

Performing their own Early Middle Ages: The festivalization and democratization of history in Wolin, Poland

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Abstract

Based on an ethnographical study on the Slavs and Vikings' Festival—a re-enactment fair organized annually in Wolin (Poland)—I analyze the differences between the re-enactment festival and the former local representations of the early-medieval heritage of the town. Wolin is a place where medieval legends of Jomsborg and Vineta were converted to archaeological discourses, as well as subordinated to the national politics of memory. After the post-socialist transformation, processes of commercialization and festivalization of Wolin's past began. Basing on my fieldwork, I argue that these processes have allowed the residents of Wolin to play an active and creative role in the local public history. As a performance simultaneously taking place on numerous "stages", the festival was more inclusive than the former representations of heritage, as it might be shaped by a number of agents. The participant observation of four such stages, namely music, cuisine, crafts, and a cultural program for children, enable me to argue that the democratization of the local public history in Wolin was possible owing to the multiple forms of expression stemming from the new, affective paradigm of historical representation, in which an encounter with the past is, first and foremost, a sensual experience.

KEYWORDS: public history, democratization of history, re-enactment, Poland, Wolin

Introduction

The small town of Wolin located on the eponymous island on the north-western border of Poland has been organizing a re-enactment fair named the Wolin-Jomsborg-Vineta

Slavs and Vikings' Festival for the past 27 years. While conducting ethnographic research in the area, I have observed the influence historical re-enactment has on the local community. Individual stories that shall be presented in this article indicate that the festivalization of the half-legendary past of Baltic Slavs and Vikings has allowed some residents of Wolin to play an active and creative role in performing the early-mediaeval history of their town. This became possible owing to specific forms of expression, characteristic of the festival and aimed towards eliciting emotional and sensory experiences in the audience. The townspeople's involvement in aspects of the festival associated with cuisine, craftsmanship and cultural animation allowed them to have a causative effect on public history, which in turn led to its democratization in the local context.

The Slavs and Vikings' Festival is a meeting of over 2,000 re-enactors from many different countries, all coming to present the attire, craftsmanship, weaponry, and other aspects of the culture of Slavs, Vikings, and other ethnic groups that inhabited Europe between the 8th and the 10th centuries. The roots of the event may be traced to initiatives undertaken in the early 1990s by foreign, especially Danish re-enactors, who offered to cooperate with Wolin's municipal authorities and cultural institutions to organize a re-enactment fair. The first such event took place in 1993 under the name Viking Festival. That name was later changed by members of a local association, the Wolin-Jomsborg-Vineta Slavs and Vikings' Centre, established in 2002 with the aim of including Wolin's residents in the organization of the event. The centre has become one of the official co-organizers of the festival, along with Wolin Town Hall and the Municipal Cultural Centre (hereinafter: MCC). It also manages the open-air archaeological museum in which the festival is held. The site is open to visitors throughout spring and summer. The 24 wooden huts presented there exemplify the following styles of mediaeval architecture: post-and-beam, wattle work, log frame, post-and-plank, and log construction. The design of the structures was based on archaeological findings from Wolin Island (Bogacki & Filipowiak, 2019). The activities of the Slavs and Vikings' Centre have initiated the process of democratization of the public image of the early Middle Ages, which constitutes the focus of the present article.

The concept of democratization of history appears in many works on contemporary visions of the past (de Groot, 2009; Baraniecka-Olszewska, 2018; Jenkins, 2003; Pawleta, 2016). Academic history is no longer the only or even the most important source of historical knowledge. It is also acquired through contact with other media, such as journalism, historical cinema, advertising, video games or, last but not least, historical re-enactment (de Groot, 2009; Schwarz, 2007). While these disciplines draw from the works of

historians and archaeologists, they mainly use them to create their own narratives and representations, which employ different means of expression (Jordanova, 2000). Sometimes (as is the case with historical re-enactors), the creators of these narratives aspire to be regarded as experts, as historians and archaeologists are (Appleby, 2005). The profound influence these non-professional historians extend over popular images of the past calls to question the status of academic history in contemporary society (Sobchack, 2013).

Democratization may mainly be observed in public history, which Ludmilla Jordanova defines as “forms of history that reach beyond academic settings and the diverse groups involved in creating a sense of the past” (Jordanova, 2000). The term *public history* is applied both to the various means of presenting history to a broader public, and to certain history-related practices performed for and by people not associated with academia. It also encompasses uses of the past employed by subversive movements that undermine the dominant, elitist version of history, as well as those preferred by establishments trying to legitimize their power by popularising specific visions of the past. Public history is often associated with the work of museums and heritage sites (Jordanova, 2000). Finally, it has its commercial aspect (Jordanova, 2000), which includes representations of the past entangled in market relations. Since one may use various types of media to offer the audience an experience of the past, one may also expect to be paid for such services. Thus, history becomes something that can be bought and consumed (de Groot, 2009; Pawleta, 2011).

