

IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE. THE SEMANTICS OF THE FAMILY  
CEMETERIES OF EAST PRUSSIA IN THE LIGHT OF LITERARY AND NONLITERARY SOURCES FROM  
THE 19TH TO THE MIDDLE OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The project falls within contemporary cultural landscape studies and research on the historical meanings of the present-day material heritage elements. The key category is landscape reading, understood as the process of discovering in space traces of various historic imagined realities. Such a cultural landscape is therefore a space based on three essential components: natural landscape, material heritage and a network of historical, culturally-defined meanings. At the same time, it is a palimpsest of past impacting forces which will be decoded in the course of the study, including the definition and description of their meanings.

The project's study field is the territory of North-East Poland, i.e. former East Prussia, and the central research subject – family cemeteries established there from the beginning of the 19th century until the end of this province, that is until 1945. The choice of the study field is far from random - the contemporary cultural landscape of North-East Poland is extraordinarily culturally diverse and historically multilayered. Understanding the specificity and historical meaning of this, not fully decoded and defined to date, multicultural material heritage of North-East Poland is significant for the contemporary Polish culture, as it allows understanding the complexity of both tangible and imagined (intangible) cultural heritage in which the Polish society lives.

The choice of the study subject is a complete novelty. The composition of the family cemeteries reflects the affiliation to an elite of specific social aspirations, cultivating its own collective myths of origin and power. Reading and documenting the quickly disappearing remains of family cemeteries and the analysis of the cultural and historical contexts that accompany them, described in literary texts of the period, shall enable full identification and understanding of the cultural landscape of the period in question and, consequently, varied symbols of its material heritage, dependent on the dynamics of cultural change, trends and ideologies prevailing at the time, and, thereby, worldviews.

The innovativeness of the planned study lies not only in the choice of research subject (family cemeteries in this part of Poland have not been analysed to date), but also in a holistic, interdisciplinary research method including analysis based on the category of anthropologically defined culture. The latter is understood in this context as a construct built of a mental reality, reflected in the literary texts of the period, and a material reality – in this particular case, in the form of the remains of family cemeteries. The cultural landscape studies carried out to date treated mental and material realities separately.

The project reaches for the ideal of interdisciplinary context studies that present the studied phenomenon in its material and ideological realities. Setting aside the subject of the study and the results of the analysis, the project introduces an innovative research model and perspective to the current of studies in the field of humanities carried out to date.