

**“FAMILY MUSEUM”
AS A SANCTUARY OF TRADITIONAL KINSHIP.
A CASE STUDY FROM POLISH SPISZ¹**

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Abstract

The object of the study is a private ethnographic collection, gathered over the past several years by Stanisław Iwańczak, a retired farmer and a construction worker, in the village of Niedzica, in the southern region of Polish Spisz, exposed in a former farm building. The collection consists of agricultural tools and crafts, furniture, housewares, costumes, utensils, religious pictures, photographs, books, letters, decorations. In the creation of the collection were involved the children of Mr. Iwańczak, the children, who emigrated in the 1990s to the United States. The conducted ethnographic research shows that the collection, which is the inherited property, plays for his children an important role as a vehicle of kin identity and family traditions. The reconstructed traditional interior hosts periodical family celebrations, especially during the visits of Mr. Iwańczak's children every year; is a place of inter-generational transmission of meanings embodied in inherited goods. The museum, with collected objects de memoire, seems to be a kind of mental and cultural resource of nostalgia and obligation to maintain family values and to reinforce kin relations.

Key words: family, museum, memory

Johann Wolfgang Goethe, known first and foremost for his seminal literary works, was probably the first author to contribute to the creation of the term

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museum-templum thanks to his experiences during a visit to the *Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister* gallery in Dresden:

I entered into this sanctuary, and my astonishment surpassed every conception which I had formed. This saloon, returning into itself, in which splendour and neatness reigned, together with the deepest stillness, the dazzling frames, all nearer to the time in which they had been gilded, the floor polished with bees' -wax, the spaces more trodden by spectators than used by copyists, imparted a feeling of solemnity, unique of its kind, which so much the more resembled the sensation with which one treads a church, as the adornments of so many a temple, the objects of so much adoration, seemed here again set up only for the sacred purposes of art (1848, p. 274).

The word *sanctuary* that Goethe used in the above quotation became the inspiration to write this paper; however, this does not mean that the paper will address a dazzling, gilded building where antique and modern pieces of art are displayed for the public's appreciation. Rather, the sanctuary, which should be called an exhibition rather than a museum, referred to here is located in a former stable (Fig. 1), where in the past, cows occupied one side, a horse and sheep occupied the opposite side, and between them rabbits hopped and chickens milled about. This was the lower part of the stable; while its upper part held straw, hay and grain, which was stored inside wooden chests. These original functions of the stable, especially in its lower part, would be difficult to recognise today. Even so, in the eyes of the person who converted the stable and its few visitors, these functions still carry a meaning that can compete with the renowned sanctuaries of the much larger museal "cult", such as the National Museum in Krakow or the British Museum. All it takes is a few moments spent with Józef Iwańczak, the sole creator of a unique exhibition in the village of Niedzica in the Polish Spisz region, on the border with Slovakia.



Fig.1 *Museum made from a former stable*

This retired 80-year-old farmer, carpenter, forester and, for a time, restorer (Fig. 2) has transformed around 2005 the interior of a former stable, with a surface area of 30 m², into a typical Spisz residential room (Fig. 3). Above it, inside a spacious eighty-square-metre attic, he has reconstructed the utility part of the household, which primarily contains artefacts related to various periods of occupation in the historical Spisz village (Fig. 4). The entire exhibition includes about 750 artefacts ranging from clothing, religious paintings, wall hangings, furniture and kitchenware, through tools used for farming, carpentry, weaving, spinning, threshing and milling, to family documents and photographs.



Fig.2 Mr. Iwanczak, 80-year-old farmer, carpenter, forester



Fig.3 Spisz residential room



Fig.4 Artefacts related...

The collection has familial roots. According to Iwańczak, sixty-five per cent of the collection is his own family's legacy. This alone is unusual, as after World War II, a wave of defective yet impactful modernisation instilled an approach of abandonment towards the past material culture among this society. The residents of Spisz, including Iwańczak himself, all report a common and systematic abandonment, mostly by burning, of the old objects that took place in the post-war period. This process was made easy by the fact that most of the household and farm equipment was wooden and was hand-made by its owners or by the

few craftsmen who were available at the time. Some of the equipment had fallen out of use (winnowing machines, looms, horse-collars, horse carts, etc.), and thus, from the viewpoint of its instrumental rationality, was simply unnecessary. Consequently, when the political transformations of the end of the 20th century began, the process of replacing the aforementioned cultural artefacts had already been mostly completed. The same was done with the local clothing, which has always been one of the main determinants of regional identity, and even the household religious objects, such as oleographs, which people would sometimes burn along with the other, completely secular, objects. All of these artefacts could not compete with the industrial products that were a testimony to the rising social status of the local population. “If you’re wearing a folk costume, you’re wearing old hand-me-downs” – this was a bitter comment about the people’s attitude towards traditional attire at the time from Danuta Milaniak, a regional scholar and member of the local folk band *Czardasz*. She also reminisces that in her childhood, these unwanted objects would, at best, be saved by visitors to the region, who found some interest in them:

The house next to ours, the old house, belonged to my great-grandmother. My grandfather used to live there. I remember something that happened one day. I remember our dog sitting there, on a leash, next to that house. A man from Krościenko came, on behalf of a museum or something – I was little, so I don’t really know. I only know that Grandfather came and called to me to hold the dog, because the man had come to pick up a clock. I know that this man took a clock from the house. I think it was the one I couldn’t see on the wall, and he also took some other things, like cups and plates. He was carrying everything in a box, while I held the dog. If I were there today, I would’ve let go of the dog [laughs], and would not have let Grandfather [give away the things].

A few immobile objects from this period of the replacement of material culture have survived, such as residential or utility buildings. Among them are a few cellar-granaries that have survived in Kacwin near Niedzica, and the aforementioned stable that Iwańczak has transformed into a private exhibition.

Some residents of Spisz feel regretful about the period when everything old was being destroyed: “I’m thinking about what they did. They got rid of everything. All these things could’ve been gathered and stored in one place. And there were a lot of things that people threw away or hacked to pieces. Because it was all thought of as garbage, so what was the point,” commented Danuta Milaniak. This practice can be called, after Aleida Assman (2008, p. 97), a case of active forgetting, which results in “intentional acts such as trashing and destroying”. Iwańczak shares this view, expressing his surprise at the lack of loyalty towards the local culture among the residents of Spisz: “There are still some people today who ask why, what

for, where, and how to get rid of things. And I don't understand this. I say, you should be happy, because the more you know, the richer you are". What is more, a certain indifference is emerging at best, and hostility at worst, towards Iwańczak's exhibition. A local teacher, Elżbieta Łukuś, made the following comments.

At the beginning, Mr Iwańczak was afraid of what people would say and what the general opinion would be. That's what the environment we live in is like. But he had such a strong need to do something. As he says all the time, he wanted to save things from being forgotten. He wanted to simply leave things for the next generation.

The case of Iwańczak and his collection was rather special at the time, as he himself states. His parents stood out from most of the local community by refusing to permanently discard the old equipment from the family's possessions. Even if an item of the equipment fell out of use, they did not burn it in a furnace or throw it into a nearby stream. Instead, they stored these items in the spacious attic of their familial, traditional wooden house, even including a horse cart. If we were to once again refer to Assman's theoretical proposals, we would still have to admit that a forgetting has taken place, but this time in a softer, passive and more impermanent form: "In these cases the objects are not materially destroyed; they fall out of the frames of attention, valuation, and use. What is lost but not materially destroyed may be discovered by accident at a later time in attics and other obscure depots" (Assman, 2008, p. 98). This process can be explained by the attitude of Iwańczak's parents towards their material possessions. In his own words, Iwańczak says:

These ancient things just sat there [in the attic of the old house] intact (...). A thought occurred to me even before my parents died [in 1973 and 1975]. I saw the way they approached these objects. If Father let someone borrow something, Mother would start asking right away, "Do you have it back or not?" So, I thought it was like these things were made of gold. That's how my parents treated them.

These memories made a lasting impression on Iwańczak. He has felt the need to preserve this familial "gold" for many years:

I thought to myself that years would pass, and the day would come when I wouldn't be able to work too well. So, after my parents died, I decided to do something about it. I didn't know back then when I would start, because I was still occupied by farming.

Finally, when it was already the 21st century and he was able to retire, Iwańczak decided to do something with his family's "gold". However, he did not expect the final result to take this shape: "If someone were to tell me ten years ago that

I would repurpose this old shed where I used to raise cows, sheep and chickens...” He began by storing the small appliances he had inherited in a room in the attic of a new, brick house he had built in the 1960s. Over time, he started thinking about transforming the former stable into a reconstructed Spisz household. He felt a need to expand his collection of objects left by the previous generations, and he found out that in addition to a few religious paintings, books and documents related to his family’s history, there were also a great number of “ordinary” objects that had been hibernating in the attic of the old house. Even Iwańczak was surprised by his own enthusiasm, although the need to preserve the work of his ancestors could explain it:

I was in my 80s, and I still felt the urge to work. I was just stubborn like that: if I could still do something, I would. I found it satisfying to show my love for my ancestors. That’s something I’ve never lost – my love for my ancestors. Everything they had. Every little thing Mother used to clean and to move around and keep. She always cared for them (...). There was a time when my work was so satisfying to me that sometimes I began after breakfast and came back to eat supper only after it got dark, skipping dinner. This was not because I was saving money, but because the time passed so quickly while I was working. I’d wonder, darn, how many hours has it been already? It’s six in the afternoon already.

