

GALICIAN SPAS IN THE AUTONOMY ERA AS A SOCIO - CULTURAL PHENOMENON

Summary

The history of Polish spas has remained so far in the shadows of contemporary research problems, unrelated to the issues of the utilization of balneotherapy resources (mineral waters, microclimate) for therapeutic purposes. For over 120 years, during which treatment in European spas developed significantly, each part of Poland divided into partitions had different history, different possibilities and different level of dependence from the invader, so this activity also took place by different routes. Consequently, it is difficult to find a common denominator for them and treat them as one issue. In Galicia, which during the autonomy enjoyed relative freedom, spas became an important element of economic, social and cultural life, where it was possible to promote the ideas of patriotism and independence. This non-therapeutic function seems to be underestimated and is not known enough. In available publications mainly topics on specific spas are discussed, but there are no attempts to provide an overall of this interesting issue. I hope that my work will fill this gap at least in a part and perhaps will encourage further research on the issues outlined.

The first chapter is dedicated to the history of Galician spas on the background of spa treatment in Europe. The increased interest in Polish and especially Galician spas was related to increasing popularity and significance of European resorts, which were treated in Poland as a matchless pattern. The presence in Galicia of many rich mineral springs of healing properties, confirmed by Polish researchers, and specific characteristics of the climate in the mountains and foothill areas, as well as an increasing attention to health and fashion, became all reasons to start the interest in local possibilities in the field of this kind of treatment.

In the development of Galician resorts we can distinguish three phases. The first one, until the 30s of the 19th century consists on quite primitive trials of creating an original, Polish organizational model of this activity, which usually completely failed. In the second phase, until the 50s of the 19th century, we can observe more successful businesses with stronger financial base and thought-out concepts. The third phase, until the I World War, brought not only strengthening of already existing spas, but also a spontaneous creation of the new ones. In the resorts and their surroundings appeared investments, administrative barriers were eliminated step by step, efforts were made to promote a special legislation. The resorts' base and communication systems were visibly improved, the offer for clients was widened, the level of treatment was rising thanks to doctors specializing in this new branch of healthcare. Within already existing spas we can observe differentiation into small, private, usually poor ones and big and rich ones, like Zakopane or Krynica, which were to compete with established foreign resorts.

The second chapter presents changes which took place in so called “related-to-therapeutic” activity of the spas. This activity consisted on widely understood education and culture. In the

beginning of the Galician spas activity the whole attention was concentrated on treatments and they were to be the only and sufficient argument making clients come and start their course of treatment. Comfort was less important, culinary needs were ignored or downplayed, each bather had to organize attractions in their sole discretion in the time free from treatment. Consequently, it was boring, monotonous, social life was lacking. But, since the middle of the 50s, it started to change. Some cultural offer appeared and its range depended on financial possibilities, invention and organizational efficiency of the resorts. Their basic elements were music concerts, theatre performances, but also balls, lectures and readings. Some prominent Polish scenes artists came to resorts for “guest appearances”, the repertoires of many centres were dominated by performances of patriotic overtones. This kind of entertainment was very popular, so soon it became a binding one, especially in big spas. Performances took place in especially prepared indoors, but for example in Krynica the theatre possessed their own building.

Performances of amateur teams born in spas were a supplement of professional theatres visits from the outside. It was the same with music concerts – apart from well known performers, there appeared musicians and singers presenting regional folklore. Lectures and readings with the participation of leading Polish writers, poets and journalists also attracted many listeners. Famous painters presented their works. Some other people set up their summer studios in spas, especially in Zakopane. Reading became an important branch of cultural activity. Modest books collections in the resorts were systematically enriched and contained publications not available, prohibited in the Prussian and Russian sectors, so bathers coming from there had the opportunity to get acquainted with “comforting hearts” literature.

Thanks to varied forms of cultural entertainment, social life was animated in spas, some new initiatives were born, which nurtured aspirations and intellectual needs of local inhabitants and went out of the resorts’ structures. Their owners and generous patrons founded carving, lace or weaving schools for rural children, which affected in awakening their artistic interests and taught the children practical jobs. The “fashion” for Polish resorts, treated as a patriotic duty, penetrated to different environments and had an inspiring character. For example architects, under the influence of traditional highlanders’ construction of Zakopane precincts, tended to creating an original style which was later named “Zakopane style”.

