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ГІРСЬКА АКТИВІСТЬ У ПЕДАГОГІЧНОМУ ТА ПЕРСОНАЛІСТИЧНОМУ АСПЕКТАХ MOUNTAIN ACTIVITY IN THE ASPECT OF PERSONALISM AND SLOW PEDAGOGY AKTYWNOŚĆ GÓRSKA W ASPEKTCIE PERSONALIZMU ORAZ PEDAGOGICZNEGO SLOW

*Mountains allow man to experience the hardships of a climb,
a steep ascent hardens personality, and contact with nature makes you cheerful.*

John Paul II

Natural environment and its phenomena have always intrigued people. Especially mountains due to their impenetrability and the fact that every person perceives them from their own perspective. They are seen differently by a painter, a poet, a geographer, a geologist, a tourist, an alpinist, an environmentalist, an economist, a philosopher... Every reflection might seem to another as incomplete, exalted, pathetic or too narrow, as expressed in a number. None of them can, however, be denied genuineness, since every man has the right to make their personal choices and judgements. Teachers and educators, as well, have their own view of mountains as a school of life, and the children and youth's choice of mountain tourism – among other outdoor activities – provides many environmental and health values, as well as educational potential.

Polish mountains – The Sudetes and Carpathians are one of the most interesting tourist regions in Poland. The Tatra Mountains are the only Polish alpine region. The charm is completed by the Highlanders, who, according to Polish ethnographers, are the native inhabitants of montane and submontane regions – from the Silesian Beskid (the most western range) to the Bieszczady (the eastern end). Characteristic of Highlanders is a set of cultural traits, that is clothes, architecture, (mainly) herding economy, the local dialect, folklore, music, art, and, above all, an awareness/sense of separateness (Z.W. Paryscy, 2004, p. 230). The geographic environment (barren soil, severe climate) and historical factors (lack or limited socage, emigration to the USA, seasonal construction and farming works in the lowlands) have determined the economy, but also contributed to forming the individual character of the inhabitants.

Carpathian Highlanders stand out for their courage, strength, agility, respect for the Mountains, they consider freedom as a paramount value. All the above-mentioned components constitute a peculiar life philosophy represented in tales, legends and a specific sense of humour. (Jazowski, 1980; Bonowicz, 2010). A well-known Tatra tale provides the origins of mountains. According to the tale, God created all things from nothing, and he only formed mountains from crumbs of stars (heard in Pieniny – author's note). There are mountains so that "you can sit and rest on them and so they remain a token of His remembrance until the end of the world" („beło na cym posiedzieć i wypocąć, i żeby beło po Nim pamiątkom do końca świata"). Then, the Creator decided: "you are to serve me to the end of the world – you shall be my church" („mocie mi służyć do końca świata- kościołem moim beecie"). It is hard to say whether this obligation contributed to the Highlanders' authentic religious attitude. It is an indisputable fact, however, that conversations and spending time with Highlanders continuously astonish one with their peculiar life philosophy and a distance towards their surroundings. Rev. Prof. Jyzef Tischner – a representative highlander, philosopher, priest, Mountain and Highlanders adorer – considered "a way of experiencing the world – without the motive of being enslaved by the world" as a significant feature of the local dialect (Bonowicz, 2010, p. 27-28). Self-irony, contrariness and humorous retorts characteristic of Highlanders are for Tischner expressions of freedom. In Highlander jokes, tales and legends one can find all shades of human existence – love, freedom, honour, death – all described according to "the highlander way of thinking", that is: every described life situation in life has a punchline in the form of a subtle saying with no trace of moralizing. In this sense, this type of humour



falls into a category of laughter (developed by Michał Bachtin), where genuine laughter, ambivalent and universal, does not reject seriousness/earnestness, it purifies and completes it. It cleanses one of dogmatism, fossilization, intimidation, didacticism...(Witkowski, 2000, p. 170- 74). For young people (especially those from the lowlands), it is an encounter with a different perspective on people and their affairs. In this sense, I perceive it as a value added of a visit to the mountains. The above-mentioned elements contribute to the popularity of this region, despite the fact that, here as well, there is a visible tendency to commercialise both material and non-material culture.