Iwańczak’s enthusiasm and diligence may not have been evident to the external observer, although some people noticed these traits at the very beginning of the project. Elżbieta Łukuś reminisced, “I’ll never forget how, on one day many years ago, he was working away in his cellar. I was looking for him, and there he was, cleaning something all alone (...).” The result is incredible. And it’s the work of a single man. The result is not surprising at all, as Iwańczak is one of those quiet, unassuming, isolated artists who do not boast about their work. The aforementioned critical attitude towards the region’s material heritage, common in the local area, has hampered his efforts to preserve it:

Everyone’s different. Some people will say things to discourage you. They’ll ask, “What are you doing this for? What’ll you get out of this?” Well, if I was weak, or if I had a weak foundation, I could’ve thought, “Maybe they’re right.” But I didn’t listen to them, and their discouragements only made me stronger. They only made me stronger. I said to myself, “No!” And that was what I needed, you know. I’m still slowly arranging things. But I’ve done what I wanted. I’ve completed my plan.

Iwańczak received support not from his extended family or the local community, but from “the family so close they couldn’t be closer”, that is, his children, and especially two of his daughters. The context of his family life is

important here. Years before, his children had left not only their parents' side, but their neighbourhood as well: all three had emigrated to the US.

My daughters really cheered me on. My youngest daughter (...), after they moved to America, she wasn't married at the time, she was still going to school, came to visit me for the holidays. She wasn't happy in America at the beginning, so she liked to come here every year (...). She always liked to go back to the family house, and she always brought different things, different souvenirs. I looked at her and said nothing, I only thought that I would build on what I had and add new things to make her happy. And that's how it all began (...). They visited me often. My eldest daughter had children, so they would all come here for the holidays almost every year. She was also inspired by this idea, and she supported me fantastically, encouraging me to continue. So did my second daughter.

The support from his daughters was strong enough that, had they been uninterested in the matter, Iwańczak openly admits that he would

still do it, but I don't know if I'd have been so intense about it (...). I knew that [my youngest daughter] was interested. And the same with my second daughter. They were happy about my work, and their support gave me strength (...). When I'm gone, they'll be the ones to rule over [my collection].

Iwańczak's emphasis on the role of his youngest daughter, who was also the youngest of all his children, is significant and transcends empirical determinism. Note the feeling of double loss that emerges from the above quotes: the loss of his familial heritage and the loss of a beloved child. It seems that the statement that "experiencing the loss of a close one often makes a person start collecting" (Tańczuk, 2011, p. 255) is very pertinent to Iwańczak's case, even though, of course, the loss here pertains not to a death, but to all of his children emigrating. His collection may be a form of preventing this loss; or a compensation mechanism meant to re-establish the direct personal bonds that he has lost due to the emigration and to remedy his loneliness and the resulting trauma.

Angela Jannelli (2012, p. 161) refers to similar, "grassroots" collections as *profane reliquaries* and *transgressive objects*. According to her, the artefacts that are characteristic for Iwańczak's type of collection can be ascribed the function of an intermediary in the processes of parting, separation and "mourning". Such artefacts represent persons or situations and the ultimate loss of them can be postponed, which seems to be the immanent feature of all museums that preserve even a sliver of the past world. Let us add that this understanding allows us to compare the artefacts to the transitory artefacts that function as described by Donald Winnicott (1971), a child psychology researcher: a child may use an artefact such as a blanket

or a teddy bear in times of emotional separation from their mother. Within the micro-scale of familial collections, this pertains to the experience of the passage of time spent with close ones, or even the death of close ones and the transience of memories and past events. Ours is a case of multiplication: the “loss” of the children by the father co-occurs with the loss of the old world and of his entire family. The resulting dual effort is aimed at postponing both events and imitating the presence of his close ones in the form of a purely material testimony. That being said, we can assume that the collected objects express both a loss and a hope for a relationship and continuation (*cf.* Clifford, 1997, p. 193). Elżbieta Łukuś’s remark about Iwańczak’s collection seems to substantiate this interpretation: “He looks at it with great love. I’d say it’s like another of his own children for him.” Łukuś’s remark is extremely accurate: the collection is a “child” that is also a substitute for the lost children. In order to further understand the phenomenon of a collection, Susan Pearce uses the concept of a gift, referring to a long tradition of thought that dates back to Marcel Mauss:

“Gift” is a standard characteristic of much of the material within collections. Many such pieces are gifts in the most literal sense, of having been bought or acquired by one person in order to make a present to somebody else. This is, indeed, one of the chief ways in which collecting becomes embedded in family and social relationships. But the huge majority of collection pieces, in fact, have this status because they operate as gifts which the collector has given himself (Pearce, 1995, p. 369).

