
THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE VOLHYNIAN MASSACRE AND THE MONUMENT OF KAROL ŚWIERCZEWSKI IN JABŁONKI AS EXAMPLES OF CONTROVERSIAL TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN THE PODKARPACKIE VOIVODESHIP

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Keywords:

- controversial tourism,
- tourist attraction,
- Volhynian
- Massacre,
- reconstruction,
- Karol Świerczewski,
- Jabłonki.

Abstract:

Introduction: The aim of the article was to present and analyse two tourist attractions in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, which could be regarded as examples of controversial tourism in the region.

Materials and methods: Certain results of historical research concerning two different tourist attractions were analysed. One of them was the reconstruction of the Volhynian Massacre of 1943 organized by the Association of Historical Reconstruction “X D.O.C” in Przemyśl in 2013. The other was Karol Świerczewski monument in Jabłonki (Baligród district). Different resource materials were investigated, such as history books on the Volhynian Massacre and about the life of Karol Świerczewski, and later press articles and Internet resources discussing the topics of the reconstruction of the massacre and different problems connected with the fact that the monument in Jabłonki is regarded as a tourist destination.

Results and conclusions: The research made it possible to state that both tourist attractions presented in the article are controversial and they could be discussed further if it is advisable to organize trips to those destinations.

There are many tourist attractions in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, but some of them are regarded as controversial. They include different places, events, buildings or constructions, for example monuments or historical reconstructions. According to B. Kruczek, who has quoted Lundberg, a tourist attraction is “anything that makes tourists interested in it”. Another definition cited by Kruczek is a definition used by Goodall for the first time. This definition describes a tourist attraction as “a special, even unique, place, for example, a historical monument, events like festivals or sports events” (Kruczek 2005: 35-36). Following the definitions, historical reconstructions are also tourist attractions. Such reconstructions are also consistent with the definitions of cultural tourism. Polish definitions of cultural tourism first appeared in the 1990s, when this kind of tourism was thought of as high culture. Those definitions paid a great deal of attention, among the others, to historical aspects. As Medlik views it, cultural tourism is “tourism id driven by cultural motivations, such as trips to places of artistic and historical value” (Medlik 1995: 81-82).

One of the leading organizations which deals with historical reconstruction in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship is the Association of Historical Reconstruction “X D.O.C”, founded in 2007. So far they have organized and shown a few big performances to the public: *Barbarossa Operation – the Battle of Przemyśl* (2007), *Przemyśl – September of 1939* (2008), *Inhumane Land* (2010), *Volhynia 1943. The victims’ calling for remembrance, not for*

revenge (2013) and *The Battle of Studzianki* (2014) (psrhwebfabryka 2015). The first controversial reconstruction which aroused a heated discussion was *Inhumane Land* prepared for the 70th anniversary of the deportation of Poles to Siberia. Three years later another performance raised discussions about it to the national level. The reconstruction *Volhynia 1943. The victims' calling for remembrance, not for revenge* was regarded the most controversial production of all reconstruction the Association in Przemyśl had already prepared since the Association was founded.

Before the Second World War the eastern part of the Second Polish Republic consisted of the provinces: Lvov Voivodeship, Nowogrodek Voivodeship, Polesie Voivodeship, Stanisławow Voivodeship, Tarnopol Voivodeship, Wilno Voivodeship and Volhynia Voivodeship. In the Volhynia Voivodeship there were 1145 Polish villages and settlements before 1943. Poles constituted around 17% of the population there. The relationship between Polish and Ukrainian people was very tensed in the area in spite of a formal agreement between moderate Ukrainian politicians and Polish authorities. The Ukrainian community claimed that their expectations were not realized. Furthermore, different activities aimed at making the position of the Polish community stronger did not improve the whole situation. The Ukrainian antagonisms towards Polish people grew and there was an increase in the support for Ukrainian nationalistic attitude, especially for the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) (“Tygodnik Powszechny” 2009).

