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The Village Museum in Maruszów as a part of local landscape. Research plan of region's cultural heritage awareness

Abstract

The text is a study about a place: a part of local landscape which role is to preserve region's cultural heritage and to create the awareness of it. The Village Museum in Maruszów was the example in the author's project. It is Open-Air Museum and Gallery of sculpture of Edward Ziarko, situated in a small village in the municipality of Ożarów in Poland. This initiative is interesting not only because of a status of a private small local open-air museum, donated by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, but also in terms of promoting and popularizing folk culture of the region. This is accomplished by the person of an owner, folk artist and the creator of eclectic exhibition, consisting of many exhibits which are not strictly "folk" or local and relate to different periods of history. The author plans to check how people perceive this place and to what extent they identify with it and, lastly, if they perceive it as the perfect image of the local culture and history.

Keywords: museum, Village Museum, Edward Ziarko, place, Maruszów

The foundation of the first heritage park in Poland dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. Although heritage parks are mostly taken care of by museum people and ethnographers who are predestined by their education to lead such projects and who have broad knowledge in this field, there are exceptions. One of them is Village Museum in Maruszów, of which founder and owner is Edward Ziarko. Actions of "Galeria pod Chmurką" heritage park and now "The Village Museum" are interesting, because the owner of the museum is trying to enter the cultural landscape of the Ożarów commune and to preserve a part of the region's folk culture heritage.

Maruszów is a small village located on the road from Annapol and Opatów in Świętokrzyskie voivodeship. There, more exactly in the district of Opatów, is the



Village Museum which is a private heritage park and sculpture gallery.

The owner Edward Ziarko is a local artist – sculptor. He was born in this area and as a former miner after retirement he decided to return to his homeland and to focus on his passion

for sculpting. He became interested in the traditional folk culture and began collecting all sorts of items associated with it.

“Galeria pod Chmurką” heritage park have existed since 2008 but the exposed part of the building was imported much earlier. The first building, which is a wooden cottage, was transferred here from behind the Vistula in the 50s. In the 90s another building, which now is an example of a landowning manor house, was reconstructed. It became a private museum in 2012 with the decision of Bogdan Zdrojewski, who is a Minister of Culture and National Heritage in Poland. It is one of the few museums of this type in our country.

The whole museum area is surrounded by a fence made of pales and brushwood. A **hut**, transferred from an unknown locality from the 50s, dates back 100 years. It is situated in the area of the museum. It is a two-chamber building with a hallway and a box room. Most of the exhibits are located in the hall because at the moment it is a main exhibition area. The exhibits are i.a. churns, coal irons, spinning wheel, kneading-trough, etc. Apart from a display function, the first chamber with the kitchen are residential places for the owner who has a small workshop with his sculptures there.

Another object is a so-called **small manor house**. This building lasted for 5 years. It is a structure reconstructed from the remains of the house which stood previously in this place and from the house bought in Słupia Nadbrzeżna which was demolished and then transferred to Maruszów. The small manor house consists of 4 chambers, a hallway, bathroom and porch characteristic of this kind of buildings. Chambers are equipped with furniture from the beginning of 20th century. They are there in order to characterize the manor house by its splendour and emphasize the difference in living standards between a poor peasant and a richer landowner.

A barn is the next building. It was reconstructed from demolition logs from Lasocin and it is covered by reed. It was erected in 2004. In the barn there are farming tools such as quern-stones, wooden horse plough, wooden ard and also flails.

Another wooden building, in which the school is located, was moved from the village of Potok in the Ożarów commune. There are two rooms in the building and it was erected in 2007. The building is also covered by reed. A school classroom is reconstructed in the largest chamber and it is equipped with desks from

the interwar period and from the 60s and 70s. The teacher's table is also from this period. Moreover, the chamber is equipped with other objects relate to original classroom equipment. The second room was earmarked for the relicts of military and findings dating back to the Second World War period. They were gathered by the owner.

Currently, in the heritage park there is a hut which was translocated from Smyków town and converted into a **tavern** from the interwar period. According to word of mouth, it used to be situated in the Maruszów region. The building consists of two chambers, a buffet and guest chamber. The tavern is called "At Szmul". The equipment of the tavern consists of i.a. festive tables, stone stove, shelf, buffet with weigh and other things typical for a tavern.

From the beginning, the museum was called a heritage park by the owner, however, it is not possible to strictly agree with that. The colloquial name of an open air museum is the heritage park and this term is generally accepted in Poland. With this kind of museum we deal when "architectural objects and certain traditional tools treated as exhibits are situated in an open countryside" (Czajkowski 1984:5).