Indeed, in Pearce’s last example of a collection (which may be composed of butterflies, post stamps or Buddha statuettes) that the collector builds in the quiet of his home, this opinion seems justified. However, does the opinion also apply to cases where the collection extends beyond a shelf in someone’s room and becomes a museum exhibition? We could say that in this case, the gift is given to many people at once: connoisseurs of art (art galleries and museums), aficionados of the past (historical museums), local societies (regional museums) or even entire nations (national museums). Feliks “Manggha” Jasiński once gifted his collection to the National Museum in Krakow (hence it acquired the name Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology, which was later detached from the National Museum), and Seweryn Udziela’s collection gave rise to the later Ethnographic Museum, also located in Krakow. These are examples of collector behaviours that are part of large-scale social relationships. To this day, Jasiński’s collection of Polish art is helping to build historical awareness, social knowledge and a national bond, as is Udziela’s, even though his collection pertains to a single, demographically dominant social class. But where should we look for the familial scale? This is, in fact, the case with Iwańczak, who gifted his collection to his

family, although some residents of Niedzica also consider the exhibition as a gift to the local and regional society. To quote Iwańczak once again:

We had an old family house at Rozalii Street. It was quite spacious, with a roof fourteen metres long, and taller. We stored all our things there. I think I must have taken sixty-five percent of the family mementos from there. I cared for them, just like I used to see my parents care for them. Whenever something broke, Mother would ask Father right away to repair it and make it work as it should. All these mementos were a guide to me. I started thinking how valuable they had to be, that my parents cared for them so much. They got them from their grandparents. So, I decided that as long as my health and providence let me walk with my own legs, I would put every effort into storing the mementos, conserving them, and displaying them. All this was to teach the young generation how to respect them, because it was history. If all this were to disappear, what would the young generation say if someone asked about their family's roots? They wouldn't know anything.

Iwańczak's plan took eight years to complete, including restructuring the stable to hold the collection, completing the collection by adding essential artefacts, carrying out maintenance work at his own expense, and arranging the finished exhibition. With great diligence, he repaired many of his exhibits, crafting missing parts and restoring their original appearance. A conversation with Iwańczak indicates a personal, deep desire to preserve both his familial heritage and the local culture. When asked about the most accurate term for his collection, Iwańczak replied that it is "a family museum". The above overview of the exhibitions' origin and its aim explains his reply to a certain extent, as do the unique emotions and motivations that reside within the exhibits.

Pearce provides a mostly speculative, though not unlikely, example of her hypothetical compatriot, who notices at some point that the Victorian jewellery she had inherited from various family members, and that was currently resting on the bottom of a drawer, formed an interesting collection that may merit from expanding: "Objects, in other words, may spend time as part of a miscellaneous, or even miserable, accumulation before their potential collectionhood is perceived" (Pearce, 1995, p. 21). However, Pearce's theoretical speculation on the origin of a collection made up of a handful of objects found in a drawer is still very pertinent to Iwańczak's collection, even if the drawer is replaced here with the attic in his old family house. Over decades, objects such as tools, paintings, clothes, books and other items that had fallen out of use accumulated in this attic, either through damage or through being made redundant by a modern alternative, all brought there by his grandparents, parents and, in the end, by Iwańczak himself. In the intense transformation of the material culture throughout the 20th century, all of

the wooden, metal and textile crafts stored in the attic had been replaced with their mass-produced versions. It was only after a long time that the owner of this heritage noticed its value and transformed it into a collection. And it took several more years to complement it.

The fact that Iwańczak continues to add to his collection can also find reference in the theories of collection: “One of the distinctions between possessing and collecting is that the latter implies order, system, perhaps completion. The pure collector’s interest is not bounded by the intrinsic worth of the objects of his desire; whatever the cost, he must have them” (Aristides, 1988, p. 330, quoted after Pearce, 1995, p. 21). Whereas most of Iwańczak’s collection consists of his family heritage, some artefacts were bought from their former owners, to the extent that his financial means permitted, while others were rescued from destruction in the neighbouring areas. The current collection is relatively complete, according to the rule that it constitutes not merely the sum of its parts, but an entire new quality: a microcosm of a grander, significant whole. Furthermore, the collection is not made up of solely material objects. A joint publication edited by a researcher on the subject, Russel Belk, underlines that: “We define collecting as a form of acquisition and possession that is selective, active and longitudinal. A necessary condition is that the objects, ideas, beings or experiences derive larger meaning by their assemblage into a set” (Belk *et al.*, 1990, p. 8, quoted after Pearce, 1995, p. 21).

