

Preface

*River, river carry me on
Living river carry me on
River, river carry me on
To the place where I come from*

*So deep, so wide, will you take me on your back for a ride
If I should fall, would you swallow me deep inside*

*River, show me how to float
I feel like I'm sinking down
Thought that I could get along
But here in this water
My feet won't touch the ground
I need someone to turn myself around*

(Peter Gabriel, Washing of the water)

An excerpt of a conversation between two Polish citizens and my translator Monica Wasilczuk and I on our train journey from Białystok to Warszawa:

“What does a foreigner do in Białystok?”

“We visited Białowieża forest for a PhD research on UNESCO world heritage sites. These sites are internationally recognised as part of humanity’s ‘most valuable’ monuments, historic sites and natural areas.”

“Oh, that sounds interesting! Which Polish heritage sites are on the world heritage list?”

“I could give you the names of the eleven world heritage sites in Poland, but I prefer to do a small quiz. What do you think that is on the list, besides Białowieża forest?”

“I think... Kraków... and Warszawa might be on the list...”

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“Yes, that is correct.”

“I think that Gdańsk and the monastery of Jasna Góra with the ‘Black Madonna’ in Częstochowa will also be on the list.”

“No, the city of Gdańsk was rejected due to a lack of authenticity, and the Black Madonna hasn’t been listed as it was primarily regarded as a national Polish symbol.”

“Hmn, that’s odd... I would say that the inner city of Warszawa is also not authentic. Then cities like Toruń and Zamość will also not be inscribed.”

“Not true. These cities are listed as a world heritage site.”

“Okay. And you say there are in total eleven sites in Poland?”

“Yes.”

“Whew, this is very difficult... Which other exceptional heritage sites do we have in Poland? Can’t you give us some clues?”

“I don’t like giving clues. Shouldn’t every Polish citizen be able to mention the Polish heritage sites that belong to the heritage of humanity?”

“But we really don’t know...”

“Okay, I’ll give you some hints. One site concerns a large castle...”

“Oh, is that Malbork Castle?”

“Indeed, and another site is a large salt mine...”

“That must be either the salt mine of Wieliczka or Bochnia.”

“Indeed, Wieliczka salt mine is a world heritage site. The salt mine of Bochnia, however, is not a world heritage site yet. It may be designated as a world heritage site in the near future, as this site features on a shortlist that has been compiled by the Polish government. I can give you a hint about another site. This one relates to the Second World War...”

“... Is that Auschwitz?”

“Yes, that is correct. And finally, there are three sites with a religious character that have been put on the list in the last four years.”

“... We really don’t know what they could be. Can you give us the names of these sites?”

“These are the wooden churches in Southern Little Poland, Kalwarija Zbrzydowska and the churches of peace in Jawor and Świdnica.”

“Really, we would never have guessed that these sites would be on the list.”

I have had many discussions of a similar nature in the last five years. Regardless of whether my conversation partners were Dutch, Scottish, Swedish or French, most of them found it difficult to name (some of the) the world heritage sites in their own country. In relative terms, our Polish travelling companions certainly did not do a bad job. What about me, for example? I did not know any of the four Dutch sites that were on the world heritage list in the spring of 1998 when a Canadian student at Queen’s University in Kingston quizzed me about the list.

How does one come up with the idea to carry out a PhD research on a topic that one hardly knows about? The initial idea for this research came from Peter Groote, who then was my supervisor when I wrote my Master’s thesis. He wondered, among others, why the Killing Fields in Cambodia were not on the list of world heritage sites. The general lack of knowledge about sites on the world heritage list was an important

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reason to pick this topic when Peter Groote and Paulus Huigen gave me the opportunity to write a PhD research proposal after I finished my MA. Even though I had never thought about going for a PhD, the content of the research inspired me to take on the project.

The final research proposal did not only pay attention to the selection of world heritage sites; the research that we had in mind was extended with an assessment of the impacts of a world heritage listing – in terms of preservation and tourism. I still do not know how much a poster that hangs at our Faculty, carrying the caption “The Dead Sea is dying – Register the Dead Sea as a world heritage site before it is too late”, has influenced the content of the final research proposal.

What I do know, however, is that the opportunity to write the research proposal was the first of a range of opportunities that Paulus Huigen and Peter Groote have given me. They also arranged that the Faculty of Spatial Sciences would pay for the research if the Dutch research organisation NWO would not award a grant. And they have, together with Gregory Ashworth, given advice, asked critical questions and made suggestions on how to carry out the research. Paulus, Peter and Gregory, I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation.

