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**Title:** Space as the value felt to be accepted : the case of Lemkos (Łemkowie)

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**Citation style:** Dziewierski Marek. (1995). Space as the value felt to be accepted : the case of Lemkos (Łemkowie). W: W. Świątkiewicz (red.), "Region and regionalism : culture and social order" (S. 105-114). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.



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MAREK DZIEWIERSKI

## SPACE AS THE VALUE FELT TO BE ACCEPTED: THE CASE OF LEMKOS (*ŁEMKOWIE*)

I devote this short sociological essay to the ethnic group called Lemkos (*Łemkowie*). The unusual history of this group have determined the complex and heterogeneous way of perceiving evaluating space.

Until 1947 Lemkos, as a close uniform group, has inhabited the southern-eastern areas of Poland. The traditional territory of Lemkos comprised the area of Beskid Niski and the western outskirts of the Bieszczady Mountains. In that way, the settlements of Lemkos spread from the Oslawa River in the east (surroundings of the village Komańcza) to the Poprad River in the west (Krynica vicinity). Therefore they created the furthest to the west cultural enclave connected with Ruthenian-Byzantine tradition.

Numerical force of the group was estimated to equal about 145 thousand.<sup>1</sup> Originally, these Carpathian uplanders called themselves Ruthenians. However, during the long and complex process of cultural integration, the notions of Ruthenian, Ruthenian nationality and Ruthenian language had become in that region almost identical with all that what was Ukrainian. The names *Łemko*, *Łemkowie* appeared in the common language in mid-19th century and were associated with separatist context. They were to emphasize that Lemkos are culturally different from Ukrainians.

There were two elements, constituting the core of the group symbolic universe, that contributed to crystallization of strong sense of place, both in the historical and consciousness aspects, namely — language and religion.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited after: S. Leszczycki, "Zarys antropogeograficzny Łemkowszczyzny" ["Anthro-po-Geographical Outline of the Lemkov Area"], in *O Łemkowszczyźnie [Of the Lemkov Area]*, Kraków 1935, p. 17.

The language of Lemkos, as an objective criterion, allows the research worker to include this ethnic group among the Ukrainian nations. It is, however, necessary to mention that it is not, and practically never was, totally concurrent with the sense of national self-determination existing in an actors consciousness. Among the people using this ethnolect there are such who do not identify themselves with the Ukrainian nationality and demonstratively emphasize the differences between the two languages. For others, the language of Lemkos functions rather as the colloquial — spoken language while the Ukrainian is the literary one. In majority of cases nowadays, the Lemkos are a bilingual group, speaking both traditional ethnolect and Polish.

Two religious orientations: Orthodox and Greek Catholic, do not only penetrate the world of material and symbolic cultures but also generate mutual bias and social distances. Marriages of the Orthodox with the Greek Catholics are not welcome and social contacts are usually confined to one's own religious group. Besides, the basis for organization of any village community is constituted by sharing the same *sacrum* values. Therefore, this religious tradition, infiltrating the everyday life of *Lemkos* in many different ways, both integrates and separates. Today, like in the period between the Wars, most of them are Greek Catholics (in pre-war Poland the number of Greek Catholic Lemkos amounted to about 85% and Orthodox ones — about 15%).

In the past the general opinions, this stigma of faith, regarding the relation between religion and national self-determination, very often justified violence against civilians. In 1915 it took the form of mass transportations of the Orthodox to the concentration camp in Talerhof (Austria). 32 years later Polish authorities laid violent hands on the Greek Catholic community.

This, from end to end rural, community originally based its living upon rather poor agriculture, cattle-breeding and sheep-farming, and non-agricultural activities, such as: forest felling, rock-and woodworks, weaving and mobile trade.

The whole world described above suffered and irrevocable extermination that took less than four years to get completed, as the tragedy of Lemkos occurred between two migration waves.

First, following the repatriation agreements with the U.S.S.R., large groups of non-Polish population from the border-land had been displaced, including Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Russians and Lemkos. Although these actions were not compulsory, their voluntary character was frequently violated. In this way, in the years 1944—1946 70 thousand people from the Lemkos' group had been moved to the Soviet Union.

