

DIRECTIONS AND PROSPECTS OF TRANSFORMATION IN CULTURAL LANDSCAPES OF POLAND - CONSIDERATIONS AND ATTEMPTS OF EVALUATION

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Abstract

The article points to several very up-to-date issues that occur in relation with the vanishing of traditional forms of land use and introduction of new, other than indigenous, management styles in Poland. Current processes of deterioration of the structure of the cultural landscapes have been discussed with regard to natural values and the historical process of land management by man. The article is a peculiar case study for quite common negative transformation of the polish countryside caused by relatively free use of the space, legal negligence, low awareness and poor identification of residents with the landscape – the countryside which loses its peculiar and typical features as the result of “mass consumption”. The text also presents positive examples of care taken for the regional landscape and lists initiatives aimed at improving the image of polish area.

Key words: cultural landscape, spatial transformation, traditional place, landscape evolution factors.

The objective and scope of the paper

The objective of the article is to discuss the quality of the space and to make preliminary evaluation of the rate and directions of transformation of cultural landscapes in Poland. The case of Poland has been compared to the European landscape policy and rules of sustainable development. The author took the effort to analyze the impact of multiple factors on development of Polish landscapes, as well as to estimate the importance of each of those factors. The article was based on many years' observations and studies made by the author in various regions in Poland, analyses of legal and strategic documents, and also the experience resulting from cooperation with landscape architects. The text is part of a larger dissertation on evolution of landscapes and evaluation of their current condition. It presents and analyses the causes and results of spatial changes occurring in the last twenty years' time in Poland.

In her article, the author refers to multiple types of the landscape from various regions of Poland, especially suburban zones of large cities and agglomerations, landscapes of historical towns, rural landscapes, as well as recreational and tourist areas – the Krakow-Częstochowa Upland and the regions of Podbeskidzie, Greater

Poland and Pomerania, among others. The article is written with highly general approach to the subject matter and does not present the detailed results of regional studies.

Landscape policy of Poland compared to European regulations

Until recently, the cultural landscape was the most stable dimension of our reality (considered in the lifespan of one generation). The natural consequence of the civilizational development, however, is transformation of cultural landscapes. The rate of spatial transformation is proportional to progressive changes occurring in the culture, particularly in the so-called mass culture recently.

The problem of rapid transformation of the cultural landscape in Poland raises multiple discussions among the academics, both landscape architects and geographers.

The main reasons include “mass consumption” of landscapes, which progressed in the socialist times and increased after 1990, in the time of so-called “democratization of the space”. Among the many causes of these transformations, the most important ones include socioeconomic, economic and legal-administrative conditions. Basing on her experience from international cooperation, the author feels it justified to claim that Poland is not a single case in that process. The conclusions from several international conferences on changes in cultural landscapes, which were held in Poland, including the conferences: *European Landscapes – planned economy or generating the chaos?* (Wrocław, 2009) and *Landscape Management* (Niepołomice, 2008) confirm the fact that the dynamic processes of spatial transformation are multidimensional and are a common phenomenon in most European countries with young democracies. “Multidimensional” means: legal, economic and social and environmental conditionings.

The turn of the 21st century brought about great opening for globalization processes, but also understanding and acceptance of the rules of sustainable development. That went alongside the times of democratic and systemic changes all over central-eastern Europe, as well as structural and spatial growth of common Europe – the European Union. Simultaneously, it was the time of great transformation in developed countries, resulting from introduction of high-tech industries. These processes have their impact on the landscape. The fact that the landscape policy has become increasingly important in declarations of united Europe shows how serious the issue is. That can be seen in the well-known European Landscape Convention, signed as an international document in Florence on October 20, 2000 (applicable from 2004). The convention comprises a set of

directives and standards of law, regarding landscape policy, which are in force in signatory states. Poland signed the convention in 2001 and ratified it on June 24, 2004¹. The convention is a new instrument aimed solely at protection, management and planning of landscapes in Europe. A very important element in these actions is international cooperation, as the quality and diversity of European landscapes has been considered the common heritage and common resource.