My supervisors were also very supportive of my proposal to visit Exeter, south west England, for a period of five months. Their support and encouragement enabled me to conduct some pilot studies – at the Dorset and East Devon Coast, Stonehenge, Avebury and the city of Bath – and to attend Master’s courses on heritage studies between February and June 2001. In Exeter, I could follow several heritage courses at the Faculty of Arts and Education, University of Plymouth. It was through Peter Howard that I came to know about Hildesheim’s Cathedral, which derives its importance – according to a local citizen – to a large extent from the fact that it is the only world heritage site in the German *Land Niedersachsen (Lower Saxony)*.

I also recall Antonia Noussia’s lectures on ‘landscape as heritage’, in which she taught us about ‘England’s green and pleasant landscape’. The next day I made a cycling trip along the Exe Valley to explore a part of this charming rural landscape. At some point I faced a steep descent, which was immediately followed by a steep hill. Just after I had started my way down, a huge dog suddenly appeared on the road at the bottom of the hill and there was no way to escape. The only thing I could do was to accelerate, close my eyes and fervently hope that I would not hit the dog.

More of such encounters ‘dogged’ me in a later phase of my research, namely when I conducted case studies in six countries. The dogs that I met at some world heritage sites in the United Kingdom and the United States of America have made a profound impression on me. In the English Heritage Office for Stonehenge in Amesbury, a huge dog contentedly slept at my feet when all the staffs were looking for the quadruped. And three teeth-gnashing dogs that ‘guarded’ the governor’s office in Taos Pueblo forced me to drive back, phone the person with whom I had made an appointment and to arrange to meet me outside the office instead.

You will understand that I was glad for the company of translators on my visits to Mexico, Poland and Spain. They would protect me when dogs came our way, I hoped. This gladness evaporated in the city of Guanajuato, however, when my translator in Mexico, Ellen Paap, called the street dogs to come to us. That was the only thing she did wrong in the three weeks. I warned Monica Wasilczuk, my translator during the

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visits to Poland and Spain, not to make such friendly advances to dogs. I was and still am glad you did not do so, Monica. Ellen and Monica, you both were a great help in planning the case studies, arranging the interviews and translating them. But most of all, I remember the pleasant time we had when we travelled through these countries.

I have to admit, we travelled at quite a lightning pace through these countries. The research has brought me to many new places and astonishing heritage sites. I have often realised, and I am still aware, that I have been extremely lucky that I could carry out research on this specific topic. I had already been to all six case countries, but I could experience and learn about many more and new aspects of these countries. The six case studies have also made a substantial contribution to the number of world heritage sites that I have visited: from twenty-five sites until 2000 to eighty-four to date. Some employees at world heritage sites even gave me a personal tour. This research would simply have been impossible without the co-operation of the employees at world heritage sites and at national heritage organisations whom I could interview.

There are many other people that I would like to thank, although I may inadvertently omit a few names. Where research was concerned, two student groups offered useful insights in the selection of world heritage sites in the Netherlands and the impacts of their listing. Contributions from Nanka Karstkarel who drew a world map without national borders and Gina Rozario for her useful textual corrections are appreciated. Members of the Department of Cultural Geography and the researchers from the first floor have been pleasant company during coffee breaks. And my roommate Lajos Brons has been accommodating by being extremely quiet all these years.

Another important aspect is what I term the 'social environment'. I enjoyed my activities as a board member of the Groninger Association for PhD Students (GAIOO), today known as GRASP! I am delighted that we have continued our meetings by starting a 'Settlers of Catan' competition. The annual weekend break with the *Chefkes* – a group of friends dating back to my earlier study years – to a Frisian island or the Ardennes is a perfect motivation for a hard year's work. I am glad that two of them, Sjoerd Feenstra and David van de Graaf, are willing to be my *paranimfen* during the public defence of my dissertation. Sjoerd, I sincerely appreciate your attendance at my defence at the expense of a holiday in the west coast of North America. And David, your visit while I was in Exeter and our trip to Bristol are still in my memory.

Last but not least is my family who help me, in Peter Gabriel's words, "to turn myself around". I dedicate this book in loving memory of my parents Jan and Ria. I wonder whether they ever visited a site that is on today's world heritage list. My relatives may not always have understood what my research was about, but they have always shown interest and asked me about the progress of my research project. Finally, Jacqueline has played a very important role. You have always been interested in my research, read my papers and chapters as well as made recommendations. And above all you created a warm and safe place to come home to, 'simply' by being there.

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