Chapter 8

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Natural and Cultural Assets of Rural Landscapes as Exemplified by the Villages of Sętal and Nowe Włóki in the Commune of Dywity

8.1. Introduction

The identity of rural areas is conditioned by both their cultural and natural landscapes. Rural landscapes often evolve under the influence of civilisational, social and economic factors. Those transformations are acceptable if they occur gradually, preserving balanced rules of shaping the natural forms and not disturbing the harmony of the landscape [Jaszczak 2010a, Sobczyńska-Wójcik 2010].

What constitute a multiple potential of the Polish countryside are not only its material resources but, most of all, the natural ones. The fragmentation of lands, forming mosaic landscapes with numerous balks, bands of meadows, tree clusters in the fields, mires, or pieces of natural ecosystems in the shape of small water holes, is favourable for landscape and biological diversity [Machnik, Kurczewski 2014]. According to Młynarczyk [2008], water reservoirs situated within rural and forested areas make an important part of maintaining a balanced cultural landscape.

Differences in rural landscapes of various regions of Poland are being gradually erased. The region of Warmia and Mazury, however, differs significantly from the remaining parts of Poland. Numerous lakes, water holes within the fields, canals, forest groups, and rivers make it distinct. Many areas as well as plant and animal species show features very close to the natural ones.

Its cultural landscape is created by its specific historic architecture in the form of numerous manors, granges, small palaces, and characteristic red-brick buildings, roofed with red tiles. Barns, sheds in the crofts, as well as crosses and wayside shrines placed among tall trees make picturesque landscapes [Jaszczak 2010b]. Those are the compositional features of the landscape in Warmia and Mazury that result in a diversity of visual experiences.
Due to their natural heritage that is inseparably connected to local traditions, rituals, and cultural elements, it is more and more often that those rural areas find new inhabitants, or aficionados of cultural and environmental tourism.

8.2. Region

The following article focuses on small, neighbouring villages of Nowe Włóki and Sętal that present high cultural values and are visibly saturated with traditional elements made by their specific architecture and their easily readable spatial organisations. The choice of the locations and the nearby rural areas was driven by both their historical features and the potential of their natural landscape that forms a mosaic of ecosystems rich in extensively used agrocenoses, meadows, forests, balks, water holes, and tree clusters, which makes a crucial asset of The Protected Landscape Area for the Valley of the Middle Łyna River.

The aforementioned villages are located within the administrative borders of the commune of Dywity (the powiat of Olsztyn) that is a part of the Warmia and Mazury region. That beautiful land, situated in a post-glacial landscape, is often mistakenly connected to the region of Mazury (Fig. 8.1). Warmia is formed not only by picturesque villages with wayside shrines, old crofts, historic buildings, churches, parks, water holes and tree clusters in fields; it is also a treasury that holds a history which is many centuries long.

The main goal of this article has been to analyze (to present) selected natural and cultural assets that shape the space of the rural areas for the villages of Sętal and Nowe Włóki.

Fig. 8.1. A demonstrative map for the area of the study
8.3. Rural Landscapes as an Integral Element of Natural and Cultural Heritage

Doubtlessly, those are environments transformed by human activities with integral parts made by water reservoirs that are characteristic for the aforementioned small villages and their surrounding regions. The reservoirs include natural, tiny water holes within fields, or larger lakes, created as a result of human activities (Fig. 8.2).

Fig. 8.2. A bird’s eye view of water holes in fields by the road to Sętal. Source: J. Miałdun.

Fig. 8.3. A map showing the territory with water reservoirs near the villages of Sętal and Nowe Włóki included into the Protected Landscape Areas. Scale 1:25,000. Source: The Commune of Dywity – A Change to the Study on Conditions and Directions for Land Development.
Such areas become subjected to natural morphogenetic and biological processes from the moment that economic activity is stated there [Molenda 2013]. Therefore, the regions of Sętal and Nowe Włóki, with their attractive landscapes and diversified ecosystems, have been included into the Protected Landscape Areas (Fig. 8.3). That form of protection aims at preserving an ecologic equilibrium in the discussed environment. Those areas mostly function as lagging and linking between landscapes, form wildlife corridors, and bond a network of protected areas into a uniform system.

