

Transformation of Political-Economic System in Poland and New Values of Built Heritage*

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Abstract

Transformation of political-economic system in Poland and the dispute about values of built heritage

This paper concerns post-1989 changes and modifications of Polish built heritage. For Poland, the year of the fall of the Iron Curtain marked the beginning of political and economic transformation: a transition from a socialist state and a member of the Soviet Bloc to a capitalist state integrated with the European Union. The implementation of democratic institutions and procedures, and the rise of free-market economy based on private property, has nurtured profound changes in the standard of living, which in turn triggered significant transformations of the traditional cultural landscape. Along with the development of pluralistic society, new ideas and approaches arose in the heritage sphere. The phenomenon described by Pierre Nora

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as “the explosion of memory” contributed to these changes, but was by no means their only source. The heritage practices were also shaped by the cultural policy of the state. As international cooperation was deepening, and the integration with the European Union was progressing, the makers of this policy increasingly drew on the ideas and solutions stemming from the experiences of the developed countries of the West. The heritage policy of the period was also influenced by the economic interpretations of culture, especially the idea of cultural capital, understood as an asset of cultural values. The primary objective of this article is to present the changes that the criteria of evaluation of monuments have been undergoing in contemporary Poland. The process is tremendously dynamic, which becomes apparent when one considers the widespread, grand-scale changes to the relics of old architecture in the last two decades. This paper describes examples of controversial uses of built heritage and details the circumstances behind a number of particular cases when the authenticity of visitors’ experience was chosen over the authenticity of a material relic of the past.

Abstrakt

Transformacja ustrojowa w Polsce i spór o wartości dziedzictwa architektonicznego

Artykuł dotyczy przekształceń i modyfikacji dziedzictwa architektonicznego w Polsce po roku 1989. Upadek żelaznej kurtyny wyznaczał początek procesu transformacji ustrojowej prowadzącej od państwa socjalistycznego będącego częścią bloku sowieckiego do państwa kapitalistycznego, funkcjonującego w strukturach Unii Europejskiej. Wdrażanie instytucji i procedur demokratycznych, a także tworzenie wolnego rynku opartego na własności prywatnej stworzyło warunki dla głębokich przemian cywilizacyjnych, które z kolei doprowadziły do znaczących przeobrażeń tradycyjnego krajobrazu kulturowego. Proces kształtowania społeczeństwa pluralistycznego sprzyjał także rozwojowi nowych koncepcji i postaw w sferze dziedzictwa. Jednakże nie wszystkie z nich mają swe źródło w zjawisku, które Pierre Nora określił mianem „eksplozji pamięci”. Praktyki społeczne dotyczące dziedzictwa architektonicznego w niemałym stopniu były również kształtowane przez działania z zakresu polityki kulturalnej państwa. Wraz z pogłębianiem współpracy międzynarodowej i postępowaniem procesów integracyjnych ze strukturami Unii Europejskiej, twórcy tej polityki w coraz szerszym zakresie sięgali do idei i rozwiązań wynikających z doświadczeń rozwiniętych krajów Zachodu. Na ewolucję założeń polityki dziedzictwa realizowanej w omawianym okresie duży wpływ miały także ekonomiczne interpretacje kultury, a zwłaszcza koncepcja kapitału kulturowego jako zasobu wartości kulturowych. Podstawowym celem artykułu jest ukazanie przemian, jakim we współczesnej Polsce ulegają kryteria oceny wartości zabytków. O dynamice tego zjawiska świadczy skala przeobrażeń, którym uległy relikty dawnej architektury w ostatnich dwóch dziesięcioleciach. Artykuł opisuje różne przykłady kontrowersyjnego wykorzystania dziedzictwa budowlanego i analizuje uwarunkowania tych rozwiązań, w których autentyczność doświadczeń odbiorców stawiano wyżej niż autentyczność materialnego reliktu przeszłości.

In December 2012, the *Polish National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites* adopted *Karta Ochrony Historycznych Ruin*, a charter for the protection of historical ruins¹. It reflects the committee members' opposition to the mounting tendency towards excessive restorations and reconstructions, which the experts consider to be a danger to relics of historical architecture. By contrast, those in favour of creating new representations of the past stress the right of a wide range of stakeholders to participate in creating their heritage, and the identity-building value of such practices². From this standpoint, not only reconstructions of partially destroyed structures, but even entirely new building investments imitating historical architecture may seem socially desirable.

As a result of the above tendency, ancient Slavic settlements have multiplied throughout Poland; medieval castles, noblemen's mansions and palaces have been erected; watermills and windmills have been built, more or less faithfully reconstructed, as have whole 19th-century towns and villages. The projects vary greatly in terms of the type of constructed objects and the functions ascribed to them, as well as the size of the construction investments and the scale of their social impact.

