

A NEED TO CONTINUE THE TRADITION IN THE REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE PODHALE REGION

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Abstract

In Podhale, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the existing historical buildings are visibly endangered due to a lack of grounds for the mass development of trade and tourism. An increasing number of characteristic buildings keep disappearing from the landscape of Zakopane. Historical objects are often subject to destruction, are knocked down or thoughtlessly re-designed losing their original character. Every year preservation of the decreasing historical substance depends on various complex circumstances, different from the ones that assisted its construction, development and 'continuation' in individual historical periods. The reason for preserving the traditional wooden architecture in the Podhale region results from a widely understood preservation of monuments nowadays, which is connected with cultural heritage and preservation of a place's identity.

Keywords: Architecture in the Podhale region, cultural heritage, preservation of monuments, place's identity

Introduction

The architecture of buildings in Zakopane and development trends of the so-called 'Zakopane style' provide extremely valuable research material for studies concerned with the development of the wooden architecture in the Podhale region, which was developed and shaped at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Although the architecture of this 'sub-region' was not considered by many decision-makers as an architecture masterpiece, it still deserves our particular attention. It has become the centre of society's interest being a creativity complex of individual personalities and its greatness was highlighted by assisting emotions.

Among those interested were artists, writers, poets and scientists, i.e. people who were sensitive to social, political and artistic processes. The following individuals are worth mentioning: Maria and Bronisław Dębowski², collectors of souvenirs and utensils based on folk traditions; Maria Andrzejkowiczówna³, who as one of the first made sketches and drawings of furniture in the style of highland furniture; countess Róża Raczyńska⁴; Helena Modrzejewska and Kazimierz Tetmajer, whose poetry extolled Polish mountains as well as

² Maria Dembowska (1856 – 1992), Bronisław Dembowski's wife – a collector of Podhale art souvenirs. She came to Zakopane in 1882 and in 1885, together with her husband, decided to stay there permanently due to her health state. Bronisław Dembowski (1848 – 1893) – a professional lawyer, a collector and researcher of Podhale art and culture, an author of works on Podhale dialect, e.g. *Słownik gwary podhalańskiej*.

Błaszczyk Anna – Żurowska, Maria i Bronisław Dembowski – gospodarze zakopiańskiej „Chaty”, in „Wierchy” R.60:1994 [edition 1995], p.97-120; Pawlikowski J.G., *O lice ziemi*, Warsaw 1938 p. 318 and Paryscy Z. and W., *Encyklopedia Tatrzańska*, Warsaw 1972.

³ Witkiewicz Stanisław, *Na przełęczy*, volume I. Po latach, Wydanie literackie, Cracow 1978, p.47.

⁴ Kenarowa Halina, Pietrzak Jerzy, Raczyńska Róża, [entry in:] „Polski Słownik Biograficzny” Vol.29, Warsaw 1986, p.621-622; Kenarowa Halina, *Najpiękniejsza zimowa kuracjuszka Zakopanego*, [in:] „Kraków. Magazyn Kulturalny” 1986, No 2.

Dr Władysław Matlakowski⁵, who undertook studies on regional architecture inspired by the extraordinary character of Podhale apartments.

At that time new science disciplines began developing. New aspects connected with highland people and their various problems became known.

Buildings in the so-called Witkiewicz style and their meaning for the national culture

Along the development of the Zakopane Resort there appeared a mutual relation between old regional traditions of the Tatra people and the culture of visiting patients. Those two cultures began merging and created a new trend in regional forms. The size of new buildings dominated the architecture of original highland cottages, creating a specific climate and relating to the features of the regional architecture. It was believed that pre-Polish forms were preserved in the Podhale architecture⁶ and on the basis of those monuments all things endangered by foreign influences during a long-lasting subjugation should be restored.

Stanisław Witkiewicz started his activity at the beginning of a growing interest in the Podhale culture⁷. A large movement of a national character in the architecture of Zakopane emerged under his influence. Local Podhale highlanders, knowing patients' requirements, had already started to adjust the traditional form and function of highland cottages to the 'higher rank' needs.

The next step in the development was shown to them not by a highlander, but a visitor from the East, the far-away Żmudź – Stanisław Witkiewicz: “We found a highlander in a tasteful and decorative cottage, surrounded by artistry visible in every piece of furniture, each detail of ordinary use. His cottage was a treasure of former culture, preserved by this nation of culture, which was still alive but stopped developing because of the inevitability of rural life conditions. It was doomed to die, disappear and seemed to wait for saving, calling for help. We saved it, a highland cottage gave birth to a type of higher architecture; the furniture and ornaments became the source of development for a big artistic movement, whereas studies showed that the architecture and ornamentation used to be once present in the whole area of Poland⁸”.