The Village Museum in Maruszów, despite the ambitions of its owner, should not be treated as an open-air museum in the scientific sense. It is difficult to qualify a private initiative of E. Ziarko as one of the types of open-air museums that exist in Poland (Czajkowski 1984: 93–112). This is due to the lack of substantive scientific support. While creating the exhibition, the owner did not base it on oral communications of Maruszów residents but on his own vision of the countryside which he has created is his mind.

In his article, Łukasz Bukowiecki (2012: 274) highlights that so called "translocation" is a characteristic practice of present heritage parks – actually it is the only way to get structures. it was no different in case of this museum's activity. the translocation of wooden architecture structures from the area and region of Ożarów was possible because of interests of the owner. The owner emphasized that it had often happened that someone had reported a building to be demolished and he "helps his land because it would be a shame if any part of the history was lost" [EZ].¹ The space is therefore largely an "asylum of unwanted architecture" (Bukowiecki 2012: 274). The founder of the museum then recreates buildings according to his own ideas and thus giving them a form fitting the whole design.

The main aims of such institutions as heritage parks are primarily educational functions, promoting folk culture and actions concerning the protection of traditional culture relics from damage and preserving cultural heritage of material (Bukowiecki 2012: 271). The Village Museum in Maruszów tries to fulfil the task by presenting the idea of the village as it is understood by the owner. The awareness that this is a private outpost not dependent on any organisational entity gives a wider range of action. The owner is only limited by his own imagination and finances. As the place which does not have a legal form, it is financed only from

¹ Conversation with the owner of Village Museum in Maruszów, 08.03.2013.

donations and owner's contribution. The owner has not set the price for the tour, thus leaving the decision to the visitors.

Impulses which led him to establish the heritage park and the gallery were mostly: his willingness to promote his work, folk culture and also to preserve from oblivion and damage such an important part of culture as wooden structures. As can be noticed, the owner is an amateur, not theoretician, what is reflected in the whole museum and the gallery form.

According to the definition proposed by A. Kamiński, "amateur is an enthusiast of a certain field of art, science, technique, etc. Amateurism then is connected with emotional engagement in a given culture field, willingness to get the knowledge and skills in this field and also practicing it voluntarily, enthusiastically and thus not in professional and not wealth-oriented way" (Kamiński 1978, quoting after Kargul 1997: 71).

Amateurs try to broaden their knowledge single-handedly, decide what kind of knowledge is necessary for them and what they want to use. They do this without any knowledge or specialist help (Kargul 1997: 71). In amateur practice the most interesting thing is the knowledge they choose to acquire and how they will use it. Taking into account the fact that the museum's owner is an artist himself, the impression may be that the whole park area from beginning to end is his vision and it creates a colourful hodgepodge with park's preserved elements. As Józef Kargul writes:

some researchers highlight a function of amateurism in culture creation, [...] it is seen in creating new artistic values, new cultural values leading to rooted heritage of regional or national culture. [...] Owing to strenuous work of amateurs, original works of art, which become inspiration for culture makers hence the elements of amateur works come into so called representational culture, are created. Culture creation function is also to preserve certain relics of Polish culture, especially folk culture, from oblivion (1997: 76).

Ziarko, during interviews regarding the museum, emphasizes himself that he is a "village enthusiast", what implies that he does not have any specialist knowledge, but regardless of it he thinks that it is important to preserve and save buildings, which in other case would be demolished. They bespeak about a former life in the countryside and are inevitable part of the heritage which the owner wants to preserve and cultivate.

Simultaneously, the gallery of Ziarko's sculpture functions within the park. He has no training in art, so it can be assumed that he is a traditional creator. He admits only to the fact that, in his youth, he attended art classes in elementary school. He himself emphasizes that he is a folk artist. His sculptures refer to folk art in their subject area.

"Folk sculpture, similarly to other fields of folk art, was an expression of artistic and spiritual needs of Polish people, reflection of their everyday worries. It mediated in contacts with various saint protectors and patrons" (Krzysztofowicz 1972: 30). Mostly the works of Ziarko are made from wood and refer to religious themes. These includes i.a. figures of Sorrowful Christ, Christ heads, torso of pope

John Paul II – all of them can be found in the museum, as well as at the roadside shrines in surrounding villages. In an interview the artist says that his art is connected with traditional folk religiousness. An interesting sign of artistic work is a cycle of paintings concerning different phases of human's life, starting from a conception till death. Those paintings are made in the form of collage and are hung on exterior walls of small manor house.

Sometimes the work of the sculptor deflects from the abovementioned subject area. The technique and the form of some sculptures also elude classification as the ones which fall within standards of folk art. These are e.g. installations consisting of roots, doll parts and metal. They can be found throughout the whole park area in an open air. Their subject area is free-form and includes patriotic and mythological motifs. They may be treated as a part of "heritage park scenography". Like effigies which are placed in some buildings – the Jew in the tavern and the teacher in school, what gives a bit theatrical character to this place.

