

Assessing the Fragility of Spirit of Place at the Tsar's Hunting Palace Garden in Bia_owie_a, Poland

Malgorzata Rycewicz-Borecki
Utah State University, Department of Landscape Architecture and
Environmental Planning
4005 Old Main Hill
Logan, Utah 84322-4005
USA
margie.borecki@usu.edu

Abstract: The people of Bia_owie_a, Poland live in a small agricultural village directly adjacent to the Tsar's hunting palace garden, which is a site of extreme negative history. The Tsar's garden serves as the visitor center for thousands of annual tourists visiting the Bia_owie_a National Park. This paper will assess the fragility of spirit of place at the Tsar's hunting palace garden in Bia_owie_a, Poland as a consequence of global design, war, abandonment, new (historically and culturally insensitive) technology, and touristification. These threats have resulted in a dynamic loss of tangible and intangible elements which would otherwise add meaning, value and emotion. The loss of historic buildings and paths, changes in site layout, and the introduction of inappropriately designed structures represent many of the tangible consequences of these threats. Intangible consequences include an unexploited potential to represent the local meaning; to act as an area for recreational opportunities within the community; and to recognize the historic and cultural value of preserving the garden for future generations.

Spirit of Place is defined as the tangible and intangible elements that give meaning, value and emotion to place (ICOMOS, 2008). The Spirit of Place at the Tsar's Hunting Palace Garden, located in the village of Bia_owie_a, Poland is fragile. The garden's (Figure 1) history is negative to a degree seldom encountered. It has been exposed to the threats of global design, war, abandonment, new (historically and culturally insensitive) technology, and touristification. This has led to the deterioration of much of the garden's historic value and spirit of place. This paper will assess the fragility of spirit of place at the Tsar's Hunting Palace Garden and explore the resulting consequences.

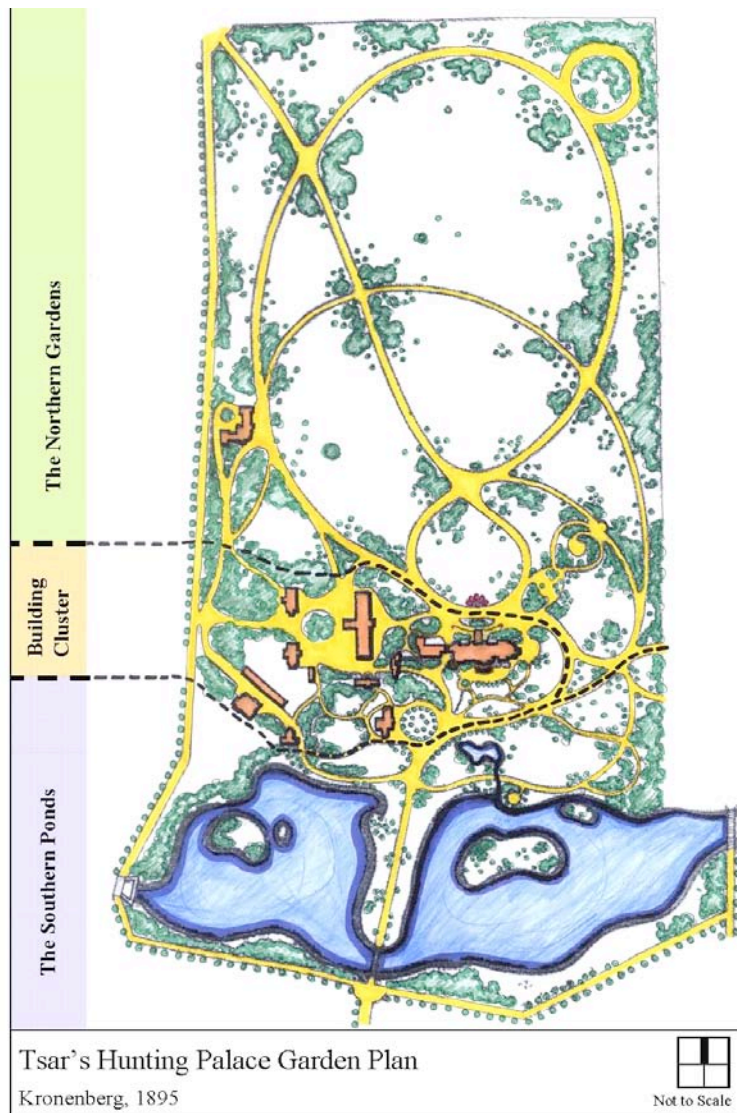


Figure 1. Layout of the Tsar's Palace Garden in Kronenberg's 1895 plan (Original images taken from the Bia_owie_a National Park Archives. Modified by Malgorzata Rycewicz-Borecki).

