

Museums as Landscape Activists

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The article discusses the issue of the “extended museum”, raising questions about how museums become active actors in current topical discussions on the shape of cities, what their role is in the processes of city management and how this engagement in external spaces affects the overall mission of museums. The point of reference is the ICOM Resolution on the responsibility of museums towards landscape adopted in 2016, which offered museums legitimacy in taking actions with regard to their environment, beyond museum walls. On the grounds of four case studies of Polish museums I present strategies whereby relations between the museum, authorities and communities are negotiated (regarding the protection of post-industrial and Second World War heritage, the contextualisation of socialist heritage and the struggle for greenery).

Keywords: extended museum, museum activism, landscape, ICOM Resolution

Many authors argue that museums have the potential to change the world¹ and that they should take advantage of their position and start acting. Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell sadly conclude that “Raising museum voices in opposition to anything is traditionally out of character”.² Regardless the type, an increasing number of museums follow the example of city activists – sometimes having them on board as staff members – speak up and go into action. Museum activism refers to various issues of social justice; however, it may also be directed at the physical presence of museums in the landscape. It regards a museum that is not only confined to its walls, but also a museum in the environment where the museum building is part of the visual landscape of the city or nature. In such case the museum becomes an actor – just as any other resident of a city – with the right to voice one’s concern about the value of the area, both for the common good and its own benefit. The article discusses the issue of the “extended museum” which finds itself in a position to safeguard its landscape. The point of reference is the ICOM Resolution on the responsibility of museums towards landscape adopted in 2016. It gave museums legitimacy in voicing their concerns and taking actions. On the grounds of four case studies of Polish museums I present various strategies

¹ In the most recent volume edited by Adele Chynoweth, Bernadette Lynch, Klaus Petersen and Sarah Smed the authors argue for the “useful museum”. See CHYNOWETH, Adele, LYNCH, Bernadette, PETERSEN, Klaus and SMED, Sarah (eds). *Museums and Social Change: challenging the unhelpful museum*. New York: Routledge, 2020.

² JANES, Robert S. and SANDELL, Richard. Posterity has arrived: The necessary emergence of museum activism. In: Robert S. Janes and Richard Sandell (eds). *Museum Activism*. London & New York: Routledge, 2019, p. 18.

whereby relations between the museum, authorities and communities are negotiated. My aim is to discuss how museums become active actors in current topical discussions on the cityscape, what their role is in the processes of city management and how this engagement in external spaces affects the overall mission of museums. My position is that the changing paradigm of museums, which is reflected in new roles and responsibilities that museums have taken on in recent decades, is interconnected with a proactive philosophy towards diverse societal issues. Thus museums shaping new paths are attracted by this activist model.

Museum activism as a way to stay relevant

In 2019 Janes and Sandell edited a major volume titled *Museum Activism*, which is a direct call to action for museums. The authors articulate that museums need a new narrative that will “embrace many issues and many stories, including reducing wealth inequality, protecting Indigenous people’s rights, curbing population growth, eliminating the use of fossil fuels, reversing the loss of biodiversity and eliminating wasteful consumption”.³ These points belong to the domain of social justice, well-being and ecology, and are all as timely and topical as ever. However, museum activism also embraces areas of urban planning, architecture and heritage, which should by no means be less important in the management of cities. Janes and Sandell voice “a need for a new breed of museum workers and museums, grounded in the consciousness of the world around them, along with the need to work in a less museum-centred way”.⁴ I will address this call, referring to the physical space around museums and their care for cultural heritage, the natural environment and social/community life.

Museums as active agents of change are not a new phenomenon. The impact of museums on well-being, health and the development of social capital have already been studied in the late 1990s. In 2013 the Museum Association in the UK launched a campaign entitled Museums Change Lives which endeavoured to increase the social impact of museums. Museums address various social and political issues – for example climate change, ecology, crime issues, migration and health problems – by discussing them in exhibitions and public programmes, and working specifically with certain groups and communities.

Often, when delicate or controversial social and political agendas are in question and when an activist stance is considered, the role of a museum as a “safe place” returns. Should a museum get involved? Is there more to gain or more to lose? Maria Vlachou explicitly says that to be relevant for the twenty-first century, museums should not be

safe, anodyne or comfortable but rather clear about their mission, the reason why they exist, and capable of creating the appropriate space for an honest dialogue; one that might help societies become more willing to listen, without fear and perhaps also with greater empathy.⁵

Concerns and limitations that often result from the funding and organisational structure may lead to an illusionary form of activism. In the majority of cases (at least in Poland, where museum directors are dependent on state, regional or municipal governments) it is rhetorical to ask whether a museum can criticise the policy of the local government which provides its funding and organisational structure. Bernadette Lynch differentiates between performative

³ JANES and SANDELL, *Posterity has arrived...*, p. 7.

⁴ JANES and SANDELL, *Posterity has arrived...*, p. 17.

⁵ VLACHOU, Maria. Dividing issues and mission-driven activism: Museum responses to migration policies and the refugee crisis. In: Robert S. Janes and Richard Sandell (eds). *Museum Activism*. London & New York: Routledge, 2019, p. 54.

and operational activism, where the former is just for “show”, while the latter means “working in collaboration with people to *do* something”.⁶ Not every museum director, in any case, under any circumstances and at any cost decides to act to demonstrate a museum’s relevance to today’s issues, problems, challenges or expectations, many choosing illusional neutrality over a clear statement.

Museums in their landscape

Museum activism is rooted in the “new museology”, preoccupied with the relation between a museum and its environment – nature and communities. The connection between the two worlds became the subject of discussions in the museum world particularly in the 1960s and 1970s;⁷ however, various new types of museums started to emerge as early as the late nineteenth century – heimatmuseums, open-air museums, then folk museums and industrial museums, and finally community museums and ecomuseums.

The “new museology” emerged as the second museum revolution (1960–1980) characterised by Peter Van Mensch, where – as he put it – “the leading force is the wish to develop museums as social institutions with political agendas”.⁸ The benchmark in codifying the new museology was the Declaration of Quebec: Basic Principles for a New Museology, adopted in 1984, with the instrumental role of Pierre Mayrand. In his view the declaration

merely reaffirms the social mission of the museum as a new point of departure and the primacy of this function over the traditional museum functions: conservation, buildings, objects and the public.⁹

The new museology reversed previous museum hierarchies: the public and community are placed at the centre of museum activity (contrary to collections before) and knowledge is assimilated from the outside (instead of the previous dissemination from the inside). According to Hugues de Varine, who characterised the movement in the 1980s,

The new type of museum could be described as essentially a cultural process, identified with local community (population), on a specific territory, using the common heritage as a resource for development, as opposed to the more classical museum, an institution characterized by a collection, in a building, for a public of visitors.¹⁰

Among responses to the ideas of new museology was the ecomuseum – a term coined by de Varine for the French Minister for the Environment who first used it in 1971. According to the 2016 Milan cooperation charter: Ecomuseums and cultural landscape,

Ecomuseums consider themselves as participatory processes that recognize, manage and protect the local heritage in order to facilitate a sustainable social, environmental and economic development. They are specific projects through which to reconnect techniques, cultures, productions and resources of a

⁶ LYNCH, Bernadette. “I’m gonna do something”: Moving beyond talk in the museum. In: Robert S. Janes and Richard Sandell (eds). *Museum Activism*. Robert S. Janes and Richard Sandell (eds). London & New York: Routledge, 2019, p. 118.

