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About the quality of the Prudnik and Gogolin railway landscape

One of the definitions of the landscape says that landscape is a physiognomy of the world that surrounds us. Using a comparison we can say that the landscape can be modified by means of different stylising activities in the same way in which the face is decorated with make-up.

When the railway entered the panorama of the world, nobody expected that it was going to become a significant element of the landscape within the next forty years. Today we can agree that it constitutes an indispensable part of the cultural landscape. At the place where there was an intensified man's activity, sooner or later iron horses arrived at that terrain on the iron railways. Unfortunately, when we observe the regression of the railway which has lasted on the Polish land, we cannot resist the impression that the face of the railway world is getting deep wrinkles. Thus, the question arises what next? Does this face have to die in the course of the natural cycle development?

In December 1896 a private Prudnik-Gogolin railway started functioning. It was built as a one-track secondary rail and it was supposed to facilitate the sale of crops of local farmers and to run the transit traffic to some extent [3]. Originally, the track had 11 stations (Prudnik, Lubrza, Józefów, Biała, Krobusz, Łącznik, Zielina, Strzeleczki, Łowkowice, Krapkowice, Gogolin) and three passenger stops (Moszna, Steblów, Otmęt)[1]. Prudnik and Gogolin were contact stations with the primary tracks of the Upper Silesia Railway, while in Biała a technical station was located where there were steam engines as well as passenger and cargo wagon sets. There were also a two-stand roundhouse and a water tower. Each of the stations had a loading platform or loading place, weighing machine and additional tracks which provided cargo wagons with a parking place and enabled trains to pass each other. In small railway sta-

tions the ticket offices and small waiting rooms were situated on the ground floor and since the 1930s signal boxes as well. On the upper floors there were flats. These buildings had basements. Some of them had warehouses which were built later – Biała, Zielina, Łącznik, Łowkowice, while in Krapkowice a separate warehouse building with a loading platform was built. The exception was the station buildings in Moszna and Krobusz where small one-storey pavilions with a ticket office and waiting room were built. The only station without buildings was Józefów; in Steblów only a brick shelter was built which was similar to the bus stop [2].

The preserved station buildings were mostly built from red clinker brick and were not plastered. They have concise two-storey forms, sometimes supplemented with small warehouse extensions or signal boxes. They were surmounted by wooden two-slope roofs with small pitch

Fig. 1. Krapkowice Otmęt passanger stop. In the foreground the hole after a removed track. The railway station building has been completely transformed into living quarters and is preserved in good condition. It is one of the few modernist stations in the Opole region (photo: M. Konopka, 2009)

Il. 1. Przystanek osobowy Krapkowice Otmęt. Na pierwszym planie widoczny dół po usuniętym torze. Budynek dworcowy zamieniony został w całości na mieszkalny i jest zachowany w dobrym stanie. To jeden z nielicznych dworców modernistycznych na terenie Opolszczyzny (fot. Marek Konopka, 2009)

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[1] The station in Otmęt was built in 1930, while the stop in Steblów in 1948. The other stations and stops functioned since the line was opened.

Fig. 2. Lubrza station. The building has been transformed into living quarters. Windows on the ground floor have been rebuilt and all the frames have been ineptly exchanged. The ground floor elevation has been painted (photo: M. Konopka, 2009)

Il. 2. Stacja Lubrza. Dworzec zamieniony na dom mieszkalny. Przebudowano okna w parterach i nieudolnie wymieniono całą stolarkę. Elewacje parteru pomalowano (fot. M. Konopka, 2009)

Fig. 3. Krapkowice station. The building is inhabited on the first floor. The ground floor has been unused since 1990. The building is squalid. New and ill-selected window frames in the flat are explicit (photo: M. Konopka, 2009)

Il. 3. Stacja Krapkowice. Dworzec jest zamieszkany na 1. piętrze. Parter jest nieużytkowany od roku 1990. Budynek jest zaniedbany. Razi nowa i źle dobrana stolarka okienna w mieszkaniu (fot. M. Konopka, 2009)

and roof ridge system. Some buildings were equipped with risalits with tops. They emphasise an axis and symmetric form of railway stations. These buildings have brick detail of cornices, jerkin heads of roofs and framings. Windows are surmounted by arches and the original joinery was wooden. They all can be defined as neo-Gothic. The building in Otmęt is different. It has wide rectangular windows, a deep arcade with an exit to the platform and a high steep hip roof with dormers. This building, which was built much later than the other railway stations, can be safely called modernistic.

