Slovak family is very often considered a significant element of identity change. I have encountered with an opinion which says: “if the son-in-law is Polish, it is proper for us to, too”. It is true and in accordance with Barth’s arguments, that many inhabitants changed their identity from Slovak to Polish to be entitled to some financial benefits from Polish state. These benefits include pensions and other allowances to which the citizen of Polish republic is entitled. A common reason is also a belief that it is easier for a majority to live in the country than for a national minority.

Slovak national minority is quite numerous in Jurgów. Important fact is that not only the old but also the young generations declare its Slovak identity besides the Spiš region identity. Also the Slovaks in Poland Society practices its activities in the village and a lot of inhabitants subscribe to the *Život* magazine pressed by this society. The characteristic feature of the national minority is their language and traditions. Slovak language is maintained only to a lesser extent. In Jurgów people communicate in local dialect which links elements both from Polish and Slovak. Currently this dialect is influenced to a large extent by the Podhale gorals dialect (SCHMIDT 2002:185). This dialect similar to all the dialects of surrounding Slovak and Polish villages works as a cultural element that erases many of the ethnic and regional differences and creates a certain kind of common symbiosis which makes the mutual frontier coexistence easier (GLADYSZ 1972:11). It is important to highlight that nor do the old inhabitants remember speaking in the village actively on a daily basis only in Slovak: “*We speak Slovak only if someone from Slovakia comes to visit us*”. Except this one case Slovak language is used also during the Sunday church service. One of them is in Slovak. However, as it is celebrated by Polish priest who according to inhabitants is not willing to learn Slovak language, those parts of the service when he reads are in Slovak. Homilies or potential baptisms during the service are in Polish, too. It doesn’t apply in the village that Slovak service is attended by the declared Slovaks and the Polish service is attended by the declared Poles. What matters are mainly the practical reasons and as the Slovak service is in late afternoon the majority of the village population attends it. However all inhabitants respect the fact that songs are sung in Slovak. The only exception are Polish tourists that often shout down the singing in Slovak with their singing in Polish to show that they don’t agree with the national minority rights existing in the village. Such examples are rare. Most tourists are fascinated with the local culture and they respect it.

One of the attempts to maintain the Slovak language in the village is the possibility to attend the Slovak language classes for the school age children. The classes are given two times a week as an optional subject and about fifty children attend it. During the classes the children and youth are working on their relationship with Slovak language and culture. The level of the language children master thanks to these classes in case they do not

communicate in Slovak on any other circumstances is rather low. It is possible to observe that there are evident attempts to keep the Slovak language and the knowledge of its significance for the community remains in the collective consciousness of all the generations.

The majority of researched locality population understands their regional and ethnic identity as a double identity existing alongside each other, one of them dominant and the other secondary. It is a very interesting fact that during the last census in Poland, some Jurgów inhabitants, but also some inhabitants in other Spiš region villages on the Polish side of the frontier declared as *Spišiak* or *Spišiačka* (Spiš region inhabitants). They didn't state their ethnic identity or their citizenship, only their regional identity that they consider dominant and thus more important. This shows, that an identity is a choice, that connects and integrates various identifications of individuals (JAWLOWSKA 2001:54). Also on the example of this village we can see that the process of identity formation is unequal, politically and socially regulated process of keeping the past inequalities and creating new ones (O'Brien 2001: 31). We may also observe the fact that considering various living conditions of individuals an identity change is affected by many factors and it is not only the question of a free decision of an individual. Above mentioned empirical data and conclusions confirm that cultural and regional identity together with diverse ethnic identity are a significant part of collective identity of Jurgów village inhabitants.