Threat of Global Design

In the late twentieth century Tsar Aleksander III commissioned a design competition for a forty-five hectare garden surrounding his luxurious new Hunting Palace at Bia_owie_a (Karcov, 1903). It was designed in the globally popular English-landscape style by the

renowned Polish landscape architect, Walerian Kronenberg (Cio_ek, 1978). The garden provided Russian royalty a welcome retreat from hunting excursions and served as a civilized contrast to the feral lands surrounding the palace grounds (Kawecka, 1960). However, it was designed in a global style without consideration for the local context and did not root itself into the region's culture or traditions.

CONSEQUENCE OF GLOBAL DESIGN

The introduction of the global-style design into Bialowieza's small community has deterred the identification of the garden as a place of meaning and value for the local culture (Rycewicz-Borecki, 2007). The garden possesses vast potential as a valuable cultural symbol; however, the local community continues to disassociate the garden from the local identity of place because it is seen as foreign.

Threat of War

As World War I began (August 1915), German troops occupied the area and the royal family's staff and employees evacuated the region, as did most of the local Russian population. The invading German army laid out over 200 kilometers of small rail track to export wood and game from remote locations of the forest to newly built lumber mills in surrounding villages, including Bia_owie_a (Rörig, 1917). German citizens were settled into these villages to operate the mills.

During World War II (1939), most of Bia_owie_a's inhabitants were arrested and sent to gulags. New Soviet forest workers replaced the extracted inhabitants, but they, too, were deported in 1941 when the German military invaded and took control of the region. The forest became a refuge for Polish and Soviet partisans, as German authorities regularly organized mass executions of people suspected of aiding the resistance. It was not until July 1944 that Soviet forces began to drive the Germans out of Bia_owie_a and eastern Poland.

CONSEQUENCE OF WAR

Poland's intimate involvement in both World Wars left the nation devastated. Fear engulfed the region and the nation. Poland's cultural heritage came under attack as many buildings and monuments were destroyed, and many oral traditions, beliefs and rituals were prohibited. A physical reminder of this negative history, the Tsar's

garden reminds the community of past cruelties, causing some people to disassociate themselves from the physical object.

Additionally, the region's population was forced to evacuate a number of times, and the region was then repopulated by inhabitants of an invading nation. This historically shifting population has not developed meaningful oral traditions and rituals associated with the Tsar's garden. As a result, the intangible spirit of place remains fragile, void of associated value and emotion.

Threat of Abandonment

The garden was meticulously maintained from its inception until Germany's 1915 invasion, which initiated a period of abandonment. During both World Wars, the region and specifically the garden were exploited for military purposes. German troops used the palace grounds as a military post (Figure 2). Soldier quarters were located throughout each of the site's buildings, including the palace. The garden was employed for military exercises and maintenance was abandoned (Szymanowski, 1925).



Figure 2. German forces on horseback during Germany's WWI occupation of Biaowie_a (Biaowie_a National Park Archives).

At the end of the First World War, the newly independent Polish State established the Biaowie_a Forestry Preservation Program. From late 1920 to 1932 the garden was used by the new federal government for representational functions. In 1932 the Biaowie_a forest, was acknowledged as Poland's first National Park

and the garden was again retrofitted to accommodate offices of the newly established National Park administration, a school of forestry, a nature museum and storage facilities (Karpinski, 1961). Throughout this time the garden was not abandoned; however, it received minimal attention and no restoration work was done.

With the advent of the Second World War (1939), garden maintenance was completely abandoned once again as the palace, garden and the region changed hands from Poland to Soviet Russia to Germany and finally back to a Communist ruled Poland. In 1944, German troops burnt the Palace upon retreat. The garden was abandoned, but it escaped intentional destruction.

In 1945 the area of the Bia_owie_a forest located within the new borders of Poland (including the burnt palace and English-landscape style garden) was reinstated as a National Park. During this time the garden was minimally maintained and increasingly manipulated to accommodate the needs of an increasingly popular National Park.

CONSEQUENCE OF ABANDONMENT

Since the onset of WWI, the Tsar's garden was threatened by abandonment and minimal maintenance. As seen on a 1962 plan by Janusz Bogdan Fali_ski, integral components of the historic design were altered. Garden paths were reconfigured, allotment gardens ('dzia_ki') were established in the central part of the garden, and new structures were introduced without sensitivity to the garden's original layout. Each of these changes represents a loss of tangible elements affecting the site's spirit of place.

