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LIFE AND DEATH OF POLAND'S LANDSCAPE – ARE WE LIVING IN LANDSCAPE “HELL”?

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Abstract

The author's thesis assumes that the degree of landscape degradation in many parts of Poland is so high that the use of the term “landscape hell” is justified. This denotes such a state of visual and aesthetic, structural and functional landscape degradation that leads or has already led to the landscape's death. This condition existed in many areas during the communist period, but now, 34 years after the political transformation and eight years of the development of the “mafia” state, it is also occurring with increasing frequency. Its origin lies in the attitude of some politicians and the public towards space and nature as resources that can be exploited to an extreme extent and that must be subordinated to people. This is due, among others, to the Poles' civilizational lag in relation to many other nations, Polish society's developmental history, and the recurring compensation for economic shortcomings. In the first quarter-century of transformation, the development of consumption, the dominance of economic development criteria, and the politicians' ignorance and bias have introduced phenomena such as strip farm urbanisation, “concreteosis”, architectural “gigantomania”, “urban blight”, “railingiosis”, and “advertosis” into the landscape. After 2015, the above have been overlaid by the landscape-eroding activities of the representatives of the “mafia” state, resulting from, among others, excessive deforestation and tree clearing in open and urban areas, continued operation of the coal-based energy sector, including open-cast mines, river diversions, construction of hydro-technical facilities, mass legalisation of arbitrary construction, and transport infrastructure planning. The various recommendations on landscape conservation, formulated for many years, have, for the most part, not been implemented, despite Poland's ratification of the European Landscape Convention. We can thus gradually kill off more landscape, which will continue to linger in our memories and documents for some time, until eventually, virtual reality becomes the main way of admiring it.

Key words

spatial management, landscape death, landscape “hell”, political transformation, the “mafia” state.

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1. Introduction

Jacek Kaczmarski, the bard of my generation, sang “It's my journey from hell to hell” in “Epitaph for Włodzimierz Wysocki”. This was about a different hell to the one I associated the phrase with, but the journey theme is adequate, i.e., from a communist hell to the mafia state hell. Landscape “hell”, to

paraphrase the words above, is a state of landscape degradation, especially in visual and aesthetic terms, but often also in the structural and functional terms, which leads or has already led to landscape death. Death means that the current landscape is completely different from the landscape that was present a dozen or more years ago (one to several generations back), but most often people who remember the

“old” landscape are still alive and documents from which we can reconstruct its appearance, structure, and processes are still available.

Not every landscape change leads to its death, but there is an increasing combination of degradation factors that – in my opinion – can lead to it. This combination leads to the following results occurring at the same time:

- change in the visual and aesthetic features of the landscapes so that its appearance becomes “repulsive” and unacceptable to the vast majority of the public;
- change in the landscape structure that leads to the loss of its suitability for all or almost all uses by the public;
- change in the mechanisms of landscape functioning that causes irreversible changes during ecological and landscape processes, which consequently negatively affect the course of human functioning and, in extreme cases, completely exclude our functioning.

Extensive areas of dead landscape, in the above sense, were present in Poland during the communist period. These included areas of ecological disaster, such as the Gulf of Gdańsk and its surroundings, part of Upper Silesia, the vicinity of Kraków, and the Legnica-Głogów Copper Belt, identified by A. Kassenberg and C. Rolewicz (1985), and the Jizera Mountains and Sulphur Mines in the Tarnobrzeg area.

The social and economic transformation implemented in Poland after 1989 has contributed to the partial return of a visually acceptable and useful structural and functional landscape but has also been associated with the emergence of new threats to the landscape, which contributed to its degradation elsewhere. I tried to present these reasons a dozen years ago (Kistowski, 2010a) and proposed the term “landscape extermination”, meaning – regarding the original reference to people – the liquidation of Poland’s historic cultural landscape constituting the unique national heritage. The intensification of the negative processes affecting the landscape occurring in the first quarter-century of the Third Republic of Poland since 2015 – after the “Prawo i Sprawiedliwość” [Law and Justice – PiS] party took power – has led to a transition from the landscape’s extermination stage to the death stage, not only with regard to cultural landscapes, but also natural landscapes. The earlier mentioned economic or social reasons, or those arising from a misinterpretation of the concept of sustainability to justify landscape destruction, were supplemented for political, religious, and even psychological reasons, amounting to the acknowledgement of the PiS state as the infallible creator of reality and people as obliged to “manage nature”.