The aim of the following paper is to discuss those criteria of evaluating and qualifying built heritage which, though outside classical theories of conservation, in practice often decide its fate and every year gain influence over urban and landscape planning.

The roots of the phenomenon and the circumstances which enabled its dynamic development may be found in the late 1980s. The nonviolent revolution of the Solidarity movement led to negotiations with the authorities, and in 1989 the talks avalanched into a systemic transformation of Poland. The result was a transition from a socialist state, a member of the Soviet bloc since the Second World War, into a capitalist member state of the European Union. The introduction of democratic institutions and procedures, and the establishment of a free market economy based on private property, ushered

¹ PKN ICOMOS. „KARTA OCHRONY HISTORYCZNYCH RUIN”, accessed April 10, 2017. <http://www.icomos-poland.org/dokumenty/uchwaly/130-karta-ochrony-historycznych-ruin.html>

² Jacek Purchła, „Dziedzictwo kulturowe,” in *Kultura a rozwój*, ed. Jerzy Hausner, Anna Karwińska, and Jacek Purchła (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2013), 44–49, 52–53; Jacek Purchła, *Dziedzictwo a transformacja* (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, Małopolska Szkoła Administracji Publicznej Akademii Ekonomicznej, 2005), 60–64.

in dramatic changes in social attitudes which, in turn, caused significant transformations in traditional cultural landscape.

The formation of a diversified, pluralist society in the wake of these political and economic changes undoubtedly facilitated actions that would restore and reinterpret the nation's history. Consequently, the attitudes concerning heritage became more diversified as well. Given the historical circumstances, it seems warranted to view the wave of reconstructions as a manifestation of what Pierre Nora termed an "explosion of memory"³. There is a clear connection between the emergence of new attitudes and new values connected with heritage on the one hand, and the society's desire to (re)build its identity on the other, after nearly half a century of their ties with the past being distorted by ideological pressure⁴.

Relating the topic at hand to problems of identity makes one wonder why the formation of this new, supposedly more genuine identity is marked by the erection of structures which, from the standpoint of classical theories of conservation, must be labeled as inauthentic. From a wider perspective it may be seen that, while particular social groups come to accept these fake structures and objects as their heritage, those relics of historical architecture that were once viewed as reliable witnesses of the past become forgotten, or undergo severe modification, since their current state of preservation no longer fits the needs of new historical narratives⁵.

The mounting post-1989 conflicts and contradictions regarding built heritage are also attributable to the fact that the systemic transformation and then Poland's entry into the European Union meant close integration with the advanced socio-economic systems of well-developed capitalist countries. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the increasingly unrestrained flow of capital was accompanied by a flow of ideas. In a country in the process of reinventing itself, these borrowed ideas set out new courses to be followed, inspiring directions of further development, or even becoming models for many solutions shaping Poland's social and cultural policy⁶. These economic and socio-cultural aspects of Poland's integration with the more developed

³ Pierre Nora, "Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory", *Eurozine* April 19, 2002, accessed April 15, 2017, <http://www.eurozine.com/reasons-for-the-current-upsurge-in-memory/>.

⁴ Krzysztof Pomian, *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci* (Lublin: UMCS, 2006).

⁵ *Zamki na nowo. Blog poświęcony odbudowie historycznych zamków w Polsce*, accessed April 15, 2017, <https://zamkinanowodotcom.wordpress.com/>.

⁶ Jerzy Hausner, "Rozwój społeczno-gospodarczy", in *Kultura a rozwój*, 26–28.

Western-European countries had significant impact on the new concepts regarding heritage which have been gaining currency in the Poland of the last two decades⁷.

In hindsight, it seems that it was Gregory J. Ashworth's views that had the most significant influence on the shaping of new attitudes among heritage professionals, and in some cases on their challenging the established local conservation tradition.

Ashworth, a specialist in urban heritage planning and management, who also specializes in the "interrelations between tourism, heritage and place marketing", has cooperated with International Cultural Centre in Kraków for the past 20 years. In one of his first publications in Polish, he juxtaposed the traditional paradigm of protection and conservation of historical objects, and a new paradigm, with a corresponding philosophy of heritage⁸. Discussing the benefits of implementing methods for "the management of the past", Ashworth stressed that "the primary aim of actions involving relics of the past treated as heritage is not to protect them from damage, but to consume them"⁹.

