

# RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TRADITIONAL WOODEN SACRAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE PODHALE REGION AND CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE OF CHURCHES

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## Abstract

The issues of building engineering in mountain regions, especially shaping sacral buildings over the centuries, beginning from traditional architecture of wooden Gothic churches to the churches built nowadays, form an interesting study topic. The Podhale region is both extremely difficult and interesting for modern authors of sacral architecture. The tradition of architectural works of wooden churches in Dębno, Obidowa, Grywałd and Harkłowa created certain unique models of churches integrated with the conditions of the mountainous climate and landscape aspects. The article aims to answer the author's following question: when designing contemporary sacral buildings in the Podhale region are we to preserve the principles formed over the centuries, following the regional tradition of wooden Gothic churches or ones strictly connected with the style of Witkiewicz architecture, or shall we make attempts at their contemporary interpretation, at the same time preserving universal values so as not to lose the regional identity - continuity of tradition, which currently seems to be a signal of a crisis of our civilization?

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**Keywords:** Cultural heritage, tradition, contemporaneity, cultural region, architectural region

## Introduction:

The Podhale region is an interesting study field from a scientific point of view. The author became interested in taking up the topic after multiple trips to the Podhale region during which she had an opportunity to get to know the buildings personally and realize that Podhale, thanks to the specificity of the place, developed as a result of an evolutionary process patterns worth analyzing. Direct observation of spatial structure in the open area - the layout of projections, architectural forms and components, used building materials, construction solutions and details, made it possible to determine the features of building sacral architecture objects in the Podhale region.

The study is supported by stock-taking methods (photography and drawings) of individual buildings as well as archive studies. They made it possible to achieve a picture of sacral architecture over the centuries until the times of churches built nowadays. The interest in the past and the need to have an esteemed past in the degrading world space are very important and worth studying. Those issues analysed as parts of a system of persistence mechanisms will enable us to confirm that the past exists in the present and is even sometimes partly revived in the present times. Modernity is thus a modification of a thing that existed earlier. It shows up and regenerates as a novelty in the context of a more permanent thing.

The study includes wooden churches beginning from the 19th century throughout the 20th century (brick architecture), in reference to the sacral architecture of the beginning of the 15th century - a group of so-called 'late-Gothic' churches.

The main study purpose was to gather, order and systematise the knowledge about traditions of constructing churches over the centuries until the times of churches built nowadays (functional and spatial, construction and material solutions as well as types

of detail). An insightful study process was aimed to answer the question: 'To what degree did the regional architecture of Podhale influence the contemporary-built churches?' The assumed research goal has had an influence on showing the relations between the wooden sacral architecture in the Podhale region and the contemporary architecture of brick churches.

### **Traditional wooden sacral architecture in the Podhale region**

The architecture of wooden sacral buildings from the 15th century is formed by a group of so-called 'Podhale churches' in Dębno, Harkłowa, Łopuszna and Grywałd, described as 'late-Gothic'. The churches built in this period in the Podhale region are characterised by homogeneity of architectural solutions, which include a set of elements shaping them as a characteristic 'alphabet' of the wooden sacral architecture.

The end of the 17th century finishes the development process of a wooden 'Gothic' church.

The next period brings a new model of a wooden church shaped in the spirit of baroque architecture (Pęksowy Brzyzek, Nowe Bystre).

The romantic and national trend, a so-called 'Zakopane style', whose creator was Stanisław Witkiewicz, represents buildings inspired by former folk architecture (a chapel on Kalatówki in Zakopane, a chapel in Jaszczurówka in Zakopane).

The years 1918-1939 resulted in creating the so-called 'second Zakopane style'. Between 1945-1957 a so-called 'new Zakopane style'<sup>12</sup> (Maria Leśniakowska) was born, which was continued in the contemporary architecture of wooden sacral buildings lasting until the 80s of the 20th century.

The 80s in the 20th century until the modern times has been a period of building brick churches.

The research material, which contains sacral architecture from the 15th century throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, includes the development of church building in the Podhale region (Brykowski Ryszard, 1981). Those years constitute a period of many transformations, changing styles and historical trends which brought about changes in the way of forming buildings in the aspect of architectural solutions, construction, material selection as well as details. Despite differences individual periods in the Podhale sacral architecture are connected by searching and referring to the regional tradition of former periods and a need to build sacral architecture objects in a spirit of continuity - 'following the tradition properly'.

Interesting attempts at connecting the Podhale building style with contemporaneity, their evolution and ways of connecting modern forms with the mountainous environment may be found in the architecture of sacral buildings in the Podhale region. The need to search for a relation to the context of the local architecture and to continue its features is a result of building traditions throughout the centuries, which was adjusted to the conditions of the surroundings. It will depend on future generations designers whether the tradition of the building style and detail selection will be lasting and respected or disrupted by introducing foreign elements.

### **Tradition continuity in contemporary brick sacral architecture in the Podhale region - an identity phenomenon**

In comparison with various tendencies and creative trends characteristic for Polish sacral architecture the picture of the Podhale churches seems to be interesting. In the Podhale region there is a large group of interesting contemporary examples of sacral architecture, not studied

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<sup>12</sup> The term was used for the first time by Leśniakowska Maria, while ordering chronological issues connected with the Zakopane style. See Leśniakowska Maria, *Jan Koszczyk Witkiewicz (1881-1958) i styl zakopiański*, [in:] „*Stanisław Witkiewicz człowiek – artysta - myśliciel*” [“*Stanisław Witkiewicz man - the artist - the thinker*”], Materials of the Tatrzanie Museum Association named after Dr Tytus Chałubiński in Zakopane, vol. 2, editor Moździerz Zbigniew, 275-292.

so far, which are a symbol of the regional identity and landmarks in the deteriorating architectural space of the country. The place identity is a mixture of the place culture and tradition as well as the place canon resulting from the coexistence between the spirit of the place and the time (Zbigniew Myczkowski, 2003).