In light of the presented thoughts, it seems reasonable to argue that the state policy pursued between 2015 and 2023 has led to a fatal risk to one of the largest ever Polish landscapes, and that these landscapes have already partly died, and it is difficult to say which part of them, to what extent, and over what time period, can be revived. Referring back to the beginning of this paper, it can be argued that after half a century of the landscape “hell” of World War II and communism, and after a quarter-century of transformation, which sometimes gave hope for a real improvement in the landscape order and quality, there has been a change – owing to the state policy – into a new landscape “hell” since 2015. I will try to confirm this thesis in the following sections by providing an overview of the historical origins and contemporary causes of the described processes and their effects, as well as by assessing the implementation of measures leading to landscape improvements proposed in 2010 and the current situation.

2. Methodological foundations

2.1. The research methods

The term “landscape” (*lantscaf*) appeared in the Old German language in the eighth century, as a translation of the Latin term *regio*, and denoted a spatial unit and the population inhabiting it (Schmithüsen, 1964, 1970). From the outset, it encompassed both the area’s natural elements and the people, along with the effects of their activities. Over time, it was given an increasingly physiognomic meaning, including under the influence of Flemish art in the 15th and 16th centuries (Chudzikowski, 1957). In scientific terms, the term began to be used in the mid-18th century, and since then, its popularity – despite variations – has not waned. In the early days, Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) laid the most important foundations for a scientific account of the landscape (Wulf, 2015). Its hallmark was a broad view of the landscape, encompassing natural and anthropogenic elements (people and their creations), and the relationship between them, regarding which, different approaches emerged and were variously assessed.

These approaches are the subject of research into environmentalism in its broadest sense, placed at the interface between natural and social sciences, the history of which is brilliantly described in the monograph by P. Macnaghten and J. Urry (1998). These authors place the spectrum of the most popular philosophical approaches to human treatment of the natural environment, including the landscape, between the views of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and John Lock (1632–1704). Considering Hobbes’

Enlightenment contractualism, nature in its pre-social state represents “a state of loneliness, poverty, ugliness, a brutal and low state” and is, therefore, essentially worthless without people. Thus, the basis of a civilised society should be to “overcome inherent disadvantages”, i.e., “adapt” the environment and landscape to the people’s needs, regardless of the cost or situation.

In contrast, according to Lock, the founder of empiricism and liberalism, pre-human nature was characterised by «a state of tranquillity, goodwill, mutual aid and cooperation», and the development of civilised societies should consist in “organising ourselves around ‘natural laws’”, and therefore in adapting our activities to the natural and landscape conditions.

The first approach formed the basis for the formation of systems of thought that consider

interference in nature and within nature (including the landscape) to be as deliberate (even “natural”) as possible. These systems assume the inevitability of struggle, selfishness, and the “sacredness” of physical interference in nature, which is deemed an extension of nature and the natural order (Macnaghten, Urry, 1998). This approach seems analogous to the way of thinking and acting of most representatives of the political forces ruling Poland in 2015–2023. The opposite approach has underpinned the emergence of contemporary movements for environmental and landscape conservation, and the knowledge concerning them, although the spectrum of attitudes and directions of related activities and research is extremely broad (Fig. 1). This approach was the basis for the concept of environmental ethics, the history and main currents of which were exhaustively presented by Z. Piątek (1998).

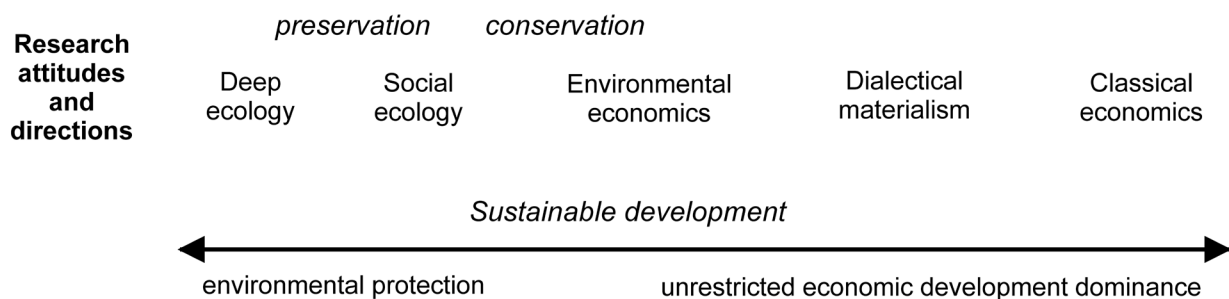


Fig. 1. Spectrum of basic human approaches to the environment and landscape.
Source: Kistowski, 2001, simplified.

