

Introduction

From the end of the 19th century until the beginning of the First World War, artists' villages thrived throughout Europe as well as in the USA. In France, they were labelled 'écoles' (école de Barbizon). In Germany, they were named 'artists' colonies' (*Künstlerkolonien*), a term that became the most popular for this kind of communities but had a distinct 'colonial' touch. Hermann Bahr, who introduced in 1901 the label into the cultural discourse, saw in them a modern form of community, based not on family structures, but, as in Goethe's novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, on an elective affinity.¹

Most of the colonies were founded by artists looking for new motives, favorable living conditions and the retreat into the summer freshness. The others, like the artists' colony of Darmstadt, owed their foundation to the initiative of the noble or bourgeois patrons. During the fin-de-siècle, they had an important impact, not only on art and design, but also on social life. They were part of a mass movement to get away from urban centers into the countryside. Most of them were located in rural areas. Some were just summer residences for pleinair painting, others included more permanent forms of cohabitation. Seeking a new kind of community of artists and artisans, many of the artists' colonies cultivated ideas of social reform (*Lebensreformbewegung*) and were influenced by socialist ideas. They experienced an alternative life-style, like a free love, or followed the Tolstoyan ideas. The role and quantity of emancipated women (called in German disdainful *Malweiber*) in most of these settlements is particularly noteworthy. The greater number of early European art colonies became casualties of the First World War. Europe was no longer the same place

¹ H. Bahr, *Kolonien*, *Südwestdeutsche Rundschau*, 1901, nr. 6, p. 163–169. The russian translation came in the same year: G. Bar, *O kolonijyach*, *Mir iskusstva*, 1900, nr. 7, p. 140–141.

socially, politically, economically and culturally, and art colonies seemed a quaint anachronism in an abrasively modern world.

In Eastern and East Central Europe however – in Hungary, Romania, Poland, Finland, Lithuania – there were several artists' colonies of long durability. In the new states, which emerged after the First World War, these ideas and forms of cohabitation were rethought and renewed in a new political context. To mention is the artists' colony in Szklarska Poręba (former artists' colony Schreiberhau in German Silesia), which persisted in Poland into the interwar period and, in a modified form, even in the socialist time. Another case of continuity under different political rules was the Hungarian Nagybánya in Transylvania, which emerged as an internationally recognized artists' summer school at the turn of the century. Renamed into Baia Mare after the World War I, as it came under the Romanian rule, it served in the Interwar period and even under the socialist regime as an artists' resort and art school. A small Bulgarian village Balchik in Southern Dobrija in the Black sea coast, that became part of Kingdom Romania in 1913 after the Second Balkan War, was in the mid-1920s discovered by the Romanian artists and by the queen Maria as a picturesque seaside city. Balchik returned to Bulgaria during the Second World War. In the socialist era, the small city continued to attract the artists and even preserved the relicts of the artistic Romanian past. Some of the artists' colonies, like the Hungarian Gödöllő or the Russian Abramsevo, cherished utopian ideals of collective handiwork modelled after the example of a medieval workshop as it was practiced by the Arts&Crafts movement in Great Britain. Like them, many artists' villages transformed themselves into popular tourist attractions, and their authentic character was lost to processes of commercialization and trivialization.

Were artists' colonies utopian projects and, like all attempts to realize utopias, inevitably doomed to failure? The aim of this publication is to search for the utopian (or may be dystopian?) potential of the artists' colonies *en longue durée*, from the turn of the century to the Socialist period. Can one identify structural unifying elements or some peculiarities in the artists' settlements and communities in Eastern Europe in comparison with – much better known Western models? How far follow the

artists' associations, villages, or "houses of creative work", which arose during the socialist period, the old traditions of artists' colonies? How worked a state controlled "structured utopia"? Where were the spaces of freedom for the artists?

The selection of papers is based on the materials of the workshop *Community and Utopia. Artist's Settlements in Eastern and East-Central Europe, from the Fin-de-Siècle to Socialism* organized by GWZO (Leibniz-Institut für Geschichte und Kultur des Östlichen Europa, research group *Utopian communities*) and Vilnius Academy of Arts at 5–7 May 2016. The workshop was held in Nida Art Colony purposefully as the village of Nida/Nidden situated on the shore of the Baltic Sea was the popular colony of German artists since the end of the 19th century. The workshop gathered international team of researchers: Marina Dmitrieva, Zsófia Turóczy from Leipzig, Roman Holec from Bratislava, Katarzyna Chrudzimska-Uhera from Warsaw, Vera Faber from Wien, and Lithuanian group – Marija Drėmaitė, Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, Vilius Ivanauskas, Laima Laučkaitė-Surgailienė from Vilnius. This workshop presented new and previously unresearched aspects, covering different countries, periods, topics of artists' settlements, therefore Lithuanian Culture Research Institute decided to publish the papers of the workshop in the series of *Dailės istorijos studijos/Art History studies*.

