

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Central Europe, divided between three empires, was immersed in discussions concerning the search for new definitions of national identity. The approach to the question of the national style was especially meaningful. Most obviously, the very idea of the national style stood for the cultural uniqueness of a particular ethnic group and consequently its right for political independence.<sup>1</sup> Another intensely debated subject was the concept of internationalism, as defined from the geographic and cultural perspective of the region. To counterbalance this trend, the central government in Austria-Hungary tried to promote regional styles, which were used to strengthen the internal policy of devolution as the way to sustain the existence of the Empire. The resulting tensions brought the essentialist approach to the idea of “pure” national culture, different from eclectic regionalism. Thus began the search for the true and exclusive national “first principle”, most often equaled with the indigenous folk culture or, more broadly speaking, the vernacular tradition and consequently the imagined origins of the national history. On the other hand, the idea of the national style could also have an inclusive character, as it crossed social divisions, and could therefore help to build a civil society and a democracy among the ethnic groups it addressed. According to Stein Rokkan, the success of democracy in Europe around 1900 had been linked to the process of nation-building in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, since it shared with democracy “a fundamental egalitarian emphasis as all people are invited to be part of the nation.”<sup>2</sup> It could also be argued that the national style presumed the co-existence

of various national groups, as expressed in a liberal spirit by Giuseppe Mazzini, “for whom nationalism was the analogue on the political level to individual freedom”, as he “hoped to see a Europe of independent nation-states, freely cooperating together for the good of their peoples.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the very idea of a democratic national community could be seen as the prerequisite for the emergence of modern internationalism, which could secure stability much better than 19<sup>th</sup>-century imperialism.

The acknowledgement of national cultures coincided with the emerging internationalist model of partnership between the smaller national units rather than multinational empires. It should not be surprising that in the Central European region, where the tensions between the irredentist movements and the imperialists politics were most acute, this new vision of internationalism found the deepest appreciation. Hence the renewed interest in cross-cultural contacts, not necessarily mediated through Parisian art, in particular with the countries and cultures which were considered “marginal” within the traditional canon. The Arts & Crafts Movement’s interest in the vernacular corresponded with the appraisal of the values of folk art and peasant communities. In Central Europe the term “vernacular” was usually identified with the still very lively folk culture and the works of peasant craftsmen and self-taught artists, known as primitive or folk art, won wide acclaim as sources of inspirations. They seemed not only to embody the national “first principle” or an anti-historicist, modernizing paradigm of the vernacular, but were also living examples of the medieval-like craftsmen and their communities, praised by Ruskin and Morris. As such the little villages represented the pre-modern model of the society, which the protagonists of the

<sup>1</sup> See *Sztuka około roku 1900 w Europie Środkowej. Centra i prowincje artystyczne* (Art in Central Europe c. 1900. Artistic Centers and Provinces), ed. by J. Purchla, P. Krakowski, Kraków 1997; T. Gryglewicz, *Malarsstwo Europy Środkowej 1900–1914* (Central European Painting 1900–1914), Kraków 1992.

<sup>2</sup> J.-E. Lane, S. Ersson, *Democracy. A Comparative Approach*, London–New York 2010, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> V. Bogdanor, *Overcoming the Twentieth Century: Democracy and Nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe*, “The Political Quarterly” 1995, vol. 66, p. 85.

Arts & Crafts Movement could learn from in their search for alternatives to the industrial civilization.<sup>4</sup>

