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CREATING AN ART TOURIST SPACE IN THE URBAN SPHERE OF LODZ – A THEORETICAL APPROACH BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE URBAN FORMS GALLERY OF MURALS

INTRODUCTION

A continuously expanding spectrum of new assets becoming a subject of tourists' interest is a remarkable phenomenon of contemporary tourism. Particularly post-industrial cities, dealing with neglect and poverty, seek new means of economic stimulation through creating unique tourist products (Kaczmarek 2001: 32).

It may be concluded that until 1990s, cities in Poland were mainly perceived as recreational, cognitive and pilgrimage tourism areas (Liszewski 2008: 29). Along with the growth of market economy, new ways of cities' activation have arisen.

Setting an example, Lodz with its specific, post-industrial character can be mentioned. Its 19th century textile industry development has left a wide stigma on its cultural landscape and become a distinguishing feature of the city. Lodz is a city seeking nowadays new trends and possibilities, a city of modern art and off-culture, which makes the city a unique Polish tourist destination still transforming its urban tissue.

One of the biggest projects in the field of modern art in Lodz is creating a "live gallery" of murals on the walls of downtown tenement houses and apartment blocks on housing estates. The post-industrial landscape of the city provides a perfect background for street art activities. The Urban Forms Foundation has spectacular achievements in this area.

As a result – a new tourist space appears: an art tourist space. The space distinguishes the city, becomes a symbol of modernity, fashion, enrichment of an urban tissue and even raises its prestige. Neglected and not attractively perceived areas, after revitalisation and regeneration, gain a new, symbolic, modern, creative and aesthetic meaning.

THE HISTORY OF LODZ – THE BEST BACKGROUND FOR MODERN ART ACTIVITIES

Lodz, a city located in the central part of Poland, is the capital of Lodz Voivodeship and lies approximately 135 kilometres south-west of Warsaw. The first written record appears in the 14th century, but the city rights were granted in 1423. From that time until the 18th century, the town remained a small rural settlement on a trade route between Masovia and Silesia. In 1815, with the Congress of Vienna Treaty, it became a part of Russian Empire (called the Polish Kingdom), which had a significant impact on the further history of the city (Rosin 1980: 135).

In 1820, the small town changed into a modern industrial centre called “The Promised Land”, and it received immigrants from all over Europe, mostly from southern Germany, Silesia, Bohemia but also Jewish people. Hence, it was a city of various cultures, different nations living next to each other – Jewish, German, Russian and Polish. A constant influx of entrepreneurs, weavers, craftsmen and factory workers transformed Lodz into the main textile production centre of the Russian Empire.

With the abolition of customs duties between the Polish Kingdom and Russia in 1850, the industry could freely develop for the needs of the Russian market. Soon Lodz became the second-largest city of the Polish Kingdom. Because of rapid growth of the textile industry, the city was called “Polish Manchester”. With free trade opportunities, manufacturers made vast fortunes on cloth production and trade. The most famous and influential industrialists in Lodz were Izrael Kalmanowicz Poznanski (Jew) and Karol Wilhelm Scheibler (German).

The city grew gradually until 1914 – with the outbreak of World War I it was one of the most densely populated industrial cities in the world. Huge industrial complexes made of red bricks were built, consisting of spinning mills, estates of factory workers’ houses, private railway systems, schools, shops, hospitals, etc. After the World War II, Lodz’s economy, focused still on the textile industry, declined dramatically in 1990 and 1991. Upon the 1989 fall of communism, Lodz was no longer a prosperous textile centre. The factories, the majority of which went bankrupt, were turned into seats of shops, banks and other institutions.

Nowadays, the post-industrial landscape of the city constitutes the best background for creative activities. Old factories (after as well as before revitalisation) gather artists, designers, entertainers and fashion creators of so-called off-culture. It is a space for original clubs and cafés, boutiques, exhibitions and concerts. It is also a home for design offices and showrooms. Hence, Lodz provides an alternative to mainstream culture.

Lodz has roots remarkably associated with modern art – avant-garde activities flourished in the interwar period, especially thanks to such famous artists as Wladyslaw Strzeminski and Katarzyna Kobro. One must also bear in mind that in 1898 the first edition of new avant-garde exhibition “Construction in the Process” took place in Lodz. The famous “Lodz Biennale Festival” – an interdisciplinary, contemporary art exhibition – is its continuation.

Finally, the unique post-industrial tissue of the city constitutes the perfect setting for large-format paintings (murals) made directly on the façades of the buildings. The Urban Forms Gallery is a “live gallery” of more than 30 murals and a street art exhibition changing the appearance of the city’s public space permanently.