For the needs of the convention, the notion of landscape was defined as “*an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.*” Landscape policy was regarded as “*an expression by the competent public authorities of general principles, strategies and guidelines that permit the taking of specific measures aimed at the protection, management and planning of landscapes.*” Also, the notion of landscape protection was defined as “*actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity.*” The notion of landscape management was specified as „*action, from a perspective of **sustainable development** (highlighted by the author), to ensure the regular upkeep of a landscape, so as to guide and harmonise changes which are brought about by social, economic and environmental processes.*”. The convention also specifies another practical aspect of human actions in the landscape, by stating that “*landscape planning*” means *strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes.*

The Landscape Convention sets a special role of the landscape in the social field. The document regards the landscape as a key element of individual and social well-being by emphasizing its functional value. In the light of the convention, the landscape constitutes a **resource** (highlighted by the author) favourable to economic activity and its protection, management and planning can contribute to job creation. The provisions of the convention also point out the role of the landscape in public interest in culture, ecology and social issues, as well as in contribution to fostering local cultures. Moreover, the convention determines that the landscape is the basic component of the European natural and cultural heritage, which contributes to human well-being and consolidation of the European identity, and also claims that it is an important part of a quality of life for people everywhere: in degraded areas as well as in those of high quality of the environment, both in cities and in the countryside.

Cultural landscapes are always the expression of influence of particular policy, system of authority, etc. (Górka, 2008). It should be emphasized that the previous policy, including spatial policy, assumed that development resulted from

¹ The full text of the convention was published in the Official Journal of Laws of 2006, No 14, item 98 (Dziennik Ustaw 2006, Nr 14 poz. 98).

consequent effort. At present, the policy and politicians' authority over the space give way to the rules of the market. Landscape management has been dominated by principles of profits and consumption. The vision of future permanent and harmonic development is shadowed by episodic events which always only bring temporary profits and satisfaction (Baudillard, 2006). The fact that we live in the "turboworld", whose main characteristics are quick changeability, uncertainty and unpredictability (Sztumski, 2006), causes everything to be regarded in terms of a product for sale. Time and space have become such goods, and so has the landscape. The landscape, especially if it is cared for and "aesthetically correct", is subject to trade. "Landscapes for sale" are increasingly managed by developers or by so-called tourist colonization.² As the result of these changes, landscapes lose their regional identity and become a brand product. Currently, there are no effective tools for landscape management in Poland. The legal act of 2003 rendered void all spatial management plans adopted before 1995, and working out new plans is at the discretion of municipal authorities, which may issue building permits without the plan. The Regulation of 02.10.2007 disbanded the Department of Spatial Order and Architecture at the Ministry of Construction. Some time before, a concept (not yet put into life) had emerged at the Ministry of Environment, regarding delegation of some rights from authorities of national parks to the State Forestry (Böhm, 2008). The latest ideas of the resort of infrastructure are aimed at urban plans being worked out by developers or individuals building their house on their own. Such a neglecting approach of the parliament to spatial economy at the nationwide level raises amazement of western experts who got to know closer the Polish practices.

Hence, although European regulations ensure protection of landscape identities as visible dimensions of the national identity, they do not translate to actual spatial management in Poland. The reason for this should be sought in at least three overlapping groups of factors: legal, economic and social; on the one hand, we are subject to the rules of global economy, which regards consumption as the superior condition of well-being; on the other hand, we lack legal tools which would ensure persistency in spatial planning and we strive with improper, typically Polish mentality of the society, which, having suffered servitude of the socialist times, treats the ideas of freedom and liberty as its absolute right.

It is also worth mentioning that Poland has not got a rational act regarding compensation for damages made to the environment and the landscape. We do not have any established method of evaluation or assessment of the value of landscapes in Poland, and so the rules of sustainable development regarding spatial policy are

² Its particular form is the concept of building "other houses" in suburban zones or summer cottages. According to the Aristotelian idea of *kalotropism*, we get so close to its beauty that we become a threat for it (Böhm, 2008 a, Myga-Piątek, 2008).

not followed. Such methods function successfully in the neighboring countries, for instance in Germany (e.g. the method of Adam-Nohl-Valentin, 1986), or in the Czech Republic.