The territory is very interesting in terms of its landscape; it is characterised by a large diversity of landforms. The landscape is of an agricultural nature, varied by water-meadows, pastures, numerous hollows, mixed forest complexes inhabited by roe deer, boars, elks, and deer, together with neighbouring reservoirs of biogenic accumulation. Particular attention may be directed towards two large water tanks (the Large Sętal Lake and the Small Sętal Lake) situated in the distance of 300 metres from each other (in a straight line), to the north and east from the village of Sętal (Fig. 8.4). A large water tank with its two characteristic pools located in the neighbourhood of the Nowe Włóki village is also interesting (Fig. 8.5). It is worth mentioning that it is the place where the Polish Championship in Ice Fishing takes place. All those reservoirs have been created as a result of land improvements and they form a characteristic cascade-like system joined by the Dratwa River flowing into the Łyna River.

The tanks are surrounded by large patches of numerous plants typical for reed-beds, for example: Carex sp. (sedges), Equisetum fluviatile L., Phalaris arundinacea L., Typha latifolia L., and Pragmites Australis (Cav.). The aquatic plants include Potamogeton natans L., Myriophyllum verticillatum L., Hydrocharis morsus-ranae L., Myriophyllum spicatum, and the paludal plants are dominated by Lycopus europaeus L., Epilobium hirsutum L., and Solanum dulcamara L. The land plants comprise of frequent occurrences of Urtica dioica L. or Cirsum arvense (l) Scop. That floral composition of plant clusters is a result of varied hydrologic and climatic conditions [Makela et al. 2004].

The developed contact lines (the ecotonic band) between the reservoirs and the rural landscape are nesting places for various birds, including gulls, cranes, and cormorants. That is exemplified well by a small tank situated in the closest vicinity of the Sętal village centre, characterised by its islet inhabited by a countless number of noisy gulls (Fig. 8.6). Numerous tiny lakes, mid-field reservoirs, and meadows surrounding the Dratwa River have a priceless biocenotic function as they shape conditions for biological diversity protection by forming food bases, hiding, breeding, and surviving places for rare species or places of temporary residence for migratory animals.

Occurrences of such developed area provide those territories with a unique character. They become particularly spectacular in springs and summers when the oilseed rape is in bloom (Fig. 8.7). The landscape developed in such a clear and picturesque way is not only a showcase of that region but also mostly favours its cultural development, improves ties within that tiny community and protects from extirpation.
Fig. 8.4. A bird’s eye view of the Large Sętal Lake and the Small Sętal Lake. Source: J. Miałdun.

Fig. 8.5. A bird’s eye view of the Nowe Włóki Lake. Source: J. Miałdun.

Fig. 8.6. The water reservoir with an islet by the village of Sętal. Source: http://setal.com.pl.

Fig. 8.7. The Small Sętal Lake surrounded by the oilseed rape in bloom. Source: K. Sobczyńska-Wójcik.)
What make an important landscape element of those small villages of Warmia are the natural contents coupled with the features of cultural force. Those include tree alleys with well-thought multi-species systems that are comprised of the ash, sycamore, linden, or, less frequently, oak and willow, together with old shrines and crosses composed into them. Due to a Catholic character of the Warmia region, those grand tree stands are harmonised with sacral elements stressing, thus, the rank of the alleys [Jaszczak 2008].

The main roads make a crucial element here, which is a distinguishing mark of that region, and are a result of a conscious area development. As an integral part of the cultural and natural environment, they play visual, aesthetic, and transport role, as well as they enhance the village entrance and exit. As it is reported by Worobiec [2005], the maple sections of the entrances to the villages of Sętal and Nowe Włóki have been included into the Polish registry of historic monuments and designed for preservation.

