

# Who is hiking in the Tatra National Park, Poland? A socio-demographic portrait of visitors

**Karolina Taczanowska**, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Austria, karolina.taczanowska@boku.ac.at

**Christiane Brandenburg**, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Austria

**Andreas Muhar**, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Austria

**Kinga Hat-Pawlikowska**, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Austria

**Szymon Ziobrowski**, Tatra National Park, Poland,

**Bogusława Chlipała**, Tatra National Park, Poland,

**Szymon Grocholski**, Tatra National Park, Poland,

**Jan Krzeptowski**, Tatra National Park, Poland,

**Miłosz Jodłowski**, Jagiellonian University, Poland

**Mikołaj Bielański**, University School of Physical Education, Poland

**Zbigniew Witkowski**, University School of Physical Education, Poland

**Jarosław Balon**, Jagiellonian University, Poland

**Jadwiga Berbeka**, Cracow University of Economics, Poland

**Krzysztof Berbeka**, Cracow University of Economics, Poland

**Wojciech Biernacki**, University School of Physical Education, Cracow, Poland

## *Introduction*

Comprehensive understanding of visitor behaviour in the protected and recreational areas is the key factor supporting management of those sites (Cessford & Muhar, 2003). Socio-demographic, psychographic and behavioural characteristics of visitors may be useful while planning and allocation of infrastructure as well as provisioning tourist information.

Effective management of visitors is especially important in heavily used protected areas, such as the Tatra National Park (TPN) in Poland (Zwijacz-Kozica, 2007). The area of 211 km<sup>2</sup> attracts approximately three million visits annually and 65 % of the observed visitor load concentrates in the summer season (Czochanski & Borowiak, 2000). Hiking along designated trails is the most popular activity in TPN and therefore it is crucial to better understand this dominant visitor segment.

The aim of this paper is to present the results of a survey campaign conducted in the summer season 2013 in the Western Tatras, Poland. This investigation is a part of the extensive pilot study concerning visitor monitoring in the Tatra National Park (Ziobrowski et.al, 2014).

## *Study Area*

The Tatra Mountains are situated in Central Eastern Europe and are the highest range within the Carpathian Mountains. Almost the entire area lies within the borders of two independently managed

national parks: Tatransko Narodny Park in Slovakia and Tatrzański Park Narodowy in Poland. The presented study was carried out in the Polish part of Western Tatras (Figure 1). The main focus was placed at Czerwone Wierchy massif, due to the planned reconstruction of hiking trails in this area.

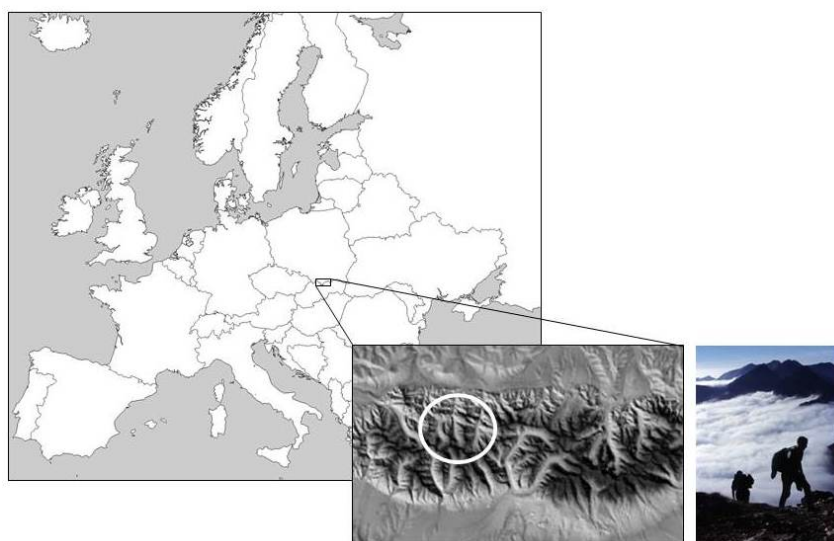


Figure 1. Localization of the case study area: Czerwone Wierchy massif, Western Tatra, Poland

## *Methods*

The survey campaign took place between June and September 2013 on 15 sampling days at 15 National Park locations. The total number of 2106 hikers was interviewed on-site using structured questionnaires (PAPI technique). Additionally, the respondents were asked to draw their hiking route in the map. The statistical analysis was done using SPSS software. The analysis of visitors' routes was done using a mixed MS Access and GIS approach developed by Hinterberger (1999) and adapted by Taczanowska (2009).

## *Results and Discussion*

The majority of hikers in Czerwone Wierchy massif visit the Tatra National Park regularly once a year (41% of respondents), spent in the region 8 days and hiked 6 days in the National Park area. One quarter of the respondents come to the Tatra Mountains several times a year (25%). There were slightly more men (52%) than women (48%) hiking in the area; visitors were mostly young (median = 35 years) and well-educated (60% of hikers have higher education, 27% - secondary education).

85% of the respondents live in a city (25% city > 500.000 inhabitants, 24% 100.000-500.000 inhabitants, and 36% city < 100.000 inhabitants); only 15% of hikers live in a village.

Among the most important motives for visiting the Tatra National Park were: escape from urban life, admiring landscape, contact with nature, time spent together with family and/ or friends, health

and physical activity. Also silence was an important motivating factor (for 52% of the respondents it was very important, and for 33 % rather important). Nevertheless, loneliness was largely unimportant (44,5%) or indifferent (28%) for Tatra hikers. Also observing animals was not significant for the interviewed visitors.

In comparison with the results from other mountain areas, such as Austrian Alps (Muhar et al., 2007), the Tatra hikers are younger. The major difference refers to the age category 16-30 years, which dominates in the Tatra and is less frequent in the Alps. Another difference denotes participation of male and female visitors in hiking activity. The share of male and female hikers in the Tatra is almost equal, while in the Alps slightly less woman hike in the mountains. A high share of visitors with completed tertiary education is common for both areas.

### *Conclusions & Outlook*

Hikers are a core group in the Tatra summer tourism. Knowledge concerning socio-demographic characteristics of visitors can support visitor management in the National Park in many ways. For instance, it can be used for designing strategic tourist offers and environmental awareness campaigns. In future, comparisons with the Slovakian hikers as well as visitors to other areas in the Carpathians and other mountain ranges are planned.

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