



**Halina Łapińska\***

***Culture and education – how to teach non-architects  
about architecture – report from the workshop  
in the rural area of the Białowieża Forest***

Taking care of the values of the cultural and natural environment, with regard for the needs of future generations as well as behavior, growth and development of civic and cultural awareness of the residents – is the statutory obligation of the local authorities provided for in their strategies. The strategy of Podlasie Province which is implemented through the “Program of Development of Culture of Podlasie Province until 2020” [2] provides the guidelines in respect of the protection of cultural heritage. It contains the permanent and long-term actions in the area of protection of material and non-material culture. The current expenditure on preservation of historical monuments is still too low and still, in spite of the needs, it is not of primary significance among many programs and undertakings which are being executed. In general it can be said that the management of historical monuments and buildings of cultural value by local authorities is not satisfactory, despite a considerable progress over the last few years and the growth in awareness of the necessity for protection of cultural heritage. Furthermore, the Program defines the role of local communities through their identification with the region and integration around specific plans and objectives of growth.

The mission of the “Program of Development of Culture of Podlasie Province” is: “To strive for social improvement in satisfying cultural needs, including the quality and level of participation in culture and creating its value by as many people living in this province as possible”. Consequently, the biggest possible participation of the society and its education is of great significance. The non-governmental organizations also play a role in this process.

Podlasie Province demonstrates a high national, ethnic and religious diversity. The multicultural character of the region is its main asset and it should constitute

the potential for its economic growth. Culture is one of the key areas of social and economic life. It builds the regional identity based on cultural heritage as well as modern achievements and it stimulates economic growth and creates new workplaces. It provides a great potential contributing to increasing regional competitiveness. “In Podlasie Province, which is neither an industry nor a financial center, culture should be one of the most significant growth and modernization factors but it’s not and furthermore in popular awareness culture very seldom is connected with the problem of regional growth. Culture is thought of more as a kind of spiritual addition – valuable and needed yet often – last on the list of priorities which require support” [3].

The European funds can be a source for investment in culture. The high level of operations of non-governmental organizations, conducting educational, cultural and promotional activities in the region is a positive thing in Podlasie Province. The operations of cultural institutions supported by non-governmental organizations, schools, parishes and private persons help to activate local communities and get to most people living in Podlasie Province. The assessment of activity of the younger generation which was made in the program [3] indicates that it is small and unevenly distributed over the area of the province. The disproportions result from the differences in cultural infrastructure, lack of interesting offers, no access to those offers and economic barriers. It looks best near city communities, whereas remote towns and villages require special activities.

The rural areas in the Białowieża Forest region are a near border region which constitutes a complex economic, social and cultural organism. The location near the most valuable forested area in Europe should be an elevating factor for people who live there and their places of residence. In reality, however, the tourists are directed to different hiking trails and educational paths leading

\* Białystok University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture.

through scenic forests and avoiding villages, whereas the cultural treasures of the Białowieża Forest region are in fact extremely valuable. The area where such nations as Poles, Belarusians and Ukrainians have been living next to each other for many years has grown a specific character. Old customs, traditions and local language have been preserved there. Different religions are practiced and services are held in churches which people attend in large numbers. This also applies to the tradition of building. Wooden buildings are a characteristic feature of the forest villages. The wooden churches as well as residential buildings with their exquisite ornaments are marvelous. The process of replacing old wooden buildings with the buildings made of bricks or wood erected with the use of modern construction technologies is slower there. Many homesteads still maintain their original shape with unchanged buildings and facilities. However, transformations, modernizations and adaptations are visible practically in all villages. The traditional rural systems are extended on the outside, whereas new infill buildings are erected inside them with a strange, catalog architecture and modern design. This is done by new owners who are children or grandchildren of former owners as well as by new owners who bought abandoned homesteads as a bargain or willingly chose their place of residence in the country. These people, after years of living in a different environment where they moved to continue their education or to look for work, bring from there new experiences and new solutions. The application of the solutions brought from other places, sometimes from other countries, during renovation or adaptation causes damage to the old fabric. This poses a great danger to the traditional shape of forest villages. The resources which have been preserved until today should be protected against such activities. The best way to achieve this goal is still “work from scratch” that is education of as many people involved in this process as possible.

The Podlasie Heritage Society [3] is a non-governmental organization operating since 2004 (the author is one of its founders). The statutory objective of the society's operations is “to undertake and execute projects aiming at a sustainable development of the Podlasie region while observing the principles of the protection of its natural and cultural values”. The areas of operations of the society include: activities supporting education and upbringing, culture and art, protection of cultural assets and national heritage, protection of natural heritage, activities supporting the growth of local communities, maintaining and popularizing the national tradition, cultivating Polish identity, development of national, civic and cultural awareness, supporting and popularizing the physical culture, sport, tourism and sightseeing as well as organizing recreation for children and youth. The following archeological workshops can be considered valuable projects executed by the society: “Let's Discover Our Past” as well as such subjects as “To Know, To Understand and To Accept”, “Art Without Borders That Is Meeting Of The Generations” or “Rafting Through The Forest”.