MURALS IN LODZ. THE EXAMPLE OF THE URBAN FORMS GALLERY

The “mural” is the word of Spanish origin meaning a decorative wall painting (Stępień 2010: 5). The origins of that art date back to the 20s and 30s of the 20th century. It gained a special fame in Latin America. The first world famous artists were: David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera.

The first murals in Lodz were created in communist times and they were a kind of huge announcements confirming the presence of the company in the market. The demolition of the entire frontage of the streets in the city centre of Lodz played an important role in creating those murals. After the demolition, the exposed, neglected walls of downtown tenement houses were used for presenting companies’ advertisements.

Currently, the activity of the Urban Forms Foundation which creates a publicly available tourist trail of murals has a mission related to social revitalisation, indicating active public participation in organised ventures. Closer observation shows that it is associated with renewal of the urban sphere of Lodz and the improvement of the image of the city through creating a brand new quality. Hence, the aim is to create an artistic, urban asset.

The main tool used by the Foundation is large-format painting on the walls of downtown tenement houses, as well as on the walls of apartment blocks on housing estates. The result of its activity is a “live gallery” of murals, which is a permanent exhibition of street art created in the urban sphere of Lodz. Currently it consists of over 30 murals which make up a public art trail.

An important feature of the project is the high artistic value of murals – the authors are representatives of large-format paintings from around the world,

presenting a diverse range of artistic concepts. The most important include, among others: Os Gemeos (Brazil), Aryz (Spain), Remed (France), Inti (Chile), Sat One (Germany), Etam (Poland), M-City and Lump (Poland).

MODERN ART TOURIST SPACE – CHARACTERISTICS

A tourist space is a part of geographical space, consisting of natural and social environment components, as well as permanent elements of human activity (both – economic and cultural). The fundamental requirement in this space to classify it as a tourist space is the occurrence of tourism (Liszewski 1995: 87–103).

As it was emphasised above, the process of creating large-format paintings in Lodz produces a new type of tourist space – an art tourist space which can be defined as a part of the tourist space with characteristics of the former non-tourist space where tourist assets connected with art play a significant role. Within these assets not only large-format wall paintings (murals) can be singled out, but also: museums of contemporary art and modern art activities (e.g.: performances, exhibitions, etc.).

Areas of the former non-tourist space are those which previously did not arouse tourist interest. Subsequently, with the appearance of new tourist assets, they become a tourist space. That kind of tourism can be defined as “tourism off the beaten track” (Stasiak 2013: 69), in which the scenery of destroyed, often post-industrial buildings, plays a significant role. It gives an excellent opportunity to explore the forgotten and unsightly districts of the city. Hence, the new aesthetics appears. This aesthetics requires often mature recipients, which determines a different perspective and a desire to build something new, often avant-garde, unconventional, with an abstract message (Kronenberg 2012: 24).

An art tourist space is a part of an urban tourist space, which is a distinctive type of a geographical space, characterised by specific organisation, function, physiognomy and a certain legal status (Liszewski 1999: 51–52). Under certain conditions of the city development, an urban space is considered as interesting in terms of cognition and recreation. This leads to the formation of urban tourist space (Liszewski 1999: 54).

The former non-tourist space can be subdivided into two types: unknown (the lack of information limits the influx of tourists) and unwanted (rejected due to the failure to meet the criteria of tourist usefulness) (Włodarczyk 2009: 93–94). Its importance in the case of murals is connected with the fact that most of them appear on the walls of neglected downtown tenement houses and apartment blocks (housing estates). Before they were created, the sites did not

constitute tourist assets. The creation of large format paintings resulted in the influx of both – individual and mass tourists – so that the former urban non-tourist space turned into a tourist space.

In terms of its function and transformations under the influence of tourism, five types of tourist space can be singled out: the space of penetration, exploration, assimilation, colonisation and urbanisation (Liszewski 1995: 87–103). Three of them appear in the modern art tourist space (Mokras-Grabowska 2014: 29):

- The space of tourist exploration which results from individual discovering of the city. Tourists not satisfied with objects recommended in guidebooks seek something interesting, original and unknown. This kind of tourist space is most remarkable for activities connected with modern art (also with street art), it is connected with individual tourist exploration and interpretation, as well as with specific sensitivity of recipients.
- The space of tourist penetration, connected with cognitive tourism, which is usually used by mass tourist. The important convenience in this case is tourist infrastructure such as trails, museums and galleries (e.g.: guided tours organised along the trail of murals in Lodz).
- The space of tourist assimilation which means mutual contacts between artists (organisers of the space) and tourists. It may refer to artists at work observations, as well as to participation in street art activities (e.g. performances).