Ironically, modern environmentalism was born in England and Scotland, regions of the UK where the Industrial Revolution took place over the course of three generations at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. In addition to socio-economic changes, it has also led to profound environmental changes, including the transformation and death of landscapes. The desire to return to nature and to live in harmony with the conditions it creates was one important response to processes detrimental to the environment and landscape.

As a result, some of the most original cultural landscapes, described by Orwell in the 1930s with regard to southern England as the most nursed landscapes in the world (Orwell, 1937), were formed there. This situation is the result of a combination of historical factors, including ownership and property issues and an insular location, which allowed it to avoid most wartime conflicts from taking place in its area, as well as activities towards nature and landscape conservation on social, design, and scientific grounds. Examples of such activities include the following:

- the establishment of the Commons Preservation Society in 1865, believed to be the first national society of nature lovers, whose aim was to protect

London’s public areas against land development and to provide recreational areas for the city’s residents;

- the publication of the garden city concept by Ebenezer Howard in 1898 (Howard, 1902) and the establishment of the Garden Cities Association, which promoted the concept, a year later;
- the rise of the anti-traction movement, opposing the degradation of the English landscape by 6,000 km of ongoing and planned power grids in 1926;
- discussions and disputes in the 1940s and 1950s among British spatial planners over three competing concepts of rural spatial development, based on the dominance of agricultural development, recreation, or landscape conservation.

The original concept of temporality of the landscape was also proposed in Britain at the end of the 20th century by T. Ingold (1993a, 1993b). In his view, “the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in doing so, have left there something of themselves” (Ingold, 1993b, p. 152).

Accordingly, the landscape of habitation is to be understood neither as nature, culture, or mind, nor as

matter. "The landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them" (Ingold, 1993b, p. 156). Unlike most definitions of landscape used in the natural sciences, this one has mainly social connotations, derived from psychology, sociology, and anthropology. It shows not only the inextricable link between the concept of landscape and the people who shape it, but also the impact of landscape on our health and well-being, especially in psychological terms, just as the energy and material properties of the environment affect our health in physical terms.

Despite all the baggage of social experiences of how the environment and landscape affect us, it seems that people still prefer an anthropocentric approach to landscape, as opposed to a "naturocentric" approach, although a slow shift in views is taking place.

In light of T. O'Riordan's (1995) research, a particular development took place between 1989 and 1995, the period when the concept of sustainable development was at its most popular, when the proportions of those who were sceptical about environmental adaptability were changing in favour of those who believed in "the ability of science, market forces and efficient management to protect the environment".

Regardless of the wide range of opinions on landscape management methods, an example of which is shown in Table 1, based on P. Macnaghten's (1995) research into the rural recreation principles expressed by groups with different preferences, the rural landscapes of England and Scotland are still maintained in a condition commonly assessed as harmonious and aesthetically pleasing. This is due, among other things, to the UK's proper spatial management law (Baranowski, 2020).

Tab. 1. Opinions of respondents with different preferences on selected leisure implementation principles in rural England.

Leisure implementation principles	Advocates of economic development	Advocates of quiet recreation & beauty admiration	Advocates of freedom & escape to rural areas
1. Farmers allowed to charge for access	more people for	less people for	less people for
2. General rights to roam in the countryside	-	less people for	more people for
3. Car use should be unrestricted in the countryside	more people for	less people for	more people for
4. New developments permitted in the countryside	more people for	less people for	more people for
5. Noisy sports permitted in the countryside	more people for	less people for	more people for

Source: Macnaghten (1995), modified

The British model of landscape maintenance, especially in rural and suburban areas, is not unique and universal – even in European countries – but certainly many of its elements could also be used in Poland (Fig. 2).