Additionally, abandonment and under-maintenance of the garden has prevented it from providing intangible elements affecting spirit of place, such as recreational and educational opportunities for the local community. The garden's exotic trees and shrubs offer an exceptional educational opportunity for gardening and horticultural enthusiasts. Two graceful ponds provide potential picnic, pedal boat, and sport fishing opportunities.

There continues to be little done to reintroduce these lost tangible and intangible elements, as funding for forest maintenance takes precedence over funding for the garden. As a result, the garden's historic and cultural significance is underrepresented and often overlooked, weakening its spirit of place.

Threat of New Technology

The original design of the Tsar's garden consisted of 12 structures. Today, there are thirty-one structures located on the site. Fifteen of these structures are considered historic (pre 1935), whereas sixteen are non-historic (post 1935)

(Rycewicz-Borecki, 2005).

In response to the changing needs of the National Park,

newly erected structures

were often built in

historically and culturally

insensitive architectural

styles. For example, staff

quarters were built in 1975-

1980 in Communist-era,

cement-block architecture

(Figure 3). This block style

building is a stark contrast

to the Eclectic architectural

style of the Tsar's palace

and supporting buildings.

Another example of

architectural insensitivity is

the oil heater structure built

adjacent to the

Marsza_kowski House

(Figure 4). The addition

was built with complete

disregard for architectural

integration.

In the early 1990s, a contemporary building housing the nature museum, director's offices, hotel, and restaurant was built on the palace's original location. As a result of disjointed circulation planning, personal and delivery vehicles must pass through an original palace entry gate to enter the service port and underground garage of the new museum building (Figure 5). The gate is the last surviving piece of the Tsar's palace and the most important historical building on site; yet, haphazard planning has allowed it to degrade at an alarming rate.



Figure 3. Staff quarters were built in the typical communist-era architecture style atop the historic electrical plant foundations (photo: Moroz-Keczynska)



Figure 4. An oil heater was added onto the Marsza_kowski House without sensitivity to architectural integrity (photo: Moroz-Keczynska)



Figure 5. The last surviving building of the Tsar's palace is starting to degrade and crumble from vehicles repeatedly hitting the gate (photo: W. Brzozowski)

CONSEQUENCE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

The loss of historic buildings and paths and the introduction of inappropriate, architecturally insensitive structures to a historically significant site diminish the integrity of tangible heritage and weaken the site's sense of place. Spirit of place is furthermore deteriorated by the toleration of structural abuse to the palace gate, which illustrates the National Park's lack of respect for the historic values associated with the gate.

Threat of Touristification

Tourists are an integral part of the National Park's mission. Most importantly, they provide a critical portion of income. In response to tourist needs, the Park has manipulated building layout and use, circulation and vegetative structure. In essence, the Tsar's historic hunting residence has been transformed into a visitor center and central administration complex for the Bia_owie_a National Park.

Tourism is often noted to act as a double-edged sword: it contributes economically to a site's development, but also has a negative impact on the conservation of heritage (International Forum, 2007). Each year, the number of tourists visiting Bia_owie_a increases. Consequently, the garden suffers from the tangible threat of increased degradation, adding to an incessant maintenance concern.

Two world-wide chain hotels have been built within the rural village. The local population also strives to benefit economically from the tourist increase. Many families have renovated their property into hostels or rooms-for-rent.

CONSEQUENCE OF TOURISTIFICATION

Site degradation increases with an increase in tourists. In response, the National Park must increase funding for garden maintenance. However, it is also possible to lessen tourist degradation by increasing the visitor's knowledge of the site's uniqueness and importance (Weinmann, 2003). This is accomplished by providing educational materials communicating the site's cultural and historic legacy. Such materials include illustrative kiosks, pamphlets, informational videos, promotional events, etc.

Tourism has also dramatically altered the architectural atmosphere of the village with the addition of the two large hotels. Subsequently, many villagers have taken economic advantage of the need for increased tourist services by altering their property and relinquishing traditional trades of agriculture and forestry. This has added to the architectural alteration of the village, and threatens villagers' cultural heritage through the loss of rituals, beliefs, and traditions.

Conclusion

The Tsar's hunting palace garden in Bia_owie_a is a landscape which distinctly illustrates a significant stage in human history. It exemplifies this culturally diverse region's incredible struggle and perseverance. It can be positioned to act as a symbol of historic and cultural heritage to the local region and nation. Pickard (2002) states that contact with cultural heritage allows individuals to locate themselves in their own historic, social and cultural environment.