Both in the surroundings and in the centre of the Sętal and Nowe Włóki villages, there are gravel routes and roads (with some preserved fragments of paving) for walking, cycling, or leading to places with historic alley developments (Fig. 8.8). Some fragments of paved country roads may be still seen when walking towards the small church in Nowe Włóki, or when going towards the Langi Valley charmingly located in Sętal.

That extremely charming ravine, totally by possessed natural flora, is one of valuable attractions in the village of Sętal. The deep gorge is eroded by the Dratwa River. Valleys make a lasting element of rural landscapes and their formation depends on the settlement network layout and how its localisation relates to the fields [Ostaszewska et al. 2011]. The name of the valley has got their own history and originates from the surname of the Lange family who owned a mill by the river in the past (Fig. 8.9). The water-soaked and tree-grown area forms a kind of ‘a forest islet’ that influences the biodiversity development and land visualisation [Schneider 2009].

In the direct vicinity of the rural landscape of Sętal, when moving from it towards the north-western direction of Kabikiejmy Górne, there are some historic Old Prussian hill forts. As it is reported by the local inhabitants, the place can be accessed in the quickest way from the place where the Dratwa River meets the road to Kabikiejmy. The peninsular fort of a depressive character is visible on the right site of the river. The land depression is visibly separated by a nearly 3-metre-high earthwork (Fig. 8.10). Most likely, it was the easternmost structure. The archaeological research indicates that a near-fort settlement was used until the 13th century in the early Middle Ages.

Another earthwork hill fort with a yard in the shape of an irregular oval is located roughly 0.5 km away in the south-western direction, on the left side of the Dratwa River (Fig. 8.11).
Fig. 8.8. The road from Nowe Włóki to Sętal with alley developments. Source: K. Sobczyńska-Wójcik.

Fig. 8.9. The Langi Gorge in Sętal. Source: A. Jadwiszczak.

Fig. 8.10. A peninsular hill fort at the right, steep bank of the Dratwa River (a right tributary of the Łyna River), 500 m to the south from Kabikejmy. Source: L. Kryształowicz [left] and A. Jadwiszczak [right].

Fig. 8.11. An earthwork hill fort at the left bank of the Dratwa River. Source: L. Kryształowicz.
The hill fort used to play a key refuginal role (a shelter) for the people inhabiting the nearby early-medieval near-fort settlement. What played a crucial defensive role here was the neighbouring at the north-western side gorge of the Dratwa River. According to the available information, the highest settlement intensification occurred here in the 11th century [http://gminadywity.pl/]. These days, by preserving their historic layout of earthworks with steep elevations and oval shapes, such hill forts play the role of extraordinary viewpoints [Batyk 2010].

What makes an indispensable part of the landscape in the village of Nowe Włóki is its post-exploitation element formed by gravel pits. It is a paradise for collectors of valuable fossil specimens (Fig. 8.12). The two old pits have taken water on and now they are composed into the surroundings, making a stable element of the land morphology.

8.4. Cultural Heritage of the Śętal and Nowe Włóki Villages Represented in Architecture

Those two picturesque villages in the region of Warmia, which was ruled by bishops until the end of the 18th century, have preserved their historic rural layout and traditional buildings. Their preserved layouts of unchanged linear settlements make those places particularly valuable ones.

What are worth mentioning here are the origins of the village names. As the land of Prussians was conquered by the Teutonic Order, the settlement progressed. The names of the established villages, inhabited then mostly by people of the German descent, have preserved their primal Germanic form until now. The Polish name of Śętal originates from the original Zussental (1344) / Sussentall (1382), which translates as Sweet Valley as the German word süß (➔ süssen) means sweet and Tal means valley. Śętal was established in the 9th century and, at first, was owned by the collegiate church in Głotowo, then by the one in Dobre Miasto, and it became the property of the Church in 1811. The village of Nowe Włóki was called Vierzighuben, which means Forty Oxgangs. An oxgang is a measurement unit equal to 16.8 ha [Jadwiszczak et al. 2011].

