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Wanting the Unwanted. “Heritage Wanted, Heritage Unwanted” by Lucyna Rotter and Piotr Legutko (Review)

Rotter, L., Legutko, P., (2023). *Dziedzictwo chciane, dziedzictwo niechciane* [*Heritage wanted, heritage unwanted*], Krakow: Avalon.

Cultural heritage is one of the most important aspects of our history and identity. It is a treasure passed down from generation to generation that shapes our view of the world and influences our daily lives. We admire with pride what our ancestors built, we observe with curiosity what the representatives of other cultures have built – we try to understand each other, sometimes fascinated we find our origins in the elements of our own heritage so we begin to understand some of the emotions, the reflexes, the sense of beauty. All these elements breathe goodness, set us creatively and positively towards our surroundings, and yet they do not exhaust the forms in which we come into contact with the past we have come to share. There are also elements that we would not like to see, that our compatriots or fellow citizens did not want to see either. Objects which became traces of a tragedy inflicted on a supra-individual scale – on communities or nation. We treat unwanted heritage as ‘ballast’ or ‘burden’ that represents a unique challenge for many communities. This heritage, which arose from circumstances beyond our control, can affect our

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lives in a variety of ways. While many of its elements are in material form, visible in space, its impact manifests itself primarily on an emotional level. This kind of legacy may require time and effort to understand and work through, in order to avoid transmitting these problems to future generations (Schulberg 1997, 324). It is also possible to adopt an attitude that tells us to get rid of forcibly imposed elements that remind us of a past marked by suffering or freedom deprivation. To remove and build anew, without the burden of trauma, without complexes and thorns. However, this is not always possible. For many people, struggling with such a legacy can be difficult, but at the same time it can be an opportunity for learning and personal growth. It is worth emphasising that whatever unwanted legacy we inherit, we are in control of how we react to it and the steps we take to influence our lives and the lives of future generations.

A pair of contributors combining academic and television experience have taken on the task of bringing readers closer to the diversity of cultural heritage using the Polish example. Lucyna Rotter is a professor at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow and has been working for years on the symbolism of dress (Marecki, Rotter, Giza, 2022) and space (Rotter, 2003; Rotter, 2016; Marecki, Rotter, 2016), also devoting attention to cultural tourism. Piotr Legutko is a versatile journalist, with practical and managerial experience in press, radio and television, and the author of studies on the craft of journalism (Legutko, 2007) and the politics of memory (Legutko, 2014). The authors of the book try (combining their respective temperaments and perspectives of interest) to take the reader on a journey through time and space, showing not only cultural beauty but also the importance of heritage elements for tourism development. This is a popular book, but not devoid of a scientific apparatus. Its sections smuggle in statistical analyses, theoretical considerations and practical experiences of media exposure of heritage elements surrounded by narratives about places and customs.

The authors argue that any heritage 'can be wanted', even one associated with a tragic or unattractive past. The secret lies in nurturing the story and building the right narrative around it to attract an audience that wants moving, interesting stories. The book is based on precisely this idea, both methodologically (driving the

heritage narrative) and teleologically (convincing the audience of the importance of narrating heritage elements).

The structure of the publication includes, apart from the introduction and conclusion, four substantive chapters, highlighted in colour. It is the colour scheme, the extraordinarily rich layout and the illustrative material (including specially selected photographs by Włodzimierz Płaneta) that create a story that focuses on the attractiveness of the message without abandoning such traditionally unattractive elements as the bibliography or footnotes.

The authors chose to reflect on the cultural code to open the publication. They highlight how complex and multidimensional the cultural code is in the context of the perception of a region’s cultural space, showing its impact on the identity, perception and heritage of a place. Here they focused on the significance of cultural artefacts, pointing out that they often have the meaning of a symbol or sign properly understood only through analysis in a chronological, geographical and cultural context. This shows that people and societies function in a universe of signs with variety of research applications. They also highlighted the influence of tradition on the perception of a region by reminding us that the multi-layered tradition of a region, including historical, social and cultural aspects, influence the way a region or city is perceived. This perception is also influenced by economic, political and religious changes, indicating the complexity of the elements that shape a region’s cultural code. Each region has its own distinctive cultural code, which is shaped and continues to shape the heritage and cultural landscape of towns, villages and the region as a whole. This code forms part of the narrative of a place and is integral to its identity.

The book also emphasises that non-verbal communication has developed different forms and modes of expression throughout history. The meaning of a sign depends on the context and situation, and its perception and understanding is not immutable. A sign is something only for someone, which indicates the subjectivity and conventionality in the interpretation of cultural symbols. Hence, an important section is devoted to the analysis of intangible heritage. The definitional considerations and the analysis of the impact of intangible heritage on the cultural code lead in the authors’ view to

emphasise its importance for the branding of the region: intangible heritage, understood as a set of symbols and signs, is the foundation for the branding of a city or region. The use of these elements in the branding process makes it possible to build a unique identity and differentiate the region from others. Through its unique cultural characteristics, traditions and symbols, it is a key element in shaping a region's brand, giving it depth and authenticity, which is extremely important in the context of tourism and cultural promotion.