As the above-presented examples demonstrate, the concept of democratization of the past may be used in contexts that have little to do with the political baggage with which the term *democracy* is usually associated. It is employed in situations in which someone (usually academic experts) loses their monopoly on creating historical narratives; giving way to a multitude of narrative-makers, which leads to opportunities for contributing to visions of history and equal access to historical narratives. However, in the case of the re-enactment event under analysis, the democratization of history may also be understood in a more literal manner, as the creation of a specific representation of history in circumstances characteristic of the democratic institution of local government. The Slavs and Vikings’ Festival constitutes the effect of cooperation between municipal administration, local cultural institutions, a non-government organization (the Slavs and Vikings’ Centre), and private partners and sponsors. It is also a specific representation of early-mediaeval history in public space, one from which the residents of Wolin benefit and directly shape.

Festivals, fairs, picnics, city fetes or market fairs to which re-enactors are invited have become one of the more noteworthy spaces for contemporary people's meetings with history. Michał Pawleta (2016) dubs this phenomenon the "festivalization of the past" (p. 170). During festivals, especially re-enactment ones, performers present the past to the audience in a number of ways, for example, by displaying replicas of objects, staging battles and other significant events in history, showcasing historical crafts or encouraging spectators to learn about various everyday practices of the past. Such a performance of a specific period in history (especially one held in a historically significant space, e.g., an open-air museum, an archaeological park, or in the close vicinity of historical architecture) allows the audience to experience the past in a very special way, involving multi-sensory experiences and a chance for repeated, full immersion in the world created by the re-enactors (and also for leaving it at will, so that history may be in the foreground, or in the background). As noted by Anna Wieczorkiewicz (2008) "arranging a situation of a historical feast harmonising with the surroundings of an open-air museum is tantamount to opening a different plane of contact with the imagined and experienced past" (p. 291).¹

Academic analysis of historical re-enactment usually focuses on the experiences of the performers or (more rarely) on direct spectators of the show. The issue of the social environment in which re-enactment events are organized appears not to be tackled at all. In truth, however, many re-enactment festivals, especially ones organized for many years in the same location, not only have an impact on the local community but also are shaped by it. The conclusion seems particularly obvious in the case of large-scale events such as the Slavs and Vikings' Festival, as the number of visitors exceeds the local population more than tenfold. It would be difficult for local residents to ignore the event even if they were not its direct audience; thus, their experience should not be disregarded in thorough analyses of the festivalization of the past and the culture-making potential of re-enactment events.

My fieldwork in Wolin was conducted using two methods: participant observation during the 25th and 26th editions of the festival (2019-2020),² and in-depth interviews with the organizers of the event, representatives of municipal institutions and other residents of the town, both involved and uninvolved in the festival. Naturally, not all these inter-

¹ All citations from Polish-language publications have been translated solely for the purpose of the present article.

² The 26th edition of the Slavs and Vikings' Festival planned for 2020 did not take place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Instead, the organizers held workshops of experimental archaeology, which included most elements of the festival's programme, but were attended by a much smaller number of people (both reenactors and spectators). The interviews and observations made during the workshops also contributed to the research material.

views could be held during the event; returning to Wolin two weeks after the festival proved necessary. This latter visit provided further insight into the realities of life in the town and the interpersonal relations, especially between the people involved in the organization of the event. Most of the interviews were carried out in the interlocutors' homes or workplaces, or, less frequently, in public places around town: in the street, in the park or by the banks of the Dziwna.³ The residents of Wolin with whom I spoke included factory workers, fishermen, employees and owners of shops and eateries, teachers, local artists, local administration officials and high-school students. After specifying their manner of participation in the latest edition of the festival, my interlocutors shared their memories from past years, and their opinions and approaches to the event. The conversations with individuals who have for many years been involved in organizing the event resembled biographical interviews, allowing me to acquire detailed life stories of people who were inspired by the festival and adding their creative contributions to it.

The city and the festival

Beneath present-day Wolin lie the remains of a town that many historians and archaeologists regard as one of the major Slavic centres of trade and craftsmanship in the early mediaeval period (Stanisławski, 2014). Authors of chronicles and hagiographic books describing the epoch refer to it as one of the largest cities in Europe at the time (*ibid.*). Wolin is believed to have been the city that inspired the mediaeval legend of Vineta—a city drowned by divine judgment, as punishment for the sins of its residents, and Jomsborg—the mythical stronghold of a Viking brotherhood extolled in sagas (Rębkowski, 2019). Archaeological research, conducted in the town since the 19th century, has confirmed that between the mid-10th and mid-11th centuries Wolin was an emporium of great importance (Stanisławski, 2014). The mediaeval city has been the subject of scholarly interest, captivated the imagination of history aficionados, and attracted tourists. The Slavs and Vikings' Festival is the embodiment of these passions. It is the reason that this small town in Pomerania (the population is less than 5,000) is visited by throngs of tourists and re-enactors every year.