A majority of Iwańczak’s collection consists of the objects crafted by his grandfather or father. Thus, woodworking seems to be his family’s inheritable occupation. The authenticity of these objects will be evident even to a person unfamiliar with the local craftsmanship in the past. Three chests, or strictly speaking, travel trunks, are the only exhibits that may be jarring. They appear to be mass-produced, and they differ considerably from the typical local dowry chests, even despite their air of antiquity. Iwańczak explains how he obtained one of these chests (Fig. 5):



Fig.5 *The chest*

That chest was brought here from America (...). It was part of my grandmother's life, on my mother's side. She and Grandfather lived in the US. That's where they got married. When they were young, they would leave here to find a job (...). Grandfather went to America three times, there and back again, in those hard times. One time, he went there, made a living for himself and got married. And they raised four kids in America. Well, not exactly, because my mother was eight when they came back to Poland [in 1910].

Iwańczak's grandfather made his last trip to the US in 1931. The chest in question is an important memento from his family's travels, which have been continued in his children's emigration; also, even earlier, his mother's sisters went back to the US, which is why his family overseas is so numerous. Iwańczak's grandmother is buried in the US. She travelled there for a second time with her husband but died before she could return to Poland. Hence, Iwańczak has strong ties to America, not only through the living members of his family (children and grandchildren). The chest was brought to Poland by Iwańczak's grandfather after his first return from America with his family. It is part of a long list of biographical objects, as Hoskins (1990, p. 78) refers to them, which make up the collection and that are related to particular persons. Iwańczak knows or knew many of these persons himself, even if he often must recall them from as far back as his childhood. The other two chests are also witnesses of his family's travels. The smallest one, resembling a briefcase more than an actual chest, used to belong to another emigrant who was seeking employment, and who travelled to America after his wife died. As Iwańczak explains in one breath, the emigrant was "my grandmother's, on my father's side, sister's husband". Iwańczak's immediate recollection can be taken as indicative of the strength of his family ties and his detailed knowledge thereof. "He worked there for a bit, but didn't stay too long. You can tell by the briefcase that he wasn't rich. It's small, while other people had much larger ones."

A letter dated to 23 May 1908, neatly foiled and hung on a wall near the chests, shows that Iwańczak's extended family also migrated to look for work. It was sent from America by Iwańczak's mother's brother, Paweł Malec. It is, as our host calls it, a "valuable memento". Notably, the letter is written in Slovakian – a testament to the convoluted Polish and Slovakian history in Spisz. Malec asks many questions about the local affairs, such as who the current *rychtar* (village head) is. "He lived in America, but his heart was in Poland", commented Iwańczak, who remembers Malec from when he used to work in a lumber mill in Niedzica before his last trip to America. As a boy, Iwańczak would bring Malec a meal made by Malec's sister, who was also Iwańczak's mother. As with many people looking for employment abroad at that time (and today, as well), they lived their lives in two worlds. Paweł Malec would never come back from America; however, Iwańczak, during his own stay in America, visited Malec's grave. Thus, after a century, his family's history

completed a circle: the letter and the grave where its author lies, separated by thousands of kilometres, came together through the experiences of a witness to the family's memory. The foiled piece of paper, covered in Slovakian words, which was sent from America in the distant past and stored with care in a village house for a few generations, has now found a safe (?) haven in Polish Spisz.

A list of the artefacts gathered in the stable-turned-exhibition is not the only fruit of my visit there. The exhibition is something more than a material familial repository, as the objects it houses, including textual and visual sources, are witnesses to a history that, through their curator, can provide the younger generations with cultural knowledge through post-memory. Let us refer to Katarzyna Kaniowska (2014), to remind the reader about the circumstances in which post-memory can appear and its characteristics.

Post-memory is content that is memorised and stored in our consciousness, but that originates not from our own experiences, but instead, from the experiences of our close ones, who relive them when they share them with us. Inherently important for this type of memory are empathy and an intermingling between our storytelling about our own experiences and the storytelling of our close ones. Post-memory is a foundation upon which we build our identity, by assimilating the identities of the persons who are emotionally and intellectually close to us (...). Post-memory merges intergenerational bonds, bridges the generation gap and creates a basis for a deep, personal insight into the past (p. 390).

Iwańczak decided to preserve this post-memory by gathering its material manifestations in one place, and by generously sharing his own experiences with others; but he also decided to formalise and archive his knowledge and, most importantly, to write it down in a special inventory book [Fig. 6]. We may state, after Aleida Assman, that the collected objects have left the sphere of functional memory, i.e. the memory that is shared through direct communication between the members of given community (in this case, the functional memory pertains especially to everyday life and family, although religious faith remains relevant). Thus, a different type of memory is needed that can preserve these objects: the type of accumulating, borrowed memory that is practised in museums and libraries. With respect to the aforementioned inventory book, this type of memory could also be called an *archiving memory* (cf. Assman, 2013, p. 132). Michał Pol, the husband of Iwańczak's younger daughter, Agata, assisted him in archiving his collection by taking analogue photographs of many of the objects, while Agata prepared the inventory book by taking a folder, gluing the photographs to its pages and leaving spaces for the descriptions. All that was left to do at this point was to write the descriptions, which Iwańczak did over the course of many long, winter evenings.

