

THE MENNONITE CEMETERIES AS FACTORS OF CULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *The Mennonite Cemeteries as Factors of Cultural Tourism Development.* This article contains preliminary reflections concerning the possibility of tourist site management of the Mennonite graveyards localized in the Żuławy area in Northern Poland. The paper presents possibilities of cultural tourism development on the basis of the Mennonite heritage - this religious group settled in Poland in the half of the sixteenth century. An in-depth overview of the concerned literature and a wide observation resulted in a precise evaluation, conclusions and solution proposals.

Key words: Mennonites, Mennonite graveyards, cultural tourism, tourist site management.

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In order to specify the subject of these reflections on Mennonite heritage-based tourism, it is crucial to analyze to which different travel movements this particular form of activity belongs to.

According to the classification of W.I. Azar, it is possible to indicate conditions concerning: the location of the stay, the degree of tourists activity, the travel purpose, the organization type, the differences in the intensity of the movements, the duration of the stay, the means of transport and the type of accommodation¹.

Due to the cultural dissimilarity of the Mennonite heritage, these sites are visited by both Poles as well as international tourists. From the point of tourists' activity we can call this type of tourism as active tourism – land penetration is a crucial ingredient. From the point of travel purpose, it can be linked to vacation and weekend tourism. This type of tourist activity can be based on different forms of organization – individual trips or in groups, self-organized or purchased as a package. The intensity of tourist movements may indicate a permanent or seasonal activity. The duration of the stay of tourists interested in the anthropogenic amenities left by the Mennonites is rather short and the visit at the graveyards is mostly accidental.

Visits driven only by Mennonite heritage are quite rare. A car seems to be a more often used mean of transport than a bus. The type of accommodation does not have any important link to cultural tourism participation, also concerning „Mennonite treasures exploration”.

¹ W.I. Azar, *Ekonomika i organizacja turizmu*, Ekonomika, Moskwa 1972.



Figure 1. Gravestone museums In the small city of Cyganek **Source:** W. Moska



Figure 2. A well-designed information board situated along the road from Tczew to Malbork informs about the cemetery in Stogi Malborskie **Source:** W. Moska



Figure 3. Aesthetical boards informing about the cemetery, his surroundings and the Mennonite culture

Some authors advise other tourism categories, on which an analysis of the Mennonite tourism movement can be based².

The Mennonite cultural tourism can be qualified as a cultural and educational tourism – it is certainly an excellent source of knowledge. We can also consider it as a religious tourism, related to visits in graveyards and former Mennonite sanctuaries. It also can be considered as a historical tourism as it is linked to the past events.

The evaluation of the types of tourism presented by different authors leads to a conclusion that tourism consistent of discovering and visiting attractions left by the Mennonites fits to the notion of the leisure tourism, educational tourism, ecotourism and religious tourism.

The literature regarding the Mennonite culture in the Żuławy area is very narrow. E. Kizik, M. Dymnicka, Z. Opacki, ks. S. Wilk, J. Stankiewicz, K. Mężyński, E. Cieślak, L. Krzyżanowski, J. Domino and T. Domagała were writing about Mennonite culture; E. Filipka, J. Hoffmann, J. Gzowski, D. Rekowska, J. Labenz and B. Trzebicka dedicated their work to Mennonite cemeteries; only the monograph of E. Filipka *Cmentarze mennonitów – Żuławy i Dolina Wisły*³ (The Mennonite Cemeteries in the Żuławy and Vistula Valley area) is a complex study of the subject.

While evaluating the tourist facilities on the Żuławy Area, I decided to concentrate my efforts on the Mennonite graveyards. This task was difficult to achieve because of the character of these sites, their historical conditions and devastation. However, the lapse of time, which causes a further degradation of the Mennonite cemeteries, was a strong stimulus for me.

One of the elements of the Polish tradition is an exceptional care for the cemeteries – the historical necropolis and the currently used graveyards.

Unfortunately this care is not so common when concerning these religions which are no longer present near the cemeteries.

One of the weak points of cultural tourism in Poland is the lack of protection and care of the Mennonite cemeteries and their leavings. It is especially noticeable in the Żuławy area, in various places of this part of Poland.

Because of the religious changes that took place in Europe at the beginning of the sixteenth century, many Anabaptists – including Mennonites, were forced to hide escape certain countries. While searching a safe place to live they came to Żuławy⁴. At this time Poland was the oasis of tolerance – the Warsaw Confederation prohibited any acts of war driven by religious reasons⁵.

The most characteristic elements of the heritage left by the Mennonites in the Żuławy area are domestic buildings and elements of industrial architecture. The Mennonite cemeteries are less noticeable – they deteriorate and are covered with vegetation and dust and they are located far from the local roads. We see them as a neglected heritage of the Dutch culture, which was growing on this land for four consecutive centuries.