The second wave of mass displacements took place within the borders of Poland and began in the spring of 1947. Then the regions of Lemkos, like other lands in the southern-eastern zone, came within the range of activities leading to stamping out the Ukrainian Underground. At those times, for the

civilians of non-Polish origin this could only mean one thing — deportation. In this way the aboriginal population of these areas, no matter whether they had any actual connections with the Ukrainian Underground, had been forced to leave their homeland and live in dispersal.

The specific character of displacement actions (called “Vistula Action”) conducted in that period of time may be defined as:<sup>2</sup>

- war-political operations: the official reason of deportation was to cut off the Ukrainian Underground from the subsidiaries in the form of the autochthonous population of these regions;
- mass: with regard to the fact that whole villages and ethnographic regions connected with Ruthenian culture were displaced;
- ethnic: the sufficient basis for deportation was non-Polish origin;
- compulsory: excluding the possibility of staying in the area of Lemkos or choosing the new place for settlement;
- internal: the population of “Vistula” action was located on the western and northern territories with clear intention of dispersal;
- rapid: the whole “Vistula” operation lasted from April to July 1947.

Thus, not only the territory of Lemkos — a specific cultural space — ceased to exist but also the fundamental systems of social relations and symbolic behaviours underwent disintegration. Practically all the elementary forms of social bonds were broken: the religious bond, the village, the neighbourhood one, and, in extreme cases, even the family ties. Greek Catholics, due to dismantling of Uniate Church, were deprived of support given by the clergy and possibility of religious practices “in the old way” for a decade. Additionally, a strong feeling of being rejected by other groups of settlers, that had come there before, was present in the forced migrants’ consciousness nearly from the very beginning. This distance, embittered by the local propaganda and the settlers repatriated from former eastern parts of Poland, resulted in developing the stereotype of Lemkos as bloody and ruthless people, bandits and incendiaries allied with the Ukrainian Underground. Incidentally, the word “Ukrainian” itself still brings similar associations in Poland today. Including this false generalization into the sphere of interpersonal relations, if did not generate repulsive behaviours from the part of Polish people, then at best, led to isolation of Lemkos. As the language of Lemkos and the eastern denomination were two factors that betrayed their strangeness and favoured the group stigmatization in the new space, therefore the social actors very quickly developed a whole range of showy behaviours in order to hide their own identity from the strangers.

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<sup>2</sup> See A. Kwilecki, *Lemkowie. Zagadnienie migracji i asymilacji (The Lemkov People. Problem of Migration and Assimilation)*, Warszawa 1974.

As it is clearly seen, the process of adapting to new places, growing into the new space — so geographically, demographically, economically and culturally different from the traditional centre — must have taken an extremely painful course. Especially because the degree of the group dispersal was very high. As in the past the Lemkos lived on the area of two provinces, then today they can be found in all the western and northern provinces in Poland. In my opinion, several characteristic moments that reflect the course of adaptation processes can be pointed out.

The first stage was characterized by the several years' isolation of the group. The Lemkos, except economic exchange, did not enter any wider neighbourly or social relations with other settlers. The sense of temporariness was caused by the landscape difference of the places and their "bleakness", by the suppression on free movement within the new space, etc. Any attempts of spontaneous returns to the mountains were strictly punished by the authorities and, at best, ended in repeated deportation. The decree on the State take-over of all the households and properties (including deserted sacral buildings and others) not being in the actual possession of the owner (July 27, 1949) finally settled the inability to return to one's own land. This way the properties of Lemkos landed in Polish settlers' hands, became a State property or simply ended as wasteland, uncultivated and deserted.

The necessity of accepting the new place, being the elementary condition of normality, somehow opens the second stage of life in dispersal. It has to be mentioned that, after the political changes that took place in the country following the year 1956, the politics towards the Lemkos had visibly softened. The major restrictions were raised and Greek Catholics were granted back their right to practise their religion.

Two typical systems of spatial behaviours were observed at that time: reemigration to the old territories of Lemkos and reintegration, that is forming local concentrations (mainly in rural areas) within the region of displacement.

The first case — the process of reemigration — is of rather limited character and is sporadically observed today. It is estimated that no more than several thousand of Lemkos have finally come back to their old territory. That means that the original structure of the village has been partly reconstructed in few cases only.