“Dad wanted to have photos, and we suggested that he also describe everything so that nothing was lost. The names are there [some objects in the exhibition are labelled], but we also urged him to write down what everything was used for,”

Agata Pol reminisced. All this was done to ensure a continuity of memory about the local culture. Below is the example of a page from the book [Fig. 7] about a *dwojocki* (or *dwojaczki*), a container that resembles two pots joined together and that derives its name from the Polish word for *twins*.



Fig.6



Fig.7

The *dwojocki*, as the name suggests, was meant to hold a meal of two courses. Most of the time, people used it when the work in the field started. I remember how useful it was when we were out harvesting; mind you, horse-drawn mowers were unheard of at the time, so we harvested by hand, with scythes. We left home as soon as we could to avoid the heat. We didn't eat anything. Sometimes, we would leave at 4 a.m., or even earlier, because with the long days, it was already getting bright outside. And when you've been harvesting for a long time, after all the work, you were so hungry so you couldn't wait for Mother to go and bring the *dwojocki*. When you saw someone bringing the *dwojocki*, you knew that there would be noodles in lard

or bacon in the one pot, and boiled and mashed potatoes in the other, plus soured milk or buttermilk in a milk can. That's what we'd eat. The custom was to all eat together from the same container, whether there were two or even three or four persons.

However, Iwańczak's descriptions and the fact that the regional culture can be seen to emerge from his collection should not invalidate the essence of his endeavour; that is, its familial character. Despite the title page of the book, which references the entire region, the book is primarily of a familial nature:

It's something you don't take outside; instead, it's a family history that is meant for the family only. I only put my biography and my father's biography in there, that's all, so they'll have things to read after I'm gone.

By "they", he means his children and grandchildren; as the author of this paper, I was no exception, as he only showed me the part of the book where the artefacts were described, leaving the facts from his family's history for the eyes of his offspring only. But do these artefacts themselves not tell a family's history or biography? This is probably a purely rhetorical question, given the character of the collection and the accompanying lively commentary provided by its curator. However, if a visitor wanted to gain an even deeper insight into these biographies, they might draw knowledge of a slightly different type from the rich exhibition of family photographs, located in the corridor adjoining the room, which document the lives of the subsequent generations [Fig 8]. The photographs form a collection defined by the term *familylore*, i.e. family stories, photographs and other objects are encoded in a manner that allows them to be recalled, repeated and relived, and at the same time, that emphasises their dramatic quality and unique beauty that help to make the family past more familiar to a visitor and provide an interpretation matching the family's needs and wishes (*cf.* Zeitlin, Kotkin, & Baker, 1992).



Fig.8

Iwańczak mentioned the essential role that his children have played in his efforts – the role of active contributors, rather than passive recipients. Agata Pol also mentions that her father told them how important they were to him:

I'm so proud of Dad. He's always had that something in him. He says that it was me who gave him the idea. Because in the beginning, when we found a few old things, I told him that he had to hang them all somewhere in one place.

Her elder sister, Irena Kucab, agreed: "We even feel like we're the ones who motivated all of this (...). And later, when he realised that we were very happy [with how his project was turning out], he redoubled his efforts". Agata Pol adds a few words about the role of the old family house and her own attitude towards the collection:

The house stood empty and neglected for a very long time. Everything lay randomly on the floor, but he'd never have anything destroyed. I remember he stored everything in a shack and in the attic. I saw some of the paintings, photographs and lamps. I've always liked one lamp, the one that used to hang in one of the rooms up there [in the attic] (...). It's very nice that everything's in one place now. There's a lot of things. I remember Mom making butter [in the churn] and washing clothes in the trough. I remember all these containers. They used to stand by the stable when people brought the wheat (...). Some things were even used for a long time. If something was needed, then it was used (...). I'm glad that nothing was destroyed, and that everything's here.

Various forms of collecting may serve to transmit family traditions. Iwańczak's collection also seems to have this function, which in this case is powerful enough to reach the far-away country of America, where Agata Pol, her siblings and their children all live. As she says:

I'm glad that the others are able to come here. It's just a shame that we can't make it [on a regular basis]. We show the collection to our children, too. They come here, and they know that it's here. They're happy to see it. I've got redacted newspapers and an English version [a guide to the Pieniny Mountains, published in the US, that mentions Iwańczak's exhibition]. So, I know that the kids even tell the other children in school what their grandfather does. They've even written some essays about it. They are proud, in their own way, that their grandfather does something like this.