Changes in functioning Galician spas, in the customs and mentality of its visitors are discussed in the third chapter of my work. The rising level of treatment services, more and more diverse and interesting proposals of how to spend free time contributed to the popularity of native resorts. A traditional visitor, taking a bath in “the bathrooms” and walking around them changed into a tourist wandering with a guide in the mountains and visiting interesting places in the neighbourhood, captivated by the folklore and nature. Moreover, tourists-men were joined by “liberated” women breaking moral stereotypes.

Mountain resorts, especially Zakopane, were transformed into tourist resorts, promoted in occasional publications and newspapers, employing guides, organizers of the social life, carriers. The next step towards the “europeness” was the birth and fast growing popularity of skiing. It was the resorts which were its initiators and refuges. Slothful, boring stays “at springs” definitely became a part of the past, superseded by active recreation, outdoor activities and feats on the mountain slopes.

In the next chapter I discussed the role of the resorts in awakening and promoting national and patriotic ideas. This area of activity was especially important for the Poles from the other districts: the Prussian and the Russian ones. Enjoying autonomy Galicia gave them a feeling of freedom, an opportunity for free speech. The spas allowed them to participate in national historic anniversaries, feasts and patriotic celebrations. The resorts were places where the national identity was strengthened, monuments in honour of national heroes were built,

commemorative plaques to commemorate famous Poles were founded, celebrations of Grunwald victory, Kościuszko insurrection, etc were organized. Here was organized help for the compatriots from the other parts of the country, social actions, raising money for the persecuted were organized. At the same time a special climate to support national resorts was created and their development was treated as a national cause.

Galicia had a multiethnic character. Next to the Poles lived numerous minorities: the Ruthenian and the Jewish. Polish-Ruthenian relations were correct, conflicts did not use to be frequent and rare Ruthenian bathers had the same status as Poles with the only difference that they did not go to a catholic but to an orthodox church. With the Jews it was different. The major part of Polish society was reluctant towards them, which was reflected also in the spas. The rich Jews used to go to foreign spas. There they met their friends from other countries and talked about business. The poorer ones were ‘the worse’ customers of Galician spas. The standards of their behaviour differed from the other bathers, they had limited living needs, usually came with families and children, inhabited peripheral areas of the resort and because of their way of living, their clothes and food they were excluded from the social life. They were somewhat exotic element of the resort.

The social-cultural and civilizational dimensions of the functioning of spas were extremely important. Here a lot of changes and transformations in spa facilities took place. Because of the specific nature of the stay there it was easy to loosen the rigid canons. Broader acquaintances, although only temporary, changes in the way of living, dressing and entertainment, including the growing importance of physical culture, changed the social mentality. A bourgeois bather and tourist, who used to be a typical guest in Galician spas, met there nature and contacted other social groups.

Thanks to mineral waters, and later also climatic values, the residents of foothill and mountain villages, so far condemned to severe poverty, now received a great chance for development. Spas needed manpower. So did the developing residential and service infrastructure. The vacationers, bathers and tourists looked for apartments, food, help in keeping their houses and visiting the neighbourhood. So the “ready money” appeared, and with it a chance for a dignified life. Unfortunately, it also contributed to many dramas – a decline of the importance of the family and traditional values, loosening ties and awakening unrealistic dreams and needs.

The new houses, built especially for bathers, the necessity to care for hygiene in flats and farms slowly changed the life of the inhabitants of the proximal and distal regions. With the guests “came” roads and bridges, modern buildings and means of transport, lighting and even water supply and sanitation. Shops and offices appeared. Doctors and church were close, too.

Bigger and smaller publications about spas and their influence on health were printed more and more frequently and attracted an increasing number of the guests, strengthening this way the habit of summer trips and leisure activities. This, consequently, upgraded many villages to summer resorts.

The specifics of national spas went far beyond treatment and rest. The Galician spas were similar to much richer German or French resorts only in the core business. In the specific political and economic situation of Galicia, they fell into incomparably greater social and economic role. In a backward, poor country they were nucleus of the civilizational progress, creative initiatives, transformations in different areas of life. They stimulated and strengthened social, national and economic initiatives and participated actively in building the modernity.