Before the Second World War the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and its armed forces Ukrainian Military Organization (Ukrainian acronym: UWO) intensified its nationalistic activities. The ideology of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists was supervised by Ewhen Konowaleć who lived in Berlin and Stepan Bandera on the spot. It was filled with enormous amount of hatred of Polish people. After 1935 the leaders of the organization were hoping that the Germans would conquer Poland and it would allow Ukrainians to restore the independent Ukraine (Roszkowski 1991: 69 and 77). The hostility of the Ukrainian community towards Polish people became even stronger after repressions and arrests of Ukrainian nationalistic activists. In addition, the situation got worse after the outbreak of the Second World War and the Soviet involvement into the war (Tygodnik Powszechny” 2009). Despite the fact that Stepan Bandera was taken to a Nazi concentration camp in the middle of 1941 (where he was kept until the end of the war), Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists continued its activity forming military troops whose one of the main goals was to fight with Polish people. Their major aim was to remove Poles from the territories where Ukrainians planned to create their own country. The end of 1942 marked the beginning of murders of Polish people and their whole families. The first mass murder was committed on 9 of February 1943 in the village of Parośla (sarnenski district) where 149 people were killed in a brutal axe attack by Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists units. They had respect neither for the sex not for the age of the people. Historians suppose that during an OUN-B conference (so called Bandera fraction controlled by Stepan Bandera) which took place in March 1943, they discussed the issue of elimination of Polish people from Volhynia. Concentrated attacks on Poles started in March 1943 and were intensified in the following month (Newsweek, 2013a). Soon there were more and more cruel murders of Poles. It is regarded that the apogee was reached on 11 of July 1943. The day is called “Volhynia Bloody Sunday” because as many as 99 places were attacked on that day, mostly people praying in churches (historykon 2015).

The memories of people who survived show how tragic was everything that occurred in Volhynia. One of the survivors was Władysław Hermaszewski whose memoirs were published in 1998. The author described, among the others, Massacre of Lipnik. The night of 24-25 of July 1943 was a terrible experience. Missiles flashed over the village causing the roofs to catch fire. Most buildings got on fire shortly. There were piercing shouts of injured

and burnt people everywhere. When it seemed that it was the worst situation possible, “[...] the assault of the wild Bandera murderers began. Shouting *Kanaryki, kanaryki hurray* and *wpered na Lachiw, smert Lacham i ryzat Lachiw*¹ a great number of attackers surrounding the village stood up and run. They were armed with axes, pitchforks and knives motivated by obsessive hatred and a desire to kill. They wanted to satisfy their desires by seizing the surviving people’s belongings. [...] The manslaughter began.” (Hermaszewski 1998: 71-72). The author of the memoirs survived the massacre. When he returned to Lipnik on the same day, together with some other people, he saw a horrifying scene: “We were walking towards our village which was dying out, seeing dead or almost dead victims of the murder. The view of a drainage ditch was the most terrifying one. It was like a bloodbath. At the bottom of the ditch there were dozens of bloody corpses with their heads smashed by bullets or axes. We saw the bodies of children, women and old people [...]. Half-burnt bodies of adult people and children and distended bodies of horses, cattle and swine emerged from the site of fire [...], and there were victims of that terrible manslaughter all around in the ashes and smoke. [...]. This is what our compatriots, Ukrainians, did as their patriotic duty for the glory of Samostijna².” (Hermaszewski 1998: 75-76).

The truths about what happened in the Eastern Borderlands in 1943 and 1944 in the Second Republic of Poland was hidden for many years which resulted in an order restricting publication identifying the events. Nowadays the Volhynian crime is outright described as anti-Polish ethnic cleansing of genocide nature conducted by Ukrainian nationalists. Officially, it is the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists OUN-B (Bandera fraction) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army who were responsible for the crime. The criminal action encompassed the Volhynia and also Eastern Galicia which included Lvov Voivodship, Stanisławow Voivodship and Tarnopol Voivodeship. Moreover, the Volhynian crime also refers to some parts of voivodships bordering the Volhynia: Lublin Voivodship in the west and Polesie Voivodeship in the north. The massacres took place from 1943 until 1945. Ukrainian organizations responsible for the genocide in the Volhynia described the actions, in their formal documentation, as planned extermination of the Polish population. Now it is estimated that the crime took a heavy toll: around 100 000 victims. Out of this amount 40 000–60 000 were Poles who lived in the Volhynia and the rest was murdered in the Eastern Galicia and the land of Chełm (zbrodniawolynska 2015). Today’s common belief states that Ukrainian extreme nationalists have blood on their hands, especially those who belonged to Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and Ukrainian Insurgent Army. According to another conventional wisdom “the condemnation of those crimes by official Ukrainian bodies and by democratic representatives of the Ukrainian society would remove the main obstacle out of the way leading to the rapprochement between Poles and Ukrainians. Both opinions are frequently expresses views nowadays (Żupański 2005: 314).