The festival is held on the island between Wolin and the village of Reclaw, in an open-air museum encircled with a palisade. For a few days, the reconstructed mediaeval huts that stand in the museum are surrounded by a sea of canvas tents and rows of specially prepared stands where sellers of tools, weaponry, jewellery, or musical instruments

³ Dziwna is the strait that separates the island and town of Wolin from the mainland, connecting the Szczecin Lagoon with the Baltic Sea.

peddle their goods made to imitate archaeological finds. In the central square around the Sventovid⁴ idol, *żercy*⁵ present ancient Slav and Viking rituals; music bands and theatrical troupes whose works are inspired by mediaeval culture may be seen performing near one of the gateways to the museum; they encourage every passer-by to come to learn mediaeval games and dances. Beyond the palisade, combat tournaments are held; it is also the location of the main event of the festival, namely the battle between the invaders and the defenders of Wolin (represented by two groups of armed re-enactors). On the other side of the open-air museum, visitors may, for an additional fee, take a cruise along the Dziwna in a replica of a Viking ship. Some stands offer visitors the chance to browse books, comics and board games inspired by Middle Ages or Slavic mythology. Others serve Slavic cuisine. All of the mentioned participants: craftsmen, vendors, *żercy*, warriors, musicians, actors, and sailors are historical re-enactors. Their participation in the event is conditional to acquiring attire and equipment that reflects our current knowledge of the everyday existence of people inhabiting Slavic and Scandinavian territories in the 8th to 11th centuries.

Another event is held simultaneously on the other side of the Dziwna. It involves musical performances on a large stage, a market, and a fun fair. Officially referred to as the Viking Market Fair, it is colloquially called a companion event or the commercial part of the festival (as opposed to the historical part taking place within the open-air museum). Interestingly, the stalls of the commercial market tempt the buyer with T-shirts bearing the names of bands representing various sub-types of the metal genre (especially black metal or death metal), images of fallen angels, vampires, demons, and other depictions in the dark fantasy style, as well as gothic fashion corsets and dresses, leather jackets with metal spikes, motorbike attire and hoodies with nationalist symbols. The presence of such apparel indicates that the history of mediaeval Slavs and Vikings has become a source of inspiration for members of certain subcultures and followers of certain styles. Children can get polyester imitations of knights' surcoats (e.g., those of Teutonic Knights), toy helmets, toy swords, hatchets, bows and other weaponry of such nature. One may also buy military surplus sold by the Polish Army, as well as bladed weapons

⁴ Sventovit, also known as Svetovit, is one of the major deities in Slavic mythology, particularly venerated in the island of Rügen (see Strzelczyk 1998).

⁵ *Żercy* are priests of Slavic deities who make offerings to them on behalf of the people. The name derives from the Old Polish term *żertwa*, meaning offering. It is not entirely obvious whether the *żercy* in the Wolin festival truly perform pagan rites, or whether they only present them to the audience, showing how such ceremonies might have looked like. One of them admitted in conversation that the boundary between one and the other may sometimes be fluid and dependent on the individual approach of each of the spectators, whom he leaves the freedom of interpreting the nature of the temple practices: 'Those who wish for spirituality, get spirituality, those who wish for historical knowledge, get knowledge,' he said.

of various ilk, some of them similar to the wares sold by re-enactors in the open-air museum (though the assortment is much broader in the commercial part, as it is not limited to items from a particular time period). The fact that these aspects of re-enactment folklore coexist in a single space with toys, fast food, and other products typically encountered in a city fair solidifies the status of history as an element of the entertainment industry.

The Slavs and Vikings' Festival is not the only reference to early Middle Ages and mediaeval legends observable in Wolin. A visitor will soon notice that some of the streets are named after famous mediaeval personages: Niedamir, Mieszko I, Świętosława; and monuments depicting Slavic gods (Sventovid and Triglav⁶). There is also Światowida (Sventovit) Street and Słowiańska (Slavic) Street. A runic stone honoring Harald Bluetooth⁷ may be found in the park by the Dziwna, along with wooden statues resembling mediaeval warriors. A replica of a mediaeval boat displayed on the other side of the street incites passers-by to visit the Andrzej Kaube Regional Museum, most of which is devoted to early-mediaeval Wolin and relics from that period. As we pass the football stadium, an inscription below the crest depicting a Viking in a horned helmet will inform us that we have entered the grounds of the Vineta Wolin sports club. This public toponymy, objects present in urban space, and the cultural program reveal the influence of one of the two major creators of the public image of Wolin's early mediaeval history: the local municipal authorities and the institutions they control. The decisions these bodies have taken over the years are the reason that Wolin communicates its past in this specific manner. Nevertheless, the local authorities are a coordinator rather than the instigator of the process of shaping the image of the city; it involves a number of entities, not all of which are dependent on the government. In any case, the image of an armed Viking and the slogan *Wolin – A City of History* placed on the outskirts of the town promises a meeting with the effect of a deliberate strategy of referring to the past in public spaces.

The other major influence comes from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, which has an office in Wolin. Established in 1952, the unit now operates as the Archaeological Laboratory of the Department of Mediaeval Archaeology of Baltic Countries. The laboratory was opened when excavation works began. They have been conducted intermittently until the present day, both in the centre of the

⁶ Triglav is a three-headed Slavic deity venerated in Western Pomerania (see: Dragnea, 2011).

