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Small Museum Exhibition as a Tool for Strengthening Local and Community Ties and a Form of Promoting Popular Science Publications – Końskowola, Poland Based on an Event in Końskowola

**Mała wystawa muzealna jako narzędzie wzmacniania więzi
lokalnych i społecznych oraz forma promocji
publikacji popularnonaukowej – Końskowola, Poland
Na podstawie wydarzenia w Końskowoli**

Introduction

Museums in Poland, and probably also in Europe and the world, are going through a kind of crisis (Folga-Januszewska 2008: 18–46; *Muzea w 2022 roku...* 2022: 34–67). They are looking for their own identity, a new idea for themselves (Clair 2009: 10–26). In this search, it is necessary to find new forms and new ways of operating that would enable museums to continue on a commercial basis on the one hand, and to make at least as important a contribution to social life and science as museums did in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on the other.

We see, in the broad perspective of the local politics of smaller towns, a trend towards reducing expenditure on activities related to the development and promotion of culture and the arts. Such strategies are dictated by limited budgets as well as purely market-based understanding of the activities of cultural institutions. Independent cinemas, virtually all theatres and art galleries and, of course, museums are victims of change (Głowacki et al. 2009). The arguments are usually similar: if there can be profit-making cinemas (e.g. so-called multiplexes) or commercial art galleries, then similar institutions subject to local governments should also be self-financing. If this is not the case, it means that they are poorly organised or uncompetitive and should be closed down. Therefore, there is very often no chance for smaller local museums to continue their activity without the support of local governments.

The aforementioned tendency to seek one's own identity and to reinvent museums takes on various forms (Mclean 2012: 89–105). On the one hand, we have modern interactive museums overflowing with electronics and gadgets, which perform a very clear educational, but also entertainment function. Such museums seem to be aiming to compete with cinemas, video-game arcades or other strictly entertainment institutions (Mclean 2012).

At the other extreme, we also notice a kind of conservatism in museology, which manifests itself in the fact that museums hardly ever change. Maintaining their current stance, they assume that, like universities or religious institutions, they do not have to succumb to temporary trends and fashions, and that they will defend their position with their current cultural significance and mission. These museums resemble institutions from the early twentieth century, relying on a kind of distance of visitors to the collections, a lofty atmosphere (Mclean 2012), and often... visitor slippers.

We proposed a certain indirect solution during the promotion of a multi-author monograph *W źródłach utrwalone – krypty w Końskowoli* (Recorded in the Sources – Crypts in Końskowola) (Nowosad et al. 2021). In agreement with the Roman Catholic Parish of the Finding of the Holy Cross and St. Andrew the Apostle, the “Fara Końskowolska” Society for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, and the Kazimiera Walczak Community Cultural Centre in Końskowola, we decided to arrange an exhibition in the interiors that were not originally intended for this purpose. We selected the town hall building housing the local library. After discussing the exhibition design with the library staff, there was no problem with making the free space available for exhibition purposes. It was intended to be a temporary or even ad hoc exhibition. We believed that its preparation would enable the local community to come into contact with their own tradition and culture in a completely new way.

All the artefacts exhibited were published in the aforementioned monograph, which is a kind of account of the research carried out by a group of archaeologists,

historians, and conservators in the crypts of the Parish Church in Końskowola. The book was created with the cooperation and help of local communities: local authorities, church authorities, and ordinary residents who lent their support.

Końskowola and research outline

The source-based history of the village dates back to the end of the fourteenth century, but it has been known under its present name since the second half of the fifteenth century. It has “always” been a part of private estates of magnate families, such as: the Konińskis, the Tęczyńskis, the Opalińskis, the Lubomirskis, and the Czartoryskis. For the first time, Konińska Wola (the name used in the modern era) appeared on the pages of *Liber beneficiorum* by Jan Długosz, a Kraków Canon and one of the most famous Polish chroniclers. It was granted the Charter in 1532 thanks to the efforts of another owner, Andrzej Tęczyński, Great Sword-bearer of the Crown¹. On the site of the present church there originally stood (for about 150 years) a single-nave, wooden Parish Church of the Holy Cross². It is assumed that the second brick church was founded at the turn of the fifteenth/sixteenth century by representatives of the Tęczyński family, as the only ancestral chapels belonged to this family. The church was of white stone, covered with regular shingles on a gable roof. The second temple in its original form survived until 1706, i.e. the Northern War, when the Swedish army burnt the town and damaged it. The repair and reconstruction of the temple rested on the shoulders of the then owners of the estate, August Czartoryski, voivode and general of the Ruthenian lands, and his wife Maria Zofia Sieniawska, Countess of Jarosław and Tenczyn.

