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MUSEUMS BEYOND WALLS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE THIRD PLACE CONCEPT

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Abstract: The article focuses on the activity of museums outside the walls of their premises and within the context of the concept of the so-called third place. The third place – a gathering place that is neither the home, i.e. the first place, nor the workplace, i.e. the second place—was described by the American sociologist Ray Oldenburg in 1999 in: *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community.* Reflections proposed in this article are based on study cases: Museum Forum (a project carried out by the National Museum in Cracow), Bródno Sculpture Park (a project co-conducted by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw), and the method implemented by

the Ethnographic Museum in Cracow with particular attention paid to the *Dzikie Planty* ("Wild" Planty Park) project. The author discussed the premises of these projects, their place in overall museum strategy, and the reasons for undertaking them. Finally, she deliberated whether the fact that they are conducted in fully accessible public space and that their character favours users' interaction justifies categorising them as third places as understood by Oldenburg. Although Oldenburg's concept has been regarded by museum theorists as not applicable to museums the author of the article concluded that projects conducted by museums in the noncommittal context of open space meet the conditions set to third places.

Keywords: Ray Oldenburg, concept of the third place, Museum Forum in Cracow, Bródno Sculpture Park in Warsaw, Ethnographic Museum in Cracow.

In 1989 the American sociologist Ray Oldenburg published *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community.*¹ Its theme is the conception of the so-called third place – a site for meetings located outside the first place, i.e. the home, and the second one, namely, the workplace. This notion, frequently discussed in the literature of numerous disciplines, has been broached also by museum professionals and is used in reference to transformations currently taking place in museums, in which increasing attention is paid to the expectations and comfort of the public for whose sake museums wish to be perceived not merely as a domain for winning knowledge or enjoying aesthetic pleasure but also as a meeting place.

The author of this article wished to take a look – via the conception of the third place – at the work conducted by

Polish museums, albeit restricting this examination to the programme-like activity of museums outside the walls of their seats. The choice of this particular fragment of undertakings pursued by museums results from a conviction that the absence of a limitation in the form of the museum building — which, on the one hand, formalises the visit and can intimidate and create a distance and, on the other hand, introduces barriers in the form of entrance fees or opening hours — incites an unhampered and optional way of spending leisure time and the establishment of interactions.

The realisation by museums of projects outside their walls is part of an increasingly widely applied openness strategy. Museums willingly invite to undertake an in-depth penetration of their program activity and enable recipients to feel like co-authors of museum strategy and program. Objects leave storerooms and make their way into the

hands of recipients, while museums physically open doors leading to zones (storerooms and conservation ateliers) that are, generally, reserved only for their employees. Taking activity outside museum walls is also one of the ways of exteriorising such openness. Education and popularisation programs belong to the most frequently realised tasks. They involve physical departure from the building, activity both in public space and assorted institutions, and out of town work.³ The presence of museums outside their walls denotes also projects that can be combined with social and education undertakings, although their nature is in principle different or wider.

The author of this article wanted to concentrate on analyses of such projects, and with this purpose in mind she selected three cases realised by three different types of museums: encyclopaedic (National Museum in Cracow), modern art (Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw), and ethnographic (the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Cracow). Upon the basis of those projects, which despite the fact that they are carried out in non-museum spaces are governed by a similar logic as the ones realised inside museums, she planned to indicate their premises and

place in program strategies as well as the reasons for their application by museums. Finally, the author intended to deliberate whether such projects are fully accomplished in accessible public spaces and whether their character favours interactions between users, which could justify their categorisation as third places according to the understanding proposed by Ray Oldenburg.

Despite the fact that each of those case studies is different, represents a divergent type of institution, is based on diverse premises, and possesses dissimilar targets, their small number still does not provide foundations and opportunities for formulating definitive conclusions. Reflections presented in this article, therefore, are a contribution to more extensive research calling for a representation of a larger number of projects and museums carrying them out – different types of museums localised in smaller centres.