On 20 of July 2013 in Radymno (Podkarpackie Voivodship) a very unique but controversial event took place. It was the reconstruction of the Volhynian Massacre entitled *Volhynia 1943. The victims’ calling for remembrance, not for revenge*. The reconstruction aroused a great deal of emotions both among the residents of the Podkarpackie Voivodship and the tourists who came from other regions of Poland. As Newsweek saw the reconstruction there were around 5 000 spectators watching the event (“Newsweek” 2013b). The aim of the authors who prepared the reconstruction of the Volhynian Massacre was to convey the message about those dramatic historical events to contemporary Poles whose knowledge about the events in the Eastern Borderland, in the view of the authors, was very limited. The leader of the association, Mirosław Majkowski, said in February 2013 that the subject of the Volhynian crime was still kept in silence, the Parliament had never condemned the culprits

¹ Ukrainian colloquial language encouraging to kill Poles.

² The Ukrainian name for „independent Ukraine”

and the Ukrainians had never apologised for the crimes in the past. In addition, he expressed his anger that in Ukraine they set up statutes of the people responsible for issuing orders to conduct ethnic cleansings. Majkowski said that showing historical truth and commemorating the victims of the genocide were two important reasons for showing the reconstruction in the town of Radymno. The initiatives were supported by the mayor of Radymno stating that if people had liked the previous reconstruction (an open-air performance reconstructing *The battle of Przemyśl 1941* was regarded the best attraction of Touristic Fair which took place on 6-7 of May 2006 in Przemyśl), he would agree to another similar event and he would permit to build a dummy of a village in Radymno. He secured the financial resources in the municipality budget. In March 2013 Majkowski proudly announced that the reconstruction would be prepared not only by Radymno residents but also people from other places and some representatives from Slovakia and the Czech Republic. When asked about the form of the reconstruction, he emphasised how essential the light, sound and special effects were, but he did not want to reveal too many details. He said that everyone who wanted to see how they would show the cruelty, should come to Radymno in July 2013. He added that spectators expecting a sanguinary event, would be disappointed. The initiative was backed up by some local authorities, like for example, the president of Stalowa Wola, Adam Szlęzak, who expressed his indignation because of the fact that there were attempts to discourage the organizers from showing the reconstruction of the massacre. In his opinion, lies or silence did not help build constructive politics so he supported depicting even the most painful truth ("Nowiny" 2013a).

The idea of the Volhynian massacre reconstruction was very controversial from the very beginning. Professor Andrzej Paczkowski (a historian and employee of the Institute of National Remembrance) did not even try to hide his astonishment when he learned about the reconstruction. He explained that it was possible to reconstruct battles, castle sieges or everyday life, but he was not able to accept a reconstruction of a slaughter. He compared that idea to reconstructing the burning of corpses in crematoria or murder at Jedwabne place and he appealed not to astound people with macabre. The floor was also taken by Piotr Tyma, the leader of the Association of Ukrainians in Poland who believed that the intentions were absurd. He was concerned that the reconstruction of a slaughter "was only mind games and triggering negative emotions" and it had nothing in common with explaining historical truth which was the mentioned by the organizers ("Gazeta Wyborcza" 2013a). A new wave of criticism rose in the media just before the day of the reconstruction. Adam Leszczyński, a journalist from "Gazeta Wyborcza", described what was going to happen as "history turned into a masquerade" and "pseudohistorical play". He justified his opinion by the fact that the Volhynian Slaughter was a national catastrophe which took a heavy toll of thousands of victims. Some witnesses of the dramatic events were still alive. According to Leszczyński, that type of reconstruction could turn that tragic anniversary into a picnic. Moreover, the journalist stated that: „A reconstruction in which Ukrainians play the roles of bloodthirsty monsters would reverberate in Ukraine and it would not facilitate reconciliation between Poland and its eastern neighbouring state" ("Gazeta Wyborcza" 2013b). The Association of Ukrainians in Poland expressed their protest as well. The president of the association issued a statement to the organizers giving his negative opinion about the reconstruction and he said: "It is an outrageous way to arise negative emotions in the Polish society and abusing the tragedy. Which took place during the second world war in Volhynia, of Poles and Ukrainians and also representatives of other nations" ("Dziennik" 2013).