The essential group of Lemkos, however, has stayed in the place of displacement. During the consecutive years a process of spatial (local migrations between the villages) and cultural integration has been taking place to the extent much greater than reemigration. There has also appeared some sort of the cultural centre, as the villages Przemków and Szprotawa are called the capitals of Lemkos. Raising the ban on moving for Lemkos has also resulted in the formation of urban population concentrations, e.g. in Wrocław, Legnica, Głogów and Zielona Góra.

The processes of reintegration in a new space are accompanied by the revival of spiritual life, the socio-cultural organizations of the minorities emerge, the tradition of celebrating according to the Julian calendar is preserved as well as the religious traditions and language. As the family and the institutionalized base of spiritual life — the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Church — are still determining the stability of the main elements of this culture and its sense of separateness, the ethnic homogeneity of marriages remains the standard, internalized by the following generations of Lemkos. The small percentage of mixed marriages confirms this statement.

After having analysed the process of change of space, that, in fact, means the necessity of living in dispersal and protection of traditional values from strange influences, it is time to raise a question about the attitude towards the autochthonous regions.

It is generally known by sociologists that a good structural indicator of assimilation processes remain the preferences regarding the place of living. In the case described, these preferences seem to be constant — as shows the limited extent of reemigration after 1956. Therefore, does the fact of resigning themselves to the historical realities means full acceptance of the new places? Does the choice of heterogeneous environment result in elimination of the bond between the following generations of Lemkos and their traditional value, that is their old territory?

Considering this issue in a model way, the process of evaluating the traditional and new places may be analysed in a few typical dimensions. During the research conducted on cultural patterns of Lemkos I managed, I believe, to grasp the following dimensions of both the spaces: usable, existential, ethical and aesthetic one.

In general terms, we may think that in the consciousness of Lemkos the area of displacement acquires mainly usable and existential values. It is, for example, associated with the chance of better education for children, its communicative convenience and easy access to work are stressed. Besides, they emphasize the fact of children feeling at home in the new space. The generation born after 1947 very clearly links its chances in life with the present space and does not state the willingness to return to the mountains. Such opinions are still formulated by those who personally experienced the tragedy of exodus. We have to remember, however, that these declarations are the manifestation of emotional attitude towards the old land — a kind of the actor's autopresentation — rather than the actual willingness to return to the places that, as they say themselves, are no longer the same ones.

A very coherent picture was obtained in case of ethical dimension of space. Due to the still living memory of displacement, tragedy of particular families, destruction of the church and burning down the villages, this ethical dimension focuses around the semantic axis: constraint — command. The sense of

constraint and ruthlessness in relation to the deserted space is evoked generally, regardless generation differences among the migrants. Thus the displacement becomes an important cultural topic.

Generation differences mentioned above have manifested themselves very clearly in the attitudes towards landscape, that is in the aesthetic dimension of space. The personal experience of that space in an organic and symbolic way has undoubtedly played a vital role in the strong idealization of the mountainous landscape by the oldest people. For them *Lemkowszczyzna* (the original territory of Lemkos) constitutes such a system of reference that any other space does not bear comparison with it on the aesthetic plane. The mountains, the family land, a deserted church are the embodiment of peace, harmony, good frame of mind, dignity, clean air, exceptionally beautiful forests and longing for wooden architecture. On the opposite end of the semantic axis they located values completely different, regarding the areas of displacement, such as: flat land configuration, worse air quality, humidity and unhealthiness.

If in the opinions of the oldest group, the new space has a visibly negative connotation, then the picture is much more neutral among the younger generation. And the old territory becomes in fact a space important only due to the social memory and cultural heritage ("that is where my parents come from", "there are a lot of dear places there, such as: family graves, grandfather's farm", "our culture was originated there").

The aesthetic dimension of space analysed here may be then broadened with the reflection that an evaluating operation does not always have to be based on those elements that especially favour meditative attitudes, such as: battlefields, temples, cemeteries, monuments, etc. Although such signs certainly intensify the sense of group identity, the strong attachment may function in the actor's awareness regardless these group sanctities. Equally deep, though not always conscious, attachment to space appears together with the sense of safety, happy childhood, memory of scents and sounds and everyday activities.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes the longing for these imponderables of ordinariness may be compensated in an unusual way. In one of the visited villages (Legnica Province) a farm building was made a place for social gatherings and group celebrations. With time the walls of the room got covered with a painted panorama of the family village Florynka. On the background of the mountainous landscape, the people tried to reproduce that architecture, with a characteristic picture of a church on the edge. In sum, all that what determined the exceptional character of the places left behind and gave the opportunity to re-experience them in an intimate way. The place — as written

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<sup>3</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Przestrzeń i miejsce [Space and Place]*, Warszawa 1987, p. 201.

by Yi-Fu Tuan — is a pause in movement.<sup>4</sup> The topos of Florynka is a return to the world of Lemkos, as it was before, a return to the well-ordered sphere of meanings.