Conception of the third place

The titular conception of the third place was originally formulated by Ray (Raymond) Oldenburg and Dennis Brissett in 1982 in the article: The Third Place, published in

Tabela 1. Features distinguishing the third place according to Ray Oldenburg
(in: The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community, Da Capo Press, Boston 1999)

On Neutral Ground	() there must be places where individuals may come and go as they please, in which no one is required to play host, and in which we all feel at home and comfortable. (s. 22)
The Third Place as Leveller	() is accessible to the general public and does not set formal criteria of membership and exclusion. (s. 24) () all shed their social uniforms and insignia and reveal more of what lies beneath or beyond them. (s. 25)
Conversation is the Main Activity	Nothing more clearly indicates a third place than that the talk here is good; that it is lively, scintillating, colourful, and engaging. (s. 26) Everyone seems to talk just the right amount, and all are expected to contribute. (s. 28)
Accessibility and Accommodation	() one may go alone at almost any time of the day or evening with assurance that acquaintances will be there. (s. 32)
The Regulars	The third place is just so much space unless the right people are there to make it come alive, and they are the regulars. It is the regulars who give the place its character and who assure that on any given visit some of the gang will be there. (s. 33-34)
A Low Profile	() the third place is all the more likely not to impress the uninitiated. (s. 36) Not having that shiny bright appearance of the franchise establishment, third places do not attract a high volume of strangers or transient customers. (s. 36)
The Mood is Playful	() the playful spirit is of utmost importance. Here joy and acceptance reign over anxiety and alienation. (s. 38)
A Home Away from Home	Though a radically different kind of setting from the home, the third place is remarkably similar to a good home in the psychological comfort and support that it extends. (s. 42)

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"Qualitative sociology": They are places where people gather primarily to enjoy each other's company. 4 The most important place of this kind, and one which plays this role most frequently, is a bar, but mention is also made of numerous categories of places, which perform such a role in different countries, cultures, and communities, e.g. a pub, a golf club, a yacht club, a local shop, an eatery, an inn, a café, a bakery, and a pharmacy. In a book published seven years later Oldenburg expanded this list by including, i.a. bookstores and hair salons, but this is still an incomplete list. For habitués third places are a remedy for stress, loneliness, and alienation.⁵ Here community is the most alive and people are most themselves. 6 Third places comprise an informal public meeting place. It is essential, however, that not every site of meetings situated between the home and the workplace (or school) is a third place. In the opinion of Oldenburg it must possess the eight features presented in Table 1.

The third place became a popular pivotal keyword for scenes of socialisation and not only places traditionally linked with entertainment, but also with knowledge (libraries, museums). This conception is discussed from the perspective of assorted disciplines, including museum studies, although it so happens that Oldenburg did not refer to museums. Viewing museums precisely as places where free time is spent in an optional manner and by holding a friendly conversation proved to be greatly tempting for museum curators and professionals alike. Numerous authors, however, indicate that the third-place theory does not match museums. They include Nina Simon, an advocate of the participatory museum, who admits that museums can be used in the same ways as one of the third places listed by Oldenburg, playing around with the art or the exhibits or magazines instead of with pints. Making this happen requires some fundamental changes to cultural institutions. More informality. Longer hours. More seating. More acceptance and encouragement of noise. More cultivation of regulars not just as docents but as social directors. Less judgment of how people use their time. Less prettification of content. Less presentation of a point of view.⁷

According to Simon cultural institutions would both gain and lose by becoming true third places.8 Her blog entry produced a heated discussion, with the majority of commentators agreeing with Simon's critical interpretation of Oldenburg. At the same time, readers indicated elements that museums may borrow from this conception and postulated an unorthodox application of the conception of the third place. A similar path was followed by Natalye B. Tate, who in reference to the Oldenburg concept conducted an analysis of projects realised by two American museums – the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the Cincinnati Museum Center. In doing so, she arrived at the conclusion that the third place described by the sociologist is an unsuitable tool for museums involved in building programs although it offers a set of instruments that may be arbitrarily applied depending on needs, possibilities, and context.9