Space Representation

In the research of the problem of Spiš region inhabitants' identity it is necessary to deal from the cultural-anthropological view also with the space representation. This is because the Spiš inhabitants are closely related to their region characterized by the fact that it is a frontier territory. Spiš inhabitants' identity may be called frontier-close identity (SCHMIDT 2002:183). Since it is a border area it is essential to look into the problem of the frontiers that constitutes a whole theme in many of the narrations. It is chiefly related to the change of state frontiers made in the 20th century and to the fact that the oldest inhabitants of the village remember the last significant frontier change. Thus it is possible to claim that the question of frontiers and its understanding belongs to the most discussed historical themes of this region. From our science's point of view it is important that the frontiers acquired a strong symbolic meaning. The knowledge of frontier change and the facts connected with it and emotions became part of collective identity of individuals. In case of Jurgów we encountered two kinds of frontier – Slovak-Polish state border and the border between the Spiš and Podhale regions. These two borders are not of the same significance in the representations of Jurgów inhabitants.

It is essential to realize neither the current nor the past political borders correspond with the ethnic or cultural borders. It is beyond doubt that political divisions have an impact on these borders but is impossible to mark the ethnic or cultural boundary (STASZCZAK 1975:64). To understand the problem of ethnic and cultural borders it is important that in case of such borders it is no longer a demarcation line but a border region surrounding this line.

To understand fully the real significance of these border regions we should pay attention to the problem of local culture and its representation in these territories. From cultural-anthropological point of view the question of representation of these borders in culture and collective identity of the area is crucial. If we look at the border as a space separating “the us” from “the others” in this respect the border between the Spiš and Podhale regions is more important. The river Bialka represents for the inhabitants the boundary line between these territories. However, the inhabitants themselves think of this river with broader connotations. For many it is the river that separates “*the Spiš region from Poland*”. This means that considering the past of the village and it’s a bit different culture from Podhale they perceive the village as a space that is not integrated into Poland although they realize that the administrative structure doesn’t match their own representation of the space. This understanding of the space “behind the river” is undoubtedly influenced by stereotypes surviving in the village forming a part of the local tradition. Considering the fact that tradition determines the character base of each local community (KOSOWSKA 2012:201) the above mentioned stereotypes determine the character of perception of the region border and the inhabitants living behind this border, too. The river Bialka that is known in Spiš region as the “Polish waters” can be understood as a space separating “the owns” from “the others” and Spiš region culture from Podhale region culture. The people living in Podhale have similar view on this river, too. The empirical data shows that gorals from Podhale consider the river as a border between Podhale region and Spiš region, between *Spišoki* and *Górali* or between *Slovioki* and *Górali*. Thus it is beyond doubt that the river Bialka has various representations in local cultures which agree in the fact that it is a border river separating two regions or *dwa światy*.

Regarding the representation of borders it is essential to pay attention to the political Slovak-Polish border, too. Jurgów village is according to the current administrative structure the last Polish village having in its land registry a border crossing with Slovakia. As I already mentioned, the WWII era represents in the memory of its old inhabitants that period of time when Jurgów village was part of Slovak State and that’s why the issue of Slovak-Polish borders is a theme evoking many emotions among the older generations. An interesting view on such border space can be found in publication by P. Bohannon (1967). He believes that border area is not different only because of its location in the space. People

living or finding themselves on any side of this border do not meet only for mutual interaction. Bohannan supposes that border areas in contemporary world form certain kind of cultural selection where in comparison with the past variety is growing¹¹. This opinion is undoubtedly justified. As a matter of fact it is impossible to state that although both sides of the border of the researched territory belong to the same region and culture of their communities is similar to a large extent, these regions on both sides of the border also make a homogeneous whole. The variedness of cultures on both sides of the border is determined mainly by political and economic situation of the given state. Such conditions and in my case also the politics in relation to national minorities affect to a large extent the culture in this border region.