Analysis of factors and directions of transformation of cultural landscapes

This analysis will purposefully exclude natural landscapes, which are valuable and in most cases legally protected. The directions of transformation in regions of high natural or near natural features of the landscape have different foundations and cannot be analyzed in reference to the factors discussed hereinafter. It is however worth mentioning that such types of landscapes cover almost a third of the territory of Poland, and the area is growing steadily. Under the current system of legal protection and management of natural landscapes (Dz. U., 16.04.2004), the highest element of the protection system includes 23 *national parks*. Within parks, whose total area exceeds 3,000 km² (approx. 1% of the area of Poland), zones of strict protection were distinguished in the area of 683 km², where no human intervention in the ecosystem is allowed. In the remaining area, park employees and scientists support restoration of natural environment. *Nature reserves* are smaller yet equally valuable natural sites. There are over 1300 of them all over Poland. Another important component of the landscape protection system includes 120 *landscape parks* of total area 24,500 km², where business activities and farming are allowed. The next formation includes *areas of protected landscapes* of total area 71,400 km², which are a link in the protection system. The Nature Protection Act also protects small isolated areas called *ecological lands*, small fragments of beautiful landscapes (*nature-landscape complexes*), as well as individual objects - *monuments of nature* and *stands for completing documentation* of inanimate nature. The year 2004 saw introduction of the European form of nature protection in Poland – *Natura 2000 regions*, which protect the elements of nature and landscape that are endangered all over Europe. As an expected result, this kind of regions will possibly cover about 15-20% of the area of Poland. The remaining regions of Poland include cultural landscapes (whose type may be determined by their dominating functions, e.g. rural, urban, agricultural, industrial, post-industrial, tourism-related, etc). Current transformation of these landscapes occurs in multiple dimensions. The dynamics of landscape transformation is determined by a number of factors, which were described in Polish reference books on geography by Dobrowolska as early as 1948. Recently, their proportional share has begun to change in favor of absolute domination of socioeconomic factors.

The most significant factors of cultural landscape transformation include:

- natural factors – geological bedrock and surface features, soils, climate, surface and underground waters, plant cover and animals;
- historical factors – political relations, structure of power, administrative divisions, legal systems; social factors;

- social relations, relationships, fashion and tastes, wealth of the community;
- economic factors – the settlement pattern, occupation structure, ownership structure, social relations, the level of economic development;
- regional and cultural factors – tradition, nurtured identity, styles of architecture;
- technological factors – inventions, technical equipment, use of space;
- demographic factors – biological and intellectual potential of the communities, their awareness, wisdom and creativity, creative desire and experience.

It should be assumed that currently, the prevailing factors are socio-economic ones, which are intensely supported by rapid technological growth, whereas natural, regional and cultural factors are playing secondary part.

Apart from the factors which are considered traditional, there appear new ones, which might be related to the level of intellectual potential of local communities and/or individuals, territorial authorities, the level of their awareness, expertise, competence and creativity.

Preliminary assessment of transformation of cultural landscapes of Poland was made for settlement landscapes, both urban and rural as well as suburban, including agricultural landscapes. The limited space of this article does not allow for a thorough discussion of landscape transformation in tourist and post-industrial areas. That is the subject matter for an independent article (compare Myga-Piątek – Nita, 2008).

The assessment of cultural landscape transformation shows two major directions, one being positive and concerning favorable changes, which however only have local range in Poland, and the other being unfavorable, of superficial character, consisting in multidimensional negative changes of structure and functions of landscapes.

The first direction is determined by the concept and realization of reconstruction and reclamation of small towns, historical places or ones which are valuable because of their history and architecture. That transformation is usually based on reliable and community-consulted projects of restoration of historical places or objects of large importance for the Polish and European culture. The most spectacular reconstructions of historical towns were carried out as early as the socialist times (Old Town districts in Gdańsk, Warsaw, Zamość, Toruń or Wrocław). At present, these actions have been popularized and extended on small towns and locations as well as villages which lost their city rights but retained spatial layouts typical of towns. The reason for these actions should be sought in at least three equally important factors: relatively high current possibilities of co-

financing restoration work from the funds of the European Union, growing activity of local communities and authorities, and increasingly common investments of private funds in renovation of recovered tenement houses and other objects of architectonic value. The effects of these efforts can be admired e.g. in various types of towns, from the best-known like: Sandomierz, Kazimierz Dolny, Opatów, Łęczyca, Kórnik, Kwidzyn, Grudziądz, Paczków, to less promoted ones and those which are at the beginning of the restoration process, e.g.: Skarszewy, Gniew, Kadyny, Tolkmicko, Trzebiatów, Żarki and dozens of others (Fig. 1-2).