However, the daughters' involvement is completely intentional. As Irena Kucab says, she hung a photograph of the historical Spisz household created by her father in her restaurant in America. Tim Edensor explains how important such

connections are in the modern world, where many families are separated; in our case, it is a family from Spisz:

Increasingly, despite the apparent fixity of home, a sense of homeliness may not only be achieved by a situatedness in particular physical space but may also be reached via homely networks of people and information. By means of a phone call, an e-mail, by tuning into a radio or TV station which broadcasts national programmes, home can become a set of regular links and contacts. It is possible, indeed is increasingly common, for there to be several simultaneous senses of home as social and cultural networks become more complex. Yet familiar reference points are sought. This is nowhere clearer than in the kinds of homes-from-home that are established in expatriate communities (Edensor, 2004, p. 85).

However, this “home-from-home” preserved in a photograph hanging on a wall cannot fully substitute for a home that you can enter, and where you can spend your time and touch the furnishings. Irena Kucab is well aware of this sensory power of particular objects that represent an axiological dimension and that ultimately help us to establish who we are: “I have this internal respect for what has passed (...). You should know something for at least three generations. Because if you don’t, then who are you? I wouldn’t even know who I am”. For the emigrants from Spisz who currently live in the distant America, the periodical visits to Spisz help them to preserve the constant question: Who am I? Iwańczak’s collection is a manifestation of the sensory, direct contact with the world; the value of this contact cannot be overstated, as it constitutes the innermost feeling of having an identity.

Thus, as Renata Tańczuk (2011, p. 263) suggests, collecting is a self-defining act: it really tells you who you are. According to Hoskins (1998, p. 198), material objects may become the key for reflection and introspection, “a tool of autobiographic self-discovery, a way of knowing oneself through things”. We already know that Iwańczak’s daughters are not simply the passive “consumers” of his work; rather, they have contributed to it themselves. The collector’s identity depends on an object, even if the object has no necessary connections to his biography or to the biography of his father, grandfather or the even older relative whose only remaining trace is the trunk he travelled with to the US. Through these objects, the collector talks about himself and his family’s history which is also part of his identity. The trunk belongs to his relative’s extended consciousness, and by building the exhibition, the collector participates in the shared, intergenerational consciousness of his family and, sometimes, the entire community. The trunk is, in general, a symbolic artefact that references an important motif in his family history, especially the migration of the latest generations. It is also a metaphor and a part of the local community’s identity related to the expansive memory-based narration

of several generations of the Iwańczak family, as well as the other families from Spisz who have travelled abroad to make a living. The trunk's symbolic mission is to justify this migration and to help overcome the trauma of separation and the resulting loss. Such a mission ends with establishing our identity, or the self-image that allows us to reconcile the choices that make us who we are. Pearce (1995) also addresses this point:

Collections are sets of objects and, like all other sets of objects, they are an act of imagination, part corporate and part individual, a metaphor intended to create meanings which help to make an individual identity and each individual's view of the world. Collections are gathered together for purposes which are seen by their possessors as lifting them away from the world of common commodities into one of special significance, one for which "sacred" seems the right word. Collections occupy a particular position in the processes by which value is created, because such value is, to a considerable extent, a creation of the imagination rather than of need; and in the play of the imagination, the objects themselves are powerful actors (p. 27).

Iwańczak himself echoes this thought, showing an intuition on par with that of the seasoned researchers of material culture: "Writing something down in a book and taking photos is not the same as touching and seeing something." The photograph on the wall of the American home is transformed into its sensory counterpart during his daughter's biennial holiday stay in her family home in Spisz. Thus, all the members of Agata Pol's family, i.e. herself, her husband and her children, experience personal contact with the witnesses of family history:

Right after we arrive, we see what's new [in the exhibition] (...). There's already so much in there that anything new is hard to see. At the beginning, you could see any change that was made (...). I teach [my children] that if they come here, they must remember that they're not in an ordinary room, but in a special one, in a sense. So, they should respect that. And I ask that this room be important for them.

This opinion is shared by Irena Kucab and her children, for whom the exhibition is a material time machine:

Whenever my children come here, I feel that I wouldn't be able to tell them about anything without also showing it (...). Imagine explaining to someone how a horse mill worked. You can do it to some extent, but this mock mill that their grandfather has made for them helps them to learn what things were like back then. There's a photograph, but what good is a photograph? (...) And how fun it would be if we had a real horse mill here in the yard!

This does not escape Iwańczak's attention:

I reckon that, between my daughters and my grandchildren, they all know [about the exhibition] and they'll come to visit. When my youngest [his three-year-old granddaughter] came here to play, she ran from one thing to the other, and played with the cradle all the time. So, she's been into it from her earliest years.