The conservation and renovation of the Końskowola Parish Church (2010–2011) made parishioners and researchers realise that virtually every inch of ground is filled with sometimes even several layers of human remains buried over centuries. It was the analysis of the uncovered graves and crypts that helped recall the history of the inhabitants of Końskowola.

One of the aims of the church renovation project³ was to connect the northern crypt – where Izabela née Tęczyńska and Łukasz Opaliński were buried – with

1 Historian and chronicler, diplomat, tutor to the children of King Casimir IV Jagiellon.

2 It is now assumed that the parish already existed before 1418.

3 The Conservation and Renovation of the Parish Church in Końskowola – a Monument of Significance for the History of the Lublin Region. Project co-financed by the funds of the European Regional Development Fund within the scope of the Regional Operational Program for the Lublin Voivodeship for the years 2007–2013. Priority Axis VII. Culture, Tourism and Interregional Cooperation.

the southern crypt⁴, where their daughter Duchess Zofia Lubomirska née Opałińska was buried, by means of an underground corridor (*Konserwacja...* 2011: 62).

In fact, apart from the well-preserved burial of Duchess Zofia and the burials in the crypt under the chancel, the others were mixed, probably partly moved to an ossuary perhaps located in the cemetery to make room for the new dead. However, many artefacts being grave goods were left behind and could therefore be identified. These included fragments of secular and liturgical clothing, various types of devotional items (rosaries, medallions, scapulars), amulets, and coins.

Publication vs exhibition

Usually, an exhibition is a pretext for preparing a publication as a permanent record of the exhibition and a catalogue of the artefacts presented. In the case described here, a completely different approach was adopted. An existing book, the fruit of research work and a complete catalogue of the artefacts recovered during the archaeological excavations, provided the inspiration for an exhibition, which, apart from the educational and social purposes described above, would also serve as a kind of promotion of the publication.

For the local community, publication of a book entirely devoted to the regional heritage was a huge event. In order to give it the right prominence, on the initiative of the local authorities, a so-called book promotion was organised, i.e. an event where the new publication was presented and discussed. In this case, the book promotion strategy went one step further, because in addition to the traditional meeting with the authors, a museum exhibition was created from scratch to bring the materials and descriptions from the book's pages to life.

The exhibition was accompanied by a lecture on the history of fashion and a court fashion show, as part of which a team from Toruń (students and doctoral students of Nicolaus Copernicus University) presented copies of secular costumes from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries modelled on artefacts found in various regions of Poland.

Beyond any doubt, the presented event contributed significantly to the promotion of the publication. In a way, the impulse to get acquainted with the new publication was not only the traditional meeting of a scientific and social nature, but mostly the interesting exhibition, which provided an opportunity for direct contact with history, the research effects, and the main characters of the book.

⁴ The extensive crypts of the Parish Church have long intrigued and attracted attention. Unfortunately, their condition did not allow free access. Entrance to the system of crypts under the northern nave was possible only by a ladder (*Konserwacja...* 2011: 78).

We are of the opinion that the two functions of this mini-museum undertaking described above, i.e. an ad hoc temporary exhibition as an impulse to stimulate the local community's sense of connection with the history of the locality and as a form of promotion of the publication, may be the answer to the museological crisis suggested earlier.

A Brief description of the presented collection

The newly renovated former town hall building, built in 1775 in the early neoclassical style, was chosen as the venue for the exhibition. The building now serves as a local community centre and library. It was decided to locate the exhibition on the ground floor, in the spacious interiors of the library, after they had been rearranged to adapt them for exhibition purposes. Four illuminated museum display cases and eight mannequins were set up.

The display cases with the artefacts were placed along the walls of the library room (Fig. 1). Their content exceeded the local range and included artefacts not only from the excavations of the Końskowola Parish Church, but also from Lublin, Gniew, Płonkowo, and Bytom Odrzański, giving visitors the opportunity to become more familiar with the work of Polish archaeologists and conservators. It also allowed visitors to understand what “treasures” are still hidden underground and how they



Fig. 1. Library room with prepared display cases and posters (photograph by Filip Nalaskowski).



Fig. 2. Preparing Zofia Lubomirska's dress, Prof. Małgorzata Grupa and Joanna Madecka. In the background, Prof. Tomasz Kozłowski and student Igor Dabralet (photograph by Filip Nalaskowski).

can be used to tell the local history. The first display case contained a biretta (a parish priest's headdress), a wooden chalice⁵, coins, buttons, shoe buckles, and an antiplague amulet (Fig. 2). Reconstructions of a grave cushion and a woman's bonnet were placed in the second display case, while in the third one, there was a cushion with a male headdress made of silk velvet. Artificial fur was fastened around the hatband, perhaps imitating wolf or beaver fur, originally found around the circumference of the hat⁶. The fourth display case was filled with devotional items, i.e. crosses made of various materials (wood, metal, bone), medallions made of brass and aluminium, and relics of rosaries from both the seventeenth and twentieth centuries (Fig. 3, 4).