Commixture of folk culture threads with motifs which cannot be classified in this strand gives the impression of interpenetration of what is traditional in pop culture. In this case we can talk about "new cultural reality emerged at meeting of contemporary forms of cultural life and traditional culture" (Burszta 1985 quoting after Hajduk-Nijakowska, Smolińska 2010:172).

According to Bukowiecki, "the heritage park is a place which shapes **social image** concerning the everyday life of village people" (Bukowiecki 2012: 274). The scientist are now talking about sustaining a "myth about peasant's culture" not about its signs. Therefore, the Village Museum in Maruszów may be acclaimed as a specific form of cultivating that myth which "aims not only to popularise the past and regional culture, but also to expose one's own ethnical individuality and sense of regional identity" (Hajduk-Nijakowska, Smolińska 2010: 180–183) and in this case also one's own artistic visions.

Originality with which this place is created may be confronted with the thesis of Waldemar Kuligowski, who emphasizes the loss of folk culture in view of "lack of natural users, that is the lack of someone who would live in that world with its values and symbols". He also also highlights that the place of what is now gone was taken by "folk culture myth" (Kuligowski 2010: 151) and that the Museum of Village in Maruszów is a kind of borrowing from the folk culture which popularizes it and confronts vision about it with popular culture. According to Kuligowski, popular culture cannot be assessed negatively, but as a "possibility of choice and interpretation" (2010: 155).

I see it in this way: the appearance and form of the museum is an interpretation of the founder, who, as an artist, has filtered the whole through a prism of his sensibility, thus imparting a special character to the museum.

Before it will be possible to give an unambiguous opinion about the value which the museum represents, we should investigate an opinion of Jerzy Czajkowski, who noticed the raised activity of local heritage parks which is a result of mostly amateur work. He writes that "such outposts very often does not have any support from big museums or other scientific institutions due to the fact that or-

ganised interiors displays may sometimes, from the scientific point of view, raise doubts". Here there are questions concerning the validity of using name "heritage park if one relates to them and ranks them as facilities of heritage park type" (Czajkowski 1984: 332).

The Village Museum in Maruszów is subjected to such a review but I agree with the opinion that such places are a reflection of a certain vision which, despite its inadequacies, is interesting. Such places are "fruition of special social activity which should be absolutely supported. It would be not appropriate to deny their value [...] because of their lack of scientific administration or substantive care. This activity proves that there is a need for one's own culture relics preservation" (Czajkowski 1984: 332).

About the fact that the Village Museum in Maruszów blends in the cultural landscape of the region, prove the fact that the owner makes this place available for various cultural events. Among other things, events organised by Urban-Communal Culture Facility in Ożarów such as: meetings of folkloristic groups and soloists *How was it formerly (Jak to drzewiej bywało)* organised with cooperation of Association in Aid of Supporting Local Activity in Opatów commune, or International Meeting of 4 Clubs and also organisation of Children's Day. The museum is one of the tourist attraction on the Vistula Artistic Trail.

Together with the Students Scientific Association of Folklorists and Ethnologists we plan to carry out the research in Maruszów concerning the contribution of the Museum to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage of the region. Apart from the museum originality, and its connections with popular culture, we are interested in how the heritage park, with actions taken by the owner, is seen by the people from Maruszów. Is the character of Edward Ziarko known to inhabitants? Have they ever been to the museum, what do they think about it? Is the interest of the rural population occasional? Do they take part in the festivities or celebrations that take place there? Are they in some way more involved?

Those and many other questions aim at finding an answer whether it is possible to identify oneself with such a place. If not identify then what feeling the place arouses and whether it contributes to the local community bonding.

Promotion of the outpost is vital. From my observations it follows that regardless of positive opinions about tourism on forums, there is no mention about the museum on the website of Ożarów commune and despite functioning at social networks, the information is not updated. What I have noticed is that the place is visited by tourists, therefore we are curious how they found out about this museum. What is the frequency of the tourists' visits, what are they caused by and how do the tourists evaluate the place?

Activities of the owner who has created the place where various exhibits are displayed can be interpreted differently. Whether we will call this place a heritage park or it will be treated as a tourist attraction, it does not diminish the fact of the existence of such places. Activities and creativity of Ziarko are interesting because they defy attempts of classification. Unique atmosphere was created here by special arrangement, interpenetration of pop culture motifs, staging of displays, and

also artistic work of the owner thus giving the place its specific form. We wonder what its significance is, not only for his creator, but also for its neighbours – the people living in Maruszów, and how it is perceived by the tourists. We hope that in the nearest future we will be able to answer these questions.

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