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GÓRALE AND FARMING – IT GOES HAND IN HAND. AGRICULTURAL WORK AS PART OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN PODHALE

Górale i rolnictwo – to idzie w parze. Praca na roli jako część kulturowego dziedzictwa Podhala

Abstract: Contrary to common associations linking Podhale with recreation and tourism, this region still retains its rural character. Rurality, thus, is a category inextricably connected with agriculture and largely shaped by work. That is why progressive changes in agriculture and general de-agrarianisation affect rural areas much more strongly than a simple change in the occupational structure would suggest. The article concerns selected narratives and activities of Podhale farmers, showing agriculture as part of the cultural heritage of the countryside. Referring to the specific agrarian structure, I argue that farmers in this region use mountain conditions and the presence of the tourist business to undertake activities that go beyond the economic aspects of work. The specific nature of agriculture makes it a space for realising individual ambitions that reach beyond earning a living and touch upon aspects of identity. Even though the agricultural past is common to most inhabitants of Podhale, farmers, consciously referring to it, use techniques available only to them as specific continuators of highland farming methods.

Keywords: Podhale, agriculture, heritage, work

Streszczenie: Wbrew powszechnym skojarzeniom łączącym Podhale z wypoczynkiem i turystyką, region ten wciąż zachowuje swój wiejski charakter; wiejskość jest zaś kategorią nierozzerwalnie związaną z rolnictwem, w dużym stopniu ukształtowaną przez pracę. Postępujące zmiany w rolnictwie, a także ogólna dezagraryzacja, dotyczą więc wsi znacznie silniej, niżby to sugerowała zwykła zmiana struktury zawodowej. Artykuł dotyczy wybranych narracji i działań podhalańskich gospodarzy, ukazujących rolnictwo jako część kulturowego dziedzictwa wsi. Odnosząc się do specyficznej struktury agrarnej, argumentuję, że podhalańscy rolnicy wykorzystują górskie warunki i obecność biznesu turystycznego do podejmowania działań wykraczających poza ekonomiczny aspekt pracy. Specyficzny charakter rolnictwa sprawia, że staje się ono przestrzenią realizacji indywidualnych ambicji, sięgających poza zarobkowanie i dotykających aspektów tożsamościowych. Mimo że rolnicza przeszłość jest czymś wspólnym dla większości mieszkańców Podhala, rolnicy, świadomie się do niej odnosząc, stosują techniki dostępne wyłącznie im samym jako swoistym kontynuatorom góralskich sposobów gospodarzenia.

Słowa kluczowe: Podhale, rolnictwo, dziedzictwo, praca

Introduction

Few places capture the Polish imagination like Podhale does. Whether we are talking about Young Poland's infatuation with the peasantry or a simple ski trip, the fact that Podhale is a rural region often seems to escape discussion. Rurality always seems to linger somewhere on the periphery, out of reach of tourists strolling through Krupówki, collectors of Górale-style pins or mountaineers who cannot see it even from the highest peaks. The villages of Podhale are, therefore, first and foremost Podhale villages, and their rurality remains somehow hidden from the eyes of visitors.

This article is based on research I conducted as part of an ethnographic laboratory¹ – my first research visit to Podhale was, therefore, my first attempt at ethnographic research in general. Until then, I had

¹ I conducted my research between 2021 and 2022 as part of an ethnographic laboratory led by Dr Maria Małanicz-Przybylska, organised by the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw.

mainly associated the region with trips to sports camps as a child and walks in the mountains, so this may be why I decided to study Podhale's agriculture. From my first conversations, I began to notice the specific conditions the local farmers had to learn to cope with. I will describe this peculiar structure in more detail later in this article. Still, for now, I will simply point out that for agriculture, the changes in the Podhale economy have taken the form of a kind of extensification (Górz 2003: 193). The large number of relatively small farms means that farmers have a wide range of techniques and strategies from which to choose, often drawn from the past. Thus, in the Podhale region, labour takes on an almost identitarian significance, allowing Górale farmers to engage in a kind of dialogue with the region's agricultural past, something that is common to almost all Górale.