At present the Society is doing the project titled “School of Architectural Traditions of Northern Podlasie Region” [4]. Over the last two weeks of August 2010 architecture

and ethnography workshops were organized within the framework of that project. The participants included the secondary school and university students from the Białowieża Forest region, from Hajnówka and Bielsko districts.

The objectives of the classes included the following:

- methods of conducting ethnographical and historical research,
- methods of making architectural and urban survey of valuable resources of wooden architecture in the Białowieża Forest region,
- creation of professional databases on the basis of Geographical Information Systems.

The program included meetings, lectures and talks by experts in history, architecture and culture of the region as well as time for fun and recreation. The workshops were free. All costs of accommodation and food as well as transport during the workshops were covered by the organizer. The participants lived on the farms which offer accommodation for tourists, where they would listen lectures as well as talks and where they would also describe the data collected in the field. The participation in the workshops was encouraged by the slogan: “Sign up to participate, it's free! You will spend time among friendly and competent people and at the same time you will help to save the cultural heritage of the Białowieża Forest region”[4].

The objective of the workshops was to educate the younger generation – secondary school and university students from the Białowieża Forest region – to teach them how to notice and experience the beauty of the area where they live by showing its value on sight as well as the features which build the “spirit of the place” where they, their parents and grandparents spend their everyday lives.

The most valuable buildings which are typical of the specific place were selected for the field workshops in the villages from eight districts. The selection was supported by local registers of historical monuments as well as by local officials who indicated specific buildings and places. The field classes were preceded by lectures given by specialists in the protection of historical monuments, ethnographers, historians, town planners, architects and photographers who presented some methods of documenting the existing resources, pointing to their value and the need to improve the quality. The workshop program was as follows:

Stage I – lectures, talks and presentations.

1. The workshops began with an introductory lecture on methodology of making architectural and urban survey, given by the author. It included the presentation of the successive steps of the procedure: from collecting input materials (information, maps, publications, field survey, photo-inventory, on sight measurements to the methods of describing the collected materials. The youth also learned about the examples of architectural and urban survey, made during vacation trainings by the students of the Faculty of Architecture at Białystok University of Technology. They included field sketches (Fig. 1), color urban inventory maps, drawings of facades, village houses and architecture, survey drawings of buildings and their decorative details (Figs. 2, 3).

2. The next lecture regarded the ways of photographing objects of architecture. After a theoretical introduction



Fig. 1. Free-hand sketch of surveyed and mapped building, by Monika Maksimowicz

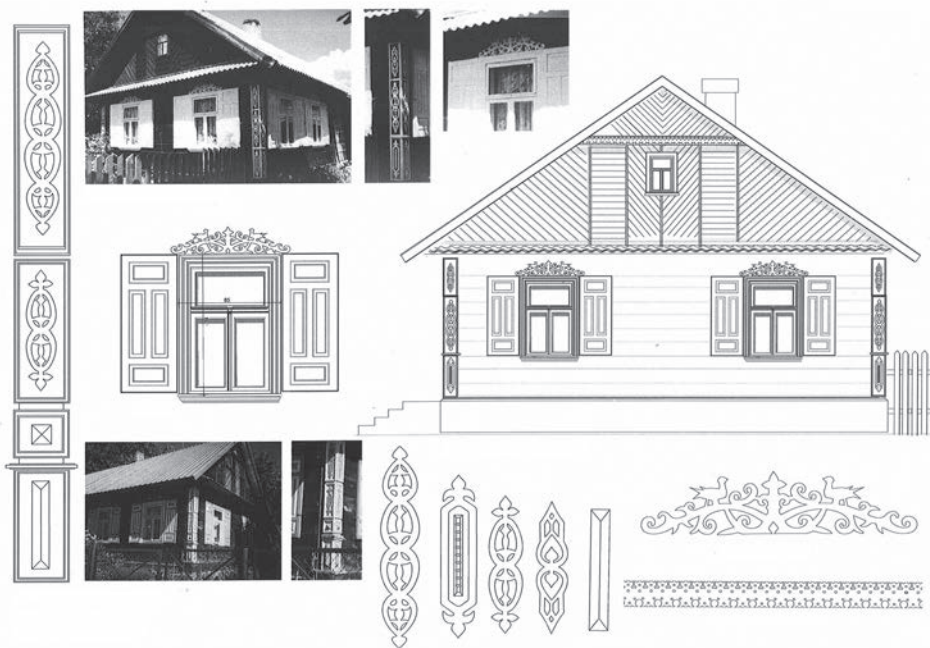


Fig. 2. Inventory drawing of residential building's elevation and decorative details, by Monika Maksimowicz [2]



Fig. 3. Stencil-model of decorative window head, by Monika Maksimowicz [2]



Fig. 4. Group patron's explanation concerning the precision of measurements.  
Photo by author

the participants under supervision of professionals took pictures of landscape and architecture, individual buildings and decorative details from proper perspective.

3. The most interesting objects of architecture in the Białowieża Forest were described by a worker of the Museum of Podlasie Region in Białystok.

4. The first stage was closed with a lecture on the use of the Geographic Information Systems in creating the database about architecture.

Stage II – field work – every day in a different village in eight selected districts.