Although the national interpretations of the Arts & Crafts Movement legacy seemed to be most obvious, it should not be forgotten that the interest in the vernacular and in folk culture also united its protagonists across borders, both political and ethnic. In Central Europe these hopes for a new language of communication, going beyond the confines of national cultures, were especially vivid, as the multiethnic character of the region made the strict national distinctions extremely vulnerable. In effect, a new definition of internationalism had to be formulated, which took into consideration the existence of separate nations, but tried to reevaluate the idea of a cosmopolitan culture as the necessary tool to allow the communication between them. It did not necessarily oppose the idea of the national style, but tried to complement it with the newly defined universalism, where belonging to a particular ethnic group did not prevent the participation in the cosmopolitan culture of mankind. This different concept of internationalism came to the fore during the emblematic visit of Ebenezer Howard to Kraków in 1912. The visit came as a result of the growing interest in the idea of a Garden City among Polish architects and town-planners, and it coincided with a major architectural exhibition, "Architecture and Interiors in Gardens", organized according to Howardian principles. The Kraków exhibition was staged by the Polish Applied Art Society, established in 1902 in Kraków by artists, designers and critics in order to promote the Polish national style in the applied arts and architecture. Apart from the actual commissions for national style projects, e.g. for the interiors of public buildings in Kraków, such as the Town Hall, the Society promoted its aims through a series of competitions and exhibitions. The 1912 event was the largest of such shows, presenting modern housing for the different social strata, inspired by the idea of a Garden City and Polish vernacular architecture. The exhibition included 63 designs for a "house in gardens" by different architects and four model houses built especially for the purpose of the show: a suburban villa, a workman's house, a house for a craftsman, and a peasant cottage. Although references to traditional architectural forms prevailed, some of the houses and their interiors showed a predilection for proto-modernist simplicity and functionalism. David Crowley singled out Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz's design of

<sup>4</sup> See *Vernacular Art in Central Europe*, ed. by J. Purchla, Kraków 2001.

a craftsman's cottage, with interiors characterized by "an atmosphere of virtue and utility", where the vernacular was not treated as "a picturesque decorative language, but a paradigm, drawn from local tradition, for practical housing."<sup>5</sup> Therefore Ebenezer Howard's visit could not have been better planned. During his stay he gave a talk about the Garden City project and its economical basis, which took place in the lecture theatre within the exhibition area. Although well-attended, the lecture did not present anything new to the professionals and supporters of the Garden City idea, at least according to the Cracovian architectural journal "Architekt". The journal saw the true virtue of the visit in Ebenezer Howard's comments about Kraków, which he visited and compared with the urban developments in Great Britain. This relatively small city, without major industries and with green courtyards, whose growth had been obstructed by its military status as an Austrian fortress, appeared to Howard as an enchanting "Garden City" which had developed naturally. According to the "Architekt" Howard dismissed the voices of the local critics, concerned with troublesome public transport and poor sanitation, and suggested some solutions to the problems. His idealism was very cautiously welcomed by the Kraków professionals; nevertheless, Howard earned a lot of admiration for his passion and visionary imagination combined with pragmatic and practical skills.<sup>6</sup> In this respect, Ebenezer Howard's visit to Kraków showed a correspondence between the architectural endeavors on the banks of the Vistula and on the British Isles, even if both places were framed in different political and economical realities. Paradoxically, for the "Architekt", it was Howard whose environment had been more difficult than the Polish one in terms of the implementation of the Garden City idea. For the members of the Polish Applied Art Society, as noted by their chief theoretician Jerzy Warchałowski, "our stagnation" had also positive effects, as it helped to avoid the pitfalls of rapid industrialization and preserve, for example, specimens of beautiful wooden architecture.<sup>7</sup> Hence the anti-urban idea of the Garden City, at least in theory, could find general acceptance much more easily in Poland.

Most interestingly, though, the cross-continental contacts, focused on the idea of alternative housing models, demonstra-

<sup>5</sup> D. Crowley, *National Style and Nation-State: Design in Poland from the Vernacular Revival to the International Style*, Manchester–New York 1992, p. 47–48.

<sup>6</sup> *Miasta-Ogrody*, "Architekt" 1912, vol. 8, p. 82–83.