The fact that state symbols have been placed on its borders has been a typical feature of every state since the past. This applied in the locality of my research mainly till 2009 when the border areas were adapted to the conditions resulting from the membership of Slovakia and Poland in Schengen Area. The oldest inhabitants remember very well the border fences and strict military guards having its centers right in the village. Watchtowers and barbed wire can be a well-marked sovereignty symbols determining the territorial state demarcation. As if these symbols wanted to display the power of state politics and conviction of state borders' dauntlessness to all the inhabitants living on both side of the border (DONNAN and WILSON 2007:15). This applied in Spiš region chiefly after the end of WWII and moving of the border behind the Jurgów village. The space behind the border represented for the majority of the inhabitants a place with a better world that they didn't consider as strange but as theirs – after all, on the other side of the border was Spiš region, too. Although the people considered the space as one region the border obtained such significance as never before. Only those who worked in Tatra National Park (its Slovak part) could legally cross the border because special passes were issued for them. However, there was also other group of people who were crossing these borders in another way. They were smugglers who were capable of risking their lives every day to illegally cross the border. Smuggling and illegal border crossing exists everywhere where the borders exist (BUŇDA 2005:127) and where free moving of persons is not possible. Smuggling is a cultural phenomenon that represents a subject of many narrations of local inhabitants. Unlike the perception of the borders by the inhabitants, smugglers saw them differently. For the first ones the borders represented a space that they knew but it was forbidden to them but smugglers crossed them on a daily basis and their activities were matter of personal

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¹¹ BOHANNAN, P. (1967): Introduction. In. *Beyond The Frontier: Social Process and Cultural Change* (eds. Bohannan P., Plog F.), New York. The anthology includes also other inspiring entries concerning this issue.

honour and proving of their own courage and ability to help themselves, maintaining the life of their families on a higher living standard. The memories of smugglers in this region make part of the “border story” and they are not always of a positive character. But not only Spiš region inhabitants from both sides of the border were dedicated to the smuggling activities. Plenty of smugglers came from Podhale region. The Spiš region inhabitants often considered them competitors. On the other hand, if the smugglers wanted to be successful they needed to keep good relationships with the rest of the smuggler communities (there was nothing easier as to betray a smuggler to the border watch and to get rid of the rivals) and thanks to this also positive relationships were formed between the smugglers from different regions. Jurgów inhabitants chiefly remember famous and skilled smugglers from Slovak villages Lendak and Osturňa who had excellent contacts with local population. It is peculiar for the narrations of smuggling that if the smugglers from Podhale are mentioned, mostly negative goral qualities are emphasized and on the other hand the smugglers from Spiš region are described only in positive connotations. Also in this respect the relationship “own” and “other” is confirmed and reflected in all elements of local culture. Since one of the main functions of a state border is to determine differences, the ones crossing it represent a potential danger to this function (DONNAN and WILSON 2007:147). This thought is in my opinion crucial for understanding of the cultural significance of smuggling not only in the region of Slovak-Polish borderlands. Thanks to smuggling activities not only stereotypes were formed but also different cultures and communities met. Due to these functions smuggling belongs to the phenomenon of border area and has enormous significance for understanding of functions and cultural meaning of borders.

Concerning the issue of space and its meaning for the Spiš region inhabitants’ identity it is impossible to ignore the cultural significance of Tatras. Tatras are of particular importance for the local inhabitants not only from economical point of view but in the community it is possible to observe also their cultural significance. People come to Jurgów village because it offers one of the most beautiful views on the Belianske Tatras in general. In the past, the clearings and other territories in Belianske Tatras belonged to Jurgów. Historical knowledge of this fact is present generally in the village and High Tatras are considered one of the most significant factor affecting the life of Jurgów inhabitants in the past because the majority of population worked in Tatra National Park also during the existence of Polish People’s Republic. This means that also after the WWII Jurgów inhabitants were daily crossing the border thanks to the passes that allowed them to work in Czechoslovakia. However, from the cultural-anthropological point of view the significance of High Tatras as the element of collective identity is interesting. Since Belianske Tatras currently belong to Slovak part of the Tatra National Park, High Tatras are considered by Jurgów inhabitants as a factor that has always connected them with Slovakia. This confirms the fact that for their own territory or for the territory where the people they consider as