⁷ See DE VARINE, Hugues. Ecomuseum or community museum? 25 years of applied research in museology and development. In: *Nordisk Museologi* 2, 1996, pp. 21–26.

⁸ VAN MENSCH, Peter. Magpies on Mount Helicon. In: M. Schärer (ed.). *Museum and Community*. ICOFOM Study Series 25, 1995, p. 133.

⁹ MAYRAND, Pierre. The New Museology Proclaimed. In: *Museum International*, 261-264, 2015, p. 116.

¹⁰ DE VARINE, Ecomuseum..., pp. 24–25.

homogeneous territory so as to relate to the cultural heritage of the area. They develop creative and inclusive practices aimed at the cultural growth of the local communities, based on the active participation of people and the cooperation of organizations and associations.¹¹

Although I will not discuss ecomuseums in this article, I believe their holistic character and interconnectedness should be a source of reference for various types of museums, and certainly it is for a handful of museums having the activist approach towards their landscape, which are discussed below.

The term “landscape” has a broad scope in definitions adopted by international institutions; however, it is often intuitively understood in museum practice. The European Landscape Convention adopted by the Council of Europe in 2000 understands landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”, and most importantly it states that “the landscape is a key element of individual and social well-being and that its protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone”.¹² Another important context for my discussion in the article regards the historic urban landscape. The Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape adopted by UNESCO in 2011 defines it as “the urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of ‘historic centre’ or ‘ensemble’ to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting”. Apart from tangible elements this context includes “land use patterns and spatial organization, perceptions and visual relationships ... social and cultural practices and values, economic processes and the intangible dimensions of heritage as related to diversity and identity”.¹³ Although the HUL approach has been promoted largely among properties inscribed on the World Heritage List, it is not limited to them.

Museums safeguarding their landscape – ICOM Resolution as a means for legitimacy

Connections and relations between museums, areas and people, which have been addressed within the broad umbrella of “new museology” and a changing approach towards landscape – including the isolation of the historic urban landscape as a separate category – led ICOM to adopt in 2016 at its General Assembly a resolution regarding “The Responsibility of Museums Towards Landscape”. The document stresses that “Museums are part of the landscape. They collect tangible and intangible testimonials linked to the environment. The collections forming part of their heritage cannot be explained without the landscape.” Based on that, ICOM recommends that:

Museums extend their mission from a legal and operational point of view and manage buildings and sites of cultural landscape as “extended museums”, offering enhanced protection and accessibility to such heritage in closed relationship with communities.

Museums contribute not only to the knowledge of the values of cultural

¹¹ RIVA, Raffaella (ed.). *Ecomuseums and cultural landscapes: State of the art and future prospects*. Maggioli Editore, 2017, p. 403.

¹² COUNCIL OF EUROPE. *European Landscape Convention*. Florence. European Treaty Series – No. 176, 2000.

¹³ UNESCO. *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, including a glossary of definitions*, 2011, accessed July 26th, 2020, http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=48857&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

landscapes, but also to the development of symbolic frameworks that determine them, so that the notion of cultural landscape becomes an instrument for the assessment of what needs to be protected, enhanced and handed on to future generations, and what will go instead questioned, criticized and modified.¹⁴

This resolution goes in line with the changing social roles and responsibilities of museums. Alberto Garlandini argues that

Museum collections cannot be explained and interpreted without considering the landscapes in which they are located and, conversely, landscapes cannot be recognised and valued without the help of museum collections. Like landscapes, museums are made up of relations between places and spaces, artefacts and people, physical evidence and symbols.¹⁵

Referring to this bond, museum-landscape, and the call for action and the legitimisation of actions taken by museums to protect cultural landscapes, I investigate strategies in which museums, feeling responsible for their context, took protection measures which derive from the ICOM Resolution.

Strategies to negotiate relations between museums and their landscape

I selected four museums representing various types, located in urban areas, having different histories and raising different issues, that have adopted an active approach towards their landscape. Muzeum Śląskie in Katowice raised the alarm to protect its post-industrial context from a new housing development approved for construction right behind the museum plot. The Museum of Podgórze in Kraków struggles for greenery and leisure space under the railway junction that neighbours the museum. The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw contextualises the socialist heritage of the Plac Defilad (Parade Square) and negotiates the historically sensitive centre of the city.¹⁶ And finally POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw adds prestige to the civic action of saving and bringing back to the city the historic Waliców Street townhouses located in the former Jewish ghetto. The negotiations are still ongoing in three case studies, while in the fourth one the museum lost its battle to safeguard the landscape. All the case studies are informative of issues and challenges that museums meet, and of positions and actions that they take.

The choice of Polish museums is not coincidental. The subject of the extended museum and the implications of the ICOM Resolution were widely debated in museological circles in Poland at the conferences on “Planning an extended museum” organised by the Museum of King Jan III’s Palace at Wilanów jointly with ICOM committees in 2017 and 2018. Those discussions, followed by conference proceedings, gave the subject substantial recognition.

This investigation of museums working in an activist way to safeguard their landscape is part of my wider research project entitled “Participation and the Post-Museum”. The analysis

¹⁴ ICOM. Resolutions Adopted by ICOM’s 31st General Assembly 2016 Milan, accessed July 26th, 2020, https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOMs-Resolutions_2016_Eng.pdf

¹⁵ GARLANDINI, Alberto. New Museums for New Social Challenges: “Extended museums” facing UNESCO’s 2015 Recommendation on Museums and ICOM’s 2016 Resolution on the Responsibility of Museums Towards Landscapes. In: Dorota Folga-Januszewska (ed.). *Extended Museum in Its Milieu*. Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas; Warszawa: Muzeum Palacu Króla Jana III w Wilanowie, 2018, p. 25.

¹⁶ Activities taken on by the Museum Śląskie and the Museum of Podgórze towards their landscape were discussed in a concise way in the article JAGODZIŃSKA, Katarzyna and TUTAK, Melania. Responsibility of Museums Towards Landscape: Discussion based on case studies from Katowice, Kraków and Warsaw. In: *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Etnograficzne* 48, 2020, pp. 141–158.

of case studies is based on numerous study visits to those museums (2018–2020) and a series of interviews with museum directors, curators, project managers, and – depending on the case study – museum consultants, architects and representatives of the community.