In a post-socialist country, where the introduction of free-market economy was a priority, and social energy was released by hopes of matching Western standards of living, another of Ashworth's statements, that "there is an irreducible contradiction between protection and development", could be

⁷ "Karta Krakowska 2000. Zasady konserwacji i restauracji dziedzictwa architektoniczno-urbanistycznego, Kraków 2000", in: *Dziedzictwo kulturowe fundamentem rozwoju cywilizacji. Międzynarodowa Konferencja Konserwatorska Kraków 2000, 23–26 października 2000*, ed. Andrzej Kadłuczka (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Historii Architektury i Konserwacji Zabytków WAPK, 2000), 189–192; Bogusław Szmygin, *Kształtowanie koncepcji zabytku i doktryny konserwatorskiej w Polsce w XX wieku* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Lubelskiej, 2000), 271–280; Andrzej Kadłuczka, "Ewolucja poglądów konserwatorskich a koncepcja zrównoważonego rozwoju", in *90 lat Służby Ochrony Zabytków w Polsce*, Wojanów 26–28 listopada 2008, ed. Jerzy Jasieńko, Kazimierz Kuśnierz (Wrocław: Dolnośląskie Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne, 2008), 100–104; Purchla, *Dziedzictwo a transformacja*, 11, 17–33; Aleksander Böhm et al., *Raport na temat funkcjonowania systemu ochrony dziedzictwa kulturowego w Polsce po roku 1989*, ed. Jacek Purchla (Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2009), 12–13; Jerzy Jasieńko, Andrzej Kadłuczka and Klaudia Stala ed., *Ochrona dziedzictwa kulturowego w Polsce. Nowe Otwarcie*, II Kongres Konserwatorów Polskich, Warszawa–Kraków 6–9 października 2015 (Warszawa, Kraków: SKZ, NID, PK, 2015).

⁸ Gregory J. Ashworth, "Paradygmaty i paradoksy planowania przeszłości", in *Europa Środkowa – nowy wymiar dziedzictwa*. Materiały międzynarodowej konferencji, Kraków, 1–2 czerwca 2001, ed. Halina Baszak-Jaroń (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2002), 110–112.

⁹ Ashworth, "Paradygmaty i paradoksy", 112–113.

read as a decisive argument for the primacy of the latter¹⁰. The author himself opts for such philosophy of heritage, as he states that it enables “the identification of basic dilemmas regarding the protection of historical assets”¹¹.

The new views and theories could not but affect the process of shaping the state’s policy toward heritage. One of the factors which made them attractive to the authorities was naturally their foreign origin and the ‘modern’ outlook on conservation problems which, if approached from traditional angle, could seem to stand in the way of economic development and the country’s ‘great leap forward’. Another factor favoring the new heritage theories during the transition period was the growing dominance of economic perspectives on culture among central government authorities, especially the notion of cultural capital as an asset embodying cultural value¹². It is hardly surprising that the vision of developing ideology-free relationships with historical objects appealed to a society which had been subject to indoctrination for almost half a century. As opposed to official Soviet-era propaganda, the notion of heritage rooted in the harsh reality of market economy seemed to be objective, hence more convincing.

Taking into account an even wider context of these changes, it is to be remembered that the position of traditional conservation approaches on this ‘free market of ideas’ in the 1990s was further weakened by the worldwide popularity of relativist conservation theories, which questioned the assumptions about the superiority of European conservation traditions and the universality of the Venice Charter¹³.

The new concepts proved a challenge especially to those conservation scholars and practitioners who, following John Ruskin, saw historical architecture as a deposit, a legacy to be passed on to future generations, and who believed it their duty to preserve the continuity of practices established in

¹⁰ Ashworth, “Paradygmaty i paradoksy”, 120.

¹¹ Ashworth, “Paradygmaty i paradoksy”, 122.

¹² Böhm et al., *Raport*; Jacek Purchła, “Dziedzictwo kulturowe w Polsce: system prawny, finansowanie i zarządzanie”, in *Kultura a rozwój*, 211–213; Purchła, “Dziedzictwo kulturowe”, 47–48; Jacek Purchła, “Cultural Heritage and Social Capital”, in *The 1st Heritage Forum of Central Europe*, ed. Jacek Purchła (Kraków: International Cultural Centre 2012), 71–77.