This paper has assessed that the spirit of place at the Tsar's garden is fragile, deficient in tangible and intangible elements that give meaning, value and emotion to a place. Threats to the garden's spirit of place included global design, war, abandonment, new technologies, and touristification. The loss of historic buildings and paths, changes in site layout, and the introduction of inappropriately designed structures represent many of the tangible consequences of these threats. Intangible consequences include an unexploited potential

to represent the local meaning and value; to act as an area for recreational opportunities within the community; and to recognize the historic and cultural value of preserving the garden for future generations.

At this juncture, the local, regional, and national cultures have two options. The first option is to continue to be disconnected from the garden and potentially produce a placeless environment which lacks richness of place and meaning. This divergence is largely due to tourists, and not the local community, forming the predominant user group. Tourists interact minimally with the garden's intangible heritage and are not in a position to form a relationship with the garden's spirit of place.

The second option is for the local culture to work toward reinstating connectivity and spirit of place. Specifically, it is the local people who are in a position to intimately interact with the garden, and to create a unique and meaningful place that will enrich the garden's spirit and local heritage. The garden possesses the basic requirements for successful place-making; its design is unique, original and expressive (Huang, 1995). The introduction of opportunities to voice the region's history, to provide a place to experience and learn about the garden, and to publicly promote the garden's values, will allow the garden's fragile spirit of place to heal.

References

- Cio_ek, G. 1978. *Ogrody polskie (Gardens of Poland)*. Revised edition of the 1954 publication under the same title, updated and expanded by Janusz Bogdanowski. Warszawa: Arkady
- Brian Daines. 2000. "Ours the Sorrow, Ours the Loss": Psychoanalytic understandings of the role of World War I war memorials in the mourning process, *Psychoanalytic Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3
- Huang, Chang-Shan. 1995. *How can we avoid placelessness? A phenomenological study of place and place-making with four case studies of landscape design projects in Boston and its vicinity*. Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania.
- ICOMOS 16th General Assembly and International Scientific Symposium. 2008. *Call for Papers*, Quebec, Canada, Available from <http://quebec2008.icomos.org>; accessed 21February 2008.
- Janusz Bogdan Fali_ski, 1962. *Vegetation reelle du Parc Botanique a Bia_owie_a [Map of Existing vegetation in the Bia_owie_a Botanical Par]*, Warszawa: University of Warszawa
- Karcov, G. 1903. *Bie_awie_skaja Puszcza [The Bia_owie_a primeval forest]*, St. Petersburg

- Karpiński, J. J. 1961. *Białowiecki Park Narodowy [The Białowieża National Park]*, Warszawa
- Kawecka, A. 1960. Park Botaniczny w Białowieży (Botanical Garden in Białowieża). *Rocznik Dendrologiczny*, vol. 14:119-127
- Pickard, Robert 2002. *European cultural heritage (Volume II). A review of policies and practice*. Council of Europe Publishing. (September): 82
- Rörig, G. 1918. *Białowieża in deutscher Verwaltung*, Heft 1-4, Berlin
- Rycewicz-Borecki, Malgorzata. 2005. *The Tsar's Hunting Palace Garden in Białowieża, Poland: Adaptation of a Historic Private Landscape for Use as a Public Garden*. Masters Thesis, University of Michigan
- Rycewicz-Borecki Malgorzata. 2007. A case study of the Tsar's Hunting Palace Garden in Białowieża, Poland; Landscape Globalisation in nineteenth century central Europe and a search for the identity of place. In *Globalisation and Landscape Architecture*, ed. St Petersburg Forest Technical Academy, June 3-6, Russia
- Szymanowski, W. 1925. *Przewodnik po puszczy Białowieżskiej [Guidebook to the Białowieża forest]*, Wilno: 16-19
- UNESCO, World Heritage Centre. 1992-2006, Belovezhskaya Pushcha / Białowieża Forest, Available from <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/33>; accessed 13 November 2006.
- Weinmann, Arno. 2003. Projects to Safeguard Threatened Landscapes in Germany and Eastern Europe, *Cultural Landscapes: the Challenges of Conservation, World Heritage 2002, Ferrara, Italy*, UNESCO World heritage Centre: 68
- International Forum 'Privatisation and Cultural Heritage.' 2007. *Catania Conclusions*, Catania, Italy, (September): 13-15