Unavoidable degradation of the cultural and natural environment has not led to a destruction of the extremely interesting historical and religious past of the villages. Until today, it is made of cultural monuments: churches, chapels, wayside shrines, tombs, crosses, and old buildings picturesquely scattered over the wavy area, which is a symbol of rural development in the area of the former Eastern Prussia (Fig. 8.13, Fig. 8.14).

According to Zwierowicz [2003], and Jaszczak [2010 b], those were alleys creating the atmosphere of manors and parks as well as tree clusters in cemetery areas that brought order to the landscapes of Warmia, which were shaped throughout centuries. It was a church tower, however, that formed the main motif of the background as it marked the centre of a village.
Fig. 8.12. A working gravel pit in Nowe Włóki. Source: A. Jadwiszczak.

Fig. 8.13. The old development on the background of the northern part of the Nowe Włóki Lake. Source: A. Skwierawski.

Fig. 8.14. The old development in a farm nearby Sętal. Source: A. Skwierawski.

Fig. 8.15. The Neo-Gothic Saint Nicholas Church in Sętal, dating back to 1910. Source: A. Jadwiszczak.
In the village of Sętal, it is made by the cross-topped tower of the Neo-Gothic Saint Nicholas Church, originating from 1910 and consecrated in 1911. That sacral, three-nave building of red brick was erected on a rectangular plan. There is a narrow and closed chancel in its eastern side and the western one is attached by a square tower with a porch in its ground floor. The main altar holds a wooden sculpture of the Holy Trinity. The left side altar is equipped with a sculpture of Our Lady of the Rosary with Saint Dominic and a sculpture of Saint Anna and Saint Joachim. There is a relief of the Transfiguration of Jesus in the right side altar. Two valuable chalices dating back to 17th and 18th centuries produced by master goldsmiths survived the fire of the previous church. The local inhabitants also take pride in 100-year-old stained glass windows that were preserved in the church in an unharmed condition throughout World War II (Fig. 8.15).

The spiritual aspect is inscribed into the landscape of rural areas. In the village of Nowe Włóki, it is possible to see a Neo-Gothic Chapel of Our Lady of the Scapular and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is hidden among green trees. There is a beautiful sculpture of Madonna and Child over its entrance. The interior of the chapel built in 1874 is equipped with an altar from the 18th century, a painting of the Holy Family and Saint Valentine (Fig. 8.16).

The monuments, commemorating important events of the past times, have their symbolism as well. In front of the chapel, there is a stone obelisk honouring the inhabitants of Nowe Włóki and Gradki who were killed during World War I. It was erected by the Schacht brothers: Franz, Bernhard, and Karl (Fig. 8.17). Located behind the chapel is an old German cemetery with mellow plaque remains and crosses of several graves dating back to the forties of the 20th century [Jadwiszczak et al. 2011].

Also, small sacral object of particular significance for small communities play an important role in the regional landscape. Old wooden, stone, or red-brick shrines, as well as crosses, either hidden among statuesque trees, or dominating the settlements and often erected alongside historic transport routes are used even now still astonishing with their beauty [Fortuna-Antoszkiewicz, Kimic 2007]. Preserved to various degrees, they not only arouse people’s admiration, but also speak to their imaginations. In Warmia, in some villages and their neighbouring territories, one may come across several sacral objects, or at least a single one, which have been connected to that place for many years and are a continuation of the regional culture.

Such three shrines are composed into the surroundings of the centre of the Sętal village: the first one is well-preserved, red-brick, Neo-Gothic, and topped with several pinnacles (Fig. 8.18); the second one is a modest and mellow one, plastered and whitewashed, with an inviting step and its characteristic gabled roof and a simple cross, contrasting with the modern architecture behind it (Fig. 8.19); the last one is also plastered and is located just in front of a barn. All those ground shrines are in the form of small houses, have been built on a rectangular plan, and house a figurine of the Virgin Mary.
Doubtlessly, those monuments of culture stand as a crucial element of the cultural landscape of the country. When located at country crossroads, they play the role of guideposts and when situated at village borders, they bid welcome and farewell to comers [Fortuna-Antoszkiewicz, Kimic 2007].