3. Socio-economic transformation and landscape degradation in Poland

When travelling around Europe in the post-1990 period, we tended to see differences between landscape quality and spatial order in Poland and in western and northern European countries, obviously in favour of the latter. On the other hand, in the post-communist countries of eastern Europe until a decade or so ago, and even more recently, we often saw manifestations of landscape degradation or death rarely seen in Poland, leading us to conclude that our landscapes were "luckier" than in other countries in the region (Fig. 3).

However, the processes that have taken place in the Polish space in the last 35 years have led to a verification of this opinion. During this period, the 45-year legacy of real socialism imprinted on Poland's landscape (including environmental contamination resulting in the extinction of forests and aquatic life, transformations related to mineral exploitation, especially open-cast mining, "cube" land development, state-owned housing estates, sub-standard summer resorts, and large-scale farming) was compounded by the effects of social and economic transformation, which led to the successive extermination of many landscapes, and to their death in some cases.

These phenomena intensified after 2015. I wrote about the sources of landscape degradation (Kistowski, 2010a) and methods of stopping it (Kistowski, 2010b, 2010c, 2012) in the first two decades of the Third Republic of Poland a dozen years ago and pointed out the causes and consequences of the worsening situation (Fig. 4).



Fig. 2. Examples of harmony cultural landscapes in Scotland: A. Ruins of 300-years old Ruthven Barracks in rural landscapes, B. Urban and suburban landscapes near Stirling (2006). Source: Kistowski.



Fig. 3. Examples of landscape “hell” in the post-communist countries of Europe from 2005–2019: A. Romania, Roma settlement in Radovan (2005), B. Romania, centre of the mining town of Targu Jiu (2005), C. Romania, a littered river near Petroes (2008), D. Ukraine, power grids in Crimea (2010), E. Ukraine, a post-communist settlement on the edge of Odessa (2018), F. Albania, a view of a junkyard from the windows of a hotel near Tirana (2019). Source: Kistowski.

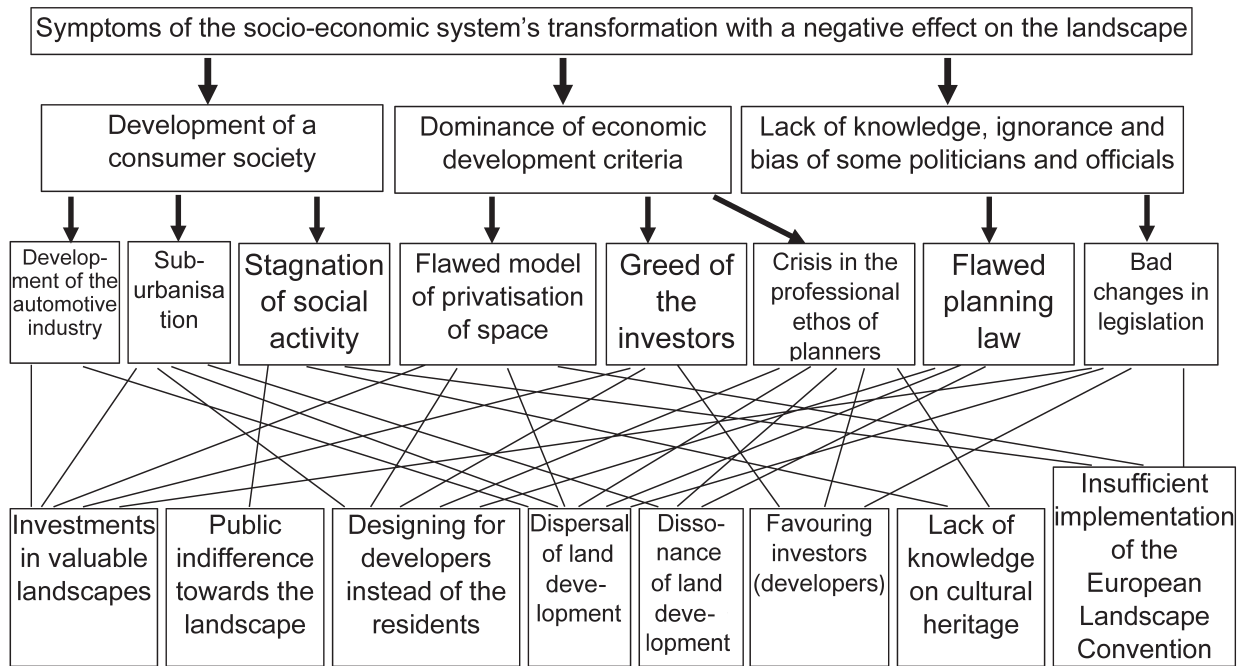


Fig. 4. Chain of causes and consequences of landscape extermination in Poland.

