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## URBAN WOODEN ARCHITECTURE AS CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CONTEMPORARY CIVIL SOCIETY

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### Abstract

On the basis of a review of old Polish literature, the changes in the valuation of urban and small-town wooden architecture in the Polish cultural environment from around the mid-19th century onward are shown. It is also shown how the Polish experience can be used in the future (including the expected „political future”) to protect the wooden heritage of urban architecture in Belarus and Ukraine.

Keywords: architecture; wooden buildings; vernacular architecture; small-town architecture

### INTRODUCTION

Old urban and small-town wooden architecture seemed to have remained on the sidelines of Polish scholars' interests (at least in comparison with urban style architecture, as well as rural folk architecture), despite the fact that already in the 19th century the commemorative value of wooden arcaded houses, wooden Catholic and Orthodox churches, and wooden synagogues was recognised, and their iconography was published in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”, “Kłosy”, “Wisła” and other non-periodical publications. However, even later, i.e. in the twentieth century, the conservation and protection of old wooden monuments of urban and small-town architecture was relegated to the background – especially in view of the scarcity of funds and human

resources, and often because of a lack of social will and support<sup>2</sup>.

Some enthusiasts of old small-town or urban wooden buildings, perceiving them as a valuable part of Poland's architectural heritage, have taken initiatives to preserve or (in some cases) restore them<sup>3</sup>. Such measures have sometimes been advocated for in spite of decision-makers and public opinion, which attributes the old wooden buildings of cities and towns (including villages) to flammability, impermanence and shoddiness<sup>4</sup>, and, in the case of buildings more recent than the mid-19th century, stylistic worthlessness, alleged civilisational backwardness or primitivism<sup>5</sup>, or even non-Polishness (rather Jewishness or Russianness).

<sup>1</sup> The earliest description (from 1865) was by Franciszek Maksymilian Sobieszczański. It concerned the synagogue in Nasielsk and was included in the commentary to the entry *Nasielsk* in the 19th volume of Orgelbrand's Universal Encyclopedia [p. 228].

<sup>2</sup> Ludwik Puszet [1903, pp. 30–31] distinguished between the “unicameral type” with two subtypes (“the Kuyavian-Pomeranian group” and the “Silesian-Spiš group”) and the “symmetrical-bicameral type”.

<sup>3</sup> A summary of the losses of monuments from World War I, including an indication of the losses of wooden monuments, was prepared and published in 1929 by Jarosław Wojciechowski [1930/31].

<sup>4</sup> On the list of the Belarusian Independent Bologna Committee (<https://bolognaby.org>) Dr. Yauhen Malikau is currently listed as a repressed person.

<sup>5</sup> See [K. Lisowska-Siudek 1979, p. 33; J. Szablowski 1946, p. 28] and the issue of „Architektura” 3–4(29–30)/1950 devoted entirely to towns.

After the political changes of the 1990s, new participants joined the discussions on the preservation of these buildings: investors interested in the value of the land – and, on the opposite side, NGOs representing heritage enthusiasts. In this way, old urban wooden architecture gradually became the subject of a complex game for space.

At the same time, discussions on the need or superfluity of protecting old urban and small-town wooden architecture proved to be a test of the principles of civil society, where theoretically all participants in discussions have equal rights and opportunities to argue, while attitudes and opinions based on a sense of communal responsibility for the public good are considered ethically lofty and systemically protected from the pressure of particular interests. However, in Poland and the neighbouring countries of the former Eastern Bloc, appealing to the common good and shared responsibility for it has become the domain of only a part of the intellectual elite – often only the most zealous enthusiasts, charismatics of democracy, able to overcome their own restraint and external accusations of ethical overzealousness or insincerity. Civic virtues, including community responsibility (for public affairs and especially for the common space), aroused suspicion. Social movements and any grassroots activity attracted and connected only small groups of participants, usually those who knew each other personally, which guaranteed a certain level of trust. Besides, grassroots architectural heritage activities were sometimes carried out against the will of the general public. The public expected an increase in living standards and improved housing, not architectural stagnation.

This state of affairs nullified the effectiveness of broader campaigns to protect urban and small-town wooden architecture, and caricatured its successful manifestations. The article presents and subjects to scientific criticism the specificity of selected grassroots attempts to document and protect urban and small-town wooden architecture in Poland. It shows

how the Polish (temporal and political) experience can be used in the future to protect the wooden heritage of urban architecture in Belarus and Ukraine, where the current political situation and war turmoil not only hinder the real protection of this heritage, but also deforms the discussion about it – and, above all, prevents cross-border activities.

The study is based on bibliographic searches carried out by the authors of this article, as well as their participation in some past documentation projects.

## 1. THE BEGINNINGS OF DOCUMENTING URBAN AND SMALL-TOWN WOODEN ARCHITECTURE

In the first half of the 19th century, only a trace of interest in urban and small-town wooden architecture could be seen in brief mentions in articles published in the pages of the "Przyjaciół Ludu"<sup>6</sup>, "Starożytności Warszawskie"<sup>7</sup>, in the work of Łukasz Gołębiowski *Domy i dwory...* [Houses and manors]<sup>8</sup> and in several other publications.

The breakthrough came in the middle of the century. In the years 1844–1855, Kazimierz Jakub Stronczyński, together with illustrators delegated by the governmental Commission of Internal and Spiritual Affairs as part of the so-called 'delegation to describe ancient monuments in the Kingdom of Poland', produced 417 watercolours and gouaches documenting the monuments of the so-called Congress Kingdom of Poland (a semi-autonomous Polish state created in 1815 by the Congress of Vienna). These illustrations were systematised according to governorates and districts; they also included (though not as main subjects) a few views of small-town wooden buildings (e.g. painted by Adam Lerue<sup>9</sup> a view of the market buildings of Kazimierz-on-the-Vistula or Józef Polkowski's view of a chapel, or rather a post in Sierpc, surrounded by wooden buildings in the Jewish quarter; or the wooden buildings on the eastern slope in front of the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in Zakroczym; Fig. 1–3)<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> These volumes are currently stored in the University Library in Warsaw (Gabinet Rycin) and made available in digital version in the Digital Library of the Warsaw University of Technology (<https://crispa.uw.edu.pl>).