From the pedagogical and psychological perspective, the choice of activity/mountain tourism has, apart from the effects of children's confrontation with natural environment, a developmental value. Growing up and upbringing in liquid modernity (Z. Bauman's term) promote individuality, pleasure, relativism, immediacy of access, success in every scope of human life. As a result, most of the new generation is prepared to achieve success in the "rat race". It also leads to convictions and declarations of one's own exceptional psychophysical abilities. Planning a trip or an expedition to the mountains requires rationality in the course of preparation, therefore, a chaperone's or an instructor's task is to teach the adepts how to prepare an escapade in the fields of logistics and physical condition. The climb requires a good level of physical fitness and mental toughness, it develops planning skills and the ability to concentrate on the task. Investing in appropriate sports equipment is insufficient.

A significant effect of mountain activity is getting to know and verifying one's own psychophysical abilities, as the mountains are characterised by their own philosophy. Here, a seemingly undemanding summit may prove very hard to reach and a high mountain – is not always difficult to conquer, however it provides a considerable dose of adrenaline, which is sought after by young people. It should be noted here that mountain activity is understood differently by aficionados and by neophytes. Mountain trips with school-aged youth are unusual. In the very first hour of a trip the best solution (in young people's opinion) is for the chaperone to disappear from view. Attempts to plan a schedule for the day, group outings/treks in the mountains, meals – end with avoiding responsibility or negotiating their arguments and, at best, looking for McDonalds, KFC or ordering takeaway food. Choosing a route, arranging a schedule, assigning persons to be responsible for maps or operability of equipment – are backbreaking tasks. Everybody (unanimously) is interested in cool photos to put up on facebook (odjechane foty, żeby było co wrzucić na fejsa – original wording - author's note). There occur, however, situations which astonish and indicate that not all is lost, for us adults, for example, the impact which the text presented in a display cabinet in St. Albert's hermitage (Zakopane – Kalatynki) has on the youth. In my opinion, it was educationally invaluable. The words placed in a modest showcase – a tourist's credo – read as follows:

Mountains purify, require purification.

Mountains purify from egoism and selfishness, conceit and haughtiness.

Mountains are a wonderful terrain to conquer.

Mountains teach how to explore, they teach patience and consistence in the search.

They purify from selfishness, when you must share your piece of bread or a cube of sugar or when you must abandon your own plans in order to rescue another human being, often a stranger.

A mountain man is not someone who is able to and enjoys walking in the mountains, but someone who can live in the valleys. When a man feels like a dwarf in the face of the magnitude of mountains, getting to know oneself, one's inner self, one's abilities, one's insufficiency, he gains, step by step, the most precious human quality – humility, which, even though gained in the mountains, bears fruit in the valleys. And then, when somebody asks you – why you are walking in the mountains – you feel confused and lost about how to reply, you give a proof that you are looking for the unknown!

And further: "Before you descend from a mountain, apologise to God, apologise to people, apologise to the whole world; the ruined grass, flowers, a warm, every life, for disturbing the silence, for diminishing the beauty which belongs to all of us".

Nearly all trip participants took photographs of the text and, after several sarcastic comments, fell into a quiet reflection. The first mountain tour – even a school field trip – sometimes becomes a trigger for reflection over the sense of life, noticing the concept and teamwork. For an educator, it may constitute indirect, but nevertheless valuable information on the condition of the student's family, his peer group, his activeness or alienation as a trip participant.

Researchers (psychologists) who focus on determinants of outdoor activities analyse the issue in cultural, biological and situational aspects.

From the cultural perspective, exploration of the environment should be referred to rites and rituals, which accompany human beings, and which are connected to maturing and a place occupied by a person in the hierarchy of a social group. The young generation (usually boys) undergo a rite of passage or an initiation rite, which arises from the age of a given candidate and his will and, after a successful verification, results in a change in social status – he becomes an adult member of the tribe, a warrior. Interestingly, regardless of geographical location, girls/women have not participated in those "male" rituals. Nowadays, there are no gender-based barriers for people deciding to explore mountains (Prychniak, 2013, p. 18 - 19).