“others” live, state, ethnic or regional borders are not important (SCHMIDT 1998:163) because Spiš region inhabitants feel High Tatras as their “home”. The significance of High Tatras for the inhabitants can be observed in talks with local inhabitants concerning this theme. Their statements are full of emotions. According to them High Tatras are mountains that *“each morning delight a man with such a beautiful view”*. These people have also embedded a distant nostalgia for the old shepherding times and free movement in High Tatras, which means the times when no National Park existed in this area. One story that happened during the existence of Slovak State speaks volumes. The inhabitants were offered a living in lowland and fertile areas in south of Slovakia. Then they sent some farmers to see their future potential territories. When the farmers returned they said: *“those are the lands of plenty, fields are fertile, abundance everywhere but High Tatras aren’t there”*. I believe that for Jurgów inhabitants High Tatras fulfill the function of a *sanctum* that is sacred space to which they relate their past and identity.

The above mentioned shows that space is definitely the category affecting the collective identity character of inhabitants from researched locality. Border areas and High Tatras represent part of identity of local population. Since it is typical of identity that it can’t be owned but formed (HASTRUP 1998:27) one of the most important processes guaranteeing the fact that the given understanding of space is part of its population’s identity is an existing collective memory of the past, chiefly the past connected with the border issues and the existence of stereotypes about gorals from Podhale due to what the river Białka acquires many symbolic meanings. The border area and its symbolism are directly affected by many events that have an impact on the creation of this space’s significance.

Conclusion

In my study I referred to select problems of Polish Jurgów village inhabitants’ identity. This village situated on the borderlands of two regions – Spiš region and Podhale region and also close to the Slovak-Polish state border is a territory where in connection with these facts it is possible to observe many unique cultural processes. The most distinctive of these processes is that fact that the population’s identity can be called frontier identity. This means that concerning concrete elements that are part of local inhabitants’ identity certain factors appear that are typical for cultures affected by the border phenomenon. The strongest of such factors is the formation of stereotypes about gorals from Podhale region and about inhabitants of Slovak part of Spiš region. Characteristic feature of Podhale gorals’ hetero-stereotypes is the fact that they have mostly negative character. Factors influencing the form of such hetero-stereotypes vary. However, it is mostly the fact that Jurgów village belonged to Slovak State what was judged negatively by

gorals from Podhale, who considered the inhabitants of Spiš region traitors of the Polish nation. The empirical material confirmed that identity based on collective ideas or group identification can lead to intolerance of others (JAWLOWSKA 2001:57).

The population from the other side of the border, Slovak part of Spiš region are the object of positive stereotypes' formation in Jurgów village because the Spiš region inhabitants from the other side of the border consider themselves as members of the same group – Spiš region population. Nowadays, the border itself doesn't have a significant impact for the inhabitants on this assessment. It is also because in Jurgów village also Slovak national minority is living. Many inhabitants living in the village are Slovak nationality or they declare as Slovaks even though they are officially Polish citizens. Many factors affect this, among others family background or financial benefits given to the inhabitants of Polish citizenship. Although we live in globalized society it is possible to observe a unique process in Spiš region. Many inhabitants consider their regional identity as more important than the officially stated nationality.

The last issue I wanted to point out is the significance of the perception of border space and High Tatras. The understanding of the area by Spiš region inhabitants has led me to a conclusion that they relate so personally to the surrounding territory that it forms part of their individual and even collective identity. The importance they give to particular areas – the river Bialka, Slovak-Polish state border and Belianske Tatras can be observed in many representations. The population relates emotionally to these places and attributes them with certain kind of essence.

Local culture of Spiš region's population represents the object of their pride on the region itself. They are proud of their background, history and culture they define as contrasting to the culture of gorals from Podhale. Nowadays, the existing stereotypes between the inhabitants of these regions are not a cause for bad human relations but are more likely understood as part of their culture and local narrations. The researched territory proves that the existence of local or regional communities depends, besides other things, also on keeping of local and regional identity.

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