Source: Kistowski, (2010a), altered.

The general groups of causes include the following:

- the development of a consumer society,
- the dominance of economic development criteria over environmental and social criteria,
- the lack of knowledge, ignorance and bias of some politicians and officials.

The processes taking place in the Polish landscape after 1989 seem to indicate that the causes are not only contemporary socio-economic ones, but they also derive from several centuries of our society's development, especially the last 300 years. The current conditions have been overlaid by a legacy of landscape approaches resulting from the societal development processes, including the following:

- rural communities until the mid-20th century (mainly peasant, agricultural communities), characterised by a limited attachment to the land in aesthetic and emotional terms, due to the prevailing very low standard of living, resulting first from the restrictions on land ownership during the serfdom period, and, in the second half of the 19th and 20th centuries, mainly derived from the scarcity of its resources and economic crises; poverty and the constant struggle for survival limited the ability to take care of the surrounding landscape (Leszczyński, 2020; Pobłocki, 2021);
- noble, magnate and then landowner communities, mainly in the 18th and 19th centuries, whose aim was to maximise personal gain from land and serfs or hired labour; care for their own residences and their immediate surroundings was accompanied by a lack of concern for the vast majority of the space beyond and usually inhabited by the poor

strata of society (Beauvois, 2021) – obviously with commendable exceptions;

- Polish society after World War I and World War II in the Second Republic of Poland and the People's Republic of Poland, when – after periods of partitioning and war traumas leading to widespread societal impoverishment, as well as the extermination of a significant part of the better educated and active people – the “getting by” process prevailed in the enabling “niches”, but the majority of society lived at a low economic level, which marginalised the problems of caring for nature and the landscape (Leder, 2014; Kuciel-Frydryszak, 2023; Janik (ed.), 2023).

This legacy was accompanied by the political transformation taking place since 1989, when – after a short-lived (lasting until the mid-1990s at the most) prominence of the issue of nature and landscape conservation, and even attempts to steer Poland onto the tracks of the so-called eco-social market economy (Michnowski, 1995), in the hierarchy of objectives, the following occurred:

- firstly, society was making up for the economic deprivation of the communist era, or even over centuries, which, in the 21st century, has moved into a phase of over-consumption, which, on the one hand has a negative impact on the landscape (investments “consuming space”), and on the other one, reduces the issues of landscape design and protection to a subordinate position in the hierarchy of needs and objectives, also reducing social activity in support of these objectives;
- just when it seemed that we were approaching the level of societies that were beginning to treat

other determinants of the quality of life (including landscape quality) as at least equivalent to economic well-being, the so-called “United Right” took over the government in 2015 and transformed Poland into a party-mafia state within 8 years; it was modelled in many aspects – including the approach to the environment and landscape – on the “tradition” of the People’s Republic of Poland, often amplifying the harmfulness of these patterns as a result of activating the mechanisms of syndicalist turbo-capitalism; the result was an accelerated obliteration of landscapes, sometimes leading to their death, in the sense given earlier.

As a result of the above factors, since 1990, and especially in the current century, unfavourable changes have been observed in Poland’s landscape, among which the following can be mentioned (examples in Fig. 5):