Raising an alarm to protect the post-industrial context of a museum: Muzeum Śląskie in Katowice and a new housing estate

In 2015 the newly built Muzeum Śląskie was opened in Katowice.¹⁷ It is a regional museum of Upper Silesia in southern Poland and represents the type of an encyclopaedic museum, encompassing collections of art, history, archaeology, ethnology, photography, non-professional art, industrial history and the Centre for Polish Stage and Set Design. Since its inception in 1929 the museum was housed in temporary buildings. In 1939 it was just about to move into the newly built edifice when the Nazis liquidated the museum and demolished the building. After reactivation in 1984 an attempt to build the museum according to a new architectural project failed due to a lack of funds. A new prospect for a new location appeared in 2003. The regional government, which operates the museum, acquired a deactivated “Katowice” Coal Mine as a result of a land swap with the intention of adapting it to become the museum. The site is centrally located in the city, within walking distance from the university and the main commercial streets.

The international architectural competition that was announced in 2006 brought an undisputable winner (no second prize was awarded) – Riegler Riewe Architekten from Graz. The architects approached the site with great respect proposing minimalist interventions above ground and thus yielding to the existing post-industrial architecture. The new construction was mostly hidden underground, including all exhibition halls and conference rooms, while above ground the architects placed white glass cubes which function as skylights and ventilation, as well as the administration building. This way the historic red brick mine buildings are confronted only with seven minimalist “glass boxes”. The jury commended the project especially for its symbolic value that addresses the mining identity of the region. The justification stressed that “The descent to the surface of the Museum under the ground emphasises the connection of its collections with the mining history of Silesia, and the place of the black treasure hidden deep in the earth is occupied by treasures of culture and memory”.¹⁸ The mine shaft hoisting tower “Warszawa II”, a symbol of the new museum, has served as a viewing platform since the museum’s opening; the former machine room of the shaft, clothing storehouse, carpentry and bathhouse buildings were converted into exhibition spaces, a restaurant and performance space, while the remaining nine buildings are still in the process of revitalisation.

Together with the museum and two adjoining developments, the National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra and the International Congress Centre, these form the Cultural Zone – a new brand of the city and the region signifying a transition from heavy industry to new technologies, education and culture. It is the biggest and most costly project regarding culture in Silesia.

The industrial history of the region is one of the main subjects addressed by the museum in its programme (e.g., through large scale site-specific artworks commissioned from the most renowned contemporary artists, the cyclical conference “Industria. Non-obvious contexts”

¹⁷ The history and context of the museum presented according to JAGODZIŃSKA, Katarzyna. *Museums and Centers of Contemporary Art in Central Europe After 1989*. Transl. Carolyn C. Guile. London & New York: Routledge, 2020.

¹⁸ MUZEUM ŚLĄSKIE. Press release: Mamy projekt nowego Muzeum Śląskiego. June 15th, 2007.

initiated in 2018 and the major Biennale of Industria launched in 2019). It should not be surprising, then, that in the face of danger the museum as guardian of the site adopted an active attitude.

In 2016 the private developer TDJ Estate announced plans to build a real-estate complex of residential blocks located on a vast wasteland right behind the museum. Not the fact that the area would be developed, but the height of the new development alarmed the museum – the first four buildings are to be of twelve stories (built on a two-storey carpark), and the remaining four, in a second line, eighteen stories. As soon as the director of the Muzeum Śląskie, Alicja Knast, saw the designs, at the beginning of 2018, she initiated a public discussion about urban planning for this district and the city of Katowice at large, and the role of cultural heritage in the process of change. She argued in a video promoted via the museum's Twitter feed that the former coal mine, today's museum complex, constitutes "a certain symbolic frame, the cultural landscape of this city and *pars pro toto* of the cultural landscape of this region" and the new investment will simply cover it¹⁹ or rather offer an unwanted background.

Knast called for a debate. Open meetings were held in the museum and a major discussion was organised by the mayor's office as a result of a series of articles in the regional daily newspaper. All efforts, however, only proved the lack of understanding of cultural heritage arguments and in effect the museum remained alone in this struggle. The head architect of the estate, Przemysław Łukasik, maintained that the buildings would constitute a distant background²⁰ and to prove it he presented visualisations of the museum with the blocks behind. Knast in turn argued that the blocks would obstruct the view of the historic architecture of the mine from several key points in the city centre, ones not selected by the architect, and she based her opinion on the "Study of the landscape protection of the Muzeum Śląskie in Katowice complex" which had been commissioned by the museum from the West Pomeranian University of Technology in Szczecin. The study offered hard data and visual material presenting the relation of heights between the residential blocks and the museum. It clearly demonstrates that the blocks will, indeed, be invasive as far as the vistas towards the mine from the city centre are concerned.

City officials supported the vision of the developer to build the dense high-rise residential district and turned down the arguments that the post-industrial architecture of the complex (which symbolically stands for the wealth of the region) requires additional protection. Similarly, the circle of architects does not share this concern for the post-industrial heritage. In their view the city should expand, also at the cost of old architecture. Łukasik said, "The museum is a democratic space, which in my understanding should not be separated by a protection zone... Because what to protect against, against people, the city or urban architecture?"²¹

In the discussion Knast proposed to consider lowering the height of the buildings in favour of density. The area would still develop, which is also in the interest of the museum, but not at the cost of the context of cultural heritage. Only then, as she points out, would the buildings not dominate the cityscape, but "the investor, it seems, aims to shape the city centre according to his vision, with the quiet permission of the city authorities".²² It is not only the floor space

¹⁹ TWITTER FEED OF THE MUZEUM ŚLĄSKIE. Appeal to prevent the launch of large developments in the immediate vicinity of the Culture Zone and the Silesian Museum, February 21st, 2018.

²⁰ JAGODZIŃSKA, Katarzyna. Muzeum broni postindustrialnego krajobrazu. In: *Architektura & Biznes* 6, 2019: 149.

²¹ JAGODZIŃSKA, Muzeum broni..., p. 150.

²² JAGODZIŃSKA, Muzeum broni..., p. 151.

of the apartments that will be monetised, but also the view of the Culture Zone.

Since the exchange of arguments between the museum, developer and architect did not bring any consensus, only the city was in a position to impose limitations on the new development. Simultaneously with the design process, city officials were finalising the regulations of the local spatial development plan for this district, and the museum lobbied to introduce height restrictions to the area neighbouring the museum complex – unsuccessfully, as the draft document presented for compulsory civic consultations in early 2019, and finally adopted in June 2020, sanctions high-rise building in the area.

Knast pointed out that citizens of Katowice have a low level of agency and that the dialogue between city officials and citizens is, indeed, illusory. No activist association expressed any interest in this struggle, similarly to local residents. The regional authorities, that own the land and operate the museum, did not participate in this discussion with the city and developer, and so neither did the other two institutions in the Culture Zone. The only support, apart from some media coverage (including my major article in an architecture magazine published in June 2019), were the letters sent by museum directors and leaders of heritage and architecture organisations.