This track functioned in such a form till the 1980s. Progressing regression of the railway in Poland did not omit it either. In the 1990s passenger and then goods traffic was withdrawn gradually [4]. The flood of July 1997 made it impossible to cross the Odra River through the bridge and the bridge did not function any longer. Since that time the transport of goods took place only between Prudnik and Krapkowice and it was soon limited to the distance Prudnik – Biała. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century the traffic on this railway line was stopped [1].

Technical condition of the line as well as infrastructure and buildings can be described as bad. Railway tracks are covered with bushes and in some places the rails were stolen. The track between Gogolin and Krapkowice was totally disassembled. The place in front of the train station in Otmęt presents an unusual site – opposite the railway station building there is a platform and next to it a big hole in the ground which was left after the tracks were removed along with the stone foundation (Fig. 1). The railway station was adapted in whole to residential purposes and its front part was surrounded by a fence thus forming a private residential area. A similar situation can be observed in Lubrza. In front of the railway station, which is now a residential building, the residents separated a garden area (Fig. 2). In both of these two places the residents' care is limited to their own separated areas, while the other parts of the station are left alone. At the station in Krapkowice company apartments are still used, however, the ground floor of the building, which was

Fig. 4. The railway bridge over the Oder between Krapkowice and Otmęt. The western span fell down during the July 1997 flood. It was repaired but the traffic has not been restored (photo: M. Konopka, 2009)

Il. 4. Most kolejowy nad Odrą pomiędzy Krapkowicami a Otmętem. Przęsło zachodnie uległo zawaleniu podczas powodzi w lipcu 1997. Zostało ono naprawione, jednak ruchu kolejowego nie przywrócono (fot. M. Konopka, 2009)

Fig. 5. The pedestrian footbridge on the railway bridge over the Oder between Krapkowice and Otmęt. The track was removed after the July 1997 flood. A pedestrian footbridge has been in operation here since the 1930s. At present the reconstruction of the bridge into a road one is under considerationn (photo: M. Konopka, 2009)

Il. 5. Kładka dla pieszych na moście kolejowym nad Odrą pomiędzy Krapkowicami a Otmętem. Tor usunięto po powodzi z lipca 1997 r. Kładka dla pieszych funkcjonuje tu od lat 30. XX. w Obecnie rozważa się przebudowanie mostu na drogowy (fot. M. Konopka, 2009)

Fig. 6. Zielina station. The station buildings have been torn down. Only fragments of the ramp have remained (photo: M. Konopka, 2009)

Il. 6. Stacja Zielina. Zabudowę dworcową rozebrano. Pozostały jedynie fragmenty rampy (fot. M. Konopka, 2009)

Fig. 7. Biała Prudnicka station. The station is abandoned and squalid. In comparison with other stations on this line it boasts richer brick details (photo: M. Konopka, 2009)

Il. 7. Stacja Biała Prudnicka. Dworzec opuszczony i zaniedbany. W porównaniu z innymi stacjami na linii posiada bogatszy detal ceglany (fot. M. Konopka, 2009)

to serve as a passenger service department, is still closed (Fig. 3). The residents of this building – without permission but in good faith – occupied a fragment of the station railway tracks and are trying to keep it in order. This view is complemented by two big signal boxes flanking the station entrances in Krapkowice, which are left alone and ruined. People could cross the River Oder through a huge steel bridge from which the track was removed. It still exists because it has a footbridge which significantly facilitates transport between Otmęt and Krapkowice (Fig. 4, 5). The stations in Zielina, Łowkowice, Moszna and Krobusz were treated very drastically (Fig. 6), where all the buildings were pulled down. The rest of the structures, which are connected with this railway line are not used and ruined. We can mention here the railway stations in Biała (Fig. 7), Łącznik (Fig. 8), Strzeleczki (Fig. 9) as well as the nearby warehouse and utility buildings. At the station in Biała there is also a water-tower. The route between the stations is treated differently. On the way from Prudnik to Krapkowice all railway crossings are preserved and new crossings were built along the by-passes of Prudnik and Biała. Completely different actions were taken on the way from Krapkowice to Gogolin. After the railway track had been destroyed, the embankment was crossed with several roads, including a highway, and there were no pos-

sibilities to restart the railway traffic without the need to build new flyovers.