- the widespread dispersion of land development in open areas (rural and suburban), occurring throughout the country, but particularly troublesome in the southern parts of the country (e.g. the Carpathian Foothills), where land development is present as far as the eye can reach, especially in areas with appealing landscapes, despite the “good neighbourhood” regulations, among others (Górka, 2016);
- so-called strip farm urbanisation, occurring in the suburbs of larger urban agglomerations in the form of rows of terraced or detached houses, usually single-family houses, completely alien to the open landscape, resulting in its extreme geometrisation (Górka, 2018);
- so-called “concreteosis”, i.e. a change in the spatial microstructure and mesostructure of centres, usually of small and medium-sized cities, and especially of markets and squares, involving the removal of historical elements, above all, tall and medium greenery, and their replacement by mostly sealed surfaces (cobblestone, concrete, asphalt); this concept can be extended to all manifestations of the replacement of biologically active surfaces by artificially sealed ground (Mencwel, 2020);
- architectural “gigantomania”, manifested in the location of buildings completely unadapted to the local context, resulting in the killing off of the semi-natural and harmonious cultural landscape still present in many areas; spectacular examples of such buildings are the “castles” in Stobnica near Oborniki and the much older one in Łapalice near Kartuzy, although monumentalism is also present in residential, service, office (including ecclesiastical) and other buildings;
- “urban blight” in the open landscape, involving the location of housing estates or other facilities (serving, for example, livestock farming) that are completely out of harmony with their surroundings in an undeveloped area; examples in recent years include the housing estate built among farmland in Witoszów Dolny near Świdnica;
- “posteoosis” combined with “railingeoosis”, i.e. erection of posts and railings with high density along roads outside towns and in developed areas with the purpose of protecting pedestrians or cyclists from contact with cars and dangerous terrain, or preventing parking; the excessive length of such railings (often many kilometres long), combined with blatant aesthetics (e.g. bright yellow colours or white and red stripes), result in visual pollution of the landscape.

The above list obviously does not exhaust the symptoms of landscape degradation, which can be supplemented with, for example, “advertosis”, already defined in a pejorative sense in the Great Dictionary of the Polish Language (Wielki..., n.d.) as “the use of too many advertisements in public space”, or the excessive technical development of seashores that destroys their landscape.

A quarter-century of landscape degradation resulting from state transformation has been compounded by the landscape-eating policy pursued by the central administration since 2015. This was part of a broader anti-nature policy, the aim of which – in addition to a series of unnecessary, but highly environmentally damaging and landscape-killing projects – was to prove the “superiority of humans over nature” (as if we were not part of nature), in line with the philosophy of T. Hobbes outlined earlier, already known from many totalitarian states, led by communist Russia and China. Ironically, the party glorifying, in its view, “living in harmony with nature”, was pursuing a plan to destroy and “fight” nature in society-nature conflicts. This plan especially assumed the following:

- excessive deforestation in relation to needs and natural conditions across the country, with the notorious cases of deforestation in the Białowieża Forest (resulting in the CJEU Judgment of the Court (Grand Chamber) of 17 April 2018, ECLI:EU:C:2018:255) and the former Carpathian Forest; these actions which kill parts of forests with high natural beauty are brilliantly monitored by the Forests and Citizens initiative (<https://lasyiobywatele/>) and NGOs (Pracownia na Rzecz Wszystkich Istot, 2021);
- mass clearing of old and ecologically valuable trees, avenues, and hedges, among others, as permitted by law, especially during the first seven months of 2017, when the amendment to the Act of December 16, 2016, changing the Nature Protection Act and the Forest Act (Ustawa..., 2016), the so-called lex Szyszko, was in force; it is estimated that several million trees were cleared during this period, mainly on private land, but the



Fig. 5. Examples of Polish landscape “hell” from the 21st century: A. The dispersal of buildings in the Highlands (Jura) near Kraków (2023), B. Strip farm urbanisation, Zgorzała near Warsaw (2022), C. Architectural gigantomania – a “castle” in Łapalice on the edge of the Kashubian Landscape Park (2000), D. “Urban ulcer” near Świdnica (2023), E. Railingeosis in the area of the Czorsztyn Reservoir (2019), F. The Vistula Split canal (2023), G. Validated sub-standard recreational land development in the “Słupia” Valley Landscape Park (2023). Source: A, C, F: Kistowski, B: Norbi Zarabisty, <https://www.architekturaibiznes.pl/o-horrorze-przestrzennym-przedmiesc,16770.html>, D: D. Nowaczyński, Swidnica24.pl, E: Tygodnik Podhalański, 2019 https://twitter.com/24tp_pl/status/1175021896942964739/photo/1, G: Pomeranian Landscape Parks Administration