Anna Zadrożyńska wrote about work as something obvious, a necessary condition of existence, one of the basic forms of human activity (1983). Through work, people not only secure their livelihoods but also realise individual ambitions and aspirations, and work itself allows them to shape the reality around them. This essential nature of work may be particularly evident in the case of agriculture, a peculiarly holistic activity that not only dominates the lives of farmers themselves but also co-creates the rural landscape. The following considerations, therefore, relate to agricultural work specifically understood as an activity that goes beyond earning a living and is not only an organising factor for the rural community (Buchowski 2006) but also co-creates a specific image of that community.

I want to preface Podhale's interpenetration of agricultural past and future with one of the field anecdotes that had a significant impact on my entire research. Before recounting it, I must emphasise that farming is a specific occupation based on the daily hustle and bustle of various errands and small tasks. This makes structured and recorded interviews considerably more difficult, which proved to have a significant impact on the method I used to collect data.² Nevertheless, a large part of my

² In total, I have collected about 30 recorded interviews.

reflections is based on observations and conversations during work and relates to my attempts to help, or rather ‘not disturb,’ my hosts. During one such conversation, while milking cows in a meadow with a beautiful view of the Tatra Mountains, one of my interlocutors urged me to keep an eye on their work, claiming that it was almost like watching *juhasi*³ in a shepherd’s hut. Of course, it was not a shepherd’s hut but a private farm, far from the tourist trails and mountain paths. Still, the fact remains that the milk milked then, like that milked in the shepherd’s huts, was to be used in the production of *oscypek*⁴. It, of course, was not made by hand but in one of the local processing plants. This comparison of everyday farm work with a specifically Górale *bacówka* in the Podhale region is not surprising. After all, farming in Podhale is something decidedly specific to the Górale lifestyle. As I will try to show, contemporary Podhale farmers actively use such connotations of their work to co-create the rural image of Podhale.

***Tourists, Oscypek, and Bacówka*⁵, or Farming the Górale Way**

Michał Buchowski described the territories of former Galicia as exotic. He wrote that their otherness attracted anthropologists not only from Poland but also from Western Europe (1995: 11). This otherness is primarily based on a specific agrarian structure, which differs significantly from the increasingly common image of a modernising countryside. During

³ The term *juhasi* in the Górale dialect, spoken in the mountainous regions of southern Poland, refers to young shepherds or herders who assist in tending sheep, especially in the Tatra Mountains. They are typically responsible for tasks such as grazing the sheep and managing them on pastures.

⁴ *Oscypek* is a traditional smoked cheese made from sheep’s milk in the Tatra Mountains of southern Poland. It is a key product of the Górale culture, known for its distinctive spindle shape, firm texture, and salty, smoky flavor. The cheese is often crafted by hand using wooden molds, giving it decorative patterns on its surface. *Oscypek* is typically enjoyed on its own, grilled, or as an ingredient in various dishes.

⁵ *Bacówka* is a term from the Górale culture referring to a traditional shepherd’s hut or shelter in the mountainous regions of southern Poland, particularly in the Tatra Mountains.

the systemic transformation, when many Polish regions, often already transformed by communist collectivisation, experienced transformations known from American or Western European examples, the former Galicia seemed insensitive to similar trends. This made it an almost ideal research area for anthropologists in search of such otherness. But whether or not we give Galicia the title of exotic, I can claim with certainty that agriculture in this region, and Podhale in particular, develops under conditions that are different from what we know from popular visions of the countryside. It is precisely these conditions that make the choices and actions I am about to describe possible.

As early as the 1870s, Maria Steczkowska wrote about Podhale, ‘The barrenness of the land, coupled with the long winter and short summer, is not conducive to agriculture. Even wealthy farm owners cannot feed themselves from their own fields’ (quoted in Tylkowa 2000: 86). The difficult mountain conditions have almost always forced farmers to look for income outside agriculture. As a result, a kind of bi-professional tradition developed relatively early in Podhale, providing an opportunity to supplement the household budget. However, it was not only the harsh mountain climate that created the need for additional income. It also stems from the agricultural structure, which, as Bronislaw Górz puts it, is based on ‘individual family farms that have survived for generations [...]’ (2003: 178). It is also significant that these are mostly small farms, at least by pan-European standards. The gradual de-agrarianisation of Podhale, which has been taking place more or less since the 1980s (cf. Tylkowa 2000: 105), has mainly affected cultivation and, importantly, has taken the form of a particular extensification (Górz 2003: 193). Indeed, one of its effects was a decline in the number of farms engaged in commodity production in favour of those maintained to support the household budget, possibly producing for the needs of visitors. Thus, a significant proportion of my interviewees earned money in one way or another outside of agriculture. Moreover, it is easy to see that the search for alternative sources of income is generally viewed positively in Podhale (cf. Pine 2007). Virtually no negative views were expressed about farmers who additionally work outside agriculture, and narratives of dual employment are common in Podhale. As one farmer summed up, in the past, people:

[R:] Well, they lived from farming and from what *pany*⁶ brought in (male, 65).

Income diversification is not only a matter of course for Podhale farmers but also something specific to Górale. It has sometimes been presented to me as something special, something that sets Podhale apart from other regions:

R: It's different here because where you are from, isn't it, as we speak, there are farms of 100/150 hectares; it's different; it's more like a mass production. And with us, you could say it's... you could say it's hobbyist [...] Oh! There's just one direction, and that's the direction you [take]... And here, for example, you wouldn't make a living from such farming in these difficult mountain conditions. And precisely... Here some bees, there some bulls, something else, some *oscypek* making..., and simply, so to speak, the countryside... All this adds up to the final balance (male, approx. 40 years old).

But in Podhale, too, one hears the polyphony characteristic of farmers. Since I see farming as a set of life strategies (cf. Krzyworzeka 2014: 149), these strategies can considerably impact the diversity of opinions expressed. For example, those of my interviewees who were active outside of farming often praised such a working model as the only one possible in the mountains, but also as a source of steady and secure income, more stable than a farm dependent on current milk prices. On the other hand, farmers who adopted the opposite strategy, i.e. concentration on farming alone, often pointed out the disadvantages of combining farm work with work outside the farm. It is also important to note that many farmers who were almost exclusively engaged in agriculture declared that they periodically performed an activity called *fiakerka*, i.e., offering all kinds of sleigh and carriage rides to tourists. Thus, even if they did not actively seek additional work, they did not rule out taking up such activities according to their needs and on condition that it did not interfere with farm work.

⁶ *Pany* in this context indicates first tourists visiting Podhale

However, tourism is more than just a way for Podhale's farmers to earn extra income. I would go so far as to say that a significant proportion of Podhale's agricultural production depends on tourism. Before explaining this dependency, I will briefly outline the historical context of the changes in Podhale's economy.

Central to the history of Podtatrze is the Wallachian migration, as the settlement wave of the 15th and 16th centuries is sometimes called, which not only contributed to the demarcation of Podhale as a region but also linked it to the Carpathian cultural community (cf. Tylkowa 2000: 24). Although settlement in the region dates back to much earlier times, as early as the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries (Kroh 2002: 17), it was the arrival of the Vlachs that initiated the process of transformation of the regional economy, which over time acquired an agrarian-pastoral character (Tylkowa 2000: 26). Along with the Vlachs, sheep arrived in Podhale, and they are undoubtedly still one of the symbols of the region.

About three hundred years later, in the middle of the 19th century, other newcomers began to appear in the Tatras who, like the Vlachs, left their mark on the agricultural character of the area. They were, of course, the first tourists.

Just as the arrival of the Wallachian shepherds marked the beginning of the pastoral tradition in the Podhale region, the popularity of tourism led to an increase in the importance of cattle breeding. This was due to the growing demand for homemade dairy products, which began to be sold to holidaymakers in time (Tylkowa 2000: 95). This interdependence continues to this day.

The high demand for locally produced dairy products is a particular phenomenon in Podhale. It is due to the national fame of *oscypek*, which most of my interviewees referred to simply as *serek* (cheese). This demand is met by small producers who buy milk from local farmers.

Thus, although there is a commercial dairy in Zakopane, only some of my interviewees sold milk to it, and just as many cooperated with local producers. This created a particular cycle of dependency in Podhale: on the one hand, the difficult mountainous conditions and the small size of the farms limit the development of intensive agriculture; on the other

hand, the influx of tourists and the demand for cheese keep the smaller, family-run farms going. And most of my interviewees were aware of these interdependencies:

R: I suppose they're not mutually exclusive, but one is feeding into the other. Because of tourism, people come because they want to go to the countryside. Even if people come to one village with no farms, there's bound to be one in the next village or somewhere else nearby.