Despite numerous protests the reconstruction was performed in Radymno on 20 of July 2013. There were a few thousands of spectators who came from different parts of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship and also people who came from Malopolskie and Lubelskie Voivodeships. The performance started with an almost idyllic picture of everyday activities:

people coming back from fields, women doing different jobs around their houses and children playing in playgrounds. When it got dark, it became quiet in the village. The silence was broken by a sudden, unexpected attack of Bandera men and Ukrainian peasants. They committed genocide with axes, scythes and pitchforks. Afterwards, the whole village was on fire. The performance was made more impressive by a narrative telling the story of the Volhynian Massacre and religious songs. The spectators were able to realize the seriousness of the moment also thanks to emotional soundtrack by Krzesimir Dębski. A great number of people who saw the performance *Volhynia 1943. The victims' calling for remembrance, not for revenge* expressed their opinions that it was a necessary initiative. Some people were asked to describe their feelings and impressions after the show and they said: "I was mostly touched when I realized that what I have just seen here had really happened", "I am glad that there were some brave people who decided to prepare this performance and showed the events from the past", "I have been crying", "The performance was powerful and I have been moved by it" and "This is the honour to the victims" (wpolityce.pl 2015). The people responsible for the reconstruction appealed to the Association of Ukrainians in Poland to condemn the crimes committed by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. Majkowski, the leader of the association, expressed his opinion that the barriers of political correctness had been broken and the Association, which was against the reconstruction from the very beginning, did not accept the request. Majkowski said that if they officially condemned the crimes, it would have a negative impact on the relationship between the two neighbouring countries: Poland and Ukraine ("Gazeta Rzeszów" 2013). Jan Pisuliński, a historian from the University of Rzeszow, was also against using reconstructions to present crimes. According to him, tragedies like the Volhynian Massacre should not be a subject to any reconstruction (polskatimes.pl 2015).

Another example of a controversial tourist attraction is the monument in Jabłonki. It is a memorial monument devoted to Karol Świerczewski (callsign *Walter*), who has caused a controversy for many years, especially after the year 1989. Marta Tychmanowicz (a historian working for the magazine "Focus") has a strong opinion about Karol Świerczewski and her view could be the quintessence of a dispute whether Świerczewski should be on the list of tourist attractions in the Podkarpacki region. Marta Tychmanowicz said that: "The biography of Świerczewski could be truly understood after 1989. Only then did it verify his membership in the club of steadfast heroes who did not bow to the bullets" (wiadomości.wp 2015). The publications about Karol Świerczewski which appeared in the times of Polish People's Republic presented the general in a completely different way than the materials published after 1989. One of the biographies entitled General Karol Świerczewski. The great patriot and a follower of internationalism (based on the materials issued during a scientific session which took place in Krosno in 1985) gives in a detailed way the reasons why Świerczewski went to Moscow when he was young, his work for communists, joining the Red Army in the 1930s, his participation in the Spanish Civil War and the military career as a Red Army general during the Second World War. The biography emphasised his role as a founder of the Polish People's Army. The book glorified his military experience, devotion, professionalism, organizational abilities, initiative, bravery and the respect he received from soldiers and other citizens. Another aspect discussed in the biography referred to the role he performed in the fight against the organised resistance and planning the operations against different groups regarded as "bandits" and "the enemy of the state". The general believed that the fight against armed groups in the Rzeszów and Kraków Voivodships were not effective, so he decided to control those areas in person. During an inspection in Baligród (now the Podkarpackie Voivodship, formerly Rzeszów Voivodship) on 28 of March 1947 he issued an order of a trip to Cisna where he wanted to check the local military unit. On the way to Cisna, the convoy which included Świerczewski's car ran into an ambush created by the units of Ukrainian

Insurgent Army. Świerczewski died from bullets which were fired at him (Ambrozowicz 1985: 50-66).