¹³ *Nara Conference on Authenticity in Relation to the World Heritage Convention. Conference de Nara sur l'Authenticité dans le cadre de la Convention du Patrimoine Mondial*, Nara, Japan 1–6 November 1994, ed. Knut Einar Larsen (Tokyo: UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS, 1995); Janusz Krawczyk, “Karta Wenecka i spór o zasady postępowania konserwatorskiego”, in *Karta Wenecka 1964–2014*, ed. Weronika Bukowska and Janusz Krawczyk (Toruń: Wydział Sztuk Pięknych UMK, 2016), 97–98.

the local culture. For this group, the criteria used for evaluating monuments of architecture mostly rely on the authenticity of the historical material and substance constituting a monument. By contrast, from a postmodern perspective, authenticity understood in this way is a “dogma of self-illusion”, and prioritizing the preservation of such authenticity is false and erroneous. According to David Lowenthal, the author of the above statements, such priorities contribute to transforming a historical object into a “truth fetish” endowed with an almost supernatural sanctity¹⁴. From Lowenthal’s perspective, a monument constitutes heritage whose value cannot be objectively assessed. The source of authenticity lies not in the material object itself, but rather in the authenticity of the recipient’s experiences and emotions¹⁵. To stress the novel idea behind this relationship with the past, the more radical proponents of this view insist on calling the recipient a consumer or user of heritage. In the face of enormous damage dealt to architectural monuments that are treated as tourist products, Dawans and Houbart described a similarly alarming practice of making conservation policy subservient to mass audience tastes, and the depreciation of the heritage authenticity criteria, which contributes to creating a false relationship between the society and the past¹⁶.

In Poland such a dramatic and profound relativization of traditional criteria for evaluating monuments of architecture has contributed to diminishing the power and resolve of preservation and conservation authorities. In subsequent years, they have found it more and more difficult to enforce the statutory regulations concerning heritage protection. New stakeholders have joined the conflict over historical architecture. As private investors bought old buildings, such as castles, palaces or historical ruins, to manifest their success and engage in a dialogue with the past, sometimes by means of megalomaniac construction projects.

¹⁴ David Lowenthal, “Authenticity? The Dogma of Self-Delusion”, in *Why Fakes Matter: Essays on Problems of Authenticity*, ed. Mark Jones (London: British Museum Press, 1992), 184–192; David Lowenthal, “Stewarding the Past in a Perplexing Present”, in *Values and Heritage Conservation, Research Report*, ed. Erica Avrami, Randall Mason and Marta de la Torre (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Trust, 2000), 21.

¹⁵ Krzysztof Kowalski, *O istocie dziedzictwa europejskiego – rozważania* (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2013), 172.

¹⁶ Stéphane Dawans and Claudine Houbart, “Le patrimoine à l’état gazeux: comment le tourisme détourne notre conception de l’authenticité”, in *Le patrimoine, moteur de développement. Heritage, a Driver of Development. Actes du symposium de la XVII^e assemblée générale de l’ICOMOS*, Paris 27 novembre – 2 décembre 2011 (Paris: ICOMOS, 2012), 593.

The recent fate of many Polish monuments of architecture illustrates what happens with the ethos of a depositary may be replaced by the ethos of a consumer and user of heritage¹⁷. The remains of the royal castle in Bobolice, destroyed in late 17th century, have until recently been one of the most picturesque sights on the Trail of the Eagles' Nests in south-western Poland¹⁸. The Bobolice ruins survived in the state in which they had been documented by an 1880 drawing until early 21st century, when their new owner, an influential politician and businessman, started construction work resulting in the erection of a quasi-medieval fortress.

The investment, incessantly promoted in the media, triggered a wide-ranging discussion, which involved historians, architects, conservation specialists, as well as Internet users, mostly representing two groups: heritage enthusiasts and tourists. The discussion illustrates the polarization of stances along these lines, and the growing influence of the "tourist gaze" on shaping attitudes and expectations regarding built heritage¹⁹. The views of the owner of Bobolice were particularly noteworthy and symptomatic.

In press interviews, the owner referred to the myth of an imagined community ("reconstructing dreams for the region and posterity"), as well as patriotic reasons ("to leave the castle in ruins would mean honoring the Swedish invader who destroyed it") and political arguments: supporters of protecting the authentic ruins were supposedly loyal to "communist conservation doctrine"²⁰. He also stressed the need to develop tourism infrastructure, referred to the international success of the Loire Valley Castles as a tourism product, and advocated a similar 'reconstruction' of all 25 ruins on the Eagles' Nests trail. Some among the many arguments and justifications also referred to the state of modern conservation theory²¹. Questioning the contemporary relevance of the Venice Charter, the owner of the Bobolice

¹⁷ Paweł Dettloff, "Karta Wenecka a ochrona historycznych ruin zamków w Polsce w ostatnich dziesięcioleciach", in *Karta Wenecka*, 165–178; Tomasz Ratajczak, "Nowy zamek w Poznaniu – negatywny przykład adaptacji relikwów średniowiecznej architektury", in *Zamki w ruinie*, ed. Bogusław Szmygin and Piotr Molski (Warszawa, Lublin: PKN ICOMOS, Politechnika Lubelska 2012), 237–249.

