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The Ministry of Polishness—travel, landscapes, texts. The cultural history of the country lore movement since 1873 until the end of the 1920s.

The subject of the research is the activity of Polish country lore (*krajoznawstwo*) practitioners gathered in societies and clubs organizing excursions on Polish lands, photographing landscapes and describing them. The aim of the research is to understand the meaning of these cultural practices for the production of Polish national identity. Detailed queries of sources, analysis of texts and textual and visual materials as well as their interpretation using the latest analytical categories has been planned.

The Tatra Mountains Society, established in 1873, is recognized as the oldest country lore club—the date sets the beginning of the studied period. Investigating subsequently created institutions—especially the Polish Country Lore Society (*PTK*, established in 1906)—as well as their activity until the end of 1920s has also been planned as part of the project. Such periodization will allow to grasp the period until 1918, in which Poland did not exist on the maps, and the first decade after regaining independence, when the shape of borders was not yet established and the inhabitants would gradually come to terms with the fact of living in a new state.

The starting point consists in noticing that, although members of country lore societies in the first decades of the 20th century were counted in thousands, and despite the fact that they conducted active documenting, publishing, (auto)didactic and popularizing activity, the meaning of the country lore movement eludes historians and the phenomenon itself is described at best on the margins of syntheses of Polish culture from that period. The reason for this is partly due to later history of the country lore movement which changed its tasks in the second half of the interwar period and then (after 1950) was “taken over” by the Polish Tourist and Country Lore Society (*PTTK*), becoming the main organizer of the Polish touring movement (not without merits of its own). This way, the comprehensive, interdisciplinary character of country lore of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, one which did not limit itself to tourism, was forgotten, and historians-chroniclers associated with the *PTTK* would be the only ones to give it attention.

There exists no simple definition of country lore. Some members of the movement regarded it as a scientific discipline and would formulate its methodology; others emphasized ancillary character of country lore practices with regard to science (geography, natural sciences, history, art history, ethnography, linguistics, etc.—field practices were supposed to build data bases for those disciplines); others still saw country lore as an educational and culturally productive activity, formulating its ideological manifestos. In fact, before 1918, the country lore movement (especially the Polish Tourist Society) was often called the “Ministry of Polishness”. If we were to develop this metaphor, we may regard country lore practitioners as a sort of officials managing Polish national identity—in conditions of no state or in time when its foundations had not yet been very stable.

The research is based on a hypothesis according to which country lore played a significant role in processes of producing national identity. It was produced not just using written and spoken word (although publishing magazines, feature pieces, fiction, descriptions of undertaken excursions, guidebooks, etc., as well as public lectures were all an important part of the activity of the movement), but, most importantly, by walking and looking. These seemingly innocuous and trivial bodily-sensory practices did not translate into actual assimilation of territories nor unifying them into one state body. It was, however, during those excursions that the canon of “shared” Polish sights was being established, constituting the grounds for founding a democratic, modern “imagined community”, i.e. the nation.

Understanding the essence of country lore practices and their significance in producing identity requires referencing the latest findings in historical and cultural research as well as those conducted within the framework of cultural studies, i.e. those of linguistic anthropology, performance studies, visual culture and landscape studies as well as affects studies. The findings will be published in Polish and foreign scientific journals and in a monographic book.