When looking at the possibilities of accessing the small village of Nowe Włóki, it may be quickly noticed that it may be reached from all of it neighbouring villages using a better or worse route. And it is its centre that three wayside shrines characterised by their unified bodies may be found: a plastered and whitewashed one with some yellow ornamentations (Fig. 8.20), a plastered and whitewashed one on a
stone underpinning with a figurine of the Virgin Mary housed behind a glass window and under a gabled roof; a plastered and whitewashed one opposite the main chapel. A beautiful fenced shrine made of red bricks, dating back to 1956, with an octagonal spire roof is to be found by the road connecting the villages of Nowe Włóki and Plutki (Fig. 8.21). Two more shrines, a plastered one a red-brick one, are situated by the route to Tuławki.

Fig. 8.18. The wayside shrine by the main route to Sętal. Source: A. Jadwiszczak.
Fig. 8.19. The wayside shrine near the church in Sętal. Source: A. Jadwiszczak.

Fig. 8.20. The wayside shrine in the village of Nowe Włóki. Source: A. Jadwiszczak.
Fig. 8.21. The wayside shrine by the route to Plutki. Source: http://www.warmianainieznana.pl/.

A gallery of sculpted saints placed in façades of the shrines provides them with specific symbolism. According to Fortuna-Antoszkiewicz, Kimic [2007] and Kuprjanik [2014], those figurines of saints are a kind of a medium between the Creator and the believers, which results in the feeling of stability and peacefulness. All the conservation works or adorning them during various religious feasts are
manifestations of a great bond with the God. In the olden days, their rank and importance in the villagers’ lives were enhanced by the surrounding trees, decorative bushes, or beautifying them with floral garlands. Both in the past and in the presence, those sacral elements have been not only places for contemplation, giving thanks for numerous graces of good health and wellbeing, but also places of prayers for protection against any possible disasters.

Many of the shrines, functioning as gems in the rural landscape of Warmia, were subjected to numerous damages, preserving only their general shape. The changeable atmospheric conditions have made them show numerous defects—mostly brick losses, decaying plasters or wooden window frames that confine the room for a figurine.

Some old houses typical for Warmia that are located both in the centre of Nowe Włoki and in its neighbourhood should also be singled out as its the cultural heritage elements still preserved in the region. Composed into the territories that are not contaminated by industry, or even virginal ones, they make an inseparable element of the landscape. Some dense architectonic developments with house roofs covered with uniform red tiles and readily separated from the rural and recreational areas may be seen in the hearts of both villages.

8.5. Non-Material Elements of Cultural Heritage

An underappreciated aspect of all regional traditions is extremely important to preserve the image of the Polish countryside. Thus, preserving local customs and features of a region is in the hands of its inhabitants. The historical tradition is made of rituals, beliefs, customs, clothing, music, dance, songs, legends, tales, traditions of living in a family, neighbourhood, community, language dialects, etc. All those elements of non-material culture are shaped by following generations.

A rather small number of people inhabiting the discussed villages favours their integration and cultivation of selected traditions. The schedule of commonly organised regular events includes the Saint Nicholas Church Fair taking place in Sętal on the 6th of December and the parochial fair on the day of Our Lady of the Scapular in July which in its name refers to the pilgrimage tradition: Łosiero

1 Back to the Tradition.

There is also The Sętal Friends’ Society multi-dimensionally operating in the village of Sętal. Its activities include taking care of the cultural heritage, sacral objects, traditions in Sętal and its neighbourhood, the aesthetics of the village, popularisation of tourism and active recreation in the inhabitants of the village, as well as supporting local economic initiatives and strengthening the ties with its former inhabitants.