¹⁸ Stanisław Kołodziejski, "Bobolice", in *Leksykon zamków w Polsce*, ed. Leszek Kajzer, Stanisław Kołodziejski and Jan Salm (Warszawa: Arkady, 2002), 94–95.

¹⁹ Dawans and Houbart, "Le patrimoine", 593–596.

²⁰ "Rekonstrukcja marzeń dla regionu i potomności" [rozmowa Leszka Chmielowskiego z Jarosławem Laseckim], *VIP Polityka Biznes Fakty*, April 6, 2010, 145–146; Krystyna Naszkowska, „Orle Gniazdo odbudowane”, *Gazeta Wyborcza. Duży Format*, November 12, 2009, 10–11.

²¹ Maciej Miłoś and Piotr Szymaniak, „Średniowiecze przeżywa renesans”, *Uważam Rze*, May 6, 2011, 58–41.

castle stated that since there is no modern unified standard of conduct in conservation, one may proceed freely, according to individual preference. To show that authenticity criteria are not absolute, he referred to philosophical disputes regarding the ancient paradox of the ship of Theseus²². The ship, he claimed, remained the same vessel and retained its identity though all its parts had been replaced; by the same token, any doubts about the castle's authenticity should be resolved in its favour. Summarizing his stance, he stated that what counts is "not the number of original bricks or stones, but the object's form, function, tectonics"²³.

A voluntaristic approach to the problems vital for the fate of historical objects poses a threat not only to the historical sources defended by scholars and experts. Resorting to populism in conservation is also a danger for the values and approaches that stem from the local traditions and are important for local identity. Sadly, in the context of Poland, a relativist approach to the concept of authenticity has not popularized actions and attitudes envisioned by the Nara Document on Authenticity. Provision 11 of the document states: "The respect due to all cultures requires that heritage properties must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong"²⁴. However, Polish investors and their many supporters fail to comply with this proposition, as they direct their attention to what is external, international, and global, rather than their own cultural roots. As a result, the traditional definition of authenticity, connected with the spatial and temporal continuity of an object's material substance, has been losing ground. Perceived as archaic and incompatible with the modern times, traditional principles of conservation conduct supposedly stifle initiative, while the freedom to choose one's own principles and adjust them to the case at hand seems much preferable²⁵. Viewed from a broader perspective, the consequences of such

²² „Rekonstrukcja marzeń”, 10. For Theodore Scaltsas, a contemporary English philosopher, the story of Theseus' ship told by Plutarch was a basis for discussing how artifact authenticity criteria are affected by cultural factors. Scaltsas' work was referenced by David Lowenthal in his search for the alternative to material protection of the relics of the past. Theodore Scaltsas, "The Ship of Theseus", *Analysis* 40 (1980): 152–157, accessed May 10, 2016, doi: 10.2307/3327668; David Lowenthal, "Material Preservation and Its Alternatives", *Perspecta* 25 (1989): 68, accessed May 16, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1567139>.

²³ "Rekonstrukcja marzeń", 10.

²⁴ "Nara Document on Authenticity", in *Nara Conference*, xxiv.

²⁵ Andrzej Kadłuczka, "Karta Wenecka 1964 i jej krakowska glossa po 36 latach, czyli między ortodoksyjną doktryną i ontologiczną metodologią ochrony dziedzictwa kulturowego", in *Karta Wenecka*, 87.

an approach do not contribute to protecting cultural diversity; in fact, they facilitate further cultural homogenization on an international scale.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that cultural relativism, which is an inspiration for many contemporary heritage theories, does not invalidate local traditions. Quite the contrary. The call to protect diversity gives the traditions a unique status, and necessitates guarding them.

Provided one accepts the relativistic point of view, it is possible to agree with Theodore Scaltsas that there is no objective hierarchy of authenticity criteria²⁶. And yet, it is becoming apparent that in the political-economic system based on production and consumption, the principles of authenticity that rely on spatiotemporal continuity of the matter tend to be rejected.

Thus, not all of the values related to built heritage have equal chances to survive in the pluralist reality of post-1989 Poland. Conservation and preservation specialists will in part define the outcome of the confrontation. The choices they make, to comply with the hierarchy of values promoted by the logic of the socio-economic system, or to stand up for those values that seem most endangered, may well prove decisive.

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²⁶ Theodore Scaltsas, "Identity, Origin and Spatiotemporal Continuity", *Philosophy* 56 (1981): 401–402.

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