A booklet entitled *About General Świerczewski. A Great Pole, a Soldier, a Revolutionist* was written in a similar tone. It was published much earlier than the previous one published by The Ministry of National Defence. The booklet contains a lot of statements describing Świerczewski as a national hero worshipped by his people, a model to be followed by the Polish citizens, a big supporter Polish-Soviet friendship, an ardent patriot and a follower of internationalism (Szleyen 1951: 7 and 21). Such evaluation of Karol Świerczewski made people erect monuments of the general in the whole People's Republic. One of those places is a village of Jabłonki. At first the place where Walter was deadly shot was commemorated by an obelisk in 1957 and then, in 1962 a monument was unveiled. This is the monument which can be seen until these days. It is a granite monument with an eagle at the top. The eagle is made of a thick sheet metal. In the central part of the monument there is a relief showing the image of Walter. At the bottom there is a stone with a four-line inscription written by the poet, Władysław Broniewski: "They do not sing songs about everyone, but this name will be extolled. It can be raised in a legend above history" (twojebieszczady 2015). In the times of Polish People's Republic the monument was an obligatory place for most school trips going to the Bieszczady Mountains. In the same time a tourist trail named after Świerczewski was marked in the Bieszczady Mountains. It was included in the list of so called liberation trails commemorating places where Polish people fought for national and social independence and where national heroes were to be remembered and respected (Kresek 1979: 28).

After 1989 the knowledge about Karol Świerczewski was revised. Now the Institute of National Remembrance describes Świerczewski as a Soviet general who took part, among the others, in the October (Bolshevik) Revolution and the war against Poland in 1920. Next, as a Red Army soldier he performed different functions. During the Second World War he was the second-in-command of the Polish Army in the Soviet Union. As a commander he made numerous mistakes, he frequently argued with his subordinates and he abused alcohol. Those were the reasons for his tragic defeats and the loss of many soldiers. The Institute of National Remembrance states that even though the general wore a Polish army uniform for a certain period of time, he was always a Soviet officer. The Institute also draws attention to the fact that Świerczewski signed death warrants for "political crimes" which included, for example, the Home Army affiliation. The list available on the Institute's website contains 27 names executed after Świerczewski had signed their death warrants (ipn 2015). When the information was revealed to the public, a lot of Polish people changed their attitude toward Karol Świerczewski.

According to many tourists who go to the Bieszczady Mountains every year and pass Jabłonki, the monument still attracts a big number of visitors. It can be observed that different kinds of tourists go to see the monument: visitors in coaches, school trips, different kinds of organized groups and individual travellers like walkers, bikers or people coming by cars. The fact that the monument is still popular is also confirmed by positive opinions which can be read on different websites. One of them gives the information that sometimes in the summer time the area around the monument is as crowded as Krakowskie Przedmieście Royal Avenue in Warsaw (nowiny24.pl 2015). Another site quotes an opinion of an Internet user who suggests going with one's family to Jabłonki. One of the arguments for are some bungalows overlooking the monument of Karol Świerczewski in a beautiful scenery (miastodzieci.pl 2015). As Stanisław Siwak, the reporter for a daily newspaper "Nowiny", says Świerczewski is still a hero for left-wing parties. They say he deserves honour and respect because his services served to the country. Siwak adds that the inhabitants of the Baligród commune, where the monument is located, defend the monument fiercely saying that it is a great tourist attraction which makes the commune well-known not only in Poland, but also abroad. In

addition, local people give a lot of economic arguments stating that this is a really good business. They are convinced that because many trips which visit the monument go to local eating places, and some even book accommodation in Baligród commune (“Nowiny” 2013b). Meanwhile, a lot of people – journalists, politicians, tourists, Internet users and others – have debates on the validity of the monument and advertising it as a tourist attraction.