In the past, rituals/rites were connected with the ability to bear pain, as a warrior had to be able to manage it if he was to decide upon the fate of the whole community. These rituals were often associated with a spiritual element, for which, it seems, there is no room in today's rational world or it is commonly perceived as a useless, pathetic burden. Natural environment – as no other – is the best place to experience spiritual sensations, feel the taste of freedom



and, at the same time, to feel respect to their majesty. Mountains have a special mysticism. A semantic analysis of the above expression (mysticism of mountains) refers to the Greek term *mysterion* and it means a mysterious, unknown thing, reality. I believe that mysticism of mountains is a kind of wisdom of a mystery and respect for mountains, as well as of the ways of their exploration, which I refer to personal reflection, and to discovering thoughts of mountain people (afficionados, mountaineers, highlanders...). For adepts of mountain activity it is the right place, where they can feel the synthesis of the spirituality and mysticism of the place through their presence, ...experience, In this respect, a chaperone, an instructor or a mountaineer who shows young people also “these” aspects of mountain escapades is invaluable.

I am afraid that the contemporary „rituals” in the above sense have been reduced to trainings, lessons with an instructor and the purchase of the most professional equipment a mountaineer adept can afford.

Theories of biological determinants are related to the level of MAO (monoamine oxidase). Zuckerman and Zaleśkiewicz’s research indicate that there are relations between the above-mentioned enzyme and engaging in activities. Its level increases with age; at a low level people feel impelled to go to the Mountains (activity is often a result of hedonistic motives) even for a price of risk. A high level of the enzyme results in avoiding risk and intense effort (Zuckerman, 1994; Zaleśkiewicz, 2005).

In the analysis of biological determinants, scientists directed their attention to hormones. The analysis revealed that the level of testosterone and its relation with sex and age of the subjects engaging in outdoor activities. Adolescence and early adulthood are characterised by a high level of testosterone, which determines risky behaviours and impulsiveness in decision-making during a climb. Other significant (peptide) hormones are endorphins, whose level increases after a successful exploration of environment (Prychniak, 2013, p.21)

Situational determinants refer to the ability to rationally assess weather conditions in reference to the planned trek/climb up a mountain. An important role in assessing the probability of success in an activity is played by the information on one’s own successes and failures (Walesa, 1998). For situational factors, a crucial role is played by experience, which determines estimating the probability of success in the planned expedition, as, in mountain conditions, depending solely on weather forecast may prove insufficient. For a source of clues one may also look for in a behaviour of animals, wind direction and force, a given kind of clouds or humidity of air.

Except for assessing the chances of success in an activity, utility for the person engaging in an activity is of a great significance in a decision to go to the mountains. According to Piotr Prychniak, “utility is (...) ascribing a certain value to possible benefits resulting from reaching the goal or a possible failure in doing so” (Prychniak, 2013 p. 23). Assessing this utility is an individual process, which is dependant on age, personality, educational background, aspirations and views on the sum of life accomplishments. Mountains are, certainly, a place, where young people may, with assistance of a person of authority learn planning skills and estimating (dis)advantages, experience the risk and effort associated with the expedition, the taste of joy of being on the top of a mountain, but also a failure, which should be considered an integral element of life. This fact gives an opportunity to learn to treat failure as a springboard to success. Research reveals that frequency and degree of difficulty (an opportunity to develop one’s own abilities) have a positive influence on one’s sense of self-efficacy and willingness to engage in further projects (Llewellyn, Sanchez, 2008, p. 414-425). Studies suggest that exploration of mountains cannot be treated as an activity performed mechanically or automatically, which is also crucial to the climbers’ caregiver, who is also responsible for mapping out the route, preparing and checking the operability of equipment or even charging mobile phone batteries.

Another challenge for a chaperone (or a self-dependent youth) is the ability to cope with the illusion of attractiveness of the unknown (for example, the temptation to “take a shortcut”). It is noteworthy that we also succumb to illusions in the course of setting our personal goals. According to Kozielicki, “illusion prompts people to take too great a risk in establishing goals which have little personal and social value” (Kozielicki, 2002, p. 203).

Outdoor activities are also a subject of psychological conceptions. From the perspective of evolutionary psychology – exploration of natural environment results from the need to ensure security for oneself and the community, and, as a consequence, survival.

Psychoanalysis treats outdoor activities, mainly risky behaviours, as a mental disorder. According to psychoanalysts, taking risks, e.g. in the mountains, may be “not entirely conscious tendency to express the death drive *thanatos*” (Prychniak, 2013, p.25) or a result of compensation for low sense of manhood (Kutter, 1998).