The artists' colonies are regarded here as *communitas* in the sense of the anthropologist Victor Turner.² As informal egalitarian groups with common experience, *communitas* existed as antipodes to the institutional structures and shared, as Turner coined it, a common experience of liminality. Although his research field were tribal groups in Afrika and India, he exerted this theoretical frame to the "efforts to experience communitas" by the individualists like "small-scale withdrawal groups like the hippie and digger communities in San Francisco and New York".³ According

² V. Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, Ithaca-New York 1966, p. 203;

E. Turner, *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*, New York, 2012.

³ V. Turner, op. cit., p. 302.

to Barbara Walker, who analyzed from this point of view the Koktebel' circle of Russian writers around the poet Maximilian Voloshin, one of the examples of this phenomenon was the Russian circle (*kruzhok*) culture. The *kruzhki* "foster a spirit of humble egalitarianism among its members, who are bound together by intensive personal, spontaneous, emotional ties, formed in mutual pursuit of a goal more ineffable than pragmatic".⁴ This model is horizontal, instead of a vertical and hierarchical oriented patronage model; it works due to the more egalitarian networking relations. Like Hermann Bahr a hundred years before, Barbara Walker presumes for the existence of this circle the necessity of a charismatic personality who has a role of a leader of the circle. Bahr called such person "a conductor spirit" (*ein dirigierender Geist*).⁵

The artists' colonies we are analyzing in this book demonstrate different ways to deal with this model.

The first part of the book is devoted to the issue of the artists' settlements in Eastern and Central Europe from the 19th century to World War II. The article of Katarzyna Chrudzimska-Uhera dedicated to the famous Polish artists' settlement in Zakopane enlightens the ideological substrate of the appearance of settlements inspired by the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Nietzsche, Charles Darwin, Edward B. Taylor, Richard Sheppard, Emile Durkheim. The influx of holidaymakers and medical patients in Zakopane brought enthusiasts and experts in construction, ornamentation and artisan handicraft. The rules of Zakopane style established by the painter and art critic Stanisław Witkiewicz Sr contributed most to the mythologization of Zakopane.

Zsófia Turóczy examines a completely new aspect in the historiography of art, the connection between artists' settlements and the Masonic movement. The activity of the settlements in the late 19th century – first part of the 20th century coincided with the freemasonry peak, not only in Hungary but throughout Eastern Europe. Like the artists' colonies,

⁴ B. Walker, *Maximilian Voloshin and the Russian Literary Circle: Culture and Survival in Revolutionary Times*, Bloomington, 2005, p. 9.

⁵ H. Bahr, op. cit., p. 167.

this fraternal and arcane organization pursued utopian ideas, aiming to change the world for the better. Turóczy shows how artists of Nagybánya and Kecskemét colonies were engaged in Masonic activities, and suggests the causes of this phenomenon.

Avant-garde artists residing in Ukraine in the first decades of the 20th century had exceptionally strong recourse to local traditions of peasant art. Especially female avant-garde artists Alexandra Exter and Lyubov Popova related their works to typically female forms of crafted art. Vera Faber analyses the phenomena of so-called folk futurists in Verbivka and Skoptsi villages, where under the guidance of avant-garde leaders peasant artisans aimed to realize utopian futuristic vision and transferred principles of suprematism, cubism and futurism to typical Ukrainian handicrafts.

Marina Dmitrieva focuses her attention on the peasant architecture, especially the rustic hut, as a model for aesthetical and ideological programs of artists' colonies before the WWI. The article argues that the critic of the vices of the urban civilisation which stood under the influence of the ideas of *Lebensreform* movement and the Tolstoyan moral imperative should be seen as an important issue of artists' settlements. In this context, a humble peasant log cabin was considered as an epitome of the healthy life in the harmony with the nature. By analysing architecture and design produced in the artists' colonies in Hungary as a part of the Habsburg Empire and in the Russian monarchy (including Finland) the article investigates the artistic imagination, which was born from the ethnographic studies and nourished by the moral impetus of the rescue of the folk art.

The second part of the book is dedicated to Lithuanian material, highlighting the different issues of Soviet experience of the artistic communities and settlements. Giedrė Jankevičiūtė presents the phenomenon of Lithuanian region – Samogitia (Žemaitija) as mythological place important for Lithuanian artists all through the 20th century. The article concentrates on several aspects: why Samogitia remained an attractive place during the different political and cultural periods; what was the story of artistic pilgrimages to the region and how did the interpretation of the place changed in the works of art during the century.

Laima Laučkaitė analyses the Soviet type of the artists' colony – the House of Creativity in Palanga at the Baltic Sea. So-called “artists' houses of creativity and recreation” sprouted up after WWII in the Soviet Union: Senezh (near Moscow), Jurmala (Latvia), Gurzuf (Crimea), Khosta (Krasnodar Krai) and Palanga (Lithuania). Houses of Creativity belonged to the Artists' Union of the USSR and were financed by the Art Foundation of the USSR. The essay discusses the functioning of the residence and presents it as a part of institutional, ideological and economic environment of Soviet art.