<sup>7</sup> J. Warchałowski, *Editorial*, "Materiały Polskiej Sztuki Stosowanej" 1905, no. 6, p. 1.

ted the existence of an international community with its own economic, political and cultural agenda. The Garden Cities and their residents seemed therefore to inhabit a new republic, one without clearly defined territory, which grew across the existing political borders and brought together different people who shared its values. It should not be surprising, therefore, that Ebenezer Howard gave his Cracovian talk in Esperanto. The very idea of the international language, which could overcome the barriers between the nations and create new communities, shared the internationalist agenda of the Garden City movement. Already in 1907, during the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Esperanto Congress in Cambridge, its participants visited the newly founded garden city of Letchworth (1903–1904) and Howard himself was known as an enthusiastic user of Esperanto. At this occasion he spoke plainly about the similarities between the new language and the Garden City Movement: “Friends of the new language! I most heartily greet you in the name of the friends of the young city. Esperanto and the Garden City Movement are both bringing about new and better conditions of peace and agreement. [...] as Esperanto is destined to become a language universally understood, so too the fundamental principles of the Garden City Movement will someday be applied throughout the world. Garden City aims at achieving, in the sphere of everyday life, what Esperanto aims at in the sphere of languages [...]. The fundamental principles of the Garden City, like the grammatical rules of Esperanto, are very few and easily grasped.”<sup>8</sup> He added “Esperanto and the Garden City are two leaders towards newer and brighter conditions of peace and goodwill.”<sup>9</sup>

In August 11–18 1912 Esperanto and Garden Cities met again, as Kraków hosted the 8<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Esperanto, which coincided with the exhibition. The congress, attended by one thousand guests from 28 countries, had an unusually rich program of collateral cultural events, which included theatre and opera performances of famous Polish plays translated into Esperanto. The congress participants laid flowers on Polish national monuments and could listen to sermons in Esperanto in Cracovian churches.<sup>10</sup> The congress chairman, Dr. Odo Bujwid, secured also the cooperation of the Society of Friends of Fine Arts, the principal artists association in the city, which organized a special exhibition of Polish art

for the congress participants. The catalogue of the show was published in Polish and Esperanto and the names of the participating artists appeared in the jubilee congress book.<sup>11</sup>

The Kraków congress marked the 25 anniversary of the foundation of Esperanto in 1887 by Dr. Ludwik Zamenhof, born in a Jewish family in Białystok, and at the time a resident of Warsaw. Zamenhof, who mastered the knowledge of several languages and asked the congress organizers to refer to him as a “son of the Polish land”, insisted that his name should not overshadow the importance of the language itself.<sup>12</sup> Yet his personal story behind the foundation of the language best illustrated the internationalist agenda, as perceived from the Central European perspective. Zamenhof was raised in a provincial city in the Russian partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where the Jewish residents constituted the majority (over two-thirds) and lived side by side with Poles, Germans and Russians. As Białystok grew in importance thanks to the development of textile industries, its factories and weekly markets attracted local Belorussian peasants, Roma, as well as Tatars who settled in the region in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Zamenhof himself emphasized that the very experience of the multitude of languages in Białystok, which divided people, inspired him to look for a universal language. Zamenhof’s idea of unification through language reflected his admiration for the works of Rabbi Hillel (1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.), envisioning universal religion and brotherhood of mankind.<sup>13</sup> The subsequent progress of Esperanto, which overshadowed other internationalist languages, most notably volapük, showed not only the linguistic quality of Zamenhof’s project but also its integrationist agenda. During the 1907 congress in Cambridge the founder of Esperanto called for the political neutrality of the language, so that it could provide the foundation for a peaceful communication between the nations, treated as equals. Significantly, though, one of the earliest Esperanto organizations were the Roman Catholic Internacia Katolika Unuiĝo Esperantista (IKUE) and the Protestant Kristana Esperantists Ligo Internacia (KELI), as the language ambitions corresponded with the universalistic aims of Christianity. After World War I the League of Nations considered the introduction of Esperanto to the school curri-

<sup>8</sup> D. Macfayde, *Sir Ebenezer Howard and the Town Planning Movement*, MUP 1970, p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> P. Glover Forster, *The Esperanto Movement*, Walter de Gruyter 1982, p. 273.

<sup>10</sup> T. Wiśniewski, *Ludwik Zamenhof*, Białystok 1987, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> “Architekt” 1912, vol. 8, p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> For the discussion about the national identification of Zamenhof see R. Dobrzyński, *Ulica Zamenhofska. Rozmowa z wnukiem twórcy języka Esperanto (Zamenhof Street. A conversation with the grandson of the founder of Esperanto)*, Bielsko-Biała 2001, p. 75–82.