Observing this situation we can ask a question concerning the quality of the landscape which was shaped in this way. The elements, which form the landscape, were created in an intended way and were subordinated to the transport idea. They were built as permanent elements. For a few dozen of years of functioning they acquired many cultural values – economical, aesthetic and historical. In the end, they have become a symbol of the time and place. At some time, however, this continuity and balance were broken. The present way of using the lines and accompanied buildings is not organized but simply chaotic. The cultural landscape constitutes a result of man's activity. Therefore, how to name the landscape in which man stopped his activity? We can claim that the lack of active actions also constitutes a manifestation of man's activity. But, where will this lead to and what kind of image of the surrounding world does it give?

The presented landscape of the railway line from Prudnik to Gogolin can be defined as degraded. It lost the values and significance which it had during the time of

Fig. 8. Łącznik station. Currently the station building is unused. Periodically small wholesale outlets function there (photo: M. Konopka, 2009)

Il. 8. Stacja Łącznik. Obecnie budynek dworca nie jest użytkowany. Okresowo funkcjonują w nim małe hurtownie (fot. M. Konopka, 2009)

Fig. 9. Strzeleczki station. The building is abandoned and unsecured, and the area around squalid (photo: M. Konopka, 2009)

Il. 9. Stacja Strzeleczki. Dworzec jest opuszczony i niezabezpieczony, a teren wokół zaniedbany (fot. M. Konopka, 2009)

Fig. 10. Łosiów station on the Opole–Wrocław line, rebuilt in 2005–2006 as a passenger stop. Platforms were rebuilt, monumental wheelchair ramps were built, the loading ramp and additional tracks were removed. The building was left unchanged (photo: M. Konopka, 2009)

Il. 10. Stacja Łosiów na linii Opole–Wrocław, przebudowana w latach 2005–2006 na przystanek osobowy. Przebudowano perony, zbudowano monumentalne pochylnie dla wózków inwalidzkich, zlikwidowano rampę i dodatkowe tory. Dworzec pozostawiono bez zmian (fot. M. Konopka, 2009)

Fig. 11. Lewin Brzeski station on the Opole–Wrocław line, rebuilt in 2005–2006. Platforms were rebuilt, the network of tracks was reorganised, the signal box was reduced to the role of a level crossing attendant's post. The station building was renovated inside and the elevation was rebuilt. The freight yard was renovated. The warehouse and housing buildings were left unchanged (photo: M. Konopka, 2009)

Il. 11. Stacja Lewin Brzeski na linii Opole–Wrocław, przebudowana w latach 2005–2006. Przebudowano perony, przeorganizowano układ torów, zdegradowano nastawnię do roli posterunku dróżniczego. Budynek dworca przeszedł remont wnętrz i przebudowę elewacji. Odnowiono plac ładunkowy. Zabudowę magazynową i mieszkalną pozostawiono bez zmian (fot. M. Konopka, 2009)

efficient functioning of the railway. The function of technical condition as regards the passing time indicates technical and usage agony. The landscape looks as if it was dying. It is weakened and comes under pressure of external elements and disappears. The spontaneity of these transformations is also striking. The matter left without any purposeful activities becomes the subject of accidental and more and more numerous transformations which are provoked by neighbouring and stronger elements.

When we talk about a disappearing landscape and spontaneous landscape, it is worth asking a question whether – like a human face – we should allow it to get older and die and accept this as unavoidable and natural. However, a domain of culture is its continuity. For that reason alone, we ought to take care of the heritage quality.

Coming back to the Prudnik–Gogolin railway, we can start to specify the activities which are aimed at protecting its cultural values. Its present condition allows working out a method which shall make it possible to preserve most of its crucial features. Thorough examinations shall let us choose the range of revitalisation possibilities and revalorisation. A good example – or in other words learning based on mistakes – can be the modernisation of the railway line Opole – Wrocław. The fact is that both of the lines differ in their significance and possibilities; however, we can certainly compare them with regard to the landscape quality. Renovated stations in Łosiów (Fig. 10) and Lewin Brzeski (Fig. 11) show the possibilities of actions. There may be some objections as regards the aesthetics of renovated structures. It shows that economical aspects were most

important during the modernisation. Nevertheless, these objects were adapted to the present needs of the railway transport. Functions of technical buildings were changed (signal boxes – gateman's lodges), buildings of local goods transport service were liquidated (loading platforms, railway sidings, weighing machines), buildings of passenger service department (platforms, shelters, waiting rooms) were renovated and rebuilt. At the same time, accompanying residential and warehouse functions were preserved.