⁵ Chalice were placed in the tombs of bishops and canons. In Końskwola, the remains of Rev. Canon Franciszek Zabłocki were identified (d. 1821).

⁶ During archaeological research, it was discovered that not all items of clothing went with the deceased to the grave after the funeral ceremonies, as some of them, such as the buttons of a delia or a zupan, were removed because this was the wish of the deceased, as stated in the funeral instructions. A similar thing might have happened with expensive fur from the hat edging.



Fig. 3. Arranging devotional items in a display case, student Nikodem Hirsch (photograph by Filip Nalaskowski).

Between the display cases there were boards informing about the lives of people who had been identified during research or about the founders of various events, such as Elżbieta Sieniawska née Lubomirska (Fig. 1) or Duchess Maria Zofia Czartoryska née Sieniawska and her husband August Czartoryski. After the Tęczyńskis and the Lubomirskis, these were the main heirs of Końskowola and guardians of the church.

The main emphasis of this exhibition was the reconstruction of both secular and clerical burial clothing. On the partially mummified remains of Duchess Zofia Lubomirska née Opalińska (d. 1675) there was a silk burial dress and small fragments of linen undergarments, which, after reconstruction, were presented to the inhabitants of Końskowola⁷ (Fig. 5). Next to it there were examples of reconstructed men's and women's gowns from other sites (Fig. 6). Unique among the garments was a silk

⁷ Zofia Lubomirska's dress differed in cut from the dresses of the period, as the Duchess suffered from idiopathic scoliosis (lateral curvature of undetermined causes), causing deformation of the spine and the whole posture of the constantly suffering woman – Nowosad et al. 2021: 55–62. With such large changes in the woman's silhouette, it was impossible to wear dresses with a neckline falling below the shoulders.



Fig. 4. The completed part of the exhibition, from the left: a children's dress from Bytom Odrzański, Duchess Zofia Lubomirska's dress, a coat from Radzyń Podlaski, children's dress from Bytom Odrzański, and a chasuble from Końskowola (photograph by Filip Nalaskowski).



Fig. 5. The completed part of the exhibition. On the mannequins in the background, an element of Rev. Franciszek Zabłocki's liturgical attire (photograph by Filip Nalaskowski).

cassock of Rev. F. Zablocki, d. 1832 (Fig. 4), the only one so far found during research in Poland. It was complemented by reconstructions of three chasubles, stoles, and maniples found in the crypts of Końskowola (Fig. 4, 6). The presented examples of burial garments constituted also one of the forms of representation of silk fabrics brought to the Republic of Poland from Asia and Western Europe. Although they were all in brownish-yellow colours (the result of ageing processes in the fabrics), their story was meant to trigger the visitors' imagination and show their diversity if only in colour.

The artefacts presented were intended to illustrate fragments of the funerary culture of the modern period. Devotional items represent the persistence of tradition in the Catholic Church, while items of clothing represent the variation of fashion over time.

Report on the event

Despite the fact that the exhibition itself was physically created in one day, preparations for it took many months. Of course, one may ask how many exactly, and the answer will depend on how broadly we treat the definition of preparations.

Discoveries of the presented artefacts were made in Końskowola and other Polish towns over the last 10–12 years. Conservation of the material obtained was completed 3–4 years ago. The preparation of selected artefacts to be shown to the public, the preparation of descriptions, and logistical activities took about 3 months.

On Saturday, December 11, the day before the opening of the exhibition, a group of eight students and four researchers from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń arrived in Końskowola. A special transport of the artefacts was delivered to the exhibition site along with the team.

They then set about unpacking the artefacts and placing them in the exhibition. The greatest amount of effort and time was needed to attach the costumes to the mannequins, while arranging the artefacts in the display cases was completed much more quickly. The mannequins presented four men's attires, two women's dresses, and two children's dresses. Approximately 60 artefacts with descriptions were placed in the display cases.

It was agreed that Sunday would be the opening day of the exhibition. This day, traditionally free from work, is also the day of church services, which still draw crowds of worshippers from the town and surrounding areas in places such as the described Końskowola.