- clearing continues after the introduction of more restrictive legislation and may have involved several times that number;
- the maintenance and even expansion of the coal-based, especially brown coal, energy sector, which is linked to an increase in coal mining in 2020–2022; open-pit mines constitute one of the main causes of landscape death, which is often not properly reactivated after mining; admittedly, some mines (mainly in the Greater Poland and the Bełchatów area) are to be closed by the end of the 2020s, but Turów is expected to operate for 20 more years, and the smallest of the mines in Sieniawa for up to 40 more years;
 - the implementation and plans for river realignment and other hydro-technical projects, including a return to the concept of creating waterfalls on the lower Vistula, and even ideas for the construction of waterways from the Baltic to the Black Sea, including a canal through the Lublin region, connecting the Vistula river with the Bug river; the “culmination” of these activities of the ruling party was the construction of a canal through the Vistula Spit in 2022 and the adoption of the Oder River Revitalisation Act of 13 July 2023 (Ustawa..., 2023), which was widely criticised by scientific circles and pro-environmental organisations due to the environmental risks (including river realignment) posed by its provisions;
 - landscape degradation by unlawfully located buildings, of which there are hundreds of thousands in Poland, including residential, holiday, allotment and sometimes service buildings, which may be legalised since September 2020 under the so-called simplified procedure, based on the Act of 13 February 2020, amending the Building Law and certain acts (Ustawa..., 2020), if at least 20 years have elapsed since completing the construction; the legalisation can be carried out regardless of other regulations, including those on nature and landscape conservation, which already contributes to landscape degradation, especially in regions with high tourist attractiveness and in suburban zones;
 - plans for the construction of the Central Communication Port (CPK) and the railways leading to it, based on the Act of 10 May 2018 on the Central Communication Port (Obwieszczenie..., 2023) and the Act of 22 July 2022 on streamlining the Central Communication Port investment process (Ustawa..., 2022); this has already resulted in the purchase of part of the land at undervalued prices and, in the future, threatens – even if most of the plans are not implemented – to enfranchise the ruling party's control of this property, and introduce inappropriate civil engineering investments.

The listed activities are only the most glaring examples of the impact on the landscape in recent years. There are many more, such as the planned construction of the Lubiatowo-Kopalino nuclear power plant and associated power lines, and the magnesium-potassium salt mine near Puck, which will lead to the degradation of the northern Pomeranian landscape.

A review of the causes and consequences of the abuse of Poland's landscape after 1989 indicates that the term of landscape death is adequate in many cases. Suburban developments stretching for kilometres will probably last a few generations, as will hydrotechnical and geotechnical developments, and concrete town centres, and may then be replaced by even more intensive land development. Forests and open-pit mines will, after one or two generations, be able to return to a condition that sometimes mimics the landscape's previous appearance but are unlikely ever to regain the structure and processes that existed before their degradation. Thus, having annihilated the primary landscapes, we are successively reducing the extent of natural and semi-natural landscapes, as well as harmonious cultural landscapes.

4. Opportunities and risks for landscape conservation in Poland

Experience to date shows the overwhelming predominance of factors favouring landscape destruction over those offering an opportunity to preserve it. A dozen years ago (Kistowski, 2010a), when diagnosing landscape “extermination”, I made some proposals that could prevent it to some extent. After nearly a decade and a half, a review of the implementation of those indications unfortunately leads to pessimistic conclusions. Most of them have not been implemented, and some have been introduced to limited extent, making nearly all recommendations put forward at the time still valid. Thus,

- there has been a definite lack of persistence (by administrations, organisations, educators) in shaping sustainable models of public behaviour towards the landscape;
- there has been a widespread lack of attention to the continuity and compactness of land development and the containment of the development of landscape dominant elements and valuable landscape interiors;
- large-scale landscape compositions have been revitalised to an insufficient extent, although excellent examples of such work can be found, such as the Valley of Palaces and Gardens in the Cultural Park of the Jelenia Góra Valley;
- some changes have been introduced – albeit too