Examples of cultural promotion include rallies, family feasts, or the villagers taking part for the very first time in The Best Food Product Competition in the

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1 Łosiera (plural: łosieri) is the region-specific name of a pilgrimage in the region of Warmia.
**Commune of Dywity: For Kłobuk**’s Pot. It was during the competition that numerous tournaments and games thematically connected to the village of Sętal were organised. Acts of honouring the past comprised common feast singing or ‘the talk of Warmia’ performed by Edward Cyfus – a populariser of the Warmia folklore. The event also included an exhibition of tools used in the local farms long time ago and originating from private collectors, an auction of local products and handicraft, as well as a presentation of field stone cleaving. Various types of prize competitions, as for example *The Competition for the Best Sculpture in Straw or Hay*, are an incentive to cultivate and popularise traditions of any kind. Here, the winners included the work entitled *The Ghost of the Gravel Pit* for Nowe Włóki and the *Słomiany zapał* tortoise for Sętal.

The Summer Feast by the Sętal Friends’ Society is another event that takes place in August at the Transfiguration of Jesus church fair. It is attended by many local inhabitants. It is an occasion to taste delicious food: dumplings (pierogi), cutlets, a hunter’s stew (bogos), or other confectionery products prepared by the housewives of Sętal, Nowe Włóki, or Dąbrówka. The gourmets may take delight in smoked cold meats, alcoholic beverages (nalewka), non-alcoholic beverages (podpiwek), or home-made kvass.

Some time ago, the village of Sętal celebrated its 670th birthday. There was an event held for that occasion (A Birthday of the Sweet Valley), called *Fajrowanie geburstagu*, which means *A Birthday Celebration* in the German-influenced dialect of Polish from Sętal. It was also the time to present a plaque that commemorates establishing of that village. Such celebrations are accompanied by numerous competitions directed both to younger and older generations, a lot of singing and noise. Staging the play *In Warmia* based on a poem by Elza Wohlgemuth, a former inhabitant of Sętal, intertwined with feast singing stressed the multicultural nature of the village [http://setal.com.pl/].

There is also an informal group of Sętal that may be an example of high awareness of responsibility for all the goods of local culture. The group includes active people who find their centre in the village hall and in the Saint Nicholas parish. Its is comprised of the local librarian Danuta Kowalska and the priest Tomasz Stempkowski together with a group of volunteers who live in the village. They implement the project named *The Virtu@l Ghost of Sętal* that aims at equalising the educational opportunities for young people by combining the knowledge of history with modern technologies and language learning. The project includes a regular action called: *The Sętal Ghostbusters or Busters of Historical Ghosts*. Its participants focus on completing stories, making interviews, and finding information on the village of Sętal and its inhabitants in paper archives and the internet.

The significance of regionalism features is indisputable. It is known that the space of a region includes not only its geography but is also shaped by both historical and cultural criteria. It is, however, the feeling of community together with

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2 Kłobuk (plural: kłobuki) is a local demon taking care of households.

3 Untranslatable word play. It is the Polish phrase for: *short-lived enthusiasm*. However, the literal translation could be: *enthusiasm that burns out as quickly as hay.*
cultivation of tradition that binds the identity with the surrounding natural and cultural heritage.

8.6. Summary

Localisation of the discussed territory, its historical, natural, and cultural potentials, as well as diversified forms of plant life, unique aquatic environment stand for an exceptional role of that area. Slowly, it becomes a product for connoisseurs searching a place for rest, tourism, and recreation. However, the landscape starts to be subjected to modernisation and the occurring changes may result in a disharmonic surrounding that loses its familiarity and identity. Doubtlessly, the changes destroy and impoverish its landscape assets. A prime example of disturbances to the original rural systems is made by modern housing that totally does not inscribe into the historic architecture of village landscapes or by recreational plots by water reservoirs. The unavoidable phenomenon of landscape exploitation leads to an overload of its elements and results in its inevitable degradation.

Preserving the assets of natural heritage in small Polish villages and improving their environmental conditions is possible only when consistently implementing sustainable agriculture that takes good agricultural practice into consideration. Moreover, all the forms of nature preservation significantly influence the condition of landscapes. What is also extremely important is developing the social awareness of the fact that the unique nature and the symbolism of natural and cultural object create human tradition and heritage that is worth passing to next generations. The only sensible solution is to establish societies that work in favour of heritage development as well as to launch numerous programmes protecting historic objects.

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