This category also includes the objects and places from of the World Heritage List of UNESCO where the landscape itself the most important factor; for example in Poland the “Kalwaria Zebrzydowska; the mannerist architectural and park landscape complex and pilgrimage park” and “Mużaków Park” (Bad Muskau) in the Germany border.

However, this increased activity with regard to reclamation projects that are carried out raises some fears as to whether their concept is right and whether it is appropriate to refer to the basic criterion of the reclamation art, namely authenticity. Seldom does reclamation consist in reconstruction of the “golden ages” of a city. Most frequently, we can see the designer apply their vision, which is subjected to the criterion of current functionality. Thus, pragmatic solutions prevail; it is good if they are consulted with the public beforehand.

The other direction has spatial range and should be considered as an unfavorable one. It consists in a process, out of control of the law and good practice, in which landscapes of the Polish countryside and suburbs become vague. The progressive devastation of the cultural landscape consists directly in destruction of traditional historical forms, or indirectly in deformation of valuable natural structures by improper location, urban sprawl, change of use of the area and predatory land management (Raszeja, 2008).

Physiognomic transformations are the most unfavorable in the zone of open landscapes, including suburban, agricultural and rural landscapes. The process of “modernization” of the countryside, which started as early as the socialist times, also initiated the process of its scenic unification, which is seen in the changes in the physiognomy of settlements. These processes have been increasing for the last twenty years of democratization of space. This leads to the loss of regional identity, which was soonest seen in architectonic changes. The importance of natural scenic values in these regions decreases. Many landscape changes can be observed in relation to discontinuation of agriculture or water management. Residents of the countryside, e.g. in the regions of Lesser Poland, Podbeskidzie and the Beskid Mountains, see more profits in selling the land for recreational and tourism-related purposes than in continued, little-profitable agriculture and animal breeding.

Fields, not ploughed for several years, are subject to natural succession and are overgrown with forest vegetation. Forestation rate of the region rises, which, wrongly, seems to be favorable from the ecological point of view. The forest-meadow and forest-arable land borderlines change their course and biodiversity decreases, because natural balks, which are an ideal refuge for various species of birds, small amphibians and mammals, cease to exist when overtaken by forested areas. The example of this could be the Kraków-Częstochowa Upland, whose landscape is changing. Areas of pinewood monocultures, which are little attractive in terms of nature and culture, are growing and the physiognomic features of the karst landscape are vanishing. The protection policy, which promotes domination of the values of the animate nature, leads to quick disappearance of abiotic values of the landscape, which frequently determine its specific character (monadnocs, outcrops, gorges).

Landscape degradation is increased by the recent settlement processes. The last decades have seen rapid disappearance of old countryside buildings, usually built of wood and thatched, all over Poland. Nowadays, traditional folk house building has only remained in a rudimental form in Poland, and its resources decrease every year, giving way to the pressure of progress and civilizational changes (Myga-Piątek, 2009).

A rapid and unstoppable process can be currently observed, consisting in taking over the landscape for the needs of weekend camping and recreation (“other houses”). Arable lands are excluded from agricultural use and sold easily as summer cottage lots, which has become a mass phenomenon. Urban trends and standard architectonic projects caused high-rise houses with large-area roofs to appear in many regions (Fig. 3-4).