So, there are tools and possibilities. There must be only people who want to use them to improve the present condition. Even in the situation when no train will ever go from Gogolin to Prudnik, all the existing railway buildings can be used in a proper way and brought back to life along with their values. The things that are now happening spontaneously and chaotically need to be directed by experts. However, what we need is the will of owners and determination of institutions which are responsible for the order and aesthetics of the space. It is really surprising that all the problems presented here concerning the small railway line are completely strange for the landscape of the neighbouring Czech Republic. This allows us to draw a conclusion that the condition of the Polish railway, which is reflected in the decrease of landscape values, is only a sign of disorganisation and 'a sin of neglecting' becomes the main value of the Polish cultural landscape.

Translated by B. Setkowicz

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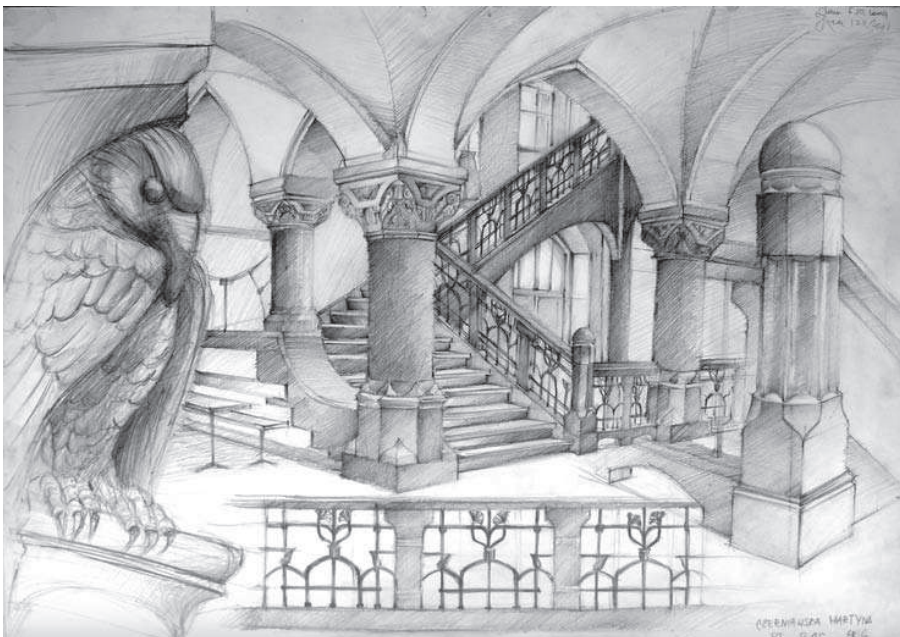
O jakości krajobrazu kolei prudnicko-gogolińskiej

Na przestrzeni dziejów kolej stała się nieodzowną częścią krajobrazu kulturowego. Na przełomie XIX i XX w. powstała lokalna linia kolejowa z Prudnika do Gogolina. Powstało przy niej kilkanaście stacji i wiele obiektów kubaturowych o wyrazistym charakterze. Wznoszone w duchu neogotyku znakomicie oddawały ówczesną stylistykę. Regularny ruch na tej linii odbywał się do końca lat 80. XX w. Od tamtej pory cała infrastruktura linii popada w ruinę. Duża część zabudowy została rozebrana, kilka obiektów wykorzystywanych jest na cele mieszkalne i usługowe, a pozostałe niszczeją nieużytkowane. Pojawia się tu pytanie o istotę takiego krajobrazu. Na pewno jest on zdegradowany i coraz bardziej przypadkowy. Dla dbałości o dziedzictwo kulturowe, należałoby podjąć odpowiednie działania rewaloryzacyjne. Wzorować można się na modernizowanej linii kolejowej z Opola do Wrocławia. Istnieją bowiem narzędzia i możliwości, by zdegradowane elementy krajobrazów kolejowych przywrócić do życia i zahamować postępujący spadek wartości krajobrazowych.

Key words: railways, station, landscape, restoration

Słowa kluczowe: kolej, stacja, dworzec, krajobraz, rewaloryzacja

Drawn by M. Czerniawska