Some psychoanalysts take the mountain terrain into consideration and describe a “God complex”; for them, conquering peaks constitutes affirmation of manhood, due to the shape of mountain peaks.

Existential psychology views exploration of natural environment as a need for the sense of life, which partly includes in itself a *primaeva* spiritual element. From this perspective, the sense of life is a “meta-need” which conditions other needs, for example “the courage to be, which is the man’s answer to dangerous situations and fear connected to it” (Prychniak, 2013, p.26).

Studies conducted by psychologists revealed that the main motive behind mountain activities are: being creative, getting to know oneself and the mountain environment, improvement of physical fitness, taking on challenges, having control and escaping from the monotony of life. According to the studies conducted by Ewert, the determinants of mountain activity are: admiration of the mountains, group relations, improving one’s self-esteem and competence or even willingness to impress others (Ewert, 1985, p. 242-249).



Describing the above-mentioned determinants and psychological concepts was aimed at outlining the benefits stemming from mountain activity, that is discovering montane terrains – as an element of nature, contemplation of beauty, relax, distance to life, “social alpinism” (an elegant name for the “rat race”), getting to know oneself and one’s own psychophysical abilities. The above considerations concerning young people are significant, they require, however, a complement of an educational context of a mountain activity, especially in the generation of children and young people born and raised in the new social and constitutional reality which promotes relativism, changeability, personal success (social alpinism), individuality, competition and creativity. Effort, cooperation, persistence and patience in relationships, community – are ideals “out of this planet”. Although nowadays schools carry out EU community programmes or have subjects employing project-based learning – the formal character of these solutions fails to contribute to the development of students’ personality. It appears that, due to the lack of appropriate educational influence, teachers, parents and educators themselves dismiss the community ideal – dooming it into indeterminate nothingness.

Despite the passage of 20 years and a generational change, one may be under an impression that the majority of young people function according to communist “wisdoms” such as: what is due today, do the day after tomorrow – you will have two days off; think, care and fight for yourself and by yourself; nothing for long, do not stop, do not get involved, do not sacrifice yourself (Sennett R., 2006, p.26).

Common observation of reality indicates that all parties engaged in the process of education seek to ensure individual success of a student, which is expressed furtherly in the number of school olympiad laureates, high position in school rankings. Ranking position and popularity of a school is an indicator of didactic abilities of its teachers, they fail, however, to reflect the quality of education. In the long perspective of man’s/society’s existence, it is education that has value and importance for the quality of social potential. In the globalising world, the concept of community should not be referred solely to the social microenvironment (e.g. family, school class, peer group) or to the Polish society. The above opinions sound like a truism; it is, however, also easy to notice the discourse taking place in order to establish axiological potential of the planned/set up projects, influences, which are ascribed a paradigm character. The dominant context is a personal one – the PERSON of a child, a parent, a teacher.

Among the many currents and directions present in the contemporary pedagogy – the concept of personalism is gaining more and more proponents. Its lead precept is respect for Person, dialogue with Person, which gives education a special perspective. Pedagogy of personalism is characterised by actions aimed at: personal support, which enables a student to make conscious autonomous life choices, and developing the ability to hold a dialogue with and respect for Others (Bremer, 2005, p.20-55). For a personalist, the perception of reality, reflection as well as a choice of a method are directed at Person and constitute a path to him/her (Bartnik, 1996). Therefore, personal pedagogy assumes a holistic image of a human being and is distinguished by optimism, hope, realism in a human’s individuality.

A personalist educator – according to J. Woroniecki – apart from assisting development understood as forming the physical and spiritual sphere, aims at interiorising the image of Self – a student with an external world and all the dimensions of human existence (Woroniecki, 1986, p. 98-106).

According to J. Tarnowski, “education is the whole of the methods and processes assisting a human being, especially by integration, in realising and developing one’s humanity” (Tarnowski, 1993, p. 66). The goal is to recognise and interiorise the primacy of good as a part of one’s character, will, conscience in partnership and social relations (Galewicz, 1998; Fromm, 1994, p. 58).

In the world of liquid modernity, it is not easy, as “a human is a paradoxical being with a double mental image, that is a world image and a deep image, of which the latter constitutes the core of his being. The aim of education is to reach this core, otherwise it is superficial and impermanent (Śliwierski, 1992, p. 148).