A really heated discussion started some time before 31 of March 2012 because some patriotic and historic celebrations were planned on that day to celebrate the 65-th death anniversary of Karol Świerczewski. The event was organized by “A Better Tomorrow Association” under “Memory and Reconciliation as essential elements for a Polish-Ukrainian dialogue” (esanok.pl 2015). On the day before the celebrations, Wojciech Zatwarnicki, a press photographer and a journalist for the daily newspaper “Nowiny”, criticised the event. One of the reasons why he did not like it was the idea of playing the national anthem of the Polish Republic at the point dedicated to an officer “who wrote a page in the Polish history as a man devoted to Stalin”. The journalist also quoted the spokesman of the Marshal’s Office in Rzeszów who gave a negative opinion about the upcoming event due to the fact that the celebrations were not planned in pursuance of earlier tenets. According to them, there was going to be a meeting as an element in the process of Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation at the death anniversary of the soldiers who died at Bystre village, both Polish and Ukrainian ones (“Nowiny” 2012b). On the same occasion, Andrzej Romaniak a historian from the Historical Museum in Sanok (Podkarpackie Voivodeship) was asked to make a comment about the situation. He was interviewed by the Internet portal esanok and he said that the only thing Karol Świerczewski and the Polish nature had in common was his place of birth, nothing more. Talking about the general’s biography Romaniak drew attention to his devotion and faithfulness for the Soviet Union. He emphasized the fact that Świerczewski was a poor commander and his addiction to alcohol often made him take wrong decisions. During the second World War when he was Vice Commander in the First Polish Army (Berling’s Army) he also showed how weak his leadership skills were. After the Second Polish Army was created, he became its Commander which was commented by Romaniak in the words “for this army’s misfortune ”as this army was defeated by the Germans in 1945. He added that Świerczewski signed death warrants for the Home Army’s soldiers so he had blood on his hands. The interviewer asked if celebrations for the general’s death anniversary should ever be planned and the historian definitely said that is was not appropriate. He justified his opinion saying that Świerczewski executed the orders from Moscow, he was a member of the Communist International and he helped to introduce communism in Poland. In his opinion, there were many other heroes and patriots who should be honoured but as for Świerczewski – people should know the truth about his life and activities and he should not be memorialized too much (youtube.pl 2015).

On the celebration day, 31 of March 2012, a group of people appeared in Jabłonki. Their aim was to show their protest and indignation against this kind of events and against glorifying Karol Świerczewski. The protesters brought banners with messages like “The General – a murderer and a drunkard” and “Go away with glorifying communism”. They also wanted to prevent playing the national anthem in front of the monument (“Nowiny” 2012b). The recording made by the Internet portal esanok.pl shows a row in Jabłonki. The protesters are singing “Świerczewski was a murderer” and “Communism – go away”. The protesters explained that they were not against the monument but against organizing patriotic events in this place. During the row, the defenders of “Walter” also shouted to show their opinions and they used expressions like “Who taught you this? What school did you attend?”, “They have told you lots of lies” and “What did the man do to you?” (esanok.pl 2015).

The survey done by the newspaper “Gazeta Wyborcza” can be a good conclusion in this case. In 2009 the journalists asked Polish people about their remembrance of the Second

World War. The people surveyed answered that Karol Świerczewski was the person Poland should be ashamed of ("Gazeta Wyborcza" 2009). Thus, it is still a matter to be discussed what kind of tourist attraction the monument in Jabłonki should be. What knowledge should the tourists going to the place where Świerczewski died have, especially the young generation?

Travelling to see the places which are considered by at least some part of the societies as controversial is a very common phenomenon. Tourists are attracted by places which are associated with a sensation and a specific type of fame. It is often hard to give an unambiguous and objective assessment of this kind of places because an aspect which is controversial for some people, may have a different meaning to other people. The attractions described in the article follow this way of thinking. On the one hand, events like the reconstruction of the Volhynian Massacre and the monument in Jabłonki receive positive regard and they are associated with educational and cultural values. On the other hand however, they evoke indignation, heated discussion and protests. For these reasons they can be definitely described as controversial tourist attractions.

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