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Architecture of Multiethnic Towns of Eastern Poland in Virtual Tourist Routes

Abstract

There are at least three levels of analysis of the topic of my paper. Firstly, using virtual ethnography methods I refer to the ways in which the built - both existing and non-existing any more in real world - environment of multiethnic towns of Eastern Poland is expressed in virtual tourist routes. Re-created in heritage tourism discourse, they - in return - reshape contemporary spaces and places, revealing dissonances and diverse meanings. Secondly, taking into consideration the results of a semiotic analysis, I present architecture as iconic guides to ethnicity and nationality, evoking the ambiguity of that role in the view of growing influence of extreme nationalist and populist movements. However, what is worth underlying, the main idea of the described projects lies in better understanding of the complexity of multicultural pasts and in building bridges between the representatives of different groups. Thirdly, I briefly discuss the broader context of the process of Europeanization in (post)socialist countries. Eastern Poland is especially rich in multicultural heritage but, at the same time, after the decades of totalitarian regimes there are still a lot of unresolved historical issues there. For that reason, it is crucial to anticipate the possible impact of a cultural and/or tourist project on local communities and make effort in explaining all doubts.

After the fall of communism, the destinations such as Zamosc, Lublin, Przemysl or Białystok started to create tourism products based on their multicultural heritage and to reinterpret the legacy in the new political circumstances. The local municipalities searched for new promotional solutions and the examples of their activity might be: "The Fortress Zamosc" or "The Adventures of the Good Soldier Svejk" in Przemysl (both related mainly to the remnants of military architecture and history); „Zamosc – an Ideal Town”, referring to its renaissance urban character; "Multicultural Route" in Lublin and so on. These projects are accompanied by virtual tools such as games, films, panoramic virtual tours etc. However, the increasing interest in tourism development has also stimulated the growth of heritage industry intensively drawing from multicultural pasts of the borderland regions and concentrating on the world which dissapeared during and after the World War 2. Initiatives such as "Virtual Shtetl" or "Shtetl Routes" have as a goal to re-enter the knowledge about and images of the multi-ethnic heritage into the public discourse. The first is a centre of documentation and historical narratives about Jewish people and culture in the pre-war Central and Eastern Europe. The latter concerns cross-border trails, including approx. 60 places in Poland, Ukraine and Belarus, as well as virtual means, i.e. guidebooks and 3D re-creation of 15 non-existing towns. The next step is the revitalization of still existing sites, reconstruction of the destroyed buildings (e.g. a wooden, 17th-century synagogue in Bilgoraj) or even establishing completely new objects with different functions (e.g. an open-air museum or a theme park). As a result, all actors involved in the domain of tourism, heritage and architecture can observe and examine mutual relationships between virtual and real worlds.

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The author and co-author of several book chapters, journal articles, conference proceedings and reviews (published in “Folia Turistica”, “Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change”, “Tourism, Culture and Communication”, “Annals of Tourism Research”, “Journal of Heritage Tourism”); co-editor - with R. Winiarski - of the volume on anthropology of tourism (2016, in press) and - with M. Banaszkiewicz - of the three thematic issues of scientific journals, devoted to the interpretation of heritage and tourism anthropology (2015, 2016), as well as the monograph “After the Iron Curtain. Anthropology of Tourism in Central and Eastern Europe” (Lexington Books, 2017, in preparation). In 2015, she was the main co-organizer of the conference “Anthropology of Tourism – Heritage and Perspectives” in Cracow, Poland.