⁷ Harald Bluetooth (ca. 911-987) was the Danish king who introduced Christianity to Denmark. According to some historians, he died on Wolin Island.

town (e.g., in the Old Town Marketplace) and in the outskirts (e.g., in the hills to the south (Wzgórze Wisielców) and north (wzgórze Młynówka, Srebrne Wzgórze)) of Wolin town. Research has also been conducted by the banks and in the bed of the Dziwna (Stanisławski, 2012). The entire archaeological complex of early mediaeval Wolin is divided into 17 sites (Stanisławski, 2012).⁸ Their presence also affects Wolin's residents' perception of their town and, in some cases, also their life choices. Suffice it to say that many locals found employment at the excavations works. For some, as was the case with Mr Mieczysław, who later became a documentation technician at Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, these experiences shaped their future careers:

How old was I, twelve? When I would get a little scraper from the chief supervisor, I scraped a bit as a kid, and if I found some shard, I then had to take it and draw it in my notebook and such. I would later ask if it was drawn nicely or not; it was all crooked, obviously ... and they were only able to sign me up for work when I was sixteen years old. They could do it then. During summer break. I always came, and as a sixteen-year-old, I came to work for two months. And after this work, clearly, I was working well, so they wanted to use that, so after school, I would come and draw research logs, documentation, and such, and so, step by little step, one made one's way upwards, right? (man, retired, age 70)

Older residents of Wolin remember the excavation works mainly as an opportunity to earn some money, especially for people that had difficulty finding other employment. At times the excavation also offered a chance for illegal profit:

More than once, you know, you'd find an interesting thing, and you would pocket it. To sell it later. Anything not to give it to them. And you'd get a few zloty for this, 'cause ... I had this client, and he took these things, only to Germany, you know? He gathered quite a bunch, a bunch. (man, retired, age ca. 80)

Inhabitants of Wolin could not remain indifferent to the importance archaeologists ascribed to their place of residence, due not only to the excavation works but the very presence of historical artifacts in the ground:

⁸ The excavations conducted by Polish archaeologists after WWII were not the first. The first (accidental) archaeological finds in Wolin were made in the 17th century. In the latter half of the 19th century, German archaeologists began excavation works, which continued until the outbreak of WWII (Rębkowski, 2019).

I, for instance, have the W2⁹ zone through my garden, there's a bucketful of 13th-century ceramics every year, so well, we live with that history, yeah? That history is simply here with us. (man, association member, age ca. 40)

This importance clearly manifests itself in the various restrictions related to land use. In this context, archaeology appears as an instrument of authority:

A: After all, before they built these blocks, the whole ground had to be turned over, right?

B: That's 'cause they couldn't, 'cause all was under the archaeology, and no blocks or anything could be built. It was all under this. (men, retired, age ca. 80)

As may be seen, the academic world also affects public history, as the significance it ascribes to the studied past (since the beginning of research works) play a vital role in its direct social environment.

Wolin has several municipal institutions concerned with presenting early mediaeval history, but the one that takes a significant role is the Regional Museum, established in 1966. Nowadays, the museum bears the name of its long-time director, archaeologist Andrzej Kaube (Muzeum Wolin, n.d.), remembered by Wolin's residents as a person of great magnitude who made profound contributions to the town and to the region. Many campaigns aimed at familiarizing the local community with the work of archaeologists in Wolin were undertaken at Kaube's initiative, often with the cooperation of municipal institutions such as the Municipal Cultural Centre. The statues of Slavic deities were one of the many elements of this activity. The monument of Triglav was erected in the local park in 1967, to commemorate Mieszko I's conquest of Wolin. Nearly a decade later (in 1975), the statue of Sventovit was unveiled. The work was made to resemble a cult item found during the excavations on the island. The Wolin Days of Amateur Art provided an opportunity to organize sculpting workshops intended to thematically refer to Wolin's history. The results of these workshops include the wooden statues of warriors that now decorate the park by the Dziwna banks. Director Kaube and the director of the Municipal Cultural Centre Ms Elżbieta Kaczmarek also organized historical spectacles entitled *Vikings Invade Wolin*, staged by the students of local schools during festivals named *Kupala Fest*. The students were divided into two groups, impersonating the

⁹ Archaeology heritage protection zones impose a set of rules on a given area, due to its historic importance. These rules need to be followed in the local spatial planning. The existence of the W2 zone in the Wolin commune means that all ground and construction works must be consulted with the Voivodeship Monument Protection Office (Wolin Town Council Resolution no. XI/121/2003, 20 September 2003, on changes to the local spatial planning in the town of Wolin).