<sup>7</sup> In Wiśnicz, Jan Matejko regularly visited the family of his wife, Teodora Matejkowa née Giebułtowska.

<sup>8</sup> For example, as early as 1827, in Łaszczów, in Tomaszów County in the Lublin region, Jews accounted for 86.2% of the population, i.e. 862 people out of the total number of 999 inhabitants [P. Sygowski 2011, p. 150], and in 1878 Trzcianne, the Moniecki County in Podlasie was inhabited almost exclusively by Jews in the number of 2057 people [Słownik..., vol. XII, pp. 543–544]. As for Białystok, it was reported that "according to statistical calculations from 1895, the population of Białystok amounted to 62,993 heads (...); There were 47,783 Jews (78%)" [H. Mościcki 1933, p. 175].

<sup>9</sup> "The old type disappears, giving way to a new figure that could be called (...) suburban or small-town" – complained Jan Karłowicz in 1884 [p. 400].

<sup>10</sup> Following the 15th-century Polish historian Jan Długosz (Ioannes Długossius, 1415–1480), it was often said that until Casimir the Great, Poland was wooden (including city buildings) and various articles mentioned the wooden buildings of old cities, including Warsaw ("Przyjaciół Ludu" 1841, No. 11, p. 85), Kiev ("Przyjaciół Ludu" 1841, No. 20, p. 158), etc.



**Fig. 1.** Kazimierz on the Vistula River in a drawing by Adam Lerue from 1852; source: [A. Lerue 1857, tabl. 32]

In the middle of the 19th century, wooden houses in Piotrków Trybunalski were drawn by Wojciech Gersohn [1865, p. 92; Z. Gloger 1907, p. 240–241]. Old wooden houses in Wiśnicz in 1857 drawn by Ludwik Łepkowski [Z. Gloger 1907, p. 210–213], and in 1863 – Jan Matejko (the woodcuts were prepared by Feliks Zablocki), where the houses, together with almost all the wooden buildings, were consumed by fire the day

after Matejko left Wiśnicz.<sup>11</sup> [Z. Gloger 1907, p. 214–216, 244; J. Łepkowski 1866] (Fig. 4). Later in the year 1866, Jan Matejko made drawings of the wooden buildings of Biecz (however, even these houses were destroyed by fire in 1903), and of Muszyna in 1867 (the buildings burnt down in 1927; Fig. 5 [J. Matejko, M. Kuczyński 1868; D. Kuśnierz-Krupa 2013]).

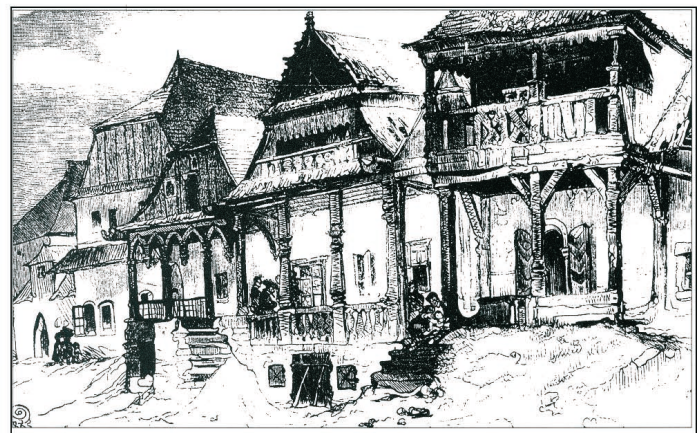
<sup>11</sup> "Houses in small towns differ from common peasant huts in that they are not covered with straw, but with timber or shingles, and a second room is often present, making them closer to noble mansions" [1830, p. 6].



**Fig. 2.** Wooden buildings in the 'Jewish quarter' of Sierpc, painted by Józef Polkowski; source: [K. Stronczyński (ed.) 1850–1855, t. 5(1853), tabl. 69]



**Fig. 3.** Wooden buildings on the eastern buttress in front of the church in Zakroczym; source: [K. Stronczyński (ed.) 1850–1855, t. 5(1853), tabl. 22]



**Fig. 4.** Woodcuts by Feliks Zablocki based on Jan Matejko's 1864 drawings from the nature of Nowy Wiśnicz; source: [Z. Gloger 1907, p. 214; *Materyały...* 1916, p. 40–41]



DOMY DREWNIANE W MUSZYNE. (Rysował z natury Matejko.)

**Fig. 5.** Jan Matejko's drawing of Muszyna's wooden buildings from 1867; source: [J. Matejko, M. Kuczyński 1868, p. 98]

Urban wooden architecture was also occasionally drawn by Hipolit Lipinski (*Miasteczko góralskie Niedźwiednik* [The highland town of Niedźwiednik], 1873; *Cygan z niedźwiedziami w miasteczku* [A Gypsy with a bear in town], 1876); Apoloniusz Kędzierski (*Domy w Przysusze* [Houses in Przysucha] in "Tygodnik Ilustrowany" 1880, No. 260, p. 400; Fig. 6), Józef Teofil Smoliński (*Stary spichlerz nadrzeczny w Warszawie* [Old riverside granary in Warsaw], 1906 [„Świat” Y. 1, No. 7 of 17 February 1906]; *Dom w Mirze* [House in Mir; Z. Gloger 1907, p. 220]; *Dom przy ul. Czerniakowskiej w Warszawie* [House at Czerniakowska Street in Warsaw; ibidem, p. 223], *Dom przy ul. Jatecznej w Lublinie* [House at Jateczna Street in Lublin; ibidem, p. 224]), Marian Wawrzeniecki ([House in Pińczów, 1883; ibidem, p. 234]).