Fig. 1: *Muzeum Śląskie in Katowice seen from a distance – new glass cubes are visible on the right, viewing platform in the centre and historic coal mine buildings on the left. The photo was taken before the construction of the blocks began – nothing obstructs the background.*

Photo: K. Jagodzińska.

Struggle for greenery: Museum of Podgórze in Kraków and park under the railway junction

In 2018 a new local museum was opened in Kraków – the Museum of Podgórze, a branch of the Museum of Kraków, which is a major museum in the city. Until 1915 Podgórze was an independent city neighbouring Kraków on the right bank of Vistula river, and then the two cities merged together. Podgórze has grown considerably over the decades, today its core part located close to the river is known as Old Podgórze, and the former industrial part undergoing dynamic revitalisation is called Zabłocie. In 2003 the Podgórze History House (part of the Podgórze Cultural Centre) was opened in Old Podgórze, headed by enthusiastic activist Melania Tutak. She ran this tiny institution as an open house for the local community. Over time the formative energy grew around this place – people brought artefacts, shared stories and participated in building and running the programme. Together with the local association PODGORZE.PL, especially its president Pawel Kubisztal, she lobbied in favour of creating a new museum in the district. It soon proved to be impossible to establish a new institution, but after almost ten years they managed to convince the city authorities to establish a new branch of the city museum. The grassroots history of this museum is unique in Kraków and not very common on Polish

soil. It is often labelled the participatory branch of the Museum of Kraków.

The museum is located in the historical St Benedict Inn, at the intersection of busy roads, by a tram stop and overground railway station on the one side, and adjacent to some wasteland below the railway flyover which brutally disfigured the area in 2015–2017. The building had been dilapidated for decades and as a new museum it was brought back to the city and the local residents. This context predetermined thinking about the role the museum can play in the neighbourhood. The idea of creating a park in Podgórze was born in the winter of 2016 during a visit to the construction site. Tutak recalls,

I was curious what was happening in the neighbourhood. I looked behind the fence and saw that there was a gigantic space torn out of the earth, which, as it turned out later, stretches out to the Schindler's Factory. I thought then that this is a brilliant place for the green surroundings of the museum and that no one will fight for it, because there is only us.²³

The following months were filled with preparations for the opening of the new museum, but the idea was always in the back of the mind.

From the very beginning, the Museum of Podgórze engaged its neighbours in joint actions, so it is not surprising that it endeavoured to meet local associations present in the district to get to know each other before the museum was opened to the public. It turned out that the topic of land development under the railway flyover is in everyone's interest. Four entities, the museum and three non-governmental organisations (the PODGORZE.PL Association, the SOS Zabłocie group and the Fundacja Czasu Wolnego), formed an informal Grupa Pod Łącznicą (Group at the Railway Flyover) and the matter gained momentum. Subsequent local consultations gathered all interested parties – the residents, representatives of the railway PKP PLK, the City Green Board, the then Municipal Infrastructure and Transport Board, the vice mayor of the city responsible for urban infrastructure, and city and district councillors. Everyone agreed that this space must be reclaimed for the city.

The development is possible due to the ongoing modernisation of the E30 railway line on the Kraków Główny Towarowy – Rudzice section, under which flyovers, new bridges and railway stations are being built. The three-kilometre Park under the Flyovers (working name) will consist of two parts: one in the district of Grzegórzki on the left bank of the river and the other in Podgórze on the right bank, and the two will be connected by a pedestrian and bike bridge on the Vistula. The Grzegórzki part was already in the planning process when Grupa Pod Łącznicą submitted its idea to continue the park on the right bank of the river.

Before these actions were taken, the museum considered pros and cons of its engagement in the creation of the park. Tutak noted that the museum director was full of concerns. She explained,

the museum would make its debut as such a stakeholder and leader of a project, and we were very afraid of the expectations that the museum would raise, and might not be able to meet. The role of the museum had to be balanced so that it was not perceived as the one who is supposed to change this space, but the one who persuades to do so and connects various entities.... I have always explained that it is not us who will be implementing the park under the railway flyover, but

²³ JAGODZIŃSKA, Katarzyna. Powstaje Oś Kultury w Krakowie. In: *Architektura & Biznes*, portal: *Miasto na celowniku* cycle, June 23rd 2020, accessed July 26th, 2020, <https://www.architekturaibiznes.pl/os-kultury-w-krakowie,4124.html>

we can be the driving force, because we have time, we have a mandate, we are a neighbour of this space and we are somewhat responsible for it. This is also the heritage of Podgórze and I felt that we had the right to talk about it and take actions.²⁴

The idea of the park is multidimensional. The first argument is to restore degraded space to the residents and offer a park including a promenade and a bicycle route, greenery with city furniture for relaxation, a playground and a social garden. The second argument is to create the Culture Axis in Podgórze, starting from the Museum of Podgórze, then leading through Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory (the most visited branch of the Museum of Kraków) and the MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków to the planned Planet Lem Literature and Language Centre, as well as the nearby Cricoteka Centre for the Documentation of the Art



Fig. 2: *Museum of Podgórze seen from the perspective of the land under the railway flyover – future park.*
Photo: K. Jagodzińska.

of Tadeusz Kantor. The third argument is the ordering of communication in Zablocie, which is symbolically cut off from the rest of Podgórze by a railway embankment. The wasteland is adjacent to the museum's courtyard which already serves as a space for outdoor activities and as a leisure zone with seating of the museum café. New space will open new possibilities for the museum as well, for example to practice yoga with the residents and organise small concerts or outdoor exhibitions.

The museum took on the role of the driving force of the project, arranging meetings of the project team, offering space for public consultations, organising actions open to the public

²⁴ INTERVIEW WITH MELANIA TUTAK, curator of the Museum of Podgórze (branch of the Museum of Kraków). June 4th, 2020.

(e.g. cleaning of the green space, planting sunflowers), administering a Facebook fanpage of the project, and initiating and conducting talks with the authorities. The Museum of Kraków is a municipal institution, which makes formal contacts easier, and there is also the prestige and prominence of a major cultural institution that stands behind its actions. However, even though the museum has autonomy as an independent institution, it is dependant financially and organisationally on the city hall, so its actions in the cityscape need to be balanced.

The civic initiative led by the public institution found fertile ground among city officials who took over the project at the administrative level and started negotiations with the railway, owner of the land. The Grupa Pod Łącznicą has continued its role as the watchdog of the process. Since spring 2020 the project has awaited formal consent from the railway, which would then enable the project implementation to begin. In May 2021, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the process was still on hold.