Viking invaders and the Slavic defenders. Many local residents became involved in the organization of these shows, yet their contribution was fully compliant with the script prepared by members of cultural institutions. The activities of the Wolin museum and cultural centre followed the historical policy implemented by the communist authorities of Poland in the western regions of the country (which were referred to as the Recovered Territories). The said policy consisted in popularizing the image of the Slavic-ness (and therefore, in a more colloquial understanding, Polish-ness) of the territories that Germany was forced to cede to Poland after World War II.¹⁰ The myth of returning to Piast lands¹¹ was an attempt at creating a historical connection between the land and its new residents, resettled there from the eastern reaches of pre-war Poland, claimed by the USSR after the war (Traba & Żytyniec, 2017). In the political context of the day, events such as the Kupala Fest were, by necessity, directed mainly to the local population.

As noted by Joanna Orłowska and Błażej Stanisławski (2004), the Kupala Fest was the direct predecessor of the Slavs and Vikings' Festival. The final edition of the Kupala Fest in 1992 was attended by a delegation of Danish re-enactors, among them Professor Geoffrey Bibby from the university in Aarhus, a famous archaeologist and one of the leading personalities of the Viking re-enactment movement. Their visit was the result of cooperation initiated with Wolin's archaeologists (especially Professor Władysław Filipowiak) and public institutions (the Town Hall, the MCC). This cooperation bore fruit the following year, as it resulted in the organization of the first Viking Festival. The Viking Invasion of Wolin was staged for the last time during that event; this time preceded by a historical spectacle prepared by re-enactors from Denmark and other Western-European countries (e.g., Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands; Bogacki & Filipowiak, 2019). Thus, a new agent emerged in Wolin's public space, one that presented the early Middle Ages in an entirely new manner, different from that used by the earlier performers, who were academics and representatives of municipal institutions.

It was not long before residents of Wolin became involved in this new manner of presentation, namely historical re-enactment. In 2002, a new association was registered, named the Wolin-Jomsborg-Vineta Slavs and Vikings' Centre. Its members were inhabitants of

¹⁰ The idea was adopted by the communist authorities of Poland yet did not originate from them. The so-called *Western thought* had been popular in Poland before World War II in the circles of the right-wing nationalist party of National Democracy (Traba & Żytyniec, 2017). It should be noted that Nazi Germany had a similar idea. Their propaganda portrayed the eastern reaches of the Reich as entirely Germanic in nature. The image of Wolin town as the legendary Jomsborg was used to present the German nation as heirs to the Vikings of old. In archaeological works, the role of the Slavic population of Wolin was diminished (Biermann, 2013).

¹¹ The Piast dynasty was the first ruling dynasty of the Kingdom of Poland, which remained in power between the 10th and the 14th century.

the town who decided to establish a re-enactment group and assume the responsibility for the festival's organization. This involvement not only helped them discover a new hobby, but also allowed them to influence the message conveyed by the event:

Our festival was being organized by foreigners or private companies; we decided to take matters into our own hands, and offered to the mayor to organize the festival ourselves. And the first thing we did was change the name. No more Viking Festival, but Slavs and Vikings' Festival. (man, association member, age ca. 50)

By taking a part of the responsibility for the organization of the festival, the Wolin-Jomsborg-Vineta Association assumed control over the manner in which Wolin's early mediaeval history would be presented. However, as my conversations with association members indicate, this control is never complete, and does not intend to be. The centre is, by design, open to creative initiatives by the event's participants; the festival offers more attractions than the organizers could conceive and provide. For this very reason, the structure of the event is relatively inclusive and may be shaped by a number of agents. The association has created a space in which various people who did not have an education in history began to play a significant role in presenting the early-mediaeval past. Thus, individual contributions to the festival have been made not only by re-enactors and members of the association, but by many other residents of Wolin. As a performance taking place on numerous stages simultaneously, the festival provided many opportunities for involvement. Based on the research material gathered for this article, the following section presents examples of the local residents' involvement in the festival, in four areas: music, cuisine, craft and cultural programmes for children.

One of the mentioned *stages* on which the festival plays out is a musical stage. The form in which music is present during the event has undergone profound changes in the 25 years of its history. The first edition featured the soundtrack to the series *Robin of Sherwood* by Clannad, broadcast from loudspeakers. In later years, the festival's programme included concerts by various artists, performing music that had a connection to Celtic and Slavic folklore. Nowadays, musical and theatrical groups present their skills at the central square in the open-air museum, inviting the gathered crowds to join in the fun. Some of them teach mediaeval dances and games.

The town of Wolin also had its own musical band *Gędźba*,¹² composed mostly of students from the local middle school. The band was founded by Ewa Grzybowska, then an employee of the MCC and a member of the Slavs and Vikings' Centre, and currently the

¹² The Old-Polish term *gędźba* may mean instrumental music, the people performing it, or a stringed instrument.