In the inhabitants' consciousness, this iconic sign plays also an important communicative function, especially towards the generations already born in dispersal. For them, as we remember, *Łemkowszczyzna* was the centre where specific values were located. As the homeland of their fathers, it sanctioned the sense of group separateness and reinforced the ethnic consciousness. Therefore, the small may be interpreted here as the mirror of the great. The panorama of the village becomes a sort of medium of the great tradition. All that what is embodied in the drama of individual biographies (the older generation) may become a subject of objectivization. Through the messages confined to the small space, the young perceive and better understand the essential moments of their own group history.<sup>5</sup>

The most striking example of general internalization of the new space fractions remain the places of religious worship. The church — the centre of the spiritual life of Lemkos — is today the only peaceful place, the sanctuary of rest and, at the same time, the source of the most intense feelings.<sup>6</sup> It is necessary to know, however, that what the Greek Catholics call "the church" has nothing to do with the old architectural form. Their places for religious gatherings are mainly Roman Catholic churches, where certain times of a day are specified and reserved for Eastern liturgy services. In this respect, the Orthodox part of the group is in much better position. Thanks to the authorities' goodwill they were able to get permission for building new places for the Orthodox services. Greek Catholics had been denied such permissions for over 40 years of dispersal. If we assume that a specific carrier of sacral values is the architecture itself, we can say that the Eastern denomination has been re-latinized.

How can we then explain the fact that such religious places are still called "our church" by the Greek Catholics? Only by the attribution of symbolic meanings — the language of liturgy, the psalmist's intonations, the incense fragrance, the iconostases arranged there for the time of the service — they are made look familiar and culturally close. They become a close and humanized space, a peaceful centre of established values.<sup>7</sup>

The sense of national belonging determines which territory a man identifies himself with in the sphere of accepted values (the bond with the "ideological homeland") and which one he feels connected with through direct experience

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>6</sup> W. Mokry, „Krzyż Łemków” [“The Cross of the Lemkov People”], *Tygodnik Powszechny*, No. 36, 1984.

<sup>7</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Przestrzeń i miejsce [Space and Place]*,..., p. 75.



— the habitual bond with the “private homeland” (according to the terminology suggested by S. Ossowski<sup>8</sup>). In case of Lemkos, this phenomenon is a complex one, and the generation variable remains the important factor. For the people inhabiting *Łemkowszczyzna* before 1947, there are two typical systems of reference. For some, the private homeland and the ideological one were the same — they defined themselves as a separate nation, people from the Carpathian mountains or they showed national indifferentism. For others, the private homeland — *Łemkowszczyzna* — was a part of the ideological one — Ukraine. Having observed their everyday life, we can notice that, for many of them, the new places of living have not become the private homeland yet. In spite of the spatial distance, the strong bond with the mountains and the places culturally close is still maintained. What clearly indicates these people’s non-conformation to the space, where they have been living for more than forty years. The mythicized picture of *Łemkowszczyzna*, on the other hand, is still inured to modification.

For the younger, born in dispersal, the areas they currently live on have become their private homeland; while *Łemkowszczyzna* is the ideological homeland for many of them. The bond with it is manifested by emphasizing their own origin and worship of the homeland of their fathers. That is often connected with two attitudes: 1) national indifferentism (calling oneself Lemko-Polish) and 2) propagating national and cultural separateness of Lemkos from the Ukrainians.

Sometimes the ideological homeland is spread over whole Ukraine. This is the attitude typical for the major part of the young intelligentsia who define themselves as “conscious Ruthenians — Ukrainians” and strongly emphasize the national and cultural connections with the tradition of Ruś Kijowska.