New, largely dispersed houses with varying structures and facades (including brightly colored external walls) have become a common element of the recreational space. New houses, as well as building lots where construction work has not started yet, are surrounded with fences, usually made of concrete. Traditional houses – with cozy countryside architectural structures or typical regional style – vanish by being pulled down or rebuilt; they are no longer accompanied by adjacent flower gardens. The mentioned processes cause the landscape to cease to be unique and become standard. It is no longer distinguished, because housing estates look the same in suburban zones of Kraków, Warsaw or Katowice. Peculiar features diminish (Pawłowska, 2001). Villages cease to be “villages” and become “locations” like hundreds of others which can be found in Poland (Myga-Piątek, 2008). Communities which aim at fast and easy profits from selling building sites and potential increase in economic activities allow for much freedom regarding the



Fig. 1. Braniewo



Fig. 2. Kazimierz

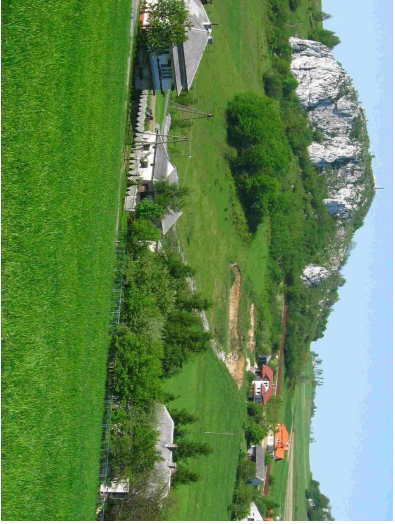


Fig. 3. Dispersing buildings



Fig. 4. Zakopane

development in their outline planning decisions or area development plans. Scarce are the situations when municipalities develop so-called typically regional projects whose style would refer to the traditional local building design. “Architectonic poaching”, extending also onto the Polish countryside, is a common phenomenon. The rural landscape is subject to purposeful urbanization (Myczkowski, 2003). The harmony of space, expressed in the mosaic of fields, balks, shrubs, forests, in accordance with the habitat and built up lines – the peculiar synthesis of culture and nature – is being pulled down and replaced with the spatial chaos. The structure of space becomes accidental. Multitude of building forms can be observed, frequently with no particular style, but manifesting the social and financial rank of the owners, who usually ignore the spatial order they initially faced. Open space is converted to small fenced plots, which segregate the area and divide it into isolated pieces, thus symbolically emphasizing the stability and range of the private property. Each private property, however, is included in the system of the public property through the process of perception, and so is perceived as the common value (Pietras, Myga-Piątek, 2005).

In many regions, especially those used for tourism and recreation, where tourist traffic and infrastructure grow rapidly, Polish landscapes could be considered “transient”, as they look different and take varying forms depending on the season. In such places landscapes become the symbol of the consumption era relatively quickly.

In addition, recent years have seen the marketing rule of emphasizing or transferring unique, distinguishing features; “architectonic extra-regional implants” appear, which are peculiar icons of the architecture of the Podhale or the Kurpie regions, or, more generally, of the countryside features of the landscape. Alienated not only from their natural regional background, but also from the historical context, pseudo-vernacular objects (most frequently wooden inns, windmills and mills) are at present perceived solely as tourist products and are meaningless symbols of the past (Myga-Piątek, 2009). They make the landscape odd by introducing rural elements into city centers or suburbs and by transplanting foreign architectonic designs to other, unnatural areas. It should be emphasized that variety of development of villages and towns is a fundamental component of diversity of the cultural landscape of each country and region. Vanishing traditional building forms and uncritical imitation of patterns from one region in another impose a threat of uniformity and cultural and spatial unification. It was increased mass tourism with commercial consumption-oriented features, among other factors, that forced very dynamic growth of regional building industry³. That is how cultural

³ An example might be provided by the Podhale region, whose cultural landscape is purposefully “nurtured” and the brand tourist product, which enjoys much interest among tourists; “new-generation vernacular” building style, which becomes the symbol of the

recycling takes place and the space changes in cycles which reflect the trends. The landscape is saturated with elements that show the prestige and inclination to the kind of fashion where the man is surrounded by architectonic gadgets and the landscape is treated as a “playground”.

Another process worth mentioning, which mainly occurs in the suburban zones of large industrial cities is the change of character and functionality of some objects: closed mining buildings are commonly converted into shopping malls, brewery buildings into culture centers, granaries into hotels, and railway stations or mills into restaurants (Górka, 2008).

That aspect shows another direction of changes of post-industrial landscapes as a result of reclamation and reuse of land, for tourism and recreation, among other things. That, however, is an extensive issue and has been purposefully omitted in the present article.