There came a moment of developing the disappearing regional values. New houses were built based on the prototype of a highland cottage. The houses that were built showed similarities but also differed from one another. As Witkiewicz wrote, the seemingly 'fossilized form' of a highland cottage could be rebuilt and at the same time adjusted to increasing requirements of guests – patients. The emerging buildings contained elements of

⁵ Władysław Matlakowski (1850 – 1895), a doctor. He visited Zakopane for the first time in 1886, because of Dr Tytus Chałubiński. He undertook studies on Podhale art. He wrote two works which constituted the basis for Stanisław Witkiewicz's works: *Budownictwo ludowe na Podhalu*, Wyd. Akad. Um.1892, *Zdobienie i sprzęt ludu polskiego na Podhalu*, Wyd. Kasy mianowskiego 1901.

⁶ Pawlikowski J.G., *O lice ziemi*, Warsaw 1938, p. 330, quote: „(...) the style was considered to be a development of not only the Podhale model, but also the pre-Polish one or, as Witkacy says, the western-Slavonic one.

Barycz H., *Na przełomie dwóch stuleci, Zakład narodowy im. Ossolińskich*, Wyd. PAN 1977, p.103-104, quote.: „Potkański's historical studies on Poland's prehistory, its ancient prehistorical society deeply influenced the development of Witkiewicz's views and affected the formulation of his theory on pre-Polish origin and character of the highland art”.

Estreicher Karol, *Sztuka około 1900 środowisko artystyczne Zakopanego w okresie Młodej Polski (1900 – 1914)*, PWN Cracow 1967, p.129-140. On folk architecture Karol Estreicher writes that ‘folk architecture in Podhale is, of course, not native, is not exclusively a possession of Podhale but is connected with herding architecture and customs stretched over the Carpathian ridges from Romania to Moravia’.

⁷ Stanisław Witkiewicz, born in 1851 in Żmudź, died in 1915 in Lovran, buried at the 'Pęksowy Brzyzek' cemetery in Zakopane, painter, writer, social activist, author of the 'Zakopane style'. He came to Zakopane for the first time in 1886 in order to cure tuberculosis. Between 1890 – 1908 he lived permanently in Zakopane.

See: Paryscy Z. and W., *Encyklopedia Tatrzańska*, Warsaw 1970, p.601.; Olszaniecka Maria, *Kalendarium życia i twórczości [in:] „Stanisław Witkiewicz 1851 – 1915”*, Zakopane 1996, p.27-41; Możdzierz Zbigniew, *Stanisław Witkiewicz (1851 – 1915). Szkic biograficzny [in:] „Stanisław Witkiewicz – człowiek, artysta, myśliciel”*. Materials from a session organized on the artist's 80th death anniversary. Zakopane 20 – 22 October 1995. Chief editor Zbigniew Możdzierz, Zakopane 1997, p.11-50.

⁸ Quote.: Witkiewicz Stanisław, *Na przełęczu*, Volume II. Po latach, Wydanie literackie, Cracow 1978, p.37

the Podhale architecture, were an example of architecture as an inherent part of the landscape and the used building materials in the form of stone and timber had deep roots in the construction tradition of the region.

All developed elements in Witkiewicz buildings played the same role as in a highland cottage: size of rafters, inclination of roofs were proportional to the strength of foehn wind and snow load as well as the size of windows and width of flat logs were a witness to the mountainous climate⁹. The trend shown by Stanisław Witkiewicz in the Podhale architecture played an important role in shaping the sense of individual artistic value among highlanders, especially the developed art of architecture and ornamentation.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Zakopane style began to lose its popularity due to various kinds of requirements or social and economic conditions. Its development was disrupted by the 1st World War.

The inter-war period meant a time of new solutions and numerous changes in the Zakopane architecture. 'The Zakopane style' was slowly losing its popularity. However, there emerged sporadic buildings as a result of some architects' aspirations to retain the style features in connection with new architectural and construction elements, apart from new buildings not connected with traditional regional forms.