The notion of the third place remains incessantly attractive for researchers and professionals alike, who upon its basis create successive ideas. The fourth place described by Arnault Morisson is an example of such a development of Oldenburg's proposal. In reference to so-called knowledge

economy Morisson argued that the traditional division into the first, second, and third place is being increasingly blurred – boundaries between the first and second place are becoming obliterated (and there comes into being a coliving space); the same is true for those between the second and third place (coworking space), between the first and third place (comingling space), and between all of them, producing the fourth place. The objective of the latter is to support the establishment of contacts, to favour the process of joining forces, and to urge to co-operate, establish direct interactions, and exchange concealed knowledge. ¹⁰

In the opinion of the author of this article the conception of the third place is a point of departure for discussing three museum projects whose joint feature is their realisation outside museum walls. These projects are: Museum Forum (Cracow), Bródno Sculpture Park (Warsaw), and the method of work performed at the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum (Cracow), with particular attention paid to the "Wild" Planty Park project.

Meeting place: Museum Forum

It is much easier to meet in a square-said Katarzyna Bik, curator of Museum Forum, a project of the National Museum in Cracow, while describing its origin. 11 The initiator of the project was Zofia Gołubiew, at the time director of the Museum. Museum Forum is a space in front of the Main Building used for the realisation of artistic conceptions. Today this is a kempt square, but ten years ago, when the project was being inaugurated, its uneven surface was used as a parking lot and apart from cars it featured a statute of Stanisław Wyspiański. In 2009 the Museum organised a debate whose purpose was to test the potential of the square. The event met with great interest and its theme immediately attracted the attention of the media and was pursued for years to come. The discussion focused on the question whether the statue should be moved or merely shifted but, predominantly, it concerned the significance of public space both for the image of the town and its residents.

The year 2010 marked the onset of artistic events at Museum Forum (this was the name given to the square). In the course of eight years the square played host to five large-scale events lasting for a whole season as well as numerous lesser artistic undertakings. This feat was made possible when municipal authorities closed the existing parking lot and erected a new underground one. Prior to digging it up the square was the site of, i.a. *Ice Rink and Centrala Park* designed by the LATALAdesign studio (2013); after the realisation of the investment and re-accessing the square it featured *Labyrinth* by Leon Tarasewicz (2015) and *Graduation Tower* by Robert Kuśmirowski (2017).

The purpose of the space gained by the Museum in front of the entrance to the building was to serve the process of becoming accustomed to art and to encourage visitors to enter the Museum, although the square was also to become simply a place for recreation. Shifting activity to space in front of the building was, in addition, a way of breaking with the tradition of a museum fortress, which the Museum building had been both physically and psychologically. The idea of an artistic project realised in the square emerged



1. Ice rink designed by LATALAdesign studio, 2013, Museum Forum in front of the National Museum in Kraków



2. $\it Centrala Park designed by LATALAdesign studio, 2013, Museum Forum in front of the National Museum in Kraków$



3. Robert Kuśmirowski, *Graduation Tower*, 2017, Museum Forum in front of the National Museum in Kraków

in the course of an evolution of objectives, of which the first was interim and consisted of moving the statue, while successive ones represented, as Bik put it, a course of an educational-propaganda-promotional-advertisement way of thinking. Reaching out to the public turned out to be of key significance as did offering a place for meetings not only focused on art but also non-compulsory events held amidst artworks: Currently, everything takes place here, including children coming to eat lunch or us arriving to meet someone and enjoy a coffee – added Bik.¹²

Testing the museum collection – Bródno Sculpture Park

In 2009 the Targówek District Office in Warsaw turned to the Museum of Modern Art with a proposal to co-operate in creating a Sculpture Park as part of Bródno Park. The initiative of establishing a Sculpture Park was suggested by the artist Paweł Althamer, connected with this district; according to the project the Museum was to perform the role of a supervisor. From the very beginning the project

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4. Jens Haaning, Bródno, 2012, Park Rzeźby na Bródnie w Warszawie

4. Jens Haaning, Bródno, 2012, Bródno Sculpture Park in Warsaw



5. Rirkrit Tiravanija, Bez tytułu (przewrócony domek herbaciany z ekspresem do kawy), 2009, Park Rzeźby na Bródnie w Warszawie

5. Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled (overturned tea house with the coffee maker)*, 2009, Bródno Sculpture Park in Warsaw



6. Paweł Althamer, *Raj*, 2009, Park Rzeźby na Bródnie w Warszawie

6. Paweł Althamer, *The Garden* of Eden, 2009, Bródno Sculpture Park in Warsaw

curator was Sebastian Cichocki. Each year the collection on show in the public park expands due to the addition of a statue. The fact that the latter is not always of a material or permanent character is defined in the project as a *sui generis dynamic art statement concerning the concrete site, time, spatial relations, and people.* ¹³ On the one hand, Sculpture Park is treated by the Museum of Modern Art as an exhibition; on the other hand, it is one of the four permanent localisations of the Museum, which is still waiting for its final seat.