Contextualisation of socialist heritage and negotiation of historically sensitive centre of the city: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw on the Plac Defilad

The history of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (MSN) started in 2005 with the announcement of an architectural competition. It was planned as the first museum of contemporary art in Poland, initiating a museum boom in art museums, and following the great success of the first modern museum in post-transformation Poland – the Warsaw Rising Museum opened in 2004. There was an expectation that the new building of the MSN would become an icon for Warsaw, attracting worldwide attention and changing the image of the centre of the capital. The future museum was allotted a plot of land on the vast Plac Defilad, at the foot of the monumental, 230 m tall, Palace of Culture and Science (built in 1952–1955), considered a Stalinist symbol of Warsaw. The museum is scheduled to open in 2022, after many delays. The Palace evokes mixed feelings, and there have been attempts to pull it down. The choice of this location was in line with thinking about breaking the dominant position of the massive building. The terms of the architectural competition stipulated that, “Architecturally, the building of the Museum should be a formal and meaningful counterpoint for the Palace of Culture, and its shape, a globally recognisable symbol of Warsaw. The museum together with the adjacent square and park will become the most important public place in the revitalised centre of Warsaw.”²⁵

The shape of this museum instantly became one of the most pressing subjects in the capital, widely discussed in the nationwide media, by the architects, planners, art historians, museologists and the general public. The keyword of this discussion was the “Guggenheim Bilbao”. Due to legal and administrative shortcomings the first competition was annulled. The second was won by the Swiss architect Christian Kerez (with a ratio of votes of 7:6) who proposed a minimalist, box-like structure, the true opposite of the flamboyant Palace. Many protested against this building, and the victory in the competition resulted in a six-year struggle as problems amassed with the new development (the city of Warsaw as the investor twice demanded substantial changes to the building, the first time to meet the requirements of the European Union funding, and the second time to fit a theatre into the building; there were also administrative problems with the land ownership and the supposedly unrealistic expectations

²⁵ URZĄD MIASTA STOLECZNEGO WARSZAWY. Regulamin konkursu na opracowanie koncepcji architektonicznej budynku Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie. Warszawa: Urząd Miasta Stołecznego Warszawy, Biuro Naczelnego Architekta Miasta, 2005, p. 7.

of the architect). The protracted standoff came to an end with the termination of the contract with the architect and the referral of the case to court in 2012.

A third competition was announced in 2013. This time, the competition framework clearly stated that the goal of the project is not to search for an iconic building, but to build social bonds: “the aim is to create a place of contact between residents and modern art in Warsaw, as well as meeting places for Varsovians and visitors to the capital”.²⁶ At the same time, it was announced that:

This place can define a new centre of gravity for the whole city. The new building should oppose dichotomies such as lack of transparency–transparency, inhuman scale–human scale, glamour–simplicity, anti-social–pro-social; instead of history, it should be directed towards the future.²⁷

US-based Thomas Phifer and Partners studio won the competition and the construction works are underway. This project, like the criticised vision of Kerez, seems visually anti-iconic: two minimalist boxes, white for the museum and black for the theatre, juxtaposed with each other.

The uneasy history of the building is an important context for programme activities of the museum. They started in 2008 in a temporary location, first in the furniture pavilion “Emilia” (initially only in a warehouse, in the years 2012–2016 using the entire pavilion), located near the intended site; and from 2017, in a temporary exhibition pavilion on the Vistula River. Since the very beginning the museum was preoccupied with the city – its urban and visual space – which is yearly discussed at the *Warsaw Under Construction* festival. The festival is a tool with which to diagnose and investigate various problems and issues present in the cityscape, of which the museum has attempted to be an integral part. The 9th, edition in 2017, entitled *Plac Defilad: A Step Forward*, was devoted to the future location of the museum. It consisted of a major exhibition held in the Galeria Studio located in the Palace, various actions on the square and a public programme of meetings.

The museum and adjoining TR Warszawa theatre will be the instruments to humanise the gigantic square covering an area of 24 ha. It was designed for defilades and mass events, but is surrounded by busy road arteries, and so is isolated from the city life. Since the political transformation of 1989 the square has reflected changes affecting all areas of life. The most visible and prominent space of the capital became a huge market place, a car park, a temporary bus terminal, a funfair... a signifier both of the inertia of city planning and of aesthetic and functional backwardness. In 2017, simultaneously with the *Warsaw Under Construction* festival, the competition for the development of the central part of the Plac Defilad (called the Central Square) was underway. The festival offered a forum for debate on the future of the square and generated greater interest among the public about this space. The director of the museum, Joanna Mytkowska, explained that in order “to root [the museum] locally, make it an important part of community life”²⁸ she needed to look around, into the square. In a foreword to the book accompanying the festival she wrote: “We want as many voices as possible to be heard, so that they can be included in the design process of this space, and so that we all have the feeling that we have not lost a huge opportunity to design a centre which is functional, friendly and

²⁶ MUZEUM SZTUKI NOWOCZESNEJ W WARSZAWIE AND TR WARSZAWA. Wytuczne programowe dla wspólnej siedziby Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie i TR Warszawa. Warszawa, 2014, 1st April, p. 8.

²⁷ WYTYCZNE PROGRAMOWE..., p. 7.

²⁸ MYTKOWSKA, Joanna. Zobacz nowy plan. In: Tomasz Fudala (ed.). *Kto odzyska Plac Defilad? Warszawa w Budowie 9*. Warszawa: Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2017, p. 7.

connected with the rest of the city”.²⁹

The museum did not limit its activities to research, observation and the offering of space for discussion, but it also played an active role in the process of liaising with various actors of the square. Artur Jerzy Filip, researcher and practitioner of innovative forms of cross-sectoral urban project management, became the museum’s consultant and plenipotentiary for the building of the partnership. On behalf of the museum he started to form a group “Local Stewards of Plac Defilad” (modelled upon New York City-based benchmarks) consisting of seven institutions with entrances on the square (including the commercial company that manages the Palace and its surroundings – Zarząd Palacu Kultury i Nauki, two theatres and two cultural cafes also located in the Palace but with separate entrances in the Palace, and two new developments – MSN and TR Warszawa). Filip commented that,

The management of the museum liked the idea to enter this area more broadly. Not that now the museum will fight for its part of the square in front of the building, but that we are talking about a perspective model of co-managing this process, first planning and then programming this space; that we will develop a model in which these institutions will serve this square, while maintaining its public character.³⁰

The museum became a leader of this process, and the *Warsaw Under Construction* festival was used as a vehicle to initiate the group. Its biggest success, as Filip notes, is the networking, as until that moment (even though some partner initiatives had been undertaken before) they had not cooperated in such a wide circle with such strategic aims to become an active member of the process of planning and finding various spatial solutions in the square. When a shortlist of designs for the future Central Square was announced, the group attended a special workshop organised by the city planning office and then conceived a document with remarks and suggestions to the winning designs that was officially submitted during public consultations. Subsequently, when the winner was announced, the group hosted “coordination meetings” as a platform for designers, city officials and local stewards to discuss detailed issues regarding needs and expectations of the future square.