In Soviet Lithuania, like in the entire USSR, informal groups of artists were not tolerated; instead the artists were encouraged to become members of the state-controlled Artists' Union of the USSR. However, informal communities of like-minded colleagues would assemble in private spaces, artists' homes and studios, where the goals of creative and political freedom were pursued. The article of Elona Lubytė enlightens such a case, Vilnius Jeruzalė Sculpture Garden – the informal settlement of sculptors led by Vladas Vildžiūnas during 1962–1990. The article deals with the groups' creative searches for modernism in the context of Social Realism and focuses on two aspects related to the autonomy of art – the role of technology and the presentation of works in the public.

The article of Marija Drėmaitė examines study housing of artists in the context of planned economy and the society where wealth was guaranteed by privileges. Members of artistic unions were allowed to apply for larger living space arrangements, justified by the need for a creative studio. After 1962, members of such organisations could form housing co-operatives; creative organisations advantageously used the possibility to build cooperative flats with studios, which meant highly desired extra space. The paper analyses two cases: the Village of the Union of Composers' in Vilnius (architect Vytautas Edmundas Čekauskas, 1960–1966) and cooperative workshops with the flats of the Union of Artists' in Vilnius (architect Algimantas Mačiulis, 1967–1970s). Both constructions were exceptional by their social origin and their design in the context of the standardisation of housing in the USSR.

Vilius Ivanauskas' paper focuses on the community of Lithuanian writers as the cultural elites of the Soviet system and the role of Writers' Union in the maintenance of Social Realism and ideological indoctrination of the society. The article analyses the process of "sovietisation" of Lithuanian writers and points out chronologically three generations with rising interest towards the national identity. The community of writers in the post-Stalinist period developed multifaceted relationship with the political system, and alongside contributed to the development of national ideology. Ivanauskas argues that the phenomenon of ethnic particularism in Soviet Lithuania, supported by local government of the Republic was also promoted by local cultural elites including writers first of all. He points out the importance of the informal circles of intellectuals, the *kruzhok* culture to concieve the complexity of different grades of relationship between the official, in-official and semi-official culture in the Soviet Union.

In sum, the artists' colonies, villages or communities, we investigated in this volume, were supported by networks of sociability and weren't places for the emergence of a lonely genius. Their existence was depended on the interaction of the artists with each other and the natural environment, with the local population and the character of a place as a whole, or with the given political situation. It didn't exclude a role of a charismatic personality who would lead or coordinate the activities. But it was not a necessary presumption of the existence of artists' communities.

Constructing a 'place-myth' is a constitutive part of an artists' colony.⁶ It often served to articulate ideas of national identity and of universally valued quality. The Eastern and East Central Europe with its unspoiled nature offered places, which had such a potential. To mention is the Karelian topos in the Finnish culture or the Górale myth in the Polish cultural self-conscience, or the role of Kalotászeg region in Transylvania for the Hungarian searching for the spirit of the nation. The Samogitia

⁶ Á. Moravánszky, Magic Mountains. Constructing the Geography of Modernity, in *Vernacular Art in Central Europe*. International Conference 1–5 October 1997, ed. by Jacek Purchla, Cracow, 2001, p. 27–46.

(Žemaitija) as a region with a genuine Lithuanian pagan culture has been for a longer time a mythical area. Looking for a mythical topos or living in such a place encouraged the ethnographic studies and the interdisciplinary exchange in the artists' colonies. It can be linked to a rural location and connected with a real or imagined national tradition. As Eric Hobsbawm demonstrated on the examples from the 19th century's quasi-authentic rituals, it was mostly a constructed, hybrid or "invented" tradition, adjusted to or glorified by the period eye.⁷

As Nina Lübbren suggested, the nostalgia is a "counterpart of Utopia".⁸ "While the utopian attitude expects a better life in the future, nostalgia locates it in the past".⁹ But both modes of relating to the world are fundamentally modern attitudes. It was precisely this nostalgia for the pre-modern, pagan or archaic past or presumed authenticity that placed the 'pastoral gazes' of artists' colonists properly *within* modernity.

We would like to express our gratitude to the Vilnius Academy of Arts for enabling the workshop in Nida Art Colony and the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute for the publication in the series of *Dailės istorijos studijos/Art History studies* and to the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO), Leipzig as well as to Hans Boeckler Mare Balticum Foundation for sponsoring the publication of this volume. Our thanks go to Rasa Antanavičiūtė for the pretty organization of the workshop in Nida, to Jaime Taber for the thoughtful proof-correction of the most articles and to Paweł Gorszczyński for his support by editing of texts.

*Marina Dmitrieva,
Laima Laučkaitė*

⁷ *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, Cambridge, 1983; see there E. Hobsbawm, Introduction: Inventing Tradition, p. 1–14.

⁸ Recalling to: C. Shaw, M. Chase, The dimensions of nostalgia, in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, ed. by Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase, Manchester–New York, 1989, p. 9.

⁹ N. Lübbren, *Rural Artists' Colonies in Europe, 1870–1910*, Manchester 2001, p. 14.