1. The field inventory classes under supervision of academic teachers were conducted in groups (Fig. 4). Specific members of the groups were assigned specific tasks. Two persons were collecting data on the buildings being surveyed from their owners, residents and local officials.

While doing that they used the questionnaire prepared by the workshop organizer in which the most important issues were listed e.g. general data such as the name and address of the building, including their name in local dialect, date of construction, history of erection, builder and owner as well as a sketch of location of the building in the homestead, names of individual rooms, building and finishing materials, description of decorative details, information about tools and furniture. The data regarding renovations, modernizations altering the original shape were also important. Other persons were responsible for taking pictures of buildings, interiors, furniture as well as details. Still others were making an inventory note, detailing a sketch of the layout of the rooms in the building with their names, a drawing of elevations and a drawing of decorative details. Three other persons were taking



Fig. 5. Measurement of corner decorations of residential building, Czyże village. Photo by author



Fig. 6. Measurement of the kitchen stove, Czyże village. Photo by author

measurements with the use of a tape measure and gave readings to be included in the drawings. The field sketches are an indispensable element of collecting data, and the participants were encouraged to make them. The explanations of the principles of the perspective, presentation of free-hand sketches (Fig. 1), drawing techniques, methods of application of different techniques and drawing instruments: pencil, pen and ink, charcoal proved helpful. The students were willing to present their own drawing skills and attentively listened to professional advice.

2. Small group classes covered the description and analysis of collected materials.

3. The youth participated also in the ritual of blessing of the fields and homesteads.

4. As a part of learning about the traditional house building crafts there was a visit to the open-air ethnographic museum in Ciechanowiec and Białystok Museum of Village.

Over two weeks of classes the following were surveyed: rural systems, typical farmsteads, individual wooden buildings and their ornaments. During the workshop it became clear that the traditional cultural resources

which build the identity of the village are not appreciated by the people who need to be shown their great value and realize it. This can be done most effectively by working together in the field under supervision of professional patrons. Collecting data made the youth realize the existence of elements creating the valuable fabric in the villages, whose presence they had not noticed earlier. It was surprising to see their interest in local names of furniture, rooms in village houses and traditional names connected with the farmstead. They were thrilled to remember the names which they knew as they were used by their grandparents. They were eager to find out the history of the buildings, names of the builders, craftsmen and their apprentices. The traditional old living quarters, which earlier had been considered unattractive, became valuable in their opinion.

One should hope that the workshops would help their participants to notice, appreciate and correctly interpret the reality surrounding them. May the saying of one of the participants: “Now I know what’s nice in my village” be a good omen of that.

### References

- [1] Łapińska H., *Inwentaryzacja zagospodarowania terenu – propedeutyka metod sporządzania*, Architektura, 1999, Zeszyty Naukowe 18, Białystok, p. 105.
- [2] Łapińska H., *Krajobraz kulturowy gminy Narew – próba skatalogowania cech urbanistycznych, architektonicznych oraz elementów zdobnictwa*, Białystok, 2005 (typescript).
- [3] Program of Development of Culture of Podlasie Province until 2020 ([www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/cultura/program\\_rozwoju\\_cultury](http://www.wrotapodlasia.pl/pl/cultura/program_rozwoju_cultury))
- [4] <http://narew.home.pl/>
- [5] <http://www.podlasie.org/>

### ***Kultura a edukacja – jak uczyć o architekturze nie-architektów – sprawozdanie z warsztatów inwentaryzacyjnych wsi rejonu Puszczy Białowieskiej***

Obszary wiejskie są obecnie w różnym stopniu zagospodarowywane i przekształcane. Ich współczesny obraz oraz tempo przekształceń zależy od czynników natury ekonomicznej, zaś kierunki zmian, jakim są poddawane, zależą od stopnia świadomości mieszkańców. Istnieje

potrzeba edukacji wszystkich uczestników tego procesu, poczynając od młodzieży szkolnej.

Właściwym miejscem dla przeprowadzenia tak rozumianej edukacji były warsztaty, zorganizowane przez Stowarzyszenie Dziedzictwo

Podlasia (z udziałem autorki) dla uczniów szkół średnich, mieszkających w rejonie Puszczy Białowieskiej. Polegały one na inwentaryzacji istniejących tradycyjnych zasobów architektonicznych wsi, w których mieszkali uczestnicy. Zajęcia w terenie poprzedziły wykłady pracowników uczelni oraz specjalistów: architekta, urbanisty, etnografa, informatyka, fotografika, którzy przedstawili metody dokumentowania istniejących zasobów, wskazywali na ich wartość oraz potrzebę poprawy jakości.

**Key words:** culture, architecture, education

W ciągu dwutygodniowych zajęć zinwentaryzowano: układy ruralistyczne, charakterystyczne zagrody, poszczególne budynki drewniane oraz zdobienia.

W trakcie zajęć okazało się, że tradycyjne zasoby kulturowe, stanowiące o tożsamości wsi, nie są dostrzegane przez mieszkańców, wymagają pokazania i uświadomienia im ich wartości. Najefektywniej można tego dokonać, pracując wspólnie w terenie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kultura, architektura, edukacja