- late – in the landscape conservation legislation (the so-called Landscape Act of 24 April 2015 (Ustawa..., 2015)) and the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 11 January 2019 on landscape audit preparation (Rozporządzenie..., 2019), which – 23 years after the drafting of the European Landscape Convention – are still far too weak to ensure landscape conservation; in 2023, their effects have amounted to the adoption of 60 so-called advertising resolutions by municipalities and 2 landscape audits by voivodeships;
- no comprehensive, national programme (policy) for landscape conservation, financed by EU funds, has been drafted, with some being blocked for 3 years during the drafting of this paper; due to the anti-democratic policy of the ruling party; previous attempts to formulate such a policy (Myga-Piątek, Nita, 2015) have not been implemented; unfortunately, also in the earlier plans for the expenditure of these funds, objectives that could have served the protection of the landscape were underpinned by objectives that could lead to its degradation or are neutral towards it, as can be seen in the critical analysis of the National Recovery Plan; a landscape audit can give an informative basis for action, but it is too weak a tool to cause widespread positive effects on the landscape;
 - it seems that the spatial planning crisis, which stems both from the existing legislation and from the excessive commercialisation of spatial development planning, has still not been overcome; profit seems to prevail over the conceptual freshness of projects favouring sustainable development; some municipalities bureaucratise the process by setting up their own planning offices, implementing their policies which are not always in line with the views of the majority of residents; there are obviously exceptions even in this regard;
 - instead of refreshing the local self-government administration structures more frequently, which have a significant impact on spatial development and thus on the landscape, their term of office was extended from 4 to 5 years, and the economic and political goals of the ruling party caused the first extended term of office to last as long as 5 and a half years; generational and mental changes in the local self-governments, which can raise hopes for the protection of local landscapes, are progressing too slowly;
 - the media did not intensify the promotion of the need to protect the landscape and did not go beyond popularising its natural and cultural attractions, but, mainly for tourist purposes, some media, including the so-called public outlets, even pursued a policy that favoured anti-landscape and

anti-nature activities, and promoted landscape transformation;

- cooperation between specialists from different disciplines (e.g. geographers, architects, sociologists) dealing with landscape conservation in research and design terms has been insufficient, although it has been attempted more extensively, e.g., during the drafting of the landscape audit methodology; disciplines still operate in their “bubbles” using hermetic language despite the organisation of quite a few conferences and training courses on landscape conservation in the last decade.

A review of the situation over the past few years introduces a climate of further uncertainty and risk. On the one hand, in the 126 landscape parks, occupying 8.4% of the country and constituting important areas for landscape conservation managed by voivodeships, the situation has significantly improved since 2010, e.g., the number of staff has increased by a third, and the applicable conservation plans have gone from 26 to 60, although the legal protection instruments possessed by the parks are quite limited. On the other hand, the landscape audits of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Wielkopolskie Voivodeships adopted so far (Budzyńska et al., 2023; Kamiński et al., 2023) cover only 15% of the area of landscape parks in priority areas for landscape conservation, where the relevant instruments are stronger, which seems to be a rather low percentage. At the same time, there are constant manifestations of architectural and urban aggression, such as a giant hotel located on a dune 100 m from the Baltic coast in Pobierowo and not much further from a nature reserve. The institution that should coordinate landscape conservation in Poland, the former National Secretariat of the European Landscape Convention at the General Directorate for Environmental Protection (GDOŚ), announced a poster competition as part of the so-called Landscape Day (20 October) and awarded the author of an embroidered tapestry depicting a building resembling a pigsty on a livestock farm with the inscription “appreciate locality”. For me, this verdict is the ultimate symbol of the reversal of meaning by the ruling party since 2015 and its total ignorance, providing further confirmation of the electoral choices made by the public in October 2023, as it led us into landscape “hell” or its vestibule.

However, none of the material tools for improving the quality of the landscape will fulfil their purpose if the approach to it does not change in our minds. It is not enough to change a small part of society – it has to be a broad transformation that is reflected in everyday action. Knowledge, education, and legislation, which are important determinants of this process, have so far not reached a level in

Poland that would lead to optimism in this respect and provide an opportunity for significant change within one or two generations. Although this is not exactly the kind of landscape the authors of the book titled “Landscape Outline. Polish Countryside vs. the Extermination of Jews” (Engelking, Grabowski (eds.), 2011) had in mind, it is difficult to understand why a part of the Polish society still keeps an almost non-existent landscape of shtetls, fairs, synagogues and Jewish districts in their minds, the traces of which are preserved mainly in necropolises, while another part of the nation is completely unaware of it. Generations that remember rural landscapes with haystacks, wells with poles and thatched cottages,

which can now be seen in open-air museums and in situ in illustrations and documents, are passing away. But, according to Ingold's view, the landscape is temporary and exists as long as it persists in human memory and not necessarily in reality. If we fail to save landscapes regarded as beautiful and bucolic today, then perhaps – by preserving them in memory and databases – we will soon recreate them (after all, this is already happening) in a virtual reality that will merge with the real one. On the other hand, however, it is to be hoped that passing generations of landscape experts (Lipińska, 2011; Chmielewski, 2012; Wolski, 2020) will find successors more effective than their predecessors.

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