The group has been dormant since autumn 2019, when the design for the future Central Square entered its technical phase; however, it has the potential to reactivate once the construction process starts. Despite its successes, the group failed to build any permanent cooperation mechanism with the city. The vision of an experimental model of space co-management was well received by the vice mayor of Warsaw; however, at the operative levels of administration in the city hall, there was no person willing to pursue this innovative idea. A significant obstacle was the fact that people working in the city office perceived the new idea as an attack on their work, as the group proposed solutions that should in fact be initiated by the city. Filip admitted that he agrees with Mytkowska, who says that “we were not stubborn enough to develop this project”.³¹

Despite attempts, it was impossible to formalise the group within any of the existing legal frameworks in Poland – they are aimed at engaging individuals and not-for-profit civic organisations, while none of them allows the forming of coalitions with public institutions, and thus – according to Filip – “cooperation needs to rely on personal relations, which results in

²⁹ MYTKOWSKA, *Zobacz nowy plan...*, p. 9.

³⁰ INTERVIEW WITH ARTUR JERZY FILIP, consultant of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and plenipotentiary for the building of the partnership of the local hosts at the Plac Defilad. April 2nd, 2020.

³¹ INTERVIEW WITH ARTUR JERZY FILIP...



Fig. 3: Construction site of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2019. Text on the fence says: #museum has future. The Museum of Modern Art is constructed here. See you in 2022. Photo: K. Jagodzińska.

institutional unsustainability”.³² He stresses that the development of hybrid governance structures requires that all parties get involved – all stewards on the one side and the local government on the other. This is why Filip in his professional work and scholarship voices the need “for more inclusive urban planning and management processes in Poland”.³³

Adding prestige to civic action: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw and historic Waliców Street townhouses located in the former Warsaw ghetto

In 2017 the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw engaged in the project of rescuing three dilapidated townhouses in Waliców Street. They are the remnants of pre-war architecture in Warsaw located in the territory of the Jewish ghetto. Museum director Zygmunt Stępiński has called these buildings “a symbol – a monument to Warsaw’s past, its wartime tragedy and post-war history”.³⁴ The destroyed front elevation of the tenement house at 14 Waliców Street is a testimony to the horror of the Second World War and the planned destruction of Warsaw by the Nazis. During the post-war reconstruction of the city and the progressive development that continues to this day, these tenement houses have retained their former shape. They fell into oblivion and ruin, but still served tenants. Time and again, since the 1970s, activists have demanded these buildings be protected, but their voice was too weak. The last tenants were evicted in 2018. The building no 14 was to be demolished due to poor condition and only in 2018, owing to local organisations and city activists who were collecting signatures of support in a petition to the Provincial Conservator of Monuments to block the demolition, did all houses enter the register of monuments.

Italian architects Guido Morpurgo and Annalisa de Curtis, who run the architectural office Morpurgo de Curtis in Milan and are both professors at the Politecnico di Milano, brought international attention to this unique heritage of Warsaw. Morpurgo was born into an Italian Jewish family that originates in Central Europe, which explains his specific interest in the history, culture and architecture of Warsaw. He considers the tenement houses at Waliców Street as bearing the DNA of a lost Warsaw and as witnesses to the history of the city’s total destruction, as well as “a ‘living’ fragment of a post-apocalyptic city”.³⁵ He conceived a project of bringing back the memory of this place in the form of a workshop for second year students at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies in Milan called “Waliców Project” where they work on diploma projects to convert Waliców Street houses for contemporary functions.

Morpurgo and de Curtis indicate that,

³² FILIP, Artur Jerzy. Local institutions of culture as urban stewards: in pursuit of hybrid governance in Warsaw, Poland. In: *Ecology and Society* 25(2), 7, 2020, accessed August 11th, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-11512-250207>

³³ FILIP, Local institutions of culture...

³⁴ STĘPIŃSKI, Zygmunt. Słowo wstępne. In: Beata Chomątowska and Zuzanna Schnepf-Kolacz (eds). *Waliców: DNA Warszawy – Dziedzictwo Europy*. Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN, 2019, p. 6.

³⁵ MORPURGO, Guido. Wstępne wytyczne architektoniczne dla zachowania i rewitalizacji miejsca pamięci przy ulicy Waliców. In: Beata Chomątowska and Zuzanna Schnepf-Kolacz (eds). *Waliców: DNA Warszawy – Dziedzictwo Europy*. Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN, 2019, p. 25.

These testimonies of an entire culture and of the resistance to annihilation are now in danger, as they permanently risk to be removed from the city and from the European collective consciousness as well, because of the rapid urban transformations triggered by aggressive and forgetful construction activity. These places are heritage for humanity; they represent a testimony, a warning and at the same time an extraordinary building material for a future of dialogue and civil consciousness, a value to be protected and regenerated by a careful museum project, both architectural and urban, before it is too late.³⁶

Morpurgo's first ally was the vice-consul of the Polish consulate in Milan, Zuzanna Schnepf-Kolacz. She mediated in arranging a meeting with the then management of the POLIN Museum. He received a warm reception; however, at that time no one in the museum was personally interested to become involved in the project. Morpurgo found a partner at the Warsaw University of Technology and in 2016 they embarked on the first workshop for students.

The situation changed in 2017 when Schnepf-Kolacz finished her diplomatic mission and returned to Warsaw to resume work at the POLIN Museum. She was already passionate about the idea of bringing this complex back to the city and its inhabitants and she convinced the director to let her engage in the project on behalf of the museum. In a conversation she referred to an ICOM policy which recommends that "a museum takes responsibility for what is happening around it, outside its walls. We belong to ICOM and this is important to us."³⁷

Three up-to-date editions of the workshops were organised and students in Milan designed forty-five projects. In each instance the function was given by the tutors and then the students worked on its architectural shape. The function has evolved over time: at first it was predominantly a place of memory presenting the microhistory, and later it addressed also the needs of the neighbourhood, resulting in a city centre of cultural, artistic and social activities, and encompassing a modern cultural centre, library, theatre and concert hall, cafe, university for seniors, premises for non-governmental organisations working for the local community, artists' studios, craftsmen's workshops and coworking spaces for academics.³⁸

The museum used its prominent position in the city to add prestige to the project and attract the attention of city officials. In 2017 the POLIN Museum hosted a debate on the future of the Waliców tenement houses and an exhibition of the students' projects; the following year the museum, together with the Shalom Foundation, Wolskie Centrum Kultury, Politecnico di Milano and Warsaw University of Technology, prepared an open-air exhibition within the Waliców complex as a part of the Festival of Jewish Culture in Warsaw; and in 2019 it organised a public discussion with international experts as a part of the Horizon 2020 project (programme of the European Commission) "Critical Heritages: performing and representing identities in Europe – CoHERE". The outcome of this last-named discussion is a specialist publication "Waliców: DNA Warszawy – Dziedzictwo Europy" [Waliców: DNA of Warsaw – Heritage of Europe] which was conceived as an input for the city.

³⁶ THE PROJECT ENVIRONMENT. Fundamentals, accessed July 26th, 2020, <http://www.walicowproject.polimi.it/about-2019.html>

³⁷ INTERVIEW WITH ZUZANNA SCHNEPF-KOŁACZ, Programme specialist for Warsaw residents in the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. October 18th, 2019.