The program conception evolved from a traditional exposition situated outside the Museum to a more experimental project. Its purpose was to test assorted strategies of the presentation and availability of collections in open space. Sculpture Park witnessed the emergence of works, which have become a permanent part of the landscape and a constant element of the image of the district: the *Bródno* inscription by Jens Haaning (2012), *Guardian Angel* by Roman Stańczak (2013), and *overturned*

teahouse by Rirkrit Tiravanija (2009). Other works are invisible, e.g. *To Be Found* – a shattered replica of a Chinese temple vase buried underground by Ai Weiwei (2014), which is to function as a sui generis urban legend, or are envisaged as performances, e.g. Honorata Martin's social sculpture *Domestication* (2015): the artist lived in the park for several weeks and during that time established relations with residents of the district. The park also became a testing ground for the question of authorship and the autonomy of art, so-called useology (putting a work of art to social or political use). *The Garden of Eden* by Paweł Althamer (2009), which initiated the whole project, consisted of planting trees and shrubs, and although this "work" belongs to the Museum the latter does not own the site. *What happens when someone breaks a birch tree*?

Or when we introduce successive plants? Where exactly is this work of art situated, and what are its borders? What will happen if one spring we do not add new plants? Will this mean that the Garden of Eden will no longer be





7. and 8. Wild "Planty" Park, 2016, Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków

(Photo. 1–Photographic Studio, National Museum in Cracow; 2–Archive of the National Museum in Cracow; 3, 7, 8–K. Jagodzińska; 4-6–B. Stawiarski)

there? – asked Cichocki;¹⁴ these are by no means merely rhetorical questions. Despite the temptation to recognize the project as an element of a revitalisation of the district Cichocki accentuated: It never claimed to be unambiguously socially engagée or participatory (...) although it certainly possesses such components and involves assorted groups of residents. From 2016 the Museum joined local discussions concerning changes that were to take place in Bródno Park. Work on sculptures also began to attract different groups, e.g. particular elements of the Bródno People sculpture (2016–2017), conceived by Althamer, were executed in the course of workshops conducted together with assorted persons firmly enrooted in the district.

Awakening the collections – the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum

Asked why the Museum decided to carry out projects outside its walls Director Antoni Bartosz answered right away: For me there is no "inside" or "outside the walls" 16; such a distinction is insignificant for the Museum - working on a collection takes place both in the Museum and in open-air conditions, just as the ethnographic method applied to obtain knowledge about the world and to work with assorted groups and communities is ex definitione field work. Bartosz used a graphic expression: awakening the collections. Objects travel not only for the sake of exhibitions but also to the communities from which they previously arrived at the museum. This was the sense of, e.g. the Social Activists (2018) programme, thanks to which the inhabitants of assorted localities were to enjoy a chance to learn about their heritage, i.a. in the course of meetings held locally for the purpose of presenting objects. The Museum also follows the steps of exhibits introduced into its collection. In 2016 it initiated a research project connected with a nineteenthcentury Siberian collection, 17 which entailed not only the supplementation or correction of Museum inventory data but expanding them by means of vast contextual material and a social component.