In the coexistence of wanted and unwanted heritage, Rotter and Legutko highlighted buildings associated with the era of industrial development. This is a well-known approach in the literature (Dąbrowski, 2017; Kisiel, 2019), although the first association with the term 'unwanted heritage' is most often associated in Poland with buildings of the German occupation period (e.g. Building 5 at Wawel Castle, the castle in Przegorzały) aiming to turn Krakow into the Nuremberg of the East referring to connections with the city on the part of Dürer and Stwosz (Schenk, 2013, p. 80). There has also been a broader look, pointing to Wawel Castle as a troubled heritage due to the significant changes in the development of the hill from the period of Austrian annexation and later German modernisation (Purchla, 2016). There have also been works showing, using this term, the policy of the communist Polish authorities towards monuments in the lands obtained by Poland after World War II, for example in Lower Silesia (Merta-Staszczak, 2018), not to mention the monuments and architecture of the communist period. Rotter and Legutko focused on softer forms, as if to harmonise with the positive overtones of the whole publication. They emphasize creation, restoration, and reuse rather than accentuate difficulties or negative aspects.

In a similar vein, examples of local phenomena (mine culture), the contemporary reproduction of minority heritage (Jewish culture) are discussed. This does not mean that the authors are completely blind to the problems of caring for and using cultural heritage. However, they treat them as a challenge, as shown in particular by the considerations collected in the last chapter, devoted to cultural tourism in Krakow and Lesser Poland (Malopolska). Here they point out the acute problem of "overtourism", tourism beyond its means, a serious problem in many places around the world, dramatically

affecting some of them (Séraphin et al., 2020; Dodds & Butler, 2019). “Overtourism” had already become an issue in Kraków in the years leading up to the pandemic. Writing about the ‘touristification of cities’, the authors mention negative effects such as the overcrowding of city centres with tourists, leading to the need for a strategy to manage and properly understand cultural heritage. They signal problems resulting from an excessive focus on tourism, such as residents moving out of city centres due to the annoying proximity of entertainment venues and the excessive number of souvenir shops and low-quality food outlets. As identity and cultural code are at the heart of their concerns, they do not shy away from these aspects either, pointing out the threat of losing the historical and cultural fabric of a place under the influence of mass tourism, especially in permanently inhabited places such as Krakow. The growing tourist pressure also leads to the use of heritage resources in an unrestricted way and often incompatible with the tradition and cultural code of the region, deforming the image of the place.

The final chapter contains quite a few statistical summaries from which the profile of tourists visiting the region and its capital city emerges. Among foreign tourists visiting Krakow, people from the UK make up a significant proportion, amounting to around 25% of foreign visitors. The dominant age group among tourists visiting Kraków and Malopolska is between 30 and 45 years old. This trend continues among both domestic and foreign tourists. The majority of tourists visiting the region have a university degree (53%) or secondary education (44%), which together account for 97% of the total tourist flow. The vast majority of tourists coming to Krakow describe their material status as good or medium, with the dominance of the affluent (about 70% of the tourist traffic stream). Among tourists visiting Kraków, the largest number are economically active people, accounting for more than 58% of the tourist traffic stream. Students take second place with a share of around 21%, and pensioners are the third most numerous group.

While giving away the main strengths of this publication, one cannot avoid pointing out possible weaker sides. It is surprising – given the authors’ professional experience – that there is no separate

section of the publication with a strictly media or even media studies reflection. Both authors have not only the aptitude for this, but also access to sources and experience that would enrich the reader with knowledge and insights that are difficult to obtain elsewhere. Being aware of this, one cannot help but feel unsatisfied – this is part of the untapped potential. It is all the more noticeable when one notices, in the selected material, the authors' fascination with (among other things) their work in the media – Zamość with its festival, in which Piotr Legutko contributes significantly every year, the open-air locations of Krakow appearing in Lucyna Rotter's TV series – one would like to read more from such a combined perspective. The second dissatisfaction is related to the title of the book and the “unwanted heritage” contained therein. The actual ‘unwanted heritage’, understood as ‘unwanted heritage’ with a proposal to use it in tourism or media activities, is hardly touched upon. These are rather incidental threads, and the ‘unwanted heritage’ in the title of the publication refers here more to the effort required to promote the brand of each material trace of the past – even the most impressive and attractive ones. The extremely attractive edition, which encourages one to reach for the book and allows one to smuggle in the content present in the scholarly literature in a way that is friendly to a non-academic audience, is not without minor glitches, proofreading oversights. One example is the amusing mistake about ‘fellow foothillers’ (Rotter, Legutko, 2023, p. 115), where a spelling error creates new content.

Rotter and Legutko's book is an interesting hybrid of forms and styles – there is a noticeable scientific and theoretical underpinning, which, however, does not deter or dominate (although the bibliography contains some 200 items). The abundance of photographs and the graphic design are reminiscent of promotional publications and elaborate tourist studies. This is the kind of publication that can serve as an inspiration to look a little differently at places one is happy to visit, or sees so often that one no longer recognises its uniqueness.

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