Some actions are being undertaken to recover a part of the Mennonite cemeteries. Part of them have been fenced and inventoried; others have been changed into gravestone museums – as it is the case in the small city of Cyganek.

In other places – like Stogi Malborskie, several gravestones from different, destroyed burial locations have been gathered together. Some information signs have

² W.W. Gaworecki, *Turystyka*, PWE, Warszawa 1998; D. Jakubikova, M. Jerek, M. Pawlak, *Cestovni ruch, Zapadoceska Univerzita, Plzeň* 1995; A. Kowalczyk, *Geografia turystyki*, PWN, Warszawa 2002.

³ E. Filipka, *Cmentarze mennonitów – Żuławy i Dolina Wisły*, dokumentacja naukowo-historyczna, WUOZ, Elbląg 1978. See also J. Domino, *Budownictwo i cmentarze mennonickie na Żuławach Wiślanych*, (in:) *Menonici na Żuławach. Ocalone dziedzictwo*, Muzeum Narodowe w Gdańsku, Gdańsk 2007, s. 77.

⁴ P.J. Klassen, *Menonici na Żuławach*, (in:) *Menonici na Żuławach. Ocalone dziedzictwo*, Muzeum Narodowe w Gdańsku, Gdańsk 2007, s. 15-17.

⁵ *Historia powszechna. Historia Polski*, tom I, pod red. B. Kaczorowskiego, PWN, Warszawa 2007, s. 473-476.

been placed to indicate the location of cemeteries – as it has been done on the road from Tczew to Malbork where an information-board on the Stogi Malborskie cemetery has been placed.

The cemeteries left by the Mennonites are located in different parts of Gdansk Sub-region⁶. There are several conditionings related to them, they concern the location, the concentration, the condition, the marking, additional arrangements, media information and internal differentiation.

It is important to underline that the most significant number of Mennonite cemeteries in the Żuławy area is located near the Lake Drużno – this fact is directly connected with the settlement.

In this area cemeteries are situated along rural roads, others are located on the far outskirts.

Due to their condition, some of them have lost the typical character of a cemetery.

Almost all of them have one characteristic feature – the lack of any information signs located along the main roads, only a few of them have information boards situated on the burial site.

Taking into account the possibility of undertaking tourism activity, following conclusions - which may contribute to further deliberations, can be reached based on visiting the Mennonite cemeteries:

1. In the analyzed area Mennonite cemeteries are rather small.
2. The Mennonite cemeteries are not marked by any information signs along the roads.
3. The marking of Mennonite cemeteries on maps of the region is very inexact.
4. The solicitude for the cemeteries is very poor.
5. The Mennonite cemeteries are left in various conditions.
6. The analyzed tourist amenities are lacking additional arrangements; only a few of them are fenced.
7. There is a great need to elaborate a tourist arrangement plan of the Mennonite cemeteries, a Mennonite cemeteries trail, a detailed plan of the terrain with accurate information on the analyzed subject.
8. The Mennonite cemeteries, if well marked and taken good care off, may become an important factor of cultural tourism on the Żuławy Wiślane.

Solutions to above mentioned conclusions may derive from standards already being applied in Żuławy area and they should be the effect of complex considerations. From the solutions that already have been applied in the Żuławy area there are some worth considering:

- a well-designed information board situated along the road from Tczew to Malbork informs about the cemetery in Stogi Malborskie⁷;
- aesthetical boards informing about the cemetery, his surroundings and the Mennonite culture;
- fencing of some cemeteries, as in Stogi Malborskie, Cyganek and Stawiec;
- delimitation of a Mennonite track;
- scientific studies on Mennonites;
- an intense activity of the Nowy Dwór Club – the Association of Nowy Dwór Admirers, dedicated to Mennonite culture⁸;

⁶ According to Z. Kruczek, S. Sacha, *Geografia atrakcji turystycznych Polski*, Kraków 1997, s. 72, Żuławy Wiślane are an integral part of Gdańsk Sub-region.

⁷ Observation made by the Author on the 03.11.2008.

⁸ Nowy Dwór Club – the Association of Nowy Dwór Admirers, by organizing several events dedicated to Mennonite culture has prepared some information-boards – “The Mennonite Track” – for the area of Nowy Dwór Gdański, Rybiny, Cedry Wielkie and surroundings of Cyganek and for Wiślina with its environs.

- promotion of the Mennonite culture by the company Foto Opitz from Nowy Dwór⁹;
- school lessons with in-land exploration along the Mennonite track¹⁰;
- individual tourists activity resulting from hobby passions.

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⁹ The company Foto Opitz, managed by Marek Opitz promotes the Mennonite culture in Żuławy area;

¹⁰ The lessons organized by Ms Wiesława Szkutnik from the Primary School in Janowo are a good example of this type of activity.