Antoni Bartosz admits that work in public space offers a visibility component, which draws attention to the activity of the Museum and is the reason why more people find out about it. Take the example of the realisation of a playground in Planty Park in Cracow, undertaken together with the Management Board of Green Areas. Local residents pointed out the absence of similar playgrounds in the centre of Cracow. In 2015 several wooden animal figures inspired by the ethnographic collection of the Museum – a set of old toys made by suburban masons at the turn of the nineteenth century and those produced by the Cracow Workshops (Warsztaty Krakowskie) - appeared as an experiment in Planty Park. This presentation was part of the Małopolski (Little Poland) Design Week, whose co-organisers included the Museum. The debate held upon this occasion concerned the space of Planty Park and asked whether and in what way could the Park serve the present-day population of Cracow, whether Cracovians are entitled to take part in the creation of the landscape of their town, and how to make wise use of cultural inspirations while designing public space. The playground project was favourably received by the residents and its full version, known as "Wild" Planty Park, composed

of meticulously executed and uniquely shaped wooden figures, was realised the following year. The final conception was the outcome of interactive urban ethno-toys executed thanks to the co-operation of Museum curators, designers, and craftsmen from the environs of Cracow.

Third place outside the museum?

While characterising the third place Oldenburg stressed its casual ambiance and the socialisation taking place within, indicating the possibility of fixed meetings with other permanent regulars as well as the necessity of conducting an informal conversation. In this respect it is truly difficult to place pubs and cafés together with the museum projects described in this article. The conditions of a getaway, leisure, and spending time with others are met, while the remaining ones can, but do not have to exist. The park, the playground, and the urban relaxation zone undoubtedly prove conducive for establishing contacts.

In the case of the National Museum in Cracow taking an art project outside the walls of the Museum seat designated transcending physical limitations and a conspicuous marking of presence (...) in public space. 18 At the same time, it signified reaching for patterns of activity pursued by museums in the West. Here, outdoor presence was to a great extent connected with an image. The crucial component was social - there emerged a meeting place constructed around a work of art or an art project acting as a meeting place (depending on the edition). A skating rink, deck chairs, and benches amidst plants indubitably favour gatherings, leisure, and fun. The social component was not essential at the time of the inauguration of the Bródno Sculpture Park project. From the very onset its centre contains an art composition – a sculpture with a material or conceptual dimension-and associated questions of material quality, autonomy, presence, ownership, and accessibility. On the other hand, the accessibility and deployment of an artwork are directly connected with the presence of the recipient. Sculpture Park turned into a part of Bródno Park, which was a place for recreation already before the project was realised and continues to be such. In turn, "Wild" Planty Park was conceived as a location for fun and socialisation. The Museum did not create a new type of a recreation site but proposed a different image of the traditional playground, introduced into the context of the space and reflecting the character of the Museum collection. All the features listed by Oldenburg can be applied in the case of these projects (perhaps with the exception of the low-profile "Wild" Planty Park), although in this particular instance the status of the third place was not intended by the Sculpture Park's authors or accomplished by the Museum project.

The author of this article is convinced that projects realised outside museum seats are closer to the conception of the third place than those created in museum space. Although the idea of the museum as a temple¹⁹ is increasingly often replaced by that of the museum-forum,²⁰ spending time in a museum – all the more so within the zone of relaxation and not in a showroom – is much more compelling (even if only because it requires crossing the institution's threshold) than remaining outside. Projects selected by the author of the article will, therefore, comprise third places according to

the interpretation proposed by Oldenburg if users approach them predominantly as sites for recreation, entertainment, and socialisation. If, on the other hand, their objective will be "touring", especially while rejecting the social function, then the third place will simply not materialise. But then, analogously, the third place will also not be the pub that we shall frequent simply to quench our thirst, eat a meal or watch a sports event, the café, where we shall only want to drink coffee, or the hairdressing salon, which we patronise predominantly to cut our hair.

In 2005–2006 Leo W. Jeffres, Cheryl C. Bracken, Guowei Jian, and Mary F. Casey conducted research²¹ based on a representative sample of American households, asking respondents to indicate three places in which they seek

interaction. The respondents did not mention museums, but the fact that in this case the third place was defined by users and not by researchers remains essential. This is a signal that the third place does not have to deciphered exclusively within the framework granted to it by Oldenburg.

It is worth attempting to continue research associated with the concept of the third place in Polish museums. On the one hand, this will call for qualitative studies dealing with the public and referring to ways of benefitting from the museum offer (not only in museum seats but also outside their walls); on the other hand, research dedicated to museums conceived as third places within the context of current changes in their functioning, connected with the place of the recipient in museum strategies, will be required.

Przypisy

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