mayor of Wolin town. On behalf of the association, she wrote an application to the Civic Initiative Fund. The subsidies that application secured paid for making historical clothing for members of the band, and for organizing a singing workshop for the vocalists. Dobromir Strzelczyk, an instructor of music from the MCC, was named the band manager; he learnt to make replicas of mediaeval instruments at workshops organized in the open-air museum (affiliated with Wolin) in Torgelow in Germany. Aside from the festival, Gędźba gave many performances in Poland and abroad. Although the band never recorded a studio album and ceased to exist after just two years, some of its songs have become popular in re-enactment circles and may still be heard at many knights' tournaments and mediaeval fairs. Part of the credit for this development goes to Marek Piguła, the author (or co-author) of much of Gędźba's repertoire. After the band broke up, Piguła decided to record three of its songs with Greenwood, another Wolin-based band with which he was involved. The songs were *Ballada o czarnej śmierci* [The Ballad of Black Death], *Pieśń Słowana* [Słowan's Song] and *Kołysanka Piastowska* [the Piast Lullaby]. The phrase *Bolej sławy*,¹³ repeated in the refrain, was chanted by re-enactors during the opening ceremony at the 25th edition of the festival:

Now I know that lots of bands do covers of it ... they play it at bonfires throughout Poland, and actually some people think that this is a song from centuries ago that was passed down 'til today. (man, artist, age ca. 30)

Gędźba's repertoire added to the popular image of Slavic Middle Ages in re-enactment. Due to the significance of its influence, I decided to ask the founders of the band for the detailed stories of their songs' origins. The interviews indicated that they adopted the very same strategies as all other musical performers with whom I spoke during the Wolin festival. Similarly to academics, musicians make use of historical sources and scholarly knowledge. However, unlike academic discourse, music allows itself to embrace the artistic mode of bricolage, to which it is essentially constrained. Musicians play instruments modelled after known mediaeval relics or items found during archaeological excavations yet cannot do the same with melodies due to the lack of source material. Thus, what they perform on their mediaeval instruments is folk music known from the works of 19th- and 20th-century folklorists. They select songs whose scale or other properties indicate more archaic origins. They also use earlier works: relics of sacred and court music. In this latter case, however, new lyrics must be written, so that the works could be used to create music compliant with the spirit of the festival, which is secular

¹³ As reenactors coming to Wolin attest, the slogan *Bolej sławy* most likely means much glory or more glory. An echo of the phrase may be found in the Polish name Bolesław.

and entertainment-focused. The same process was followed in creating Gędźba's repertoire. The lyrics of their most famous song, *Kołysanka piastowska* by Marek Piguła are based on a (slightly adjusted) ballad included in Antoni Gołubiew's novel *Bolesław Chrobry*. *Pieśń Słowana*, in turn, is drawn from the novel *Stara baśń* by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (the lyrics also had to be adjusted by Marek Piguła, because the original was not suited for singing). The melody was borrowed from a mediaeval work allegedly authored by the Spanish king Alfonso X. Although Gędźba no longer exists, its contribution to re-enactment representations of the Middle Ages has not become a thing of the past. The leader of the band, Dobromir Strzelczyk, remained an active member of the re-enactment movement (even though he had not been involved in it before joining Gędźba). He takes part in the festival, holding instrumental music workshops and selling the instruments that he makes.

Another important aspect of the festival is cuisine. Both the historical and the commercial parts of the event feature many stalls with food and drink. It must be noted that for cuisine the rules of admissibility to the historical part are much less strict than is the case, for instance, with re-enactors' equipment or music. Dishes that are in some way evocative of historical cuisine (e.g., groats cooked over the fire, mead, cabbage soup) are served alongside strictly modern-day products (such as grilled sausages or bottom-fermented beer). However, the organizers of the festival do set certain restrictions. They would never permit a stand with toasted sandwiches or hot-dogs to appear in the historical section of the festival. They do, however, allow *re-enactment burgers* or *re-enactment kebabs*, which resemble popular fast foods, but do not contain any ingredients that would not have been available in the Middle Ages. Other foods, such as buns baked in clay ovens, may not be based on any historical recipes, but the method of their preparation evokes associations with the past. The same is true of coffee brewed over a special fireplace, which has for many years been served by a re-enactor dressed as a mediaeval Arab. Although, as he himself admits, the drink had not been known in mediaeval Europe, both he and his clients (re-enactors and tourists), especially long-time ones, claim that simply because the coffee is prepared in less industrial circumstances, its taste gives them a feeling of immersion in the past, and is an important element in the experience of the festival.

One person that laid an invaluable contribution to the culinary scene of the Slavs and Vikings' Festival is Ms Wanda, whose regular occupation is managing an ice-cream shop and an appliance store in Wolin. For many years, she was known to the festival audience as the owner of the Wandolek Inn, which was relocated to the open-air museum for the

duration of the event. Although she discontinued that business activity, festival regulars still reminisce about the exceptional taste of her dishes. She is also mentioned by Orłowska and Stanisławski's book on the history of the Wolin festival:

When it comes to early-mediaeval gastronomy, Ms Wandzia 'feels the flow' like no other. Her unique menu makes her one of the most famous festival personalities. Gaspadina, Frau Wandzia, Mrs Wandzia—as she is called by visitors from various European countries—understands culinary requests made in any language. (Orłowska & Stanisławski, 2004, p. 25)

