

“Hutters in the Zamoyski Family Entail - history of an environmentally conditioned social group”

Abstract for the general public

Each forest has its own unique story to tell. This is also the case with the most known natural forest in Europe the Białowieża Forest and with the younger tree stands scattered all over Europe. It seems important to dig up those exceptional relations between man and environment from the depths of the past in order not only to place them in the local consciousness and regional knowledge but also to try and show their significance for the global processes. In this context the Solska Forest is an ideal place for complex studies on those two interweaving levels – the history of the society and the history of the environment.

This forest complex, which lies in the area of the Zamoyski Family Entail, was penetrated from the end of the 17th c. by peasants from the neighbouring villages, by townspeople, beekeepers, pitch burners, forest guards, barracks inhabitants and budniki. Although more and more numerous, these population movements within the forest, most often associated with some type of forest industry, had no significant effect on environmental changes in the forest. The middle of the 18th c., when a group of people called “hutters” (the name comes from huts – poor huts, where they lived in the beginning) began to be formed, should be considered the breaking point. “Hutters” quickly became a separate social group living within the framework of laws (or against them) functioning in the Zamoyski Family Entail. At the turn of the 18th and the 19th centuries they lived in over 500 households making up more than 100 separate forest settlements in the Solska Forest. They were mostly peasants from the nearby villages who moved to forests, where they were occupied with forest industry, agriculture, bee-keeping and wild bee-keeping, cattle and sheep breeding as well as poaching and paid labour in sawmills, etc. The hutters had a separate self-government and they usually did not do unpaid feudal services but they paid a rent. The first half of the 19th c. should be considered the twilight of their settlement when a lot of forest settlements were liquidated after the land use regulation in the Zamoyski Family Entail and the hutters living there were relocated to the nearby villages. Hutter settlement had a significant influence not only on the development of the settlement network but also on environmental changes in the forest.

What were the environmental, legal, social and economic conditions which shaped the relation man-environment at the threshold of the industrial epoch? What can the activity and phenomenon of the group of hutters from the Zamoyski Family Entail tell us about man’s interaction with the environment? What environmental factors drove it? What did the specific character of hutter settlement in the Zamoyski Family Entail look like compared to forest settlement in Poland? The abundant resources comprising both cartographic sources and written sources (the majority of which are found in the Archives of the Zamoyski Family Entail from Zwierzyniec and in the State Archives in Lublin), supplemented with field studies will enable the application of historical, geographical-historical and environmental methods to answer these questions.

These studies will have considerable importance not only in increasing the knowledge about the history of the Solska Forest and in discovering the forgotten beginnings of the community living there but they will also help to answer a number of more general questions from the field of social history, historical geography and environmental history of the 18th and the 19th centuries. Thanks to the project and its effects – a doctoral dissertation, three scientific articles, a map showing a cartographic reconstruction of hutter settlement in the area of the Solska Forest, etc. – the gaps in the state of knowledge about the problems under discussion will be filled in.