The other two types of tourist space are: the space of colonisation and urbanisation. They do not appear in an art tourist space because of different meanings in the case of functions and transformations under the influence of tourism. The space of tourist colonisation means tourist infrastructure development (e.g.: hotels, recreation centres, etc.). The space of tourist urbanisation usually means transforming a non-urban space into an urban space (due to tourism development) (Liszewski 1999: 55–57).

An art tourist space has also different types of comprehension levels (understanding levels). Four types of comprehension levels can be singled out within that space (Włodarczyk 2009: 80). The first and the most important is a real space, actually experienced, being a sum of places connected with modern art and visited by tourists (Mokras-Grabowska 2014: 29).

The second type is a perceptual space (also called a mental-perceptual space), which is a kind of memorised space. It is usually incomplete and highly hierarchical in terms of meaning and value. In the case of modern art, especially large-format paintings in an urban space, it is a set of ideas about them. Some of the experiences are rejected by tourists so that the form of it is simplified and distorted.

The next one is a virtual space which is a kind of unreal space arising on the basis of secondary sources. It is not directly experienced, sometimes fake and blurred. In the case of modern art tourist space, it is pretty well developed, mainly due to colourful photos in guidebooks, brochures or on websites. Secondary sources present, however, a strongly idealised image of the space – full of colours and strong visual stimuli.

The last kind of comprehension level of modern art tourist space is a mental space. It is symbolic and it results from the conscious, the mind, thoughts and feelings and it is a derivative of the three types mentioned above. It is also an expression of the tourist's system of value and works on the basis of strong associations – e.g. “Łódź – a city of murals”, “Łódź – a city of contemporary art”, etc.

TYPES OF MODERN ART TOURIST SPACE IN ŁÓDŹ BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE URBAN FORMS GALLERY

Analysing the location of murals in the urban tissue of Łódź, five types of modern art tourist space can be distinguished within the city (photo 34):

1. The tourist space in the city centre – murals are located on the walls of tenement houses in direct surroundings of Piotrkowska Street (the main vertical artery in Łódź and the main tourist attraction). Although they cannot be easily seen from Piotrkowska Street, they constitute an attractive additional tourist offer. Examples of the murals singled out in this kind of space are: 5 Nowomiejska Street, 5 Roosvelta Street and 9 and 11 Prochnika Street. Moreover, the mural at 5 Roosvelta Street has an additional feature – it is located close to the place connected with OFF Piotrkowska Centre (photo 33) – the centre connected with avant-garde culture, where many alternative activities take place – concerts, festivals, exhibitions, etc. This is also space for designers, artists and their unique, creative activities (www.offpiotrkowska.com).
2. The tourist space located away from the city centre but important due to significant tourist assets. The relevant example of this kind of space is the mural at 82 Wojska Polskiego Street. This tenement house is situated within the area of the former Jewish Ghetto. Some remarkable historical monuments are located in the vicinity (e.g. the biggest Jewish Cemetery in Europe, a museum exhibition of Gypsy camp, etc.). One can dare to say that although the tenement house is situated in a neglected part of the city, the appearance of the mural raised its aesthetics, the prestige of the place and enriched the tourist space.

3. The former non-tourist space situated in the city centre – the examples of such space are: 67 Pomorska Street (photos 4, 18–21, compare photos 31, 32), 25 Pogonowskiego Street and 81 Nawrot Street. The space was previously not perceived as a tourist space. Located away from the main tourist artery (Piotrkowska Street), it was neglected and not visited by tourists. The appearance of murals helped to improve quality and attractiveness of this urban sphere.
4. The former non-tourist space situated away from the city centre – close to industrial areas, on housing estates. An excellent example of such space is the mural at 80 Wyszynskiego Street, made on the wall of a block of flats on a housing estate built in the 1980s. This controversial project is a good example of enlarging tourist space of the city.
5. The commercial tourist space – murals are situated in shopping malls for marketing purposes (to lure in clients). The example of such space is mural in: “Galeria Lodzka” shopping centre (photo 35).

SUMMARY

The formation of new tourist spaces results from motivations of new tourists who apart from traditional sightseeing increasingly look for areas “off the beaten track” and explore an urban tissue in a different way.

The art tourist space in Lodz is an expression of new activities in the field of modern art, including in particular the Urban Forms Foundation project – the “live gallery” of murals. The post-industrial landscape of the city and its traditions connected with avant-garde art, dating back to the interwar period, form a perfect background for the project. This space, singled out from the general urban tourist space of Lodz, adapts previously not-perceived tourist spaces. Through the original renovation of the walls of tenement houses, the tourist space expands.

The space analysed in the paper is not an “easy” space. Although many murals are perceived mainly as an interesting colour composition, their interpretation requires mental effort, the recipient’s engagement and special sensibility.

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