What long-time visitors to the festival often recall about the Wandolek Inn is the strong flavor of its dishes, their fattiness, and the impression of having something traditional, natural, filling, and rarely encountered in the world of today. As my own interview with Ms Wanda revealed, enhancing re-enactors' historical immersion through creating the impression of uniqueness and abundance had been a conscious strategy:

For instance, with onion, we braised a little bit differently, with a lot of spices and everything. I cooked a different kind of bigos, on smoked meats, it was all done under the label of the 9th century. It was spicy, strong, with much fat. (Ms Wanda)

Aside from literature on mediaeval cuisine and some advice from experts, Ms Wanda also made use of spices brought from foreign trips and, most of all, of her own intuition and instincts as a cook. Her contribution to the historical experience offered by the festival was very personal and very creative. Incidentally, she provided ideas not only for the menu, but for how and in what environment the food was served and consumed:

Scholars, archaeologists from all over the world would also come to eat at my place. They liked it, these flat wooden bowls on which everything was served ... this kvass in pitchers, a bit like. ... I wanted to refer to this history a bit, so that it would be. ... The girls were also wearing these clothes, like the ones they had. I must tell you, all of it was my life.

Asked about the possible benefits of attending the festival, many tourists mentioned not only entertainment but also the opportunity to acquire knowledge about history. The educational potential of re-enactment events obviously draws visitors who have not yet finished school, together with their parents and guardians. To some extent, Wolin's festival is a family-friendly event, as its organizers arranged the infrastructure and attractions so that visitors of all ages could find it enjoyable. Many of my adult interlocutors declared that they were visiting the festival mainly to show their children something interesting. It should also be noted that the direct predecessor for Wolin's festival were

spectacles staged by schoolchildren, during which adults were only the spectators. Since the first edition of the festival, the roles were gradually reversed, until youth-led initiatives disappeared from its program in 1999. Nowadays historical re-enactment turns out to be mostly a pastime for adults, though many multi-generation families are involved. However, as regards the re-enactors attending the Wolin festival, children are decisively a minority.

Teenagers have returned as significant contributors to the festival with the emergence of the Academy of Slavs and Vikings, an after-school history club led by Ms Gabriela, a history teacher. She began her cooperation with the Wolin-Jomsborg-Vineta association in 2004, when it participated in the Equal Opportunities program organized by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation and the Polish Children and Youth Foundation. Funds from the program were used to finance a project entitled *We Are from Wolin, We Are Building a 9th-century House*, in which local middle-school students participated in the construction of one of the huts in the open-air museum. As a result of the efforts of Ms Gabriela, the participants of this project later became a group that engaged in further initiatives and workshops associated with early mediaeval re-enactment (arts and crafts, cuisine, etc.). They contribute to the festival by setting up the *Mediaeval Playground*, an area designed for the children of tourists and re-enactors. Students from Wolin organize the cultural program there, engaging children in various games and contests.

Wolin's depiction of the early Middle Ages has yet another aspect, displayed at the myriad of stalls around the festival. It consists of the works of art and craft looked at and purchased by the participants of the event. While attractions such as battle tournaments, musical performances, temple rituals or the staged battle between Wolin's defenders and invaders (which is the culmination of the festival) take place at the scheduled time, the works of craftsmen (and, in some cases, the very process of creating them) may be seen for the entire duration of the festival. Much of the products on offer are based on specific archaeological finds (most often from Wolin, Hedeby, Birka, and other known early mediaeval sites). These include tools, jewelry, bits of weaponry, pottery, and metal or wooden utensils. Some artisans encourage tourists to try their hand at the kind of work they do.

Although the craftsmanship scene is dominated by re-enactors (either from Wolin or from beyond), there is no shortage of items produced by local residents who are not involved in re-enactment on a regular basis. One of them is Daniel (40+), who participates in the festival and the archaeological workshops. He sells chests, coffers, and wooden mugs, which he turns himself on an old lathe inherited from his grandfather. The wares

he offers also include items made of amber and knives whose blades were made from a circular saw wheel. Daniel does not perceive himself as particularly interested in history or archaeology. It was his handiness and technical skill that allowed him to find his place in the world of early mediaeval re-enactment and make his own contribution to the event under analysis.

Figure 1: A mediaeval playground (photo by Rafał Rukat)



Another person with a unique contribution to the image of early Middle Ages presented in Wolin is Ms Ela, the maker of Slavic and Viking Teddy Bears. Having observed re-enactors' attire every year, she came up with the idea to sew small-scale replicas of these clothes and use them to dress plush toys sold in one of the popular hypermarket chains. She exhibits and sells her teddy bears at the Viking Market. Each bear's dress is modeled after a specific re-enactor, and thus no two are alike. Re-enactors regularly visiting the festival sometimes see Ms Ela's mascots sporting their own gear.

As the above examples demonstrate, the festival provided some residents of Wolin with an opportunity to participate in creating a representation of early Middle Ages through individual grassroots initiatives. To some extent, these initiatives followed the conventions of re-enactment, but were not forced to conform with any ready-made scripts. Many inhabitants of Wolin made use of their talents in this new paradigm of presenting history, which employs many methods of affecting the senses of the audience.