³⁸ CHOMĄTOWSKA, Beata and SCHNEPF-KOŁACZ, Zuzanna. Wprowadzenie. In: Beata Chomątowska and Zuzanna Schnepf-Kolacz (eds). *Waliców: DNA Warszawy – Dziedzictwo Europy*. Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN, 2019, p. 8.



Fig. 4: Contemporary condition of Waliców Street townhouses. Photo: K. Jagodzińska.

“These issues are part of the broadly understood mission of the museum, which is why we get involved, but also never declare that we will be a leader”, underlines Schnepf-Kolacz. “We have always emphasised that our museum cannot be a leader because we have different priorities.”³⁹ In her view the city should be a natural leader. The considerable media coverage and social interest that this project generates finally mobilised city authorities in 2019 to host the first meeting. Schnepf-Kolacz concludes, “If all goes well and they are given the green light to act, they will take over the role of a leader, and we want to continue to participate in building the programme as a social partner. We feel responsible to the people who got involved and whom we contacted.”

The project is in the gestion of the city authorities. “The right thing to do is to involve the young people, because the future of memory is in their hands, not in our hands” says Morpurgo.⁴⁰ In his view, once the city manages to secure the financial resources to restore the tenement houses,

it should organise an architectural competition that would be targeted to international students of architecture. Due to the cost of the investment, the idea may remain on paper for some time.

Conclusions

The activist approach of all the museums discussed is apparent, although the merit, context and level of engagement in each case is different. The museum is either the *spiritus movens* and leader of change or acts as one of several engaged parties. As in the case of the Muzeum Śląskie, the call of a museum targeted at its neighbourhood to act jointly may not be heard. After a fierce struggle the museum may lose the case; however, it can hardly be called a defeat – the courage and determination to speak on a difficult matter should embolden other museums to be active actors of the civil society.

Dorota Folga-Januszewska admits that the essence of change that led to the ICOM resolution on the responsibility of museums towards landscape is “promoting awareness of the role of museums as organisers of social life among significantly wider circles than those of the former recipients of the museums’ offers”.⁴¹ The resolution and the activist mode of operation that it proposes is in line with the proposal for a new museum definition that began to be forged soon after the 2016 ICOM General Conference in Milan. The new definition that was considered at the ICOM General Assembly in Kyoto in 2019, yet not adopted, says that

³⁹ INTERVIEW WITH ZUZANNA SCHNEPF-KOLACZ...

⁴⁰ INTERVIEW WITH GUIDO MORPURGO. April 2nd, 2020.

⁴¹ FOLGA-JANUSZEWSKA, Dorota. Museum and Its Milieu – Bilateral Relations. In: Dorota Folga-Januszewska (ed.). *Extended Museum in Its Milieu*. Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas; Warszawa: Muzeum Pałacu Króla Jana III w Wilanowie, 2018, p. 11.

museums are inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue, that they acknowledge and address the conflicts and challenges of the present, and that they work in active partnership with and for diverse communities.⁴² These issues were raised by the discussed museums with reference to the safeguarding of the monuments or their context (POLIN, Muzeum Śląskie) or the bringing of change to the public space neighbouring the museum building (Museum of Podgórze, MSN).

In the case of the Muzeum Śląskie, arguments for the recognition of post-industrial cultural heritage lost to those favouring economical profit and the changing of the image of the city towards modernity. The museum director was too isolated in this struggle to be able to win. Despite the outcome in Katowice, it should be a lesson for other museums that their role is not only to observe and document changes, but also to be part and even generate those processes. Would the situation be different if the museum had allies in neighbours, local communities and city activists? My judgement of the situation is that appreciation of the heritage of recent decades is still too low in post-communist countries and people are still hungry for modern, spectacular investments which visually herald new times. So, there is still a lot to be done in the field of cultural education. Local pride and identity in the heavy industrial region is strong, although it should be channelled towards the protection and smart spatial development of this cityscape, not only the walls and objects which can be housed within museums. Nevertheless, stronger networking and engagement with communities would undoubtedly result in raising the scope, temperature and coverage of those debates.

Due to political pressure on the museum, in February 2020 Knast lost her position as director. Officially she was accused of formal inaccuracies in management, while circles of museum professionals and museum associations that unanimously demonstrated support have raised the issue that she was being punished for her nonconformist attitude, especially when it came to the political entanglement of the museum. She filed a lawsuit and won the first hearing; however, the museum under the new leadership does not follow in her footsteps and concentrates on operating within its walls.

The MSN in Warsaw has been preoccupied with the context of the city since the launch of its programme activity, so willingness to generate discussion about its future context on the Plac Defilad and engagement in building the partnership was more natural than in Katowice. The very first exhibition opened in 2008 was devoted to experimental art in the former Yugoslavia. The mediocre interest that it generated pushed the then small team of the museum to reconfigure the main interest areas of the institution and one of the leitmotifs of the new museum became local issues and an activist programme related to the city.⁴³

The MSN cooperated with an expert equipped with knowledge and experience in urban planning and building partnerships, and it was he – the external officer – who brought people together and negotiated the processes with neighbours and the city planning office. The success was partial – the partnership that was formed by the institutions on the Plac Defilad did not manage to win the full recognition that could have led to the innovative idea of space co-management. The museum assumes that the lobbying was not strong enough; however, it

⁴² ICOM. Museum definition. 2019, accessed July 26th, 2020, <https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>

⁴³ JAGODZIŃSKA, Katarzyna. Trwa proces radykalnego światopoglądowego zwrotu i musimy się wobec niego określić. Rozmowa z Joanną Mytkowską (dyrektorką Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie). In: Jagodzińska, Katarzyna. *Nowe miejsca nowej sztuki w Europie Środkowej*. Warszawa: Muzeum Pałacu Króla Jana III w Wilanowie; Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2019, p. 98.

proves that the museum acknowledges the power of public entities in pursuing their aims in the area of social justice.

In the Museum of Podgórze the driving force of the process of green change outside the museum walls is a curator/city activist who believes that individuals, associations and institutions can change the shape of neighbourhoods, and – crucially – that it is the responsibility of a public institution such as a museum. She gathered neighbours around the common goal, animated the whole process (including moderation of the Facebook fanpage) and managed to convince the museum director that the museum should be a leader of this process. From the perspective of the whole Museum of Kraków it is not a prominent project. Nevertheless, the director, who is a respected specialist in Kraków-related subjects, was a face of the project in negotiations at the managerial level.

