

Transformations of the Cultural Space of Podhale

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Abstract. The landscape, coverage and climate have a major impact on the architecture of the mountain lands. This architecture can be considered in multiple layers. In terms of culture, the area of Sub-Tatra Mountains is an ethnically coherent area with similar conditions. The development of architecture in the mountain areas can be seen in the XIX century, when the resorts have developed massively in the Carpathians. Leisure in the mountains in the resort towns has popularised many European towns. This was mainly related to the presence of mineral waters. Also in Poland, the spas were created in the form of Alpine, Swiss and Tyrolean resorts. The type of Podhale buildings has changed over time, especially since the 80s of the XIX century, when the Alpine-style villas began to appear in Zakopane. On the wave of the growing interest in leisure associated with health care, the popularity of Zakopane increased. Stanislaw Witkiewicz was the creator and precursor of the style based on the folk architecture of the highlanders from Podhale. The affirmation of the Zakopane style opened the way for the search for a universal architectural form corresponding to the national style. Many variations about it were created over the centuries, which were not always accurate. In addition, the architectural and building regulations providing a rigid framework to the principles of shaping the solids, did not correspond and social needs. The ongoing pressure of the tourist traffic in Podhale and the “fashion for Zakopane” were intensifying by forcing more homes for the holiday-makers. The shape of the present architecture of Podhale is a resultant of the adaptation to the urban conditions and the attempts to push the maximum number of rooms in the facility. The whole area of Podhale (not only Zakopane) has been used in recent years for offering tourist attractions (lifts, spas, aqua parks, etc.), which greatly transforms the space and structure of the buildings. The areas with the highest spatial, landscape and cultural values are most often exposed to the enormous pressure of tourism. It makes the specificity of the area, delicate settlement structures, authenticity of the cultural space disappear. Unfortunately, many years of mass tourism in Podhale have made an irreversible devastation of the landscape, both of the “Pearl of Podhale”, which is Zakopane in the eyes of the tourists, but also the whole functional area associated with it.

1. Introduction

In terms of culture, the area of Sub-Tatra mountains is an ethnically homogenous area with similar conditions. The main division that we could carry out are the groups of inhabitants of cultural sub-regions, including Podhale, Spisz, Orava and Lachy Sądeckie, partly on the outskirts. The common Wallachian¹ roots have shaped the primitive shamanic architecture² and, after the end of the migration

¹The Wallachian-Russian people flowing to the Carpathians were distinguished by their pastoral skills and the Eastern rite. (Wallachians have been Christians of the Orthodox rite since the X century, which was conditioned with centuries-old historical and cultural ties with the Byzantium). As a result of rapid assimilation with the local population, the differences disappeared.

² this issue is discussed in detail by Szafer P. [in:] Tatra Shepherd huts; Warsaw 1961 and by Antosiewicz W. [in:] Shepherds of the Polish Tatras and Podhale: Physiography and geography of the shepherds of the Polish Tatras



and nomadic culture³, also the architecture of “domains”. The climate of the Western Carpathians, including the Sub-Tatra region, has been very different from the Balkan climate; therefore, the Wallachians could have abandoned their basic form of farming – which led to the establishment of permanent settlements/villages with the Wallachian laws. The specific “Carpathian culture” has been shaped over the ages in the Carpathian region, which material and spiritual products have survived to the present day. Architecture is nothing but a record of material culture shaped in harmony with the idea of sustainable development between man, nature and structure that is the material wealth.

2. Conditions and historical background

The terrain, coverage and climate have a major impact on the architecture of the mountain lands. The architecture of mountain lands can be considered in multiple layers. The conditions resulting from the elevation of the mountain area can be a criterion. The climatic variation can be the next criterion. The next division may be due to the plating and coverage of the area and the availability of the building material. Also the cultural conditions may affect the type and appearance of the architecture. Because the Wallachian colonization took place in areas with no income earlier, it was supported by the kings of Hungary and Poland, and the local landowners. The Wallachian colonization left several lasting traces behind. First of all, the Highland ethnos common for the entire Western Carpathians has been formed under its significant (if not dominant) influence. The architecture of mountain lands in Poland is a conglomerate, in which we find the greatest diversity of wooden architecture in Poland. This results from the shape of the terrain and its history. Like in the area of Beskids, the Tatra region was originally settled by the Wallachians, who have created primitive architecture, resulting from the needs of life, since they were pastoral people.