<sup>13</sup> T. Wiśniewski, op. cit., p. 15.

culum to overcome the national divisions (1920–1922), but eventually dropped the idea. Nevertheless, in 1925 Esperanto was accepted as one of the official languages of the Union Internationale de Telecommunications.<sup>14</sup> The foundation of Esperanto illustrated to what extent the search for “internationalism” came as a result of the political and social instabilities in Europe at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, caused by national concerns. The “Internationalism” of Esperanto signified not only a utopian community of people, but also the abolishment of the politics directed against smaller nations living in multinational empires, which was the everyday experience of the Zamenhofs’ Jewish family in the Russian Empire. According to its founder, the new language did not mean the eradication of the existing national languages, but could provide the communication tool for the whole mankind, respecting individual national identities.

The reception of the Arts & Crafts Movement in Central Europe showed similar coexistence of the international and national characteristics. The vernacular could equally stand for the uniqueness of local culture, but its propagators all over the world shared the belief in the new vernacular paradigm and its modernizing agenda, which questioned the heritage of 19<sup>th</sup>-century historicism. The vernacular could therefore act as the equivalent to linguistic Esperanto, providing the common language for the new century. According to Janos Gerle, the vernacular could be equaled with the search for the “Mother-Tongue of Forms”, which he considers to be one of the three layers of language, which preserves and determines its national character: “The first is the spoken mother-tongue, connected most closely with thinking, the second is the musical mother-tongue with its temporal character expressed in singing, dancing and music-making, linked above all to the emotions, and the third is the mother-tongue of forms with its three-dimensional character and ability to organize the material environment, which is bound up with the human will to leave a mark on the external world.”<sup>15</sup> As Katalin Keserü noted, it could also be perceived as the agent of modernization.<sup>16</sup> In terms of artistic methods, the artists-designers had to concentrate first of all on the unity of function and the aesthetic

quality found in peasant art, which corresponded with the contemporary move away from historicism. Secondly, the functional types of art work, and the new communal character of art work had to be emphasized, especially where art served in the process of the modernization of society, for example when being used for the construction of public schools and their educational aids, or in the design of community houses. Last but not least, the vernacular inspirations, with their interest in “primitivism”, the direct effect, and construction rather than depiction, corresponded to the avant-garde innovations. According to Keserü, “it can be contended that the style based on folk art was an alternative alongside the Avantgarde, ‘challenging the canon.’ This is to say, folk art was also a paradigm at the turn of the century in Europe.”<sup>17</sup> Through the discovery of the vernacular Central European artists and architects could therefore elaborate the unique language of communication for the members of the “imagined” national communities. Equally significant, however, was the attempt to provide a platform for international communication and exchange networks between the separate national groups who shared a belief in the new model of society, based on communitarian values imbedded in the Arts & Crafts Movement. The envisioned modernity would therefore be based on the principle of cooperation, where national communities share mutual respect. At the same time, the national tensions could be counterbalanced by the “internationalist” agenda, which secured the exchange of information and transgressed the national boundaries. For the supporters of the design revival in Central Europe the language which could accommodate both “national” and “international” ambitions existed not in the decorative folklorist stylizations, but in the archetypal forms of the vernacular, which, though differently interpreted by various ethnic groups, preserved the universal principles of construction and decoration.

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<sup>14</sup> For a history of Esperanto see J. Żytyński, *Esperanto i Esperantysty* (Esperanto and Esperantists), Warszawa 1987, p. 68–84.

<sup>15</sup> J. Gerle, *What is Vernacular? Or, the Search for the “Mother-tongue of Forms”*, [in:] *Art and the National Dream*, ed. by N. G. Bowe, Dublin 1993, p. 144–145.

<sup>16</sup> K. Keserü, *Vernacularism and its Special Characteristics in Hungarian Art*, [in:] *Art and the National Dream...*, p. 127–142.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131.