The contemporary sacral architecture in the Podhale region demonstrates a connection between properly understood architectural tradition and a natural process of development and progress, which means creative continuity.

**Representative objects of contemporary sacral architecture in the Podhale region - representation of examples**

In the proposed combination of examples being representative objects of contemporary sacral architecture in the Podhale region only a criterion of diverse selection was taken into accounts as far as urban, architectural, construction, material, formal and decorative factors are concerned. The leading principle is a representation of different tendencies occurring within the whole phenomenon.

Table 1. A representation of examples of contemporary brick sacral architecture

	
<p>Photo 1. St. Cross Church, Zakopane Zamoyskiego St., designed by Witold Cęckiewicz, 1983 (photo by the author)</p>	<p>Photo 2. The Holy Heart of Jesus Christ Church, Bukowina Tatrzańska, designed by Wojciech Pietrzyk 1975-1994 (photo by the author)</p>
	
<p>Photo 3. God's Mercy Church on Chramcówki, Zakopane, designed by Janusz Ingarden, 1988-1991 (photo by the author)</p>	<p>Photo 4. God's Mother of the Miraculous Medallion on Olcza, designed by Tadeusz Gawłowski, 1981-1988 (photo by the author)</p>



Photo 5. The Transfiguration Church, Gliczarów, designed by Stanisław Tylka, 1976-1990 (photo by the author)



Photo 6. Salvatorians' Church at Bulwary Słowackiego, Antałówka, Zakopane, designed by Marian Dziewoński and Jerzy Haber, 1956-1968 (photo by the author)

The selected objects certainly do not represent the whole situation in the aspect of the respect for the tradition in contemporary sacral buildings in Podhale. Apart from the buildings, to which we may apply a criterion of creative inspiration by the local tradition in synthetically processed forms (the cultural factor; spiritual ties with the past; conservatism of the local society and designers), there also exist, unfortunately, buildings difficult to accept, contrasting negatively with the Podhale landscape, whose solutions refer to the tradition

in a less successful way, e.g. the church in Gliczarów (photo 5) as a direct reference to the tradition (unconscious use of traditional models, faint architectural ingenuity reduced to repetition, a lack of interpretation, automation).

### **Application of new materials**

In contemporary architecture from Podhale timber is still being used but on a much smaller scale. Timber as the material used to build the whole structure (walls construction, elements of details) has been abandoned and new solutions have been introduced in which timber, however, plays a significant role (e.g. constructions glued together). In churches built in the half of the 20th century there are no examples of framework structure, apart from Gliczarów (photo 5), where it was used in upper parts of the frame, the lower ones were built with stone.

At present timber is usually used for fittings in sacral interiors constituting a decorative element. The external structure of the form of Salvatorians' Church on Antałówka in Zakopane (photo 6), built by means of the traditional technology, was completed by boarding with an application of boards in a vertical arrangement. The tower placed asymmetrically to the church front and a fragment of the aisle with presbytery were covered with shingle. The form of the church's mass refers to the regional tradition and is additionally intensified by the used local material and the character of the interior.

In Bukowina Tatrzańska (photo 2), in the church on Olcza (photo 4), timber played a role in covering steel or reinforced concrete construction of roofs, vaults, ceilings and walls. It is laid in the form of vertical, horizontal or herringbone patterns. Traditional wooden structures, because of different barriers resulting from changing dimensions of buildings, have been eliminated and replaced by modern technologies. Using local, natural building material as the native material together with application of new construction possibilities constitutes a unique connection between tradition and modernity - a harmonious and creative dialogue of the past and contemporaneity. Despite a great amount of new building materials available

on the market it is difficult to find the ones which would refer to a roof covered with shingle and changing with the time flow.

### **Architectural details**

Architectural details also underwent changes together with transformations in spatial structure (the projection layout, architectural form) as well as material and construction solutions. Nowadays they are transposed, bear hallmarks of interpreted tradition, simplified and modernised as a result of more perfect carpentry construction methods and modern building materials. They are visible both outside and inside a building in the form of Podhale motifs or taken directly from the Witkiewicz style. The attention is drawn to such elements as: 'the rising sun motif' occurring in fronts' gables, characteristic dowelling on the surfaces of doors and door as well as window trims. Roofs are still decorated with vertical wooden ornament placed on extreme ends of a roof ridge so-called in Polish 'pazdur' shaped as a tulip or lily flower and so-called in Polish 'rysie' the beams supporting eaves, made as elements processed in a different scale or material. One of the elements taken from the tradition, but used on a smaller scale in contemporary sacral architecture is also a cross beam performing solely a decorative and not a construction role, characteristic for the traditional wooden sacral architecture.

Conscious continuity of former cultural traditions is visible in the examples of architectural details used nowadays.

### **Conclusion:**

It is difficult to find in the contemporary building style a kind of architecture expressing a connection with the place, culture and tradition of a given region. Most newly designed buildings, among them sacral ones, could be situated in any place. The situation is different in the Podhale region, where a living tradition of the Podhale style and carpentry has been established. The regional style represents a culture of forms and techniques suitable for a given region, in concordance with the prevailing climate, material and topographic conditions. Its character and aesthetics come into being thanks to infinitely diverse, intelligent repetition of the basic formal and typological repertoire subject to constant adaptations. Contemporary churches in Podhale demonstrate features which allow us to classify them as solutions attempting to continue local architecture motifs. Traditionalism ensures the permanence of these forms and their application. The continuity of regional architecture consists in using the architectural language of former periods in contemporary times as well.

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