3. The research area – Podhale

The escalation of the architecture development in mountain areas can be seen in the XIX century, when the resorts developed massively in the Carpathians. Leisure in the mountains in the resort towns has popularized many European towns. This was mainly related to the presence of mineral waters. Also in Poland, the spas were created in the form of Alpine, Swiss or Tyrolean resorts. The type of Podhale buildings has changed over time, especially since the 80s of the XIX century, when the Alpine-style villas started appearing in Zakopane. The Podhale construction started creating rural systems characteristic for the countryside around the Tatras⁴, however, much earlier. The area of Podhale has already been inhabited in the XIV and XV century. This settlement is related to the shepherd routes, which ran mostly in the valleys and along the water courses.

Villages were established along streams, where cottages were built from logs, with windows facing south (more light), and farm buildings were most often placed in a perpendicular manner to the house from the west, to protect from the wind.

However, it was the XIX century that has brought about a fundamental change in the appearance of the architecture in Podhale. This was expressed in the opening of Zakopane as a village, which was then considered to be a health resort, to the “holiday-makers” arriving in bigger numbers. These were, most often, artists, people of the culture and people from “upper spheres” seeking favourable climatic and environmental conditions to treat mainly pulmonary diseases.

4. The phenomenon of the Zakopane style

On the wave of the growing interest in relaxation associated with health care, the popularity of Zakopane was growing. Stanisław Witkiewicz was the creator and precursor of the style based on the folk architecture of the Podhale highlanders. In the XIX century, the Podhale style acquired certain unified architectural features, which are “exemplary” to this day, mainly due to the descriptions of these features in publications and books (e.g. W. Matlakowski – Folk architecture in Podhale).

and Podhale - Vol. 6. Architecture and pastoral development of the Polish Tatras and Podhale, and the highlander arts; National Ossoliński Institute 1959.

³Wallachian shepherds did not set up settlements at that time, this stage of colonization is called the “nomad phase”.

⁴Moździerz Z. „Architektura i rozwój przestrzenny Zakopanego 1600-2013”. Zakopane Publishing House Halny; Zakopane 2015; page 151

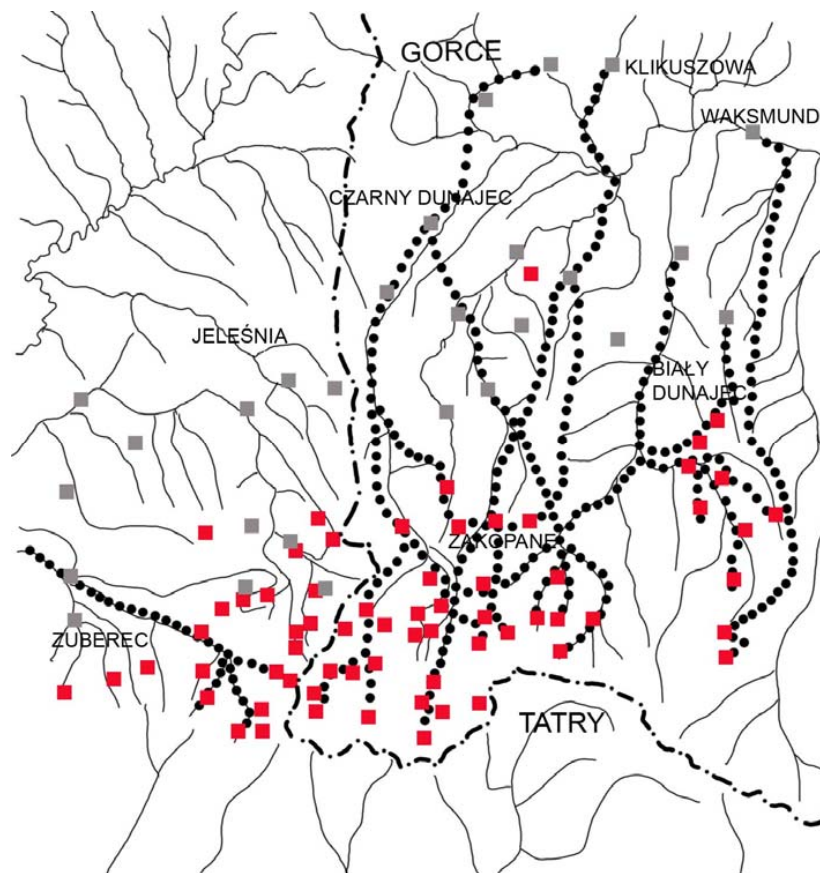


Figure 1. The course of shepherd trails in Podhale in the XVI and XVII century. 1- permanent settlements - domains; 2- residential quarters in the halls; 3- state border; 4- hydrographical system;
Study based on Moździerz Z. "Architecture and spatial development of Zakopane 1600-2013. Zakopane Publishing House Halny; Zakopane 2015; page 33



Figure 2. The original layout of the Podhale village has been preserved in Chochołów. Over time, in order to meet the competitiveness of the accommodation or to increase the usability, houses were rebuilt from one to two tracts, porches were added, lofts have been utilized, etc. variations

were created based on the prototypes. This caused a certain change in the body of the building “four”), however, the main features characterising Podhale were long preserved. The Zakopane style is the first example in Podhale of the “designed” architecture... although not by an architect. Searching for the national style for the Polish architecture was at the base of the Zakopane style. It was not an activity detached from the young Polish tendencies of that time, which affirmed the simplicity of life and potential dormant in the countryside⁵. The youth of the creator’s style spent in Russia was most probably reflected later on in the style created by Witkiewicz in the form of details unusual for Podhale⁶.



Figure 3. The roof over the stairs – an element unknown to the region of Podhale, and found in the East-Russian architecture. A – a sketch by Witkiewicz presenting the Russian folk architecture; B- the “Pod Jedlami” villa by S. Witkiewicz. Summary based on the materials of the Tatra Museum



Figure 4. Corner balconies – niches not found in the architecture of Podhale, quite popular in the architecture of central and eastern Russia. A- a sketch by Witkiewicz, B- the “Pod Jedlami” villa.

Summary based on the materials of the Tatra Museum

⁵ In addition, the tendency to search for the national style has then swept more countries, and their achievements could be seen at world architectural expositions. The folk tradition has also fascinated A. Rompet – a Russian architect, who has simultaneously created the national style of Russia based on very similar assumptions.

⁶ Stanislaw Witkiewicz attended drawing lessons in Tomsk, and because of a poorer supervision that the rest of his family, he ventured deep into Siberia with his colleague, Konrad Pruszyński. He got to know the Eastern-Russian architecture during these trips, which is predominantly wooden and richly decorated.

The style researchers are divided on the issue of influences visible in the architecture of Stanisław Witkiewicz. This particularly applies to the elements unheard of in our architectural space around Tatras. One of the suggestions points to the subconscious adaptation of elements of the architectural detail, which he observed in the youth in Russia. The second theory suggests that it was inspired by the activity of the Dembowski's marriage⁷. However, the larger building blocks, more fragmented, with very original architectural and structural solutions tend to perceive the subconscious adaptations of the Far Eastern architecture. Also in the carving itself we can see patterns, both native resulting from the ornaments on the objects of everyday use, as well as more distant inspirations. Stanisław Witkiewicz undoubtedly came to the architectural form and patterns of the Zakopane style. On the occasion of many publications, he tried to persuade architects to make a real change in the style space, which was being created, however, the attempts proved futile – there were no willing until he himself started building the Koliba villa.

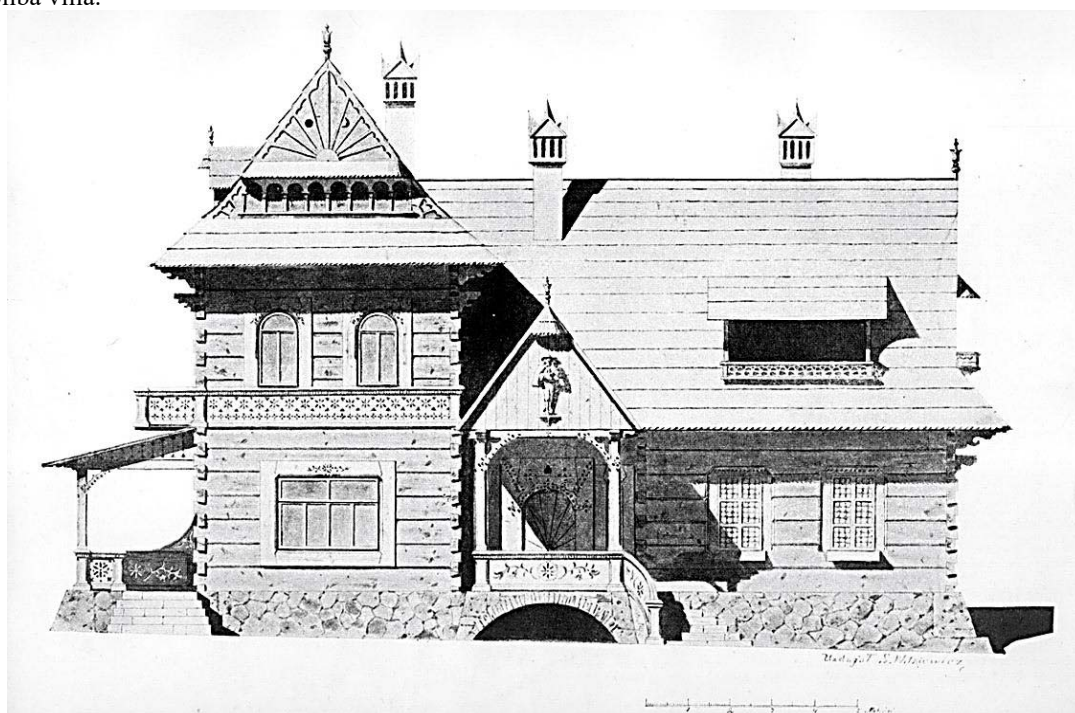


Figure 5. The Koliba Villa. Project by S. Witkiewicz in the resources of the Tatra Museum

After the death of Zygmunt Gnatowski in 1906, "Koliba" has changed its owners several times. Over the years, without renovation, it was increasingly destroyed. In 1935 the villa was sold at the bidding to the railway organization. The new owner was going to set up a holiday home in it. The renovation was conducted without respecting the historical substance of the building. The original decoration of the façade was changed, and the decorations in the interiors included the ornaments characteristic for the new regionalism – art deco. In the post-war period, the historic villa was further devastated. "Koliba" was then used as a holiday home and later as an orphanage. Currently, under the care of the Tatra Museum, the villa was restored to its former glory. The flagship example of the Witkiewicz style building (or the Zakopane style) is the Pawlikowski family house in Koziniec in Zakopane, known as the "Pod Jedlami" villa. "Budorze" (local craftsmen) had a great influence on the shape of pioneering objects, apart from Witkiewicz, - they convinced the designer that, e.g., the "lordly" house should not

⁷Bronisław and Maria Dembowski settled in Zakopane for health reasons and exerted a significant influence in promoting the folk culture in its original version and promoting the Zakopane style, thanks to which the uncontrolled architectural form was somewhat limited at that times. Dembowski were good friends with Stanisław Witkiewicz and they supported each other in the pro-folk activities.

stand on the ground like a simple shack.⁸ The style of Witkiewicz needed to have a brick version, the so-called “murowańce”, as it was supposed to be national.

The direction of the architecture of the Zakopane style was continued by the cousin of Stanislaw – Jan Koszyc Witkiewicz – an architect and conservator. Koszyc was the style promoter, but as an architect he understood that the investor was looking at the money and he was unwilling to use the detail, which was quite expensive at the time. His objects were poorer in detail, which was caused by the usual professional pragmatism – investors did not want to “overpay”. It was the first Polish national style, which went beyond the theoretical postulates and resulted in practical realizations, not only in Zakopane, but also in many places in the former Polish territories.

5. Contemporary architectural space of Podhale

And how does the modern architecture of Podhale present itself? The affirmation of the Zakopane style opened the way to the variations about it, not always accurate. In addition, the architectural and building regulations that provide a rigid framework to the principles of forming the solid, did not correspond to the social demands. The ongoing pressure of the tourist traffic on Podhale and the “fashion for Zakopane”⁹ were intensified by forcing more homes for the holiday-makers. The shape of the present architecture of Podhale is a resultant of adaptation to the urban conditions and attempts to push the maximum number of rooms in the facility.



Figure 6. Contemporary architectural forms in Podhale: A- A holiday house “U Tośki”; B- Accommodation „U Jakuba”- Stachonie; C- A single family house Kokoszków-Nowy Targ; D- A holiday home Giewont Murzasichle

⁸The field conditions are another explanation. The building was set up mostly on a sloppy terrain, so a foundation was built to level it, which was made of stone slabs, often high. Then the walls of the foundation were at the same time the walls of the cellar with a barrel-arched vault.

⁹ No longer only for health purposes.

Due to the limited tourist absorption of Zakopane¹⁰, the functional area connected with the city took over the accommodation functions. Zakopane itself currently amounts to 27 500 people, with the annual tourist traffic 10 times its population¹¹. In the area surrounding Zakopane, there are places of tourist attractions in Podhale¹² around which the space and structure of the buildings are strongly changing. Unfortunately, the ineffective legal system and the architectural and building regulations unsuitable for this space make the quality of the cultural space of Podhale disappear without the visible continuation of architectural forms, replaced, architecture difficult to be determined in the aesthetic categories. Against this background, it is difficult to agree with the claim of Gregory Ashworth¹³ that the heritage resources are inexhaustible and that the tourist brand can be built anywhere based on the local potential. In fact, Dr Z. Możdziej points out in his publication that the early variation of architectural forms impacted the today's appearance of Zakopane, however, the reasons should rather be sought in the change of the scale of objects and some universalism of form which was defined by S. Żychoń as an attempt to search for the regional character for large-scale objects¹⁴.

6. Conclusions

The areas with the highest spatial, landscape and cultural values are most often exposed at the same time to the enormous pressure of tourist traffic. It causes the specificity of the land, delicate settlement structure, authenticity of the cultural space to disappear. Unfortunately, many years of tourism in Podhale have made an irreversible devastation of the landscape, both of the "Pearl of Podhale", which is Zakopane in the eyes of tourists, and the entire functional areas associated with it.

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¹⁰ Zakopane had 43 settlers in its origins. For many years, Zakopane has been developing in a sustainable way. In 1189, the population increased to 3000 due to the location of the metallurgical plant in Kuźnice, popularization of the town as a resort in terms of pulmonology. After another 10 years, the number of inhabitants increased by over 2500, the increase was analogous in the next decade. Due to many geopolitical factors and cultural transformations in the period before World War II, the number of inhabitants increased to almost 18 000. The post-war period – until the political changes in 1989, caused another rise to over 28 000, and after a slight decline it persists to this day.

¹¹ According to the CSO statistics, the official number of lodged accommodation is 27 000.

¹² The number of attractions that glaze out the residential structure of houses with rooms to be rent in Zakopane and centralize the attractions throughout the region is growing. The number of attractions in Podhale is growing (lifts, regional restaurants, spas, aqua parks, ice rinks, etc.), and apartments and guesthouses around them.

¹³ Ashworth G. “The fragmented legacy: the fragmented instrument of the fragmented politics [in:] Murzyn M; Purchla J. “Cultural heritage in the XXI century. Opportunities and challenges; Cracow 2007 p. 29-42

¹⁴ [5].Żychoń S. “Spatial development and construction [in:] *Zakopane. Four hundred years of history; Vol. 1.* Cracow 1991 p. 475

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