Summary

Bauman (2006) writes that the idea of management as realization of the “world designed in advance” has come to an end in the world of consumption. Stability seems to be a curse in it, as it excludes the attractiveness of novelty. The event overcomes the strategy. Our lives, and consequently, inevitably our landscape, have been overtaken by playful gadgets, controlled by the logics of prestige and fashion, and advertisements convince us that “the world is a playground”. At present, spatial management has been reduced to controlling single projects – events. Plans of housing estates or single objects do not result from any landscape arrangement vision (concept) as a coherent whole, but rather express the fever of mobility – the urge to search for new areas of activity at any price (Górka, 2008). As the result, spatial chaos grows and open areas shrink rapidly. That is a significant obstacle for any actions aiming at improving the quality and beauty of the landscape. The notion of spatial order, although it appears in legal regulations concerning land management, is neither sufficient nor introduced properly. Disturbing and easily noticeable lack of spatial order also results from the lack of civic concern about the landscape and insufficient involvement of communities in responsible land management.

Landscape, however, like the natural environment, should be treated as the strategic resource (Redclift, 1996; 2009). We must learn how to “save” it the same

place, is easily recognized and has “local” features. Currently, the “spirit of the place” is often brought back for the needs of tourism.

way we learn how to save water or energy. That will require us to reevaluate our ways of thinking about the landscape, just as we did it in case of the natural environment. There are a lot of tasks the system of education should deal with: school curricula should be supplemented with the issues which would promote aesthetics and concern about the beauty⁴ of the landscape and teach to follow the rules of rational use of “free space”. It would be also helpful to realize the importance of social participation for care of the landscape.

Many examples from Poland show that currently the landscape needs as appropriate care and protection as possible. Because of growing threats for the image of space, resulting from the unified “mass culture”, the legal protective measures existing so far turn out to be insufficient. The administrative practice concerning protection of monuments and spatial planning fails to keep up with the modifications regarding the system and the society. More and more often we can witness the conflict of interests, resulting from varying points of view on the natural-cultural goods. The need of possession and free use is still stronger than the care for environment or monuments and the need to keep them as elements of our heritage. Much hope in that regard is put in activities of local institutions, based on education concerning the cultural heritage and ecology, as well as developing the practice of social participation (Pawłowska, 2008).

Scenic values are the public good and belong to all citizens. Sustainable development must also concern the spatial policy. It may not be applied, however, in relation to the landscape without radical changes in the system and in the economic approach; some ideology and mythology have already developed regarding that issue (Sztumski, 2009). It is therefore necessary to change the point of view on the surrounding and reevaluate globally the hierarchy of needs and expectation. That imposes challenges unknown before on local policies of countries, the parliament of the united Europe and all the remaining countries (Myga-Piatek, 2010).

The landscape requires sustainable development mainly through widespread landscape education and social participation. We hope that the current stage of landscape development, which was based on the “game in the space” and the “game to win the space” is coming to an end. We are gradually becoming ready to apply really conscious spatial planning. All our experience from the past and its negative consequences should make us stronger in our mature and well-considered

⁴ CBOS (Public Opinion Research Center) carried out a survey for the Union of Polish Architects in May 2005 (*Polish space...*, 2007). 83% of the respondents declared their interest in the condition of their surrounding and 37% of them claimed that their interest was very high. 69% of the surveyed believe that the changes occurring in their surrounding are for better and 6% claimed the changes are for worse. The others could not assess the changes (Böhm, 2008).

decisions. We should promote the claim that the landscape is the public good and at the same time an absolute basis for further existence of communities (Pietras, Myga-Piątek, 2005). The landscapes concentrate both the state of the natural environment and the condition (including the morals) of the societies. This requires us to change the point of view on the surrounding and reevaluate globally the hierarchy of needs and expectation. That imposes challenges unknown before on local policies of countries, the parliament of the united Europe and all the remaining countries. These challenges will be based on the need to introduce particular limitations, which will possibly be hard to apply, especially in countries which did not regain democracy until recently. Otherwise, however, both the provisions of the European Landscape Convention and the notions of sustainable development will remain inefficient.

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