The timetable for the event was as follows: the event started with a show of period costumes at 12.00 p.m. This was followed by a lecture with a discussion and questions from the audience, and finally, at around 2.00 p.m., there were the official opening of the exhibition space and guided tours for visitors.



Fig. 6. Lecture – presentation on court fashion (photograph by Filip Nalaskowski).



Fig. 7. A visitor (photograph by Filip Nalaskowski).



Fig. 8. Talks accompanying the opening of the exhibition (photograph by Filip Nalaskowski).

Around 80 guests attended the event, along with representatives of local and church authorities.

The show featured 8 historical costumes (Fig. 8), which were reconstructions of the originals obtained during archaeological research. The models were students and local volunteers, whose participation had been agreed in advance.

In the next part, Prof. Małgorzata Grupa, who is the author of the exhibition and the prime mover of the event, gave a lecture on the presented costumes and an outline of the research on which the publication and the exhibition were based (Fig. 8). Another lecture was given by Prof. Tomasz Kozłowski, who referred to the archaeological and anthropological themes and interesting facts revealed during research, in particular concerning the figure of Duchess Zofia Lubomirska.

The lectures were followed by a discussion combined with questions to the authors of the book⁸. It should be noted that the interest among the audience was very strong. The questions concerned not only threads strictly connected with the presented material, but also the history of Końskowola and its famous inhabitants, noble families, and old customs.

⁸ Five authors of the monograph were present at the meeting.

The exhibition was opened by the authors and the head of the Końskowola Commune. All those interested then proceeded to take a tour, with students as guides whose explanations supplemented and extended the descriptions of the artefacts presented. Also during this part visitors showed great curiosity and actively engaged in discussions with the authors of the exhibition and the book (Fig. 8).

The exhibition was open for the following three months during library opening hours. Entry was free of charge.

Echoes of the event

The prepared exhibition aroused considerable local interest, as intended. Firstly, it manifested itself in the local press. Local social media covered the event quite thoroughly, encouraged participation, and published very favourable reviews (Stefanek-Nowacka 2021: 9–10)⁹. The comments made by local residents under social media posts were also very important for the evaluation of the initiative; they did not hide their satisfaction and actively commented on the exhibition itself, the book and, most importantly, the historical and cultural information revealed.

Secondly, Professor Małgorzata Grupa was asked to record several statements on the subject of the exhibition and the publication for the “Fara Końskowolska” Society for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage. These interviews were intended to further the local dissemination and promotion of the history of Końskowola.

Finally, according to the information obtained from the centre’s management, several school trips have visited the exhibition since December, whose participants had the opportunity to supplement their purely book knowledge by confronting the exhibited artefacts. These trips were organised by local schools as part of history lessons.

The Sociological and pedagogical perspective on the event

When discussing the functions of museums and exhibitions, the classic three are most often distinguished. The protective function is aimed at preserving and protecting collections of artefacts and mementos of the past. The aesthetic function has the aim of sensitising the audience (aesthetic education) and showing beauty by means of artefacts of material culture. Finally, there is also the educational function aimed at familiarising viewers with history and customs.

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/farakonskowolska/> (access: 1 v 2022), <https://www.konskowola-fara.pl/2021/12/17/promocja-ksiazki/> (access: 1 v 2022).

The exhibition in question performs to the greatest extent the last – educational – function. However, this activity should be interpreted somewhat differently and more broadly than the common understanding would suggest. We naturally associate education with the system: schools, lessons. As statistics show, the most frequent visitors to museums are pupils, who visit these institutions during school trips (*Muzea w 2022 roku...* 2022: 90). Such activities most often arise from the curriculum and are quite obvious from the point of view of education and upbringing, and hardly need a longer explanation.

The exhibition in Końskowola, however, had a far more subtle educational character. The aim was not to impart knowledge directly to visitors, but rather to sensitise them to the history of the land on which they walk, which is an educational measure. Obviously for the community, no clear and legible connection to the ancestors who made their mark locally is necessary. The exhibition in question featured a number of artefacts that showed the noble or even magnate character of the community of old. The uncovered “treasures” and restored artefacts showed the difficult history of Końskowola in a chronological, cross-sectional manner. Thus, the exhibition had the potential to make the inhabitants aware, in an absolutely tangible way, of the beauty of Końskowola’s history and traditions.

On the one hand, it showed the times of splendour and wealth of the area along with its importance for international politics, and described Końskowola as a cradle of people significant for the politics and history of the whole nation. On the other hand, however, it also showed human tragedies in a dimension as personal as the disability of Duchess Zofia Lubomirska née Opalińska, or her untimely death, but also in a macro-dimension, i.e. in the form information about wars that swept through the area, partitions, or epidemics.