The festival has many attractions, one of which is an academic event: the annual International Conference on the History of the Peoples of the Baltic Sea, organized since 2005 by the Department of Military History at the Institute of History of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the Wolin-Jomsborg-Vineta Slavs and Vikings' Centre, and the Town and Commune Hall in Wolin (Bogacki & Filipowiak, 2019). Since 2016, the list of co-organizers includes several other institutions, among them the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Academic archaeology is also present at the festival in the form of stalls selling publications, and popular science lectures which the audience may attend in the so-called reading zone. Like all other participants, academics follow the rules of the festival, also donning historical costumes. Although their voice is still heard, they do not speak from a privileged position, as they did before the festivalization of Wolin's history. Re-enactors even attempt to persuade the festival's audience that their knowledge, based on experimentation and experiencing re-enacted items, is superior to the (in their opinion) overly intellectualized knowledge gathered by archaeologists.

While the town of Wolin remains the formal organizer of the event, it largely defers to the factual *producers* of the festival, namely re-enactors, with the Wolin-Jomsborg-Vineta association in the lead. They are the only group that shapes the historical part. The participation of the MCC is limited to organizing the accompanying event: the Viking Market Fair which, as the mayor admits, is designed to cater to the needs of tourists and residents alike. Nevertheless, employees of the Town Hall and the MCC make every effort to keep that part of the event compliant with the overall theme of the festival. Re-enactors' work is regarded as the canon towards which they are oriented.

Conclusion

As noted by Baraniecka Olszewska (2018) the democratization of history does not mean equal rights for each and every voice in the public discourse on the topic. Some enjoy more privileges or authority, while others are marginalized. Performance-based representations of the past may still be regulated and controlled (Baraniecka Olszewska, 2018). The same is true in the case of the Slavs and Vikings' Festival. In the days before the festival, depictions of Wolin's early mediaeval past resulted from the efforts made by employees of the Town Hall and local cultural institutions (the MCC, the museum). As regards the selection of historical content worth presenting, it was researchers from the Polish Academy of Sciences that were considered an authority. During the first few editions of the festival, most of the responsibility for the form of the historical spectacle fell

to the Danish re-enactors and their partners. Even though the Town Hall remained the deciding body, and employees of municipal institutions were in charge of much of the event's organization, the role of an authority on how early Middle Ages should be presented was now played by re-enactors from abroad. The situation changed as the organization of the festival was taken over by Błażej Stanisławski, and then by the Wolin-Jomsborg-Vineta Slavs and Vikings' Centre he established. Since then, local re-enactors have gained more control over what happens in the historical part of the festival. Academic circles and municipal authorities, which had previously acted as the main directors of the show, are still involved, even though their role has changed with the democratization of the process of influencing the shape of the festival.

The festivalization of Wolin's mediaeval history was the direct cause of its democratization. As the Slavs and Vikings' Festival developed, so grew the numbers of the individuals and institutions contributing to the depiction of Middle Ages in their own specific ways, adding new ideas for invoking associations to that period in history.

The individual stories presented herein indicate that the democratization of history does not pertain only to re-enactors in the narrow understanding of the term, but also to other people who become in some way involved in re-enactment festivals organized in their place of residence. This involvement lets them discover new forms of participating in public history. These people are able to make their contributions owing to the multiple forms of expression stemming from an affective paradigm of historical representation, in which an encounter with the past is, first and foremost, an experience triggered by sensory stimuli.

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Povzetek

Na podlagi etnografske študije o festivalu Slovanov in Vikingov—prireditvi ponazarjanja, ki jo vsako leto organizirajo v Wolinu (Poljska)—analiziram razlike med festivalom ponazarjanja in nekdanjimi lokalnimi predstavitevami zgodnje- srednjeveške dediščine mesta. Wolin je kraj, kjer so bile srednjeveške legende o Jomsborgu in Vineti spremenjene v arheološke diskurze, pa tudi podrejene nacionalni politiki spomina. Po postsocialistični transformaciji so se začeli procesi komercializacije in festivalizacije preteklosti Wolina. Na podlagi svojega terenskega dela trdim, da so ti procesi prebivalcem Wolina omogočili dejavno in ustvarjalno vlogo v lokalni javni zgodovini. Kot predstava, ki se hkrati odvija na številnih "odrih", je festival bolj vključujoč od nekdanjih reprezentacij dediščine, saj ga sooblikujejo številni akterji. Opazovanje z udeležbo na štirih takšnih 'odrih, in sicer glasbenem, kulinaričnem, obrtniškem in kulturnem programu za otroke, mi omogoča potrditev, da je bila demokratizacija lokalne javne zgodovine v Wolinu mogoča zaradi številnih oblik izražanja, ki izvirajo iz novih, afektivnih paradig zgodovinske reprezentacije, v kateri je srečanje s preteklostjo predvsem čutna izkušnja.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: javna zgodovina, demokratizacija zgodovine, re-enactment, Poljska, Wolin

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