Here is an image of the beginning of a sensory intergenerational message: the granddaughter is playing with the dolls that are part of the exhibition. It seems that only this deep, sensory form of experiencing the past (including by the adult members of the family, especially the daughters) allows one to appreciate the value of the collection as a family capital. Irena Kucab expresses this thought indirectly, by saying:

It's a great treasure that we had no idea about (...). Only Dad had the desire in his heart to preserve whatever remains from the part. To create a small gift for us that we could reach out for, approach it and think about things for a while. There's some mementos that my grandfather left, some mementos that my grandmother left, and a photograph or two.

Do the above testimonies allow us to conclude that the exhibition is primarily familial in character? The explicitly stated motivations seem to leave no place for doubt. According to Pearce (1995, p. 27), the motivation behind collecting is often more important the content of the collection itself. This is evidenced by Iwańczak's other remarks that are not necessarily about his collection as such. For instance, he says the following about the canon of familial, regional and religious values:

It's been passed down in my family, from me to my children. My daughters, all of my children, they all feel it. I gave them an example. I tell them, do what you want, but teach your children to work hard, to be humble and pious; and never neglect to teach them values. I've told them that often (...). My grandmother taught me that, so many years ago.

Thus, an axiological message about the sense of life survives between the generations thanks to Iwańczak's teaching, but also thanks to his collection of unassuming, old, no longer understood objects that constitute the repository of this axiology: "Let [the collection] serve the next generations. Someone will come after me. Let them grow up and think about how people used to live in the past and how they live today," explained Iwańczak. He even goes on to say that the goal is not only to preserve the past, but also to learn about it, which he does constantly and

hopes that the subsequent generations will, as well: “I think that as you get older, you should think about what your grandfather has collected and about the past. If you don’t, then your life’s going to be empty, so to say.” In light of his other comments, this “collecting” should likely be understood as more axiological than instrumental and utilitarian: as time passes, the objects enter the sphere of metaphors, as Susan Pearce suggests, or semiophors, as Krzysztof Pomian claims (2001).

For Irena Kucab, her periodical visits to the family home engage her in a world that is enclosed in the old stable:

I see a lot of things more clearly when I look at all these mementos. Without them, I was a *tabula rasa*. But now, it’s like a film playing before my mind. I can see Grandmother weaving on a loom (...). I see a workshop, which is the same as Dad has set up here. When I was very little, I used to play with the jointer and some planks or lumber. We lit the fireplace with some of the wood, and it was great fun for children. I remember it like it was yesterday. But I didn’t before (...). Whenever I see the exhibition, the film starts again (...). The horse cart. These are wonderful things. When you see all of it, it’s like you jump straight into the past.

Admittedly, however, Iwańczak’s project has not always met with understanding, even among some of his own family members:

My extended family, on my sister’s side, they were not interested in these things. They only got interested after they saw my work when they came to visit me. My sister’s son stayed here for a month, no, two weeks, recently. After he left, they started thinking, “How did Uncle come up with such a nice idea?” (...). In my opinion, my extended family have only now begun realising whether I made a good decision or not. Well, I can see that they’re happy about my work.

Perhaps one needs to distant oneself, including geographically, as did Irena Kucab, who notices a double axiology in her father’s work: “Part of me gets this wonderful feeling that I’m privileged to be the daughter of a man who’s done something this grand (...). But I also feel that I’m part of something that affects other people.”

Even though Iwańczak’s museal tale revolved primarily around his family, his constant work towards self-definition that is ingrained in the exhibits also demonstrates his need to preserve a group identity on a larger scale, that of a village in a region, as well as a need to find a form of cohabitation with the national, or even the transnational, environment. After all, the subject matter concerns a post-traditional society, despite the presence therein of such objects as the familial exhibition, which is still immersed in the traditional world thanks to its exhibits. Moreover, according to Anthony Giddens, a post-traditional society is also a global

one (Beck, Lash, & Giddens, 1994, p. 107). The fact that the Iwańczak family has lived both in Spisz and in America for many years is an obvious proof of this statement. Note that through his work, Iwańczak expresses what Giddens has formulated in an assessment typical of a scientific narration; namely, that the post-traditional order is “one where social bonds have effectively to be made, rather than inherited from the past” (Ibid.). The integral tradition, which would have provided consistency, continuity and a group (or clan or communal) identity, can no longer be relied upon. Iwańczak knew that the time had come to create an identity on his own, thus demonstrating an intuition on par with that of the famous English sociologist, who was born in almost the same year as Iwańczak. Both show a great cognitive insight, even though Iwańczak expresses it indirectly through his work, the aim of which is to preserve the aforementioned bonds that were created not in a well-known part of the world, but in a mountain village far away from any capital. However, it should be admitted that this type of insight is available to anyone who stands at the crossroad between the old world and the new world.

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