The experience of the event has yet another component. The meeting had a unique, interactive character. The gathered audience, visitors had the rare opportunity to confront their curiosity and doubts live. In this case, it involved not only the authors of the book, as at many promotional events, but also the authors of the exhibition. Surrounded by the artefacts on display, visitors raised a number of threads concerning both the history told by the artefacts and the circumstances of their discovery, as well as the technical details of conservation or the processing of materials. We can therefore conclude that the educational value was revealed here in its traditional version, but in a new form, so to speak, of interaction with the authors of the publication and the exhibition.

A second dimension of the interactivity of the event described was the feedback drawn from comments on social media. In addition to comments on the exhibition itself, they included some interesting reflections on the history and culture of Końskowola, as well as questions. This is a new dimension of interaction that can only be experienced on such a scale in the web 2.0 era (O’Reilly 2009: 3–38).

From a sociological point of view, a group is formed by a human community who, firstly, have personal contact with each other and, secondly, have some common goal (Olechnicki, Załęcki 1999: 33). Similarly, a local community will be formed by a group of people living in the same area, who have personal contact with each other and share some goals. In the case of the community in question, such goals may be harmonious co-existence, cultural transmission, and respect for local traditions and customs. The stronger the relations built in communities, the stronger the cohesiveness of these groups and the foundation on which the group is based (Zbieg et al. 2015: 335–351). A very strong foundation can be shared cultural heritage. Feeling a connection to another person through the same lineage is one of the most important characteristics determining the strength of a relationship. The more we are willing to trust the other person, to enter into a social relationship with them, the more we will feel that we have more in common with this person (Smith 2013). These basic characteristics linking individuals can be a common language, a similar appearance, but above all, as mentioned earlier, cultural heritage. Such heritage consists of common history, common tradition, and similarly fostered and interpreted social, moral, and legal norms.

Precisely for these reasons, the exhibition had the potential to significantly strengthen the bonds between local residents by presenting a collection that demonstrated the shared history of the inhabitants of these lands as well as the historical connection with distinguished people from the area, and that showed a kind of genealogical lineage with which visitors could identify.

The exhibition also had a lesser, but not negligible, significance as an element of an important local socio-cultural event. This event brought together representatives of local, lay, and ecclesiastical authorities¹⁰. It provided an opportunity for ordinary residents to meet in one place with representatives of the authorities and their representatives, as well as local cultural managers, where admiring the exhibition offered a chance to meet and focus thoughts and conversations around the historical, archaeological, political, and religious content presented.

The second aspect worth noting about the exhibition in question is its function vis-à-vis the publication based on the discoveries it presented.

In the popular understanding, a museum is associated with splendour and magnificence. It evokes associations with a large building, numerous staff and, consequently, considerable expenditure (Kotler, Kotler 2000: 271–287). We also frequently notice certain slowness in the creation, development, and updating of museum collections. These problems do not concern the examples shown.

10 Rev. Canon Piotr Trela was parish priest and vice-president of the Parish Church in the years 2003–2010, then these functions were held by Rev. Adam Bab (2010–2014), who is currently an auxiliary bishop (since 2020) in the Archdiocese of Lublin.

The arrangement of the exhibition in Końskowola was created in one day, did not require large financial outlays, and was thus a response to the problems identified.

Obviously, the event described was of a micro nature compared with traditional museums. It also did not fulfil as wide a range of functions as traditional museums. Nevertheless, we believe that the educational function, the aesthetic function for visitors, and the no less important promotional function for the publication were all brilliantly fulfilled within the framework of this temporary exhibition at a very low cost. It is therefore worth considering popularising such undertakings as a way of complementing the activities of traditional museums.

Conclusions

The form of history promotion described in this paper is fairly new in Poland¹¹. The element to which we wanted to draw particular attention was the culture- and society-creating function, which can be performed by similar undertakings on a micro-scale.

Moreover, we believe that such micro-exhibitions, ad hoc in nature, which combine publication of discoveries with their presentation, are an excellent form of promotion of scientific events, carried out with relatively little effort and resources.

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11 In the case of the Toruń group led by Prof. Małgorzata Grupa, such activities are quite often applied after the end of archaeological research: presentation of the results of the research and display of selected artefacts before conservation, and if it is a several-year programme of work, also the effects of conservation carried out in Toruń's laboratory – Płonkowo, Gniew, Piaseczno, Szczuczyn, Radzyń Podlaski, Łuków, and Góra Kalwaria. The curriculum at the Institute of Archaeology of NCU in Toruń includes classes in the conservation of archaeological artefacts, which are extended to include preventive conservation in the field during archaeological research.

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