The least important from the position of the museum is the Waliców townhouses project. It was adopted by the POLIN Museum when it was already in progress. The idea came from an external individual – an Italian architect, who found an advocate for the project in the person of the Polish vice-consul in Milan. Later, when she came back to the POLIN Museum, she brought the project with her, having convinced the museum director to give it institutional assistance. The presence of the museum in the project adds prestige and thus increases its visibility and facilitates the handling of official matters; however, for the museum it is a minor project carried out on a plan far from its core interests. Schnepf-Kołacz admits,

I work here because I care about this place, it is in my heart, I am glad that the museum allows me to do so, supports me, gives me its resources, the director participates in talks with the city, it was ennobling and empowering... On the other hand I'm aware that the Waliców issue is not among the main goals of the activities undertaken by the museum. Therefore the range of the Museum's involvement in this case depends to a great extent on my personal interest in this matter.⁴⁴

Observation of the activities of museums in Poland brings me to the conclusion that museums rarely get involved in matters happening in their environment, and in particular they rarely take real action. The four cases presented here are not the only ones, but are among few in Poland. Nevertheless, there are more and more examples of those that do get involved. The reasons why some do and some do not take action vary. It is always a matter of the personality of museum management and museum staff, of whether they feel comfortable to act in this way or not; a matter of courage and pragmatism; a matter of possibilities. Some museums may be more, and some less predisposed to carry out activities outside their walls, to motivate their neighbours to act, and to lobby municipal or regional authorities (local museums by definition should be best equipped because they should closely work with the communities), but without the consent, support and personal involvement of the management, such processes cannot be carried out.

Museum activism is for those who dare. In discussing activism one should consider historical context, which is different in the post-communist countries and in western democracies. Central European societies adopted values of civil society late and thus city activism was born here with a delay. It is the lesson that the Central Europe is still learning. Sociological diagnoses conducted in Poland since the early 1990s demonstrates that the civil society in the country does not develop and remains worryingly low. One of the indicators is the organisation of and

⁴⁴ INTERVIEW WITH ZUZANNA SCHNEPF-KOŁACZ...

participation in activities for the benefit of the local community (communes, housing estates, towns, in the immediate vicinity). In the most recent diagnosis of 2015 only 15.4 percent of those surveyed had got involved in the last two years.⁴⁵ “Since Poles gather up so poorly, they rarely undertake activities for the benefit of other people, organisations and their own communities, they are reluctant to gather to decide something together and then do something, they do not have the opportunity to learn organised social activity and acquire skills necessary for life in civil society. Poles do not know how to organise and act effectively together...”⁴⁶ This accurate observation may partly explain the social inertia around the call raised by the Museum Śląskie and the reserve of city authorities towards the group of local stewards in Warsaw. It also explains the tendencies of museum leaders who still only rarely demonstrate a proactive attitude to which, indeed, the four examples discussed in the article are in contradiction.

Also, the fact that the majority of museums is publicly funded means that their freedom of speech is practically somewhat limited. It would be very challenging, for instance, for a municipal museum to stand up against municipal authorities in its struggles to make a change in the cityscape. In Katowice the museum rose against authorities; however, it is the regional museum and it communicated with municipal authorities, so the issue of dependency was not involved. In other case studies museums attempted to inspire authorities to take action. In the MSN it was only partly successful, the Museum of Podgórze achieved everything that it sought to and the situation around the Waliców Street houses looks promising.

The personal involvement of the director was fulfilled in the Muzeum Śląskie, was strong in the MSN, came rather in the form of support in the Museum of Podgórze and constituted the granting of permission for an employee to become involved in the POLIN Museum. Nevertheless, every case study proves the growing awareness of museum directors that operating beyond museum walls, taking part in public discussions on topics not necessarily related to collections and programme activities, may be as important as their obligations as listed in the museum definition, that is to acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit.

None of the mission statements refers to physical space – the museum building; only references to geographical space are included – Silesia, Kraków, Warsaw, Poland, Europe, the world.⁴⁷ The involvement of museums in the outside world is included in statements like “We listen to the city”, “We want to be useful... closely tied with Warsaw, its history and inhabitants”. The discussed projects do not affect museum missions; on the contrary they constitute a new reading of those missions and understanding of what the museum is or can be. Museums have physical boundaries, but the scope of their interest and public resonance is not limited.

⁴⁵ CZAPIŃSKI, Janusz. Stan społeczeństwa obywatelskiego. In: *Diagnoza społeczna 2015. Warunki i jakość życia Polaków*, Janusz Czapinowski and Tomasz Panek (eds). Warszawa: Rada Monitoringu Społecznego, 2015. In: *Quarterly of University of Finance and Management in Warsaw* 9(4), 2015, pp. 341–344.

⁴⁶ CZAPIŃSKI, Janusz. Stan społeczeństwa obywatelskiego..., p. 348.

⁴⁷ These are the mission statements of the four museums: Muzeum Śląskie: “Bound by the heritage of the region, its historical dynamics, its numerous cultures and the leading role of industry, and yet recognising Silesia’s intellectual and artistic background, Muzeum Śląskie provides a space for dialogue with the past and the achievements of modernity to further explore Silesia, Poland and Europe.” Museum of Kraków: “We describe, document and tell Kraków. We listen to the city...” MSN: “... We want to be useful. We treat art as a means of communication, of discovering and understanding the world... We move beyond art, but are always inspired by it. The Museum is closely tied with Warsaw, its history and inhabitants, all the while actively taking part in artistic life in Poland and abroad.” POLIN Museum: “To recall and preserve the memory of the history of Polish Jews, contributing to the mutual understanding and respect amongst Poles and Jews as well as other societies of Europe and the world.”

Folga-Januszewska anticipates that “good intentions need to be supported by good legislation ... Museums will operate in their milieu, work for their surroundings and obtain support in response to their actions – if only a suitable legal context emerges, regulating the competences of museums.”⁴⁸ It seems to me that such legislation could result from education. The authorities would need to be convinced that it was important to back museums in their presence in the public space. If the education was successful and recognition was achieved, perhaps new legislation would not even be needed.

Museums as agents of change, museums caring for the common good, seem to be the most relevant response to insufficiencies in civil societies and in culture. One may, however, ask a justified question: Is a museum an institution that should lead its own “policy”? Is it what the museums are for in the first place? These questions lead to a discussion on the non-neutrality of museums. It has been convincingly argued that museums are by no means neutral,⁴⁹ although some museum directors act as if they were and create an illusion of objectivity. I shall reverse the question and ask: If not its own “policy”, then whose? Local authorities? Government? Donors? Political agendas are tricky, yet many museums indeed get involved in politics. An activist position, however, does not require radicality.

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⁴⁸ FOLGA-JANUSZEWSKA, Museum and Its Milieu..., p. 12.

⁴⁹ See the global advocacy initiative Museums Are Not Neutral at <https://www.museumsarenotneutral.com>.

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Interviews

- INTERVIEW WITH ZUZANNA SCHNEPF-KOLACZ, Programme specialist for Warsaw residents in the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. October 18th, 2019.
- INTERVIEW WITH ARTUR JERZY FILIP, consultant of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and plenipotentiary for building the partnership of the local hosts at the Plac Defilad. April 2nd, 2020.
- INTERVIEW WITH GUIDO MORPURGO. April 2nd, 2020.
- INTERVIEW WITH MELANIA TUTAK, curator of the Museum of Podgórze (branch of the Museum of Kraków). June 4th, 2020.