And people come if there's some agro-tourism there. People like to come to where there are animals (female, approx. 40 years old).

It can be argued that agriculture is an integral part of the image of rural Podhale. It is dependent on the tourist business, yet it simultaneously forms part of it through the production of *oscypek*. The nature of *oscypek*, which is unambiguously associated with Podhale, is also important.

It is accurate to conclude that only a limited number of respondents were directly involved in the production of the cheese. However, even those who solely provided milk for its manufacture played an active role in the creation of this fundamental Górale product. By producing cheeses that were subsequently sold to tourists, they thereby participated, to some extent, in the reproduction of a specific image of rural Podhale. The selection of a milk recipient is a complex undertaking. Commercial dairies often impose a number of requirements on producers, e.g., forcing the renovation of the shed,⁷ regular milk quality inspection, and farm inspection. Supplying milk to local cheese producers, despite potentially lower prices, is also associated with the maintenance of greater independence, which is an important element of the agricultural ethos (Krzyworzeka 2014: 302). It may also align with the myth of the free Góral present in Podhale (Malewska-Szałygin 2008: 42).

⁷ The shed was what my interlocutors called the building I know as the barn.

Kiedyś to się gazdowało... Back in the day, we used to farm...

Podhale, like many other rural regions, is undergoing a dynamic transformation. A significant proportion of this change can be attributed to the aforementioned process of de-agrarianisation, which in the Tatra foothills is further compounded by the high demand for land and the development of tourism infrastructure. One consequence of this is that agriculture has ceased to be the ‘default’ occupation for the rural population (Krzyworzeka, 2014). In the present day, farming is one of the many potential occupations, and a considerable proportion of the population of Podhale villages have no direct involvement in agricultural activities on a daily basis. The Górale themselves acknowledge these changes. During my fieldwork, I frequently encountered narratives about the demise of the traditional farming way of life (‘end of the *gazdówka*’),⁸ about the fact that there are no longer any real *gazdas*, and that everything has changed. It is not surprising, given that the rural landscape is naturally shaped by work, and any changes to it have significant consequences for the countryside as a whole and its social structure. The calendar of festivities associated with rural areas is also an agricultural calendar. The most illustrative example is the *dożynki* (harvest festival), which is probably known throughout Poland (in Podhale, it is called *hołdymas*), and in the Tatra Mountains – *redyk* – the day when the sheep are taken out to the pastures (spring *redyk*) and return for winter (autumn *redyk*).

However, in Podhale, the presence of work in the rural landscape has another dimension, which may be described as identity-related. Some of the interviewees presented themes of ‘traditional’ ways of farming in the same context as dialect or dressing ‘in Górale style’:

Q: And he goes ‘*na góralski*’, what do you mean?

R: He knows how to dance Górale dances; he’s learning it, well, in fact, he does it very well.

Q: In this group?

⁸ *Gazdówka* – a Podhale farm; *gazda* – a farm owner; *gazdzina* – a farm owner’s wife.

R: Yes, well now we all take an active part because, in the film you saw, our cows were there, the sheep. Janek arranged it, and we gave the phone number to the *baka*⁹ to come with the sheep. *Ostrewki* (hay poles) from the neighbours, because there aren't any *ostrewki* any more, you rarely see them. But as I say, the Górale love tradition and that's how it is, isn't it? At Christmas, we dress in the Górale style, not just to show off; we love it, we like it, and I don't know if you know that when it's St. Stephen's Feast, we go and bless the oats, and that's the tradition in our country, to bless the oats (female, approx. 40 years old).

Such narratives situate agriculture on an equal footing with activities that are perceived as 'typically Górale-style'. The image of the Podhale, as conveyed by the dialect or traditional dance classes, is that of a rural, and therefore agricultural, community. The film referenced in the preceding section also addresses analogous themes. Created by members of the *Cornodunajcanie* ensemble, its objective was to familiarise the ensemble's children with the realities of work conducted through traditional methods. The film's originator and director emphasised that this was crucial precisely because the majority of the children in the group do not hail from farming families and lack daily exposure to the work that was once ubiquitous:

Q: And I have a question, perhaps, where did you get the idea to make a film like this, specifically about this subject?

R: Because our children see very little of that, they're becoming so city-like, they have very little contact with animals, with manual work, with the typical work, because everything is already mechanised, more and more... Either large farms are being created, as it's more the case in the north or there in central Poland, or there aren't any at all, this fragmentation is being lost, where in our country

⁹ A *baka* is a senior shepherd or head shepherd in the Górale culture of southern Poland, particularly in the Tatra Mountains. The *baka* is responsible for overseeing the grazing of sheep, the production of traditional cheeses like *Oscypek*, and managing the activities of the younger shepherds, known as *juhasi*. The *baka* holds a respected position in the community, often possessing extensive knowledge of pastoral practices and local traditions.

there was from one, two, three cows in each house to a maximum of, well, ten cows was already a rich household, when you think of the 30, 40, 25 years, the past 20 years have completely changed that here (female, approx. 40 years old).

The theme of change as something primarily affecting children emerged in many of my conversations. As previously noted, de-agrarianisation is a phenomenon that has been evolving for much longer than the past 20 years. However, it has recently gained considerable momentum. Many of my interviewees jokingly pointed out that children did not know where milk came from or couldn't use farm equipment. However, the consequences of this were presented as being about more than just practical skills:

R: [...] We used to make *oscypek* and butter at home. She used to spin and knit those jumpers and socks. For some time I even learned from her, it was time to spend time together. And now it's winter, we all go to work around 7-8 o'clock, and we don't come back until 4 o'clock or something. It's already late, it's already dark for winter, and these children don't even have time to sit, or at least that was, in my opinion, such compensation for our work on the farm.... This reunion with the parents, with the home hearth, because this winter united us more, I would also say. Because in the summer they didn't have time for us, we were like self-raising children, the summer was for children, who can survive, who's more resilient so, well, unfortunately, knees, hands or something, although I remember we didn't break much [...].

R1: We're afraid, but the children are now... Irresponsible, oh, in that way.

R: Little assertive, yes, we had already worked out this responsibility for ourselves from when we were toddlers (two females, approx. 40 years old).

The necessity to re-establish at least a partial connection with agricultural work is therefore associated with the aspiration to return to a lifestyle characterised by proximity to nature or to familial relationships, which are perceived as a consequence of the nature of joint agricultural

work. It is noteworthy that this perspective was articulated by interviewees who did not engage in agricultural activities themselves. It is evident that work appears to assume a value that extends beyond its economic dimension, which, in this context, I refer to as heritage. In accordance with the theory proposed by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2011), heritage is only ostensibly about the past; in reality, it is oriented towards the future. Therefore, the transmission of information about the past to the next generation, despite its apparent impracticality, can have significant consequences in the future, and knowing where milk comes from is not merely an irrelevant curiosity. Indeed, a number of values of a far more general nature emerge from the work: the specificity of being brought up on the family farm shapes character and builds relationships within the group (home, neighbourhood, peer group), which can have an impact on the whole of later life, irrespective of career choices. In such a context, heritage is, therefore, not so much about a specific occupation as it is about relationships in the community and even about individual character shaped by work.

Nevertheless, the transmission of labour-related content does not inherently entail a desire to revert to the erstwhile socio-economic relations. Despite nostalgic recollections of ‘manual’ farm work, many of my interviewees indicated the positive nature of the changes:

R: Do I know if it’s bad? It’s also a question of the times; we’ve come to live in such and not others, and we can’t hold ourselves to the past at all costs because it’s not possible to live like that, either. We have to go along with progress, I understand, but we also want the idea of this film... To show the children how we lived... (female, about 40 years old).

Farming is not merely a profession; it is a way of life with a distinctive character that permeates everyday life. In consequence, any reference to the agricultural past entails the selection of specific practices and the meanings ascribed to them. In her study of heritage production from the mining past of a northern English town, Laurajane Smith (2006) highlighted the significance of the values derived not only from the knowledge

of material objects associated with the past. The significance of specific places or objects is derived directly from an awareness of the activities or uses associated with them. The transmission of this knowledge proved equally important (ibid: 264, 265). However, the continuation and process of knowledge transmission involve the selection of specific practices and the linking of these to specific values. This choice is an integral part of the heritage-making process (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2011).

The customs associated with harvest festivals (in Podhale: *holdymas*), the blessing of crops and other events linked to the agricultural calendar simultaneously belong and do not belong to the sphere of work. For farmers, these customs are an integral part of their lifestyle. However, for other inhabitants of rural areas, they do not carry similar connotations. In this context, a certain conflict arises, which is best summarised by one of the conversations I had in a village with a decidedly non-agricultural character. The discussion encompassed agricultural practices, changes in the rural landscape, and the celebration of the harvest festival. Paradoxically, as one of the few farmers in the area, my interviewees could not fully participate in the celebrations. This was because the nature of the celebration did not include the need for daily chores and constant care for the animals they owned. The celebration, designed as a holiday for farmers, consequently assumed the nature of an all-day festival for all residents. My interviewee commented on this, pointing out that, beyond the morning Mass, it was not possible to participate in these events.

It is important to note, however, that the agricultural past was a common experience among the majority of my interviewees. The actions undertaken in relation to this past varied considerably, contingent on their way of life. For some rural residents, certain practices belong exclusively to the past, from which they can now freely choose the content they remember; for others, they form a part of their everyday lives. This divergence does not mean that farmers do not engage in activities initiated by other residents. The film mentioned earlier, in which a family of active farmers participated, is an illustrative example; they even lent their equipment and livestock for the film. However, beyond this, farmers have opportunities

to practise heritage that are not available to those who do not live in this way. The following section is devoted to such practices.

It's No Longer a Tradition, It's Not... – on Work, Farmers, and Heritage

If farm work is considered an integral aspect of the cultural heritage of rural areas, the activities undertaken by farmers as the primary custodians of this heritage become central. Certainly, farmers have access to a diverse range of activities within this domain.

These activities are particularly evident when viewed in the context of the distinctive characteristics of Podhale agriculture, which have been previously discussed in greater detail. On the one hand, small farms with a relatively low degree of mechanisation and, on the other, a great diversity of farming strategies mean that approaches to the past and narratives about it are significantly diversified. Admittedly, although these narratives concern a sphere of practices undergoing, especially in recent years, an extremely rapid change, to some extent, they continue thanks to the farmers' specific way of valuing work, which is best illustrated by the representation of agriculture as a kind of vocation.

R: If you want to and if you have the will, it is a vocation, just like marriage and the priesthood; if someone likes sheep and such things, they go for it, and if they don't, you won't convince them, even if you give them a million (male, approx. 70 years old).

Thus understood, work is situated almost entirely outside the economic sphere, thereby assuming an almost identitarian significance. Furthermore, the decision to pursue a career in farming is, in fact, already made before this choice is even made. Passion, as Grażyna Jaworska and Witold Pieniżek (1995: 16) defined this phenomenon, represents a crucial context for understanding the value that farmers ascribe to work. In the course of my interviews, these themes emerged primarily in the context of children and specific predispositions, which the majority of my

interviewees indicated. It can be exemplified by the case of one of my interviewees, with whom I spent a certain amount of time during the autumn grazing season. During one of our discussions, he stated that a number of the sheep in the flock actually belonged to his teenage son. Of the three children, only this one has displayed an inclination to run the farmstead. Thus he purchased some sheep and maintains them with his father's existing flock.

Themes of a similar nature frequently emerged. Children identified as born farmers are permitted to assist adults and participate in the management of the farm:

R: And I'll tell you frankly that when he has free time, for example, because he goes to play football or to learn Górale dancing, it's different because he is free. No one forces him to do it. Well, school in the morning, you know, but when he's got a day off, at the weekend, he goes in the morning and in the evening, for example, and wants to [help on the farm – JN]. But, as I say, the kids prefer their mobile phones and games and stuff, and only to pet it [contact with animals only through play, petting – JN], but sometimes children don't even know where the milk comes from, don't they? They already start [saying] it's from a ladybird¹⁰, don't they... [laughs] (female, approx. 40 years old).

However, not all of my interviewees spoke of farming as an unambiguously positive occupation. The housewife quoted above repeatedly stressed that she did not think farming was a good occupation for her son. Still, at the same time, she did not put obstacles in his way when he wanted to help her with the daily farm work. At any rate, despite differing opinions about farming as an occupation, most of my interviewees expressed general satisfaction when their children showed an interest in such work. In fact, they often contrasted this with playing computer games or staring at the phone.

¹⁰ Ladybird – Polish: *biedronka*, which is also a name of a popular discount chain, thence a pun.

Work, therefore, has a special value for farmers. It is not only a way of earning an income but also a way of life that is undergoing rapid change. The mechanisation of agriculture is not only changing the nature of work, it is also changing lifestyles. The change cited by many of my interviewees as the most significant was the spread of haylage,¹¹ which has made haymaking largely independent of the weather, as the hay does not have to be perfectly dry for production. This means that mowing does not have to be done in such a hurry, so it does not need as many people as it used to. Along with the nature of the work, family relationships are also changing, as help with farm work is no longer necessary when even only basic machinery is available. In spite of all these changes, work seems to have retained its central importance as an organising factor in everyday life. Above all, it remains a sphere for the realisation of individual aspirations and ambitions (Zadrożyńska 1983: 48). Still, it is also in and through the sphere of work that certain narratives about the past are transmitted.

Talking to farmers in the Podhale region and observing their daily lives, I noticed that they sometimes engage in activities that certainly belong to the sphere of work but do not seem to bring significant economic returns. Many statements included phrases about hobbies, sentimentality or doing something *'just like that, for myself...'* The nature of farming makes it impossible to draw a clear line between what is work and what is not. Therefore, many of the activities and actions undertaken by my interviewees were on the borderline between these spheres.

The most important and perhaps most characteristic of these activities in the Podhale region is sheep farming. During my research, many interviewees stressed that this is an almost economically unprofitable activity and that its possible profitability only materialises with very large flocks. Such a situation was often explained by the high cost of maintaining the animals¹² in relation to the possible profit. Nevertheless, many of my in-

¹¹ Haylage, in Polish: *sianokiszonki, baloty, bole* – a way of storing hay by partially ensiling it.

¹² For example, at the time of my research, the profit from wool could not compensate for the cost of shearing the sheep.

interviewees kept small flocks. They explained this by sentiment, love of sheep, or simply as a ‘hobby’:

R: I still have 40 sheep, but it’s just out of sentimentality that I keep [them], that I come from such a family, and it’s just so ingrained in me that I just have to have sheep (male, about 40 years old).

Obviously, keeping sheep involves the possibility of selling the lambs, but in the case of small flocks, most of my interviewees pointed to decidedly uneconomic reasons for keeping them. Deciding on the profitability of particular activities is extremely difficult in the case of farming, not least because of the diverse understanding of the concept. Family farms do not necessarily have to have a specific budget or explicitly aim to increase assets. Moreover, an important part of the agricultural worldview is to avoid presenting one’s situation as satisfactory (Krzyworzeka 2014). However, given the amount of work involved, the need to maintain a separate building for the sheep and the trend towards farm specialisation, I believe that the reasons for such farming must go beyond the economic sphere. Sheep are often presented simply as part of the farm, part of the agricultural landscape of the Podhale. The aspect of passion for certain activities also seems important to me. As I have written, heritage is inextricably linked to the choice of specific practices and content. Farm work reflects individual ambitions and aspirations – so many of my interviewees said that they kept sheep because they simply liked them and enjoyed rearing them.

I mentioned earlier that changes in farming practices represented some of the most striking changes in the rural environment, with perhaps the most striking change being the almost complete disappearance of horses from the rural landscape. My interviewees often recalled a time when a horse was an integral part of every farm while pointing out how this situation had changed in recent years. Nowadays, the usefulness of horses in the Podhale region is limited to earning a living as *fiakiers*¹³, i.e. offering

¹³ A *fiakier* is a term used in Poland, particularly in the Tatra region, to refer to a horse-drawn carriage driver or coachman.

sleigh and carriage rides to tourists. Some stables in Podhale specialise in this service, but most of my interviewees did not own horses. This is because keeping a horse is extremely expensive and time-consuming.

Despite this, some farmers not only kept horses but actively used them for fieldwork. As with sheep, a frequent response to the question of why horses were kept on the farm despite adverse conditions was a love of them.

Whatever the reasons, the horse can be seen as a certain symbol of the countryside. To explain the context in which horse breeding appears in contemporary Podhale, I will use the story of one of the farmers who was my most frequent interlocutor. He and his wife ran a farm in a non-agricultural village. They were one of the few farmers in the area who produced milk, which they sold to *oscypek* producers, and the income from milk was their main source of livelihood. As well as cows, they also kept horses, and the farmer himself claimed that they were his passion and that he enjoyed working with them. Once, during a field trip, they invited me to join them in sowing triticale, which in itself is a rather unusual activity in the villages of the Podhale region, where the sowing of all cereals has been almost completely abandoned. The fact that we were sowing with a sowing machine harnessed to a pair of horses belonging to the farmer's estate added to the uniqueness of the situation. One could say, of course, that the horses were working for themselves, sowing the grain which, together with the straw harvested from it, was intended for them, among others. Obviously, sowing one's own grain is financially more advantageous than buying feed, but horses eat and use more than just grain. My interviewee estimated the total financial benefit of this activity to be several hundred PLN per year. Of course, owning a horse gives you the opportunity to work as a *fiakier*. However, finding such work in a village a little further away from the tourist routes, especially in the off-season, is not easy. Horses, like sheep, are simply part of the farm, and keeping and working with them requires knowledge and skills derived from a farm upbringing. In a way, horses belong to the agricultural past of the Podhale countryside, and working with them helps to consolidate a certain image of work and its place in the rural landscape.

Summary

In her book *Homo faber and Homo ludens. Etnologiczny szkic o pracy w kulturach tradycyjnej i współczesnej* [Homo Faber, Homo Ludens. An Ethnological Outline of Work in Traditional and Contemporary Cultures] (1983), Anna Zadrożyńska distinguished three models describing how work functions in human reality. In this classification, individual farmers were placed in the traditional model, which is characterised by the most holistic impact on the human being, in which work constitutes almost the entirety of human existence. Regardless of my attitude to this ‘traditionality’, I believe that among contemporary Podhale farmers, work is also an extremely important aspect of life, becoming primarily a sphere (but also a means) for realising individual aspirations and ambitions. My interviewees not only shaped their livelihoods through work but also constructed narratives about the reality around them. It may be particularly evident in the changes taking place in rural areas, which are leading to a significant diversification of income generation opportunities. Thus, in today’s rural areas, work is becoming the organising factor of their social structure (Buchowski 2006). In Podhale, agriculture has ceased to be something common to all its inhabitants, and with this separation has come a diversification of narratives and strategies about the agricultural past.

Podhale farmers, therefore, reproduce a certain image of the Górale lifestyle, using the methods and means available to them, such as small-scale sheep or horse farming or carrying out certain tasks in a non-mechanised, ‘old-fashioned’ way. Clearly, many of my interviewees expressed a desire to modernise and expand the farm, and having a ‘modern shed’ was very often mentioned as a goal and plan for the future. At the same time, however, the use of farming techniques that belong to the past seems to play an important role in shaping local identity. For heritage, as Laurajane Smith has written, is not something that one *possesses*, but something that one *actualises* (2016: 43). And this actualisation necessarily involves a conscious choice of what is transmitted and what practices are continued (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2011: 126). In Podhale, this choice is made possible by the specific conditions that favour the maintenance of

small farms, as well as the mountainous nature of the region, which often prevents the use of modern agricultural technologies.

Guided by individual preferences and possibilities, farmers construct a specific narrative about the past, which, on the one hand, is presented as a time of murderous work that now luckily belongs to history and, on the other hand, as a source of ways of farming that are radically different from those of today. These techniques constitute a peculiar space of choice, and the decisions made in this regard not only allow changes to be made to daily routines but also constitute an agricultural identity. This is because knowledge of these techniques and methods stems from an agricultural upbringing and the possession of competences that cannot be acquired in any other way, for example, by attending agricultural courses. It is also important to note that despite the apparent divergence, or at least radical difference, between the activities undertaken in this field by farmers and the rest of the rural population, these activities are not contradictory. The farmers' activities I have described reproduce similar content about the past as the film mentioned earlier or the harvest festivals. Still, at the same time, they manifest themselves in the sphere of work as the closest thing to agrarian everyday life.

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