In the face of the above presented images of a human, one of the “tools” which are perfectly applicable to personal pedagogy is mountain activity. In the mountains, one can develop patience, openness, a whole spectrum of positive feelings (camaraderie, friendship, love) and an opportunity to verify them. Common journeys are a chance to meet, accept and communicate with other participants as an element of building trust, closeness, and, as a result, experiencing community; completing entrusted tasks, obligations as well as finding faith in difficult moments and readiness to overcome a personal crisis. J. Grochulska calls it the “real education, which should be a stimulant of a student’s spiritual development using maximum of (his – author’s note) abilities (Grochulska, 1994, p. 19). Personalism “invests” in the spiritual sphere in a human, a sphere which does not appreciate or even ignores the ever-present realism and relativism. I believe that in this respect the significance of mountain activity/tourism is invaluable. As I emphasised above, the mysticism of mountains compels humans to reflection on themselves and their surroundings.

Mountain activity is a very effective means of developing in a student fundamental characteristics of personalism. Furthermore, in the natural mountain environment, as in any other natural environment, one can learn camaraderie, patience, persistence, and respecting the rights of Others and of nature.

Mountains reduce egoism, hedonism – when one must share a sandwich, a room in a hostel or abandon one’s own plans in order to help a friend or a stranger. In the mountains, a young person can learn sincerity, as mountains are intolerant of swankiness, showiness/staginess, conceitedness; they return joy and the joy of the mountains is the joy of being together.

Referring, once again, to the cradle of our European culture -the ancient Greece, as an educationalist (and a personalist), I find there the cult of the word and respect for noble ideas. Greeks proclaimed *oros* and *chara*, i.e.



mountain and joy - two words which indicate positive emotions and lead to koinonii, i.e. community. And so the past in the dialogue with the present determines and directs the future, as community and cooperation are recognised and expected as a quality of a XXI century human. Promoted in education reports, apart from education, they are indispensable lifelong competences to build the global village/a democratic, learning, society based on knowledge (Biała Księga, 1995, Delors, 2008). Similarly, the Lisbon Strategy adopted in 2005 presents the expected competences for creative, constructive, causative creating of personal goods, but also teamwork, democratic cooperation of the society.

Education for community and cooperation preserving a student's own individuality should be the lead goal of families, schools and other educational facilities. In the social reality where the single-child family model prevails education for community requires long-lasting educational influences of every educational environment. It is not an easy task in the aforementioned postmodern sociocultural reality.

Once more, I am convinced that trips and discovering the mountains are an unusual, but also, due to participation, an attractive school of life, creativity, creative verification of communication skills, accepting responsibility for oneself and others.

Personal pedagogy carried out in the field and in mountain conditions is the opposite of the traditional, formalised, and, frequently, boring education. It allows for a development of creative initiative, acquiring socially expected skills, such as learning, thinking, seeking/exploration, self-improvement, communication and cooperation with schoolmates (Gnitecki, Rutkowiak, 1999, p. 408).

In the Polish school reality, the postulates proposed in this article are already present in the so-called nature schools ("green schools") and initiatives or projects of this sort deserve popularisation and multifaceted perception.

Combination of mountain activity and the fundamental assumptions of personalism produces an effect which may be referred to as "slow pedagogy", that is a return to nature, human goodness, which has been eclipsed by consumption, the pace of life, inclination for hedonism... Being in the mountains compels us to slow down all the spheres of human existence, we get away from the time pressure, more willingly forgo activity in the social media and controlling electronic mail. There, we pay more attention, or even more intently listen to nature, we experience the fact that we are only (or so much as) one of its elements and, as a result, we are the architects of our own fortune and life.

It is difficult to decide whether the Slow Movement is a fashion or a utopia of the contemporary world. Regardless of the perspective, mountain activity is certainly an alternative educational method (slow school). Owing to it, a student has an opportunity to find himself or a path for himself, his friends and social environment. Mountain activity is also a challenge for educators. There, we can get to know the student's Self in authentic, informal situations. Shaping students' bravery in the journey through the mountain micro-world, we shape BRAVERY in the journey of life, that is with a risk, courage, but also with the joy of discovery and finding as well as a respect for Otherness in human beings and the world. I believe that this is the kind of man that we expect next to us and in the global village of XXI century.

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