To sum up, one can notice that the important dimension of current living space of Lemkos remains the phenomenon of double filiation. The fact of being rooted in two spaces: the new one — determined by the post-war life of the group and the old one — constituting the permanent system of symbolical references.

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<sup>8</sup> S. Ossowski, *O ojczyźnie i narodzie [Of the Homeland and the Nation]*, Warszawa 1984, p. 26 ff.

Marek Dziewierski

## PRZESTRZEŃ JAKO WARTOŚĆ ODCZUWANA: PRZYPADEK ŁEMKÓW

### Streszczenie

Przedstawione tu uwagi na temat przestrzeni i jej waloryzacji pochodzą z badań terenowych realizowanych w latach 1987—1990 na Dolnym Śląsku. Pozwoliły one m.in. na lepsze rozumienie sensu i rangi kategorii przestrzennych w procesie konstituowania się społecznej i kulturowej tożsamości grupy etnicznej.

Intencją autora było odtworzenie najbardziej znaczących dymensji obu typów przestrzeni, tzn. dawnej, bezpowrotnie utraconej Łemkowszczyzny oraz aktualnej, narzuconej w sposób przymusowy i, zdaje się, ostateczny. I tak, w sposobach wartościowania przestrzeni przez badaną społeczność Łemków doszukano się czterech wymiarów, które dalej określano jako: walor użytkowy, egzystencjalny, etyczny i estetyczny przestrzeni.

Choć różnice pokoleniowe implikują tu odmienny typ więzi nawykowej z badanymi obszarami, to przestrzeń tradycyjna (Łemkowszczyzna) w dalszym ciągu podlega pozytywnej waloryzacji i pozostaje istotnym składnikiem świadomości etnicznej obu pokoleń Łemków. Oznacza to, iż interesującym wymiarem aktualnej sytuacji życiowej Łemków pozostających w diasporze jest zjawisko filiacji, czyli fakt osadzenia własnych losów jakoby w dwóch przestrzeniach: tej nowej, zachowującej w świadomości badanych walor użytkowy i egzystencjalny, oraz tradycyjnej, tworzącej obiekt symbolicznych odniesień i idealizacji — owo spokojne centrum, obszar lokalizacji wartości i źródło etnicznego samo-określenia.

Marek Dziewierski

## RAUM ALS EIN ZU AKZEPTIERENDER WERT: FALL DER LEMKER (*LEMKOWIE*)

### Zusammenfassung

Die hier geäußerten Bemerkungen zum Thema Raum und seine Aufwertung stammen aus den lokalen Untersuchungen, die in den Jahren 1987—1990 in Niederschlesien durchgeführt wurden. Sie erlaubten unter anderen besser den Sinn und den Rang der Raumkategorien im Prozeß der Herausbildung der gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen Identität einer ethnischen Gruppe zu verstehen.

Vorhaben des Authors war die Wiederherstellung der meist bedeutenden Dimensionen der beiden Raumtypen, d.h. der alten, unwiderrufbar verlorenen Welt der Lemker und der aktuellen, die zwangsmäßig — und wie es scheint — endgültig aufgezwungen wurde. Und so, versuchte man in den Arten der Raumwertung der untersuchten Gesellschaft der Lemker vier Dimensionen zu finden, die weiter als: Gebrauchswert, Existenzialwert, ethischer Wert und esthetischer Raumwert bezeichnet werden.

Obwohl die Generationsunterschiede einen unterschiedlichen Typ der Gewohnheitsbande mit den untersuchten Gebieten implizieren, so wird der traditionelle Raum ("das Land der Lemker") weiterhin positiv aufgewertet und bleibt ein wesentlicher Bestandteil des ethnischen Bewußtseins beider Generationen der Lemker. Das bedeutet, daß das Phänomen der Filiation eine interessante

Erscheinung der aktuellen Lebenslage der Lemker, die in einer Diaspora leben, ist, d.h. die Tatsache, daß sie das eigne Schicksal scheinbar in zwei Räume setzen: in den neuen Raum, der im Bewußtsein der Untersuchten den Nutz- und Existentialwert bewahren, und den traditionellen, der ein Objekt symbolischer Übertragungen und Idealisierung bildet — den ruhenden Pol, das Gebiet der Wertfestlegung und die Quelle der ethnischen Selbstimmung.