Continuation of traditional features of the regional style in the contemporary architecture of the Podhale region

Besides widely understood preservation of cultural heritage, mainly conservation care for monuments, a problem that becomes increasingly noticeable as far as preservation of cultural and traditional landscape are concerned is the question of architectural expression of the contemporary architecture existing in the Podhale region. There emerges a need to continue the regional architectural tradition in the spatial structure of an architectural form, detail or also construction elements of new buildings.

Traditional wooden architecture which continues harmoniously principles in the method of solving spatial structure of buildings (projection outlay, architectural form), construction and material issues, developed over the centuries, co-created the characteristic cultural landscape in the region, defined the cultural environment spatially, created the mood and beauty of the place's climate;

Wooden buildings (residential villas, guest houses, inns, hotels, etc.) with the surrounding elements of the 'small architecture' (gates, fences, etc.) visibly determine the cultural identity and traditions in the region connected with forms of housing, climate, natural environment – they create the cultural landscape to a considerable degree;

Regional architecture was accompanied by ornamentations and adornment with motifs and forms closely connected with the region, among others woodcarving and smithery works (richly ornamented window and door carpentry, solutions of gables with the motif of the so-called sun, balustrades, 'ceiling main beams' and so on) as well as construction solutions, e.g. beams supporting eaves, the so-called 'rysie', with a meaningful artistic expression;

Traditionally used construction materials in the form of timber (construction arrangements of log cabin with quoins so-called 'ostatki'), linings in the form of so-called boarding in horizontal and vertical arrangements, shingled roofs as well as stone (stone foundation) influence the entirety connected with reception of an architectural form and its artistic expression visible in details.

Features and elements functioning as characteristics connected with a place have important influence on defining a region's identity, they constitute more or less noticeable

⁹ Witkiewicz Stanisław, Styl zakopiański, booklet 2: Ciesielstwo, Lvov 1911, p.8.

spatial and formal characteristics. Regional features visible in architecture, construction and details, appearing in newly-designed buildings harmoniously refer to and continue traditions – they enable survival of local features shaped by generations or last but not least they visibly differentiate between villages and towns in different regions and thus effectively counteract widespread unification, which destroys valuable regional qualities.

Distinguishing regional features, their defining and especially continuation sometimes seem extremely difficult, require multi-disciplinary analyses and decisions. There are only few regions which undoubtedly and unquestionably continue regional traditions in construction and architecture. Style features disappear in individual regions of Poland – with the exception of the Podhale region.

Factors influencing disappearance of traditions continuation in regional architecture

Disappearance of continuation of characteristics connected with regional architecture is a result of numerous aspects influenced by:

- weakening or disappearance of a sense of regional ties and regional identification in society's awareness;
- chaos in aesthetical values of modern art, including architecture, negation of cultural traditions;
- frequent ineffectiveness of the National Service for Monuments Protection and reducing its activities to practically ineffective protection of the existing wooden buildings;
- a lack of catalogues with designs of buildings with traditional features connected with a given geographical, historical and cultural region;
- technical limits resulting from quite strict fire, safety, sanitary and epidemiological regulations;
- replacement of traditional building materials with new technologies and materials effectively advertised and easily accessible, not always used in accordance with guidelines referring to mountainous lands;
- disappearance and weakening of interest in continuing regional traditions in architecture on the side of architectural and construction services.

Conclusion

Need for a new strategy in protecting and increasing the region's attractiveness.

Continuing regional traditions in the contemporary Polish architecture does not exist as a rule. It has not been formulated as a recommended principle in designing. Devastation of existing objects has been allowed and foreign, useless standards have been introduced.

Tendencies to continue traditions in new architecture are rarely met. In general, attempts to regionalize contemporary architecture using traditional motifs and inspirations are only incidental in building activities.

Every year preserving the decreasing historical substance depends on various complex circumstances, different from those which were connected with its construction, development and 'continuation' in individual historical periods. The reason for 'caring' about regional wooden architecture nowadays results from the widely understood monuments preservation, which is connected with cultural heritage and preservation of regional identity influenced by:

- care for aesthetical values of buildings and cultivation of the local regional tradition,
- exposing traditional wooden architectural forms which constitute an element of individualization and identification of a place,
- renovation and modernization of buildings while preserving a unique mood and climate of the local regional architecture,
- a need to draw on the extensive achievements of the regional culture in times of globalization and unification of places.

Thus, attractiveness of a region should be based on:

– traditional sources about a place and the society's culture developed over the centuries, preserved existing historical objects and natural climate and landscape conditions.

A regional style has one specific characteristic, namely it is independent from historical styles and contrary to them it retains canonic values important for national culture.

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