Since the end of the 19th century, drawings and photographs of the oldest or most interesting wooden town houses were published in "Tygodnik Ilustrowany", "Wisła" and other Polish magazines [see e.g. H. Łopa-

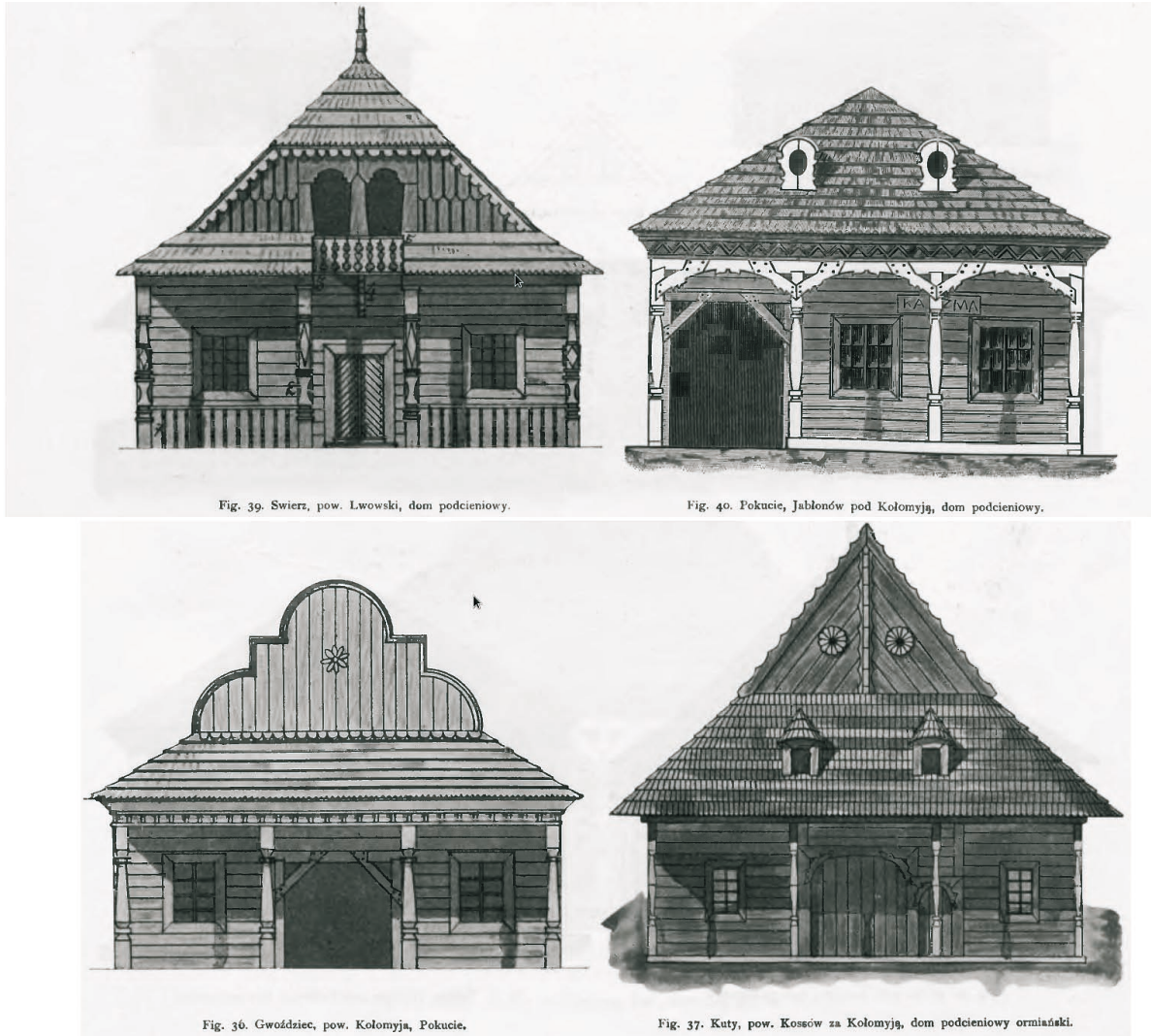
ciński 1902]. Nevertheless, Zygmunt Gloger, having devoted 33 pages to houses in his *Budownictwo drzewne* [Wooden Construction; 1907, p. 209–242], included under the encyclopedic heading "houses" not only urban, bourgeois houses, but also suburban mansions and rural croft houses, and even local taverns and inns.

In a joint chapter on the pages of *Sztuka ludowa w Polsce* [Folk Art in Poland], Kazimierz Mokłowski [1903, pp. 448–466] described urban wooden "arcaded houses" and "suburban manors" [ibid., pp. 444–447]; he also prepared a paper devoted to wooden arcaded houses for a meeting of the Commission for the Study of Art History in Poland [K. Mokłowski 1905] (Fig. 7).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, scientific reflection also included wooden synagogues [M. Bersohn, 1895–1900–1903; Z. Gloger 1907, p. 22–55; K. Mokłowski 1903, p. 425–441], documented by Polish erudite scholars since around 1874 (drawings and mentions were published earlier in the pages of "Kłósy"). However, published considerations were limited

**Fig. 6.** Apoloniusz Kędzierski drawing of houses in Przysucha; source: "Tygodnik Ilustrowany" [1880, No. 260, p. 400]





**Fig. 7.** Drawings of arcade houses; source: [K. Mokłowski 1905]

to descriptions of selected wooden synagogues<sup>12</sup> and possibly to the divagation about the nativeness of this architecture and the origin of its forms either from the wooden churches of Silesia [M. Bersohn 1895, p. 14–15], or from nobleman’s mansions [K. Mokłowski 1903, p. 352, 436 i 438]. There was a lack of typologization, a lack of consideration of the integration of synagogues into the urban landscape – e.g. Mathias Bersohn [1895, p. 5] quips this aspect with a brief statement: “*It’s a pity that buildings of a similar kind are usually obscured by various huts and cottages*” (although precisely this surrounding or even ‘cladding’ of synagogues with houses of pious Jews was a spatial expression of their

personal aspirations, very characteristic of this group; having a house adjacent to the synagogue ennobled the family in question). Proposals for protection were also lacking.

However, this abundance of manifestations of interest in old urban wooden architecture was apparent, because much more research attention and space on the pages of dissertations was devoted to rural peasant cottages and wooden churches and Orthodox churches (especially those erected by Greek Catholics). Their systematic study and preservation was called for as early as the mid-19th century; soon the first attempts to typologize the cottages were also

<sup>12</sup> Especially in issue 8 from 1849.



**Fig. 8.** Collage of three photos of synagogues in Zabłudów and a photo of the synagogue in Volpa from M. Bersohn's brochures [1895, p. 7–9; 1903, p. 7]

made (at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries the division of Polish cottages into wide-fronted and narrow-fronted appeared, which was later consolidated in ethnography). It was even theorized that small-town and suburban architecture was more susceptible to foreign influences and absorbing architectural unfashionableness, so that by the end of the 19th century it was already a source of patterns foreign to Polish indigenusness: *"In spite of a strenuous search, I have not found (...) a single type of Polish cottage, (...) for we lack detailed descriptions of all the corners of the country, and in addition, every day the old type disappears, giving way to a new form, which could be called*

*(...) suburban or small-town"* complained Jan Karłowicz in 1884 [p. 400].

A short-lived signal to focus research and conservation attention on small-town buildings turned out to be the destruction of the first years of World War I. In response to this historical catastrophe, in 1916, through the efforts of the Society for the Care of Monuments of the Past, the album *Wieś i miasteczko* [Village and Township] was published, intended by the publishers to be the first volume of the series *Materiały do architektury polskiej* [Materials for Polish Architecture; *Materiały...* 1916], documenting the resources of indigenous customary and style architecture. The afore-





26. WŁODOWICE, DOM Z PODCINIEM.



182. SZTYDLOWIEC, DOMY PODCENIOWE.



248. KAZIMIERZ DOLNY, DOMY W MIASTECZKU.



370. JEZÓW, DOMY MIEJSKIE.



301. BYTOM, BRAMA PRZY DOMU MIEJSKIM.



477. BIAŁA RADZIWIŁŁOWSKA, DOMY MIEJSKIE.

**Fig. 9.** Selected illustrations of small-town buildings from the *Materyały do architektury polskiej* [*Materyały...* 1916, p. 9, 67, 91, 111, 139 and 178]

mentioned volume includes drawings and photographs of various buildings (including those of wooden construction; Fig. 9), including religious buildings of various denominations, city granaries, town halls, houses, etc., arranged by province.

In conclusion, with the end of World War I and the establishment of an independent Polish state, there was already an iconography that had been collected for more than 60 years, documenting selected wooden buildings and public spaces of small towns.

## 2. ATTITUDES TOWARD OLD URBAN WOODEN BUILDINGS

The society of the newly formed Second Polish Republic, including its intellectual elite, faced a challenge, namely, the need to respond to the old wooden buildings of cities and towns that had been heavily damaged by warfare: its acceptance or even appreciation as heritage – or, on the contrary, its negation as a ballast of the past or as a product of non-Polish ethnos.

Attitudes toward old urban wooden buildings were already taking on ideological overtones: “*Who knows whether and to what extent the weak development of the self-government of our cities (...) does not stand in relation to the almost exclusively wooden buildings prevailing in them?*” Zygmunt Balicki asked rhetorically [1908, p. 53], arguing, “*Cities, towns (...) built of wood, changing their appearance (...) every few generations, do not – because they cannot – have a tradition.*” [ibid]. Perhaps this is why Artur Kühnel overlooked wooden monuments in his guidebook *Zasady budowy miast małych i miasteczek* [Principles of Construction of Small Towns and Cities], written during World War I – despite the fact that many towns had wooden buildings, and despite the fact that he carefully justified the need to “*protect buildings that have historical, commemorative or artistic value*” and, furthermore, in a separate argument, justified the need to “*protect swojszczyzny*” i.e. architecture having “*peculiar, exclusively our characteristics, distinct from other nations ..., arising from the requirements of the climate and the habits of life of the population, acquired over the centuries*” [A. Kühnel 1918, p. 114–120].

A critical attitude to the existing wooden buildings of towns may also have resulted from fears of their Judeanization, which has been repeatedly written about in ideological tones ranging from anti-Semitism to cautious reflection; at the end of the 19th century the most reliable expression of these fears was given in the book *Nasi Żydzi w miasteczkach i na wsiach* [Our Jews in towns and villages] by Klemens Junosza Szaniawski, who also drew such a picture of the towns

of the Congress Kingdom of Poland: “*The average town, both in the governorates of the Kingdom and in neighboring governorates, presents more or less the same type. Muddy, dirty and shabby, it consists of a large market square, around which stand Jewish houses in a compact row, and several narrow streets diverging in different directions. Along these streets are the houses of the Christian population, engaged either in farming or crafts. A long row of barns outside the town completes the picture. Jews are settled at the main point of the city, at the market: here they have hams, stores and stalls, here are the dwellings of money potentates (!) – the main providers of small usury credit. This is where commerce is concentrated. A little farther away is a large synagogue (because there is no shortage of small ones either), a dozen or so cheders, where small children study, the locum of the rabbi and various kahal dignitaries. It’s the same in every town.*” [K.J. Szaniawski 1889, p. 12–13].

Not surprisingly, such a picture of a “muddy, dirty, shabby” town with flammable wooden buildings did not encourage conservation efforts – yet similar descriptions are also found written by other authors, not excluding Jewish ones. In 1925, the Polish-Jewish historian, Rabbi Majer Samuel Balaban, in his textbook for rabbinical schools, outlined a picture of former Jewish neighborhoods in the 16th century that coincides with the state of town buildings at the turn of the 20th century: “*The Jewish street is built up still in the middle of the 16th century exclusively with wooden houses, only here and there stand brick houses, and in them are storehouses, or butcheries, in Lithuania hams. Cramped conditions cause dirt and mud. (...) The cramped conditions and lack of housing force the ghetto’s residents to divide their apartments into several sections. When this no longer helped, higher and higher floors were built, and above them apartments were arranged in facades, and finally courtyards were built over and houses were moved closer to the city walls. Outbuilding windows were often pierced through these walls, niches were planted in the walls, and almost always sewers were passed through the walls. (...) In such cramped quarters the Jews nestled; here they housed a great number of stoves and chimneys, often made of wood and covered with shingles; it would only take one spark for the entire Jewish city to go up in smoke. No wonder, then, that in the second half of the 16th century Jewish quarters in Lviv, Lublin, Poznan, Brest almost burnt to the ground.*” [M.S. Bałaban 1925, p. 227–228].

Also in later centuries, the densely built wooden towns east of the Vistula River, populated largely or sometimes predominantly by Jewish people, were easily

subject to fire<sup>13</sup>. It was easy to regard them (from a non-Jewish perspective) as cultural ballast rather than heritage. In other cases, their Polishness was proven, treating Jewish craftsmen as depositories of Polish building culture<sup>14</sup>.

### 3. EXAMPLES OF EFFORTS TO DOCUMENT OR PROTECT PRE-WORLD WAR II URBAN WOODEN ARCHITECTURE

While World War I was still in progress, in 1916, through the efforts of the Civic Committee for the Reconstruction of Villages and Cities in Krakow, a catalogue of small-town building designs was published, proclaiming the need for “*architecture ... based on the basic simplest elements of our native art*” [J. Gałęzowski 1916, p. 7]. However, the editor of the catalogue, Jozef Gałęzowski, was critical of the architecture of small towns and suburbs at the time: “*Despite their illustrious past and the wealth of remaining monuments, they show in recent times the complete collapse of our building art, especially in small towns. Good traditions have been lost and a lot of time and work is needed to revive the old beauty through evolution. We have to start from the beginning. (...) However, with reconstruction already real in a specific place, the tradition and poetry of its former art should be a source of inspiration for architects.*” [ibid.].

The critical attitude towards the existing architecture of small towns (which east of the Vistula was mainly wooden, but not necessarily very old) was also evident in the fact that the catalogue designs limited the use of wood as a building material (Fig. 10), providing for “*plaster masonry with the use of wood in porches, arcades, and gable boarding*” as the basic material [ibid.], while the adopted forms of the proposed buildings referred mainly to the forms of Renaissance architecture from Lesser Poland region and to manor house construction, rather than to the actual peculiari-

ties of small-town construction in the various regions of the then Polish cultural area.

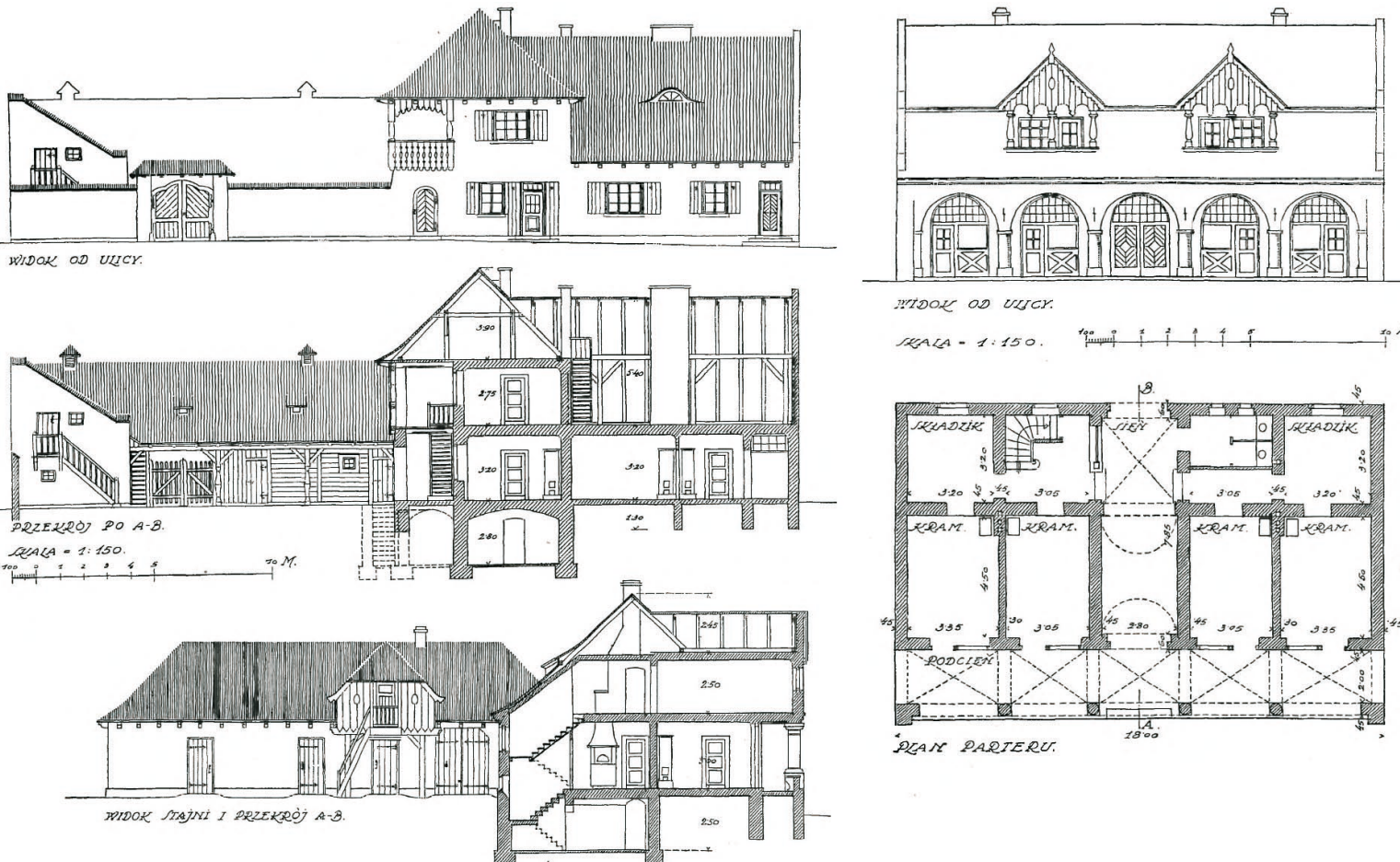
War damage<sup>15</sup> also prompted monument enthusiasts to intensify their research of Polish architectural heritage, and as a result, small-town wooden buildings were also covered to some extent by inventory research, carried out by students of architecture faculties as part of compulsory summer internships – especially at the Faculty of Architecture of the Warsaw University of Technology under the supervision of Oskar Sosnowski, as well as at the Faculty of Architecture of the Lviv Polytechnic (the Lviv collection, however, was mostly destroyed during or after World War II). By 1936, the Measurement Section of the Department of Polish Architecture and History of Art at the Warsaw University of Technology had taken measurements of some urban wooden buildings, mainly wooden churches and bell towers; in addition, several wooden Orthodox churches, manor houses and a dozen or so synagogues were measured and inventoried [Zbiory... 1936].

However, an ideological breakthrough had already been made earlier by the Second All-Polish Congress of Conservators in Warsaw, organized in 1927, which adopted and supported the proposal put forward by Jerzy Dobrzycki for programmatic documentation of old wooden architecture and its scientific study at the state level: “*In view of the growing interest of science, both Polish and foreign, for the monuments of Polish wooden architecture, the congress expresses the wish to organize an archive of wooden construction, which would gather in one place all materials concerning the history of the creation and conservation methods regarding Polish wooden construction. This archive should then develop into an independent institute of scientific research in the field of Polish wood construction.*” [J. Remer 1930–31, p. 358]. Thus, for the first time, the thesis of the need to emancipate inventory studies of wooden architecture (then still located in the catego-

<sup>13</sup> “*Although Matejko drew old Jewish houses in Wiśnicz near Kraków, and Mickiewicz described one of the old Jewish taverns that existed in his holy Lithuania, Matejko’s drawings and Mickiewicz’s description indicate one and the same architectural motif (...). But why were these motives so especially loved and cherished by the Jews? How can we explain this undeniable fact that it was thanks to the Jews that the most valuable and interesting monuments of our oldest architecture survived?*” – Stefan Szyller [1916, pp. 45–46] wondered.

<sup>14</sup> “*The depreciation of the value of wooden architecture was undoubtedly the result of the cultural inferiority complex that accompanies the evaluation of our cultural heritage, which, given the outdated system of evaluation, means that so far there has been no monographic study of this subject from the point of view of the history of art, a study (...) in which the perfection of the load-bearing structures of this construction would be properly read, using (...) technical properties of the material, such as (...) hanging roofs on 9-post structures in arcaded houses in Zakliczyn*” [J. Dutkiewicz 1966, p. 4].

<sup>15</sup> “*Who knows, maybe in Podhale or Rzeszów it would not be advisable to group scattered objects in one or more towns (e.g. in Zakliczyn, Czchów or Próchnik), where they would then have a better chance of survival and appropriate conservation care. Several such towns throughout the country, performing their normal functions, would be a huge tourist attraction. Unfortunately, the implementation of such plans will be hindered by both ownership issues and costs related to the relocation of objects and their maintenance*” [W. Kalinowski 1964, p. 9]. “*Towns with the largest percentage of preserved buildings and a good tourist location should be selected, to which the most valuable specimens from other centers unsuitable for care could be transferred. I think that in the Kraków Voivodeship it could be, for example, Ciężkowice and Lanckorona, and perhaps even one street in Zakliczyn*” [J. Dutkiewicz 1966, p. 5].



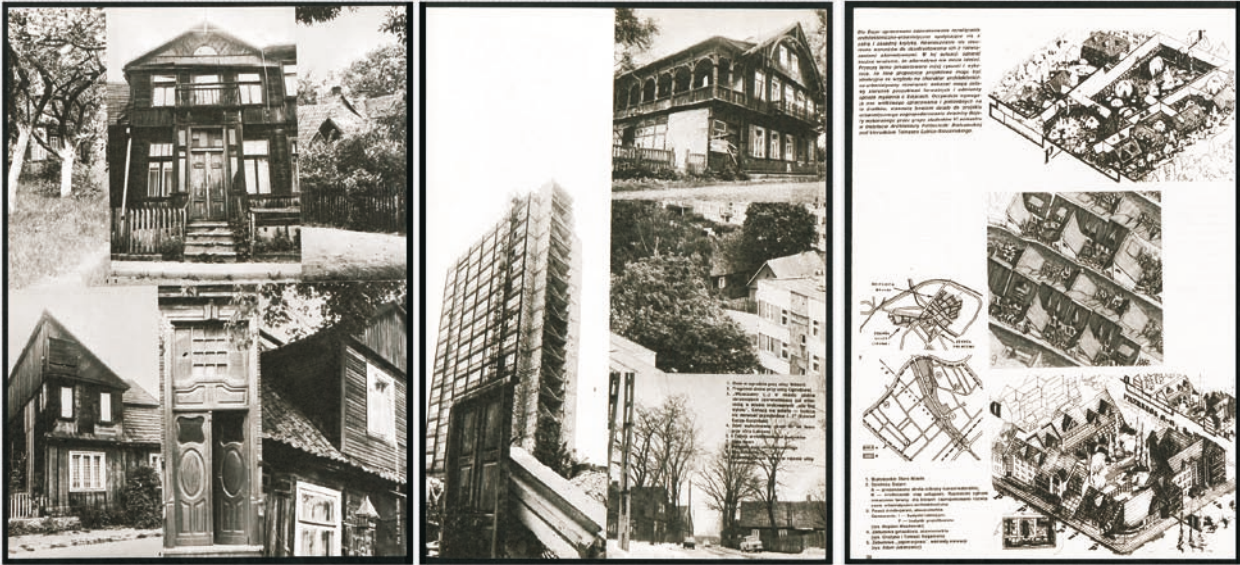
**Fig. 10.** Collage of designs from the catalogue *Odbudowa polskiego miasteczka* [Reconstruction of a Polish town; J. Gałęzowski, 1916, p. 33, 61 and 67]; the buildings with the most exposed wooden construction were selected

ry of “construction” and not professional architecture) was put forward and supported. Of course, this would include primarily wooden rural architecture, but not only, as the quoted message deliberately avoids phrases like “rural architecture” or “folk architecture” so as not to narrow the scope of objects worthy of scientific and perhaps conservation attention.

At the General National Exhibition in Poznań in 1929, in the section of state care of art monuments, maps showing the location of architectural monuments in the lands of the Second Polish Republic were displayed, with wooden architectural monuments singled out (with grey squares). This method of clearly systematizing knowledge about monuments resonated with the theses put forward at the aforementioned Second National Congress of Conservators, which led in the same year to the creation of a corresponding unit in the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment – the Central Office for the Inventory of Art Monuments.

#### 4. SELECTED EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES IN DOCUMENTING AND PRESERVING URBAN AND SMALL-TOWN WOODEN ARCHITECTURE IN THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF POLAND

For the post-war half-century, urban wooden buildings were given little conservation and scientific care, as due to the massive war damage, priority was given to monuments of stylish architecture, usually older, as well as – in the folklore community – to the former rural buildings of indigenous Polish communities. Shortly after World War II, Jerzy Szablowski, considering the needs for an inventory of monuments in Poland, postulated: “...in relation to small-town wooden buildings (...) I would inventory only examples of typical historic buildings, while I would mention their complexes only in general terms, adding their photographic views.” [J. Szablowski 1946, p. 28]. Thus, there have been few efforts for the appreciation, inventory and protection of the former wooden “tsarist” villas (i.e., built to serve the



**Fig. 11.** Illustrations of the old wooden buildings of the Bojary district of Białystok, posted on the rights of an architectural manifesto in the pages of the *Architektura* in 1989 (No. 3–4, p. 34–35). As well as a project posted there (p. 38) using concepts from students at the Białystok University of Technology (proj. by A. Jakimowicz, B. Wasilewski, G. and T. Rogala under the guidance of arch. T. Brzeziński); <https://mbc.cyfrowemazowsze.pl/dlibra/publication/86753/edition/86154> <accessed December 2024>

needs of Russian officials of the partition period) or the residences of factory owners, richly decorated wooden summer resorts from the turn of the century, wooden railroad stations, frontages of market houses-crams, although there have been commendable exceptions [I. Tłoczek 1955; J. Górak 1966], and one of the few threads not ignored was small-town arcaded houses [W. Kalinowski 1952; J.A. Miłobędzki 1952; M. Pękalski 1959] and wooden synagogues [J. Górak 1966]. These topics were taken up by passionate people aware of the importance of the issues and willing to go beyond the current political course and beyond the generally accepted views of their time.

Small-town architecture was only marginally represented in the increasingly established open-air museums. When the Nadwiślański Ethnographic Park in Wygiełzów was begun in 1968, one of the first buildings acquired was a suburban craftsman's house from Chrzanów (dated 1804), and just a few years later, in 1973, a small-town arcaded house from Alwernia (dated 1825) was also transferred there. Nonetheless, for several more decades the inventory and transfer of town houses to open-air museums was among the exceptions.

A breakthrough in thought turned out to be an attempt (albeit ineffective in terms of practical results) to protect the Bojary district in Białystok, a neighborhood built with only wooden buildings. In 1987, Białystok-based architects Janusz and Barbara Kaczyński, Krzysztof and Barbara Sarna and Mirosław Siemionow at the Second International Architecture Biennale in

Cracow won an award from the magazine "Architektura" for their project to readapt and protect the Bojary district. In October 1988, the so-called Bojary Charter, later approved by the Program Council of the 9th All-Polish Regional Architecture Symposium chaired by Prof. Andrzej Skoczek, was edited, while earlier – in 1983 – the so-called Bojary Appeal was published, edited by a group of recognized Polish architects (Zbigniew Ihnatowicz, Michał Gutt, Konrad Kucza-Kuczyński, Tadeusz Zieliński and others). And, in addition, in 1989 this district was devoted a lot of space in the pages of the then bilingual "Architektura" (the texts were also published in English) [K. Lisowska-Siudek 1989]. These activities did not gain public support at the time, but they broke the impasse of thought blocking the discussion of the value of the old wooden architecture of cities and towns. Another thing is that this district of the provincial capital had a rural genesis and such as to the genesis and character of the buildings.

In 1988, at the Scientific Conference of the Association of Art Historians in Wojnowice, among other topics, the need to protect the architectural heritage of towns was addressed, and the results of the deliberations, including 17 papers, were published in a book published a little later, *Wieś i miasteczko u progu zagłady* [Village and Town on the Threshold of Destruction; M. Bielska-Łach, T. Rutkowski 1991]. Thus, it can be considered, taking into account this conference, the aforementioned Bojary initiative and several other initiatives of the time, that approximately the year 1988 was a breakthrough – the impasse was overcome and

discussions began on the value and preservation of old urban and small-town wooden buildings. In the 1990s and beyond, this discussion swelled and became fraught with issues previously pushed out of individual and collective consciousness.

##### 5. SELECT EXAMPLES OF CIVIC ACTIVITIES IN DOCUMENTING AND PROTECTING URBAN AND SMALL-TOWN WOODEN ARCHITECTURE IN THE THIRD REPUBLIC OF POLAND

The aforementioned initiative to protect Białystok's Bojary district, built up with wooden houses, recurred over the following decades in unsuccessful practice and in scientific publications by employees of the Faculty of Architecture at the Białystok University of Technology [D. Korolczuk et al. 1994; D. Korolczuk et al. 1996; G. Dąbrowska-Milewska 1996b; J. Żarnowiecka 2004; J. Szewczyk 2006; M. Tur 2017]. This is just one of many examples, as discussion centers on the value of old local urban wooden architecture have also formed at other universities. Some topics were discussed on a national forum. In the 21st century, scientific and conservation activity in this field has increased even more [I. Górńska et al. 2020].

In practical and theoretical terms, the discussion of the value of urban and small-town wooden architecture was undertaken by folklorists. Jan Górak in 1996 published a small brochure called *Podcieniowa zabudowa miasteczek Lubelszczyzny*, perhaps inspired by Wojciech Kalinowski's article *Drewniane podcienia rynków południowej Lubelszczyzny* four decades earlier, where he wrote: "To date, 20 towns with wooden arcaded houses were known, of which 63 photographs or drawings were presented in various publications, scattered and often difficult to access. Also known were 12 townships with arcaded market frontages. Field research and a bibliographic search enriched this material with a further 12 townships with arcaded houses and 45 photographs of arcaded houses. It turned out that some of them, such as those in Krasnobrod and Tyszowce, are impressive in their richness of form, although they are, in a way, houses of the second generation, as they were erected after World War I, during which the original buildings, more impressive than the ones being rebuilt, burned down". [J. Górak 1996, p. 2–3].

In some open-air museums, the bolder directors have initiated efforts to systematically transfer wooden town houses to open-air museums or to create so-called "urban sectors" (often with buildings reconstructed rather than transferred). Examples of urban sectors include the Galician Market in the Folk

Building Museum in Sanok (the concept had been in development since the 1980s, but implementation was completed in 2011), the Galician Town sector in the Ethnographic Park in Nowy Sącz (also in 2011), the town sector in the Lublin Village Museum (implemented in 2010-2013 [A. Wrona (ed.) 2018]). An urban sector was also intended at the Folk Culture Museum in Wasilków-Jurowce.

The conservation community has also matured to discuss the title topic. When the 5th Warsaw Preservation Conference was organized under the aegis of the Capital Conservator of Monuments in 2022, its subject matter was defined as follows: "Historic wooden architecture in urban centers – issues of conservation." The titles of the speeches given by representatives of the Capital Conservator of Monuments became a specific sign of the transformation of thought:

- "Actions of the City of Warsaw for the protection of wooden architecture" (Michał Krasucki),
- "Recognition of the stock of wooden monuments as a basis for further actions defining conservation policy" (Andrzej Wolański),
- "Historic wooden architecture in Warsaw – inventory and recognition of the stock" (Małgorzata Jaworska) [M. Jaworska (ed.) 2022].

Some local charismatic activists, enthusiasts of local culture and history, local government activists, founders of the so-called third sector organizations (NGOs, non-governmental organizations), private entrepreneurs, and even managers and employees of some landscape parks, community centers, schools, etc., have joined the discussion on the value of urban and small-town wooden architecture. For example, the Society of Friends of Otwock, the Wawer Cultural Center and the Municipal Cultural Center in Józefów have been organizing the Świdermajer Festival since 2010, which promotes wooden villa architecture (in the so-called "Nadświdrzański style") on the so-called "Otwock Line" – in former summer resorts, but also in the town of Otwock itself. Another example is a private business initiative to create a replica of old small-town wooden buildings in Biłgoraj, initiated in 2005 by Tadeusz Kuźmiński and supported by the Biłgoraj XXI Foundation. [E. Przesmycka 2021, p. 313].

Thus, with regard to the title issue, the beginning of the 21st century brought heated discussions and, consequently, a pluralism of themes and attitudes; discussions were undertaken in various forums (including various scientific communities: architects, ethnographers, historians, conservationists) and at different levels of discourse, both from a scientific-theoretical perspective and from a practical, conservationist perspective.



Fig. 12. One of the term papers of the students of the Architecture Department of the Białystok University of Technology promoting a public discussion on the preservation of the wooden buildings of Białystok (M. Pacewicz and A. Sadowska led by J. Szewczyk, 2018)

## 6. WOODEN TOWN BUILDINGS IN BELARUS AS A SCIENTIFIC CHALLENGE

In 2009, Belarusian art historian Yauhen Malikau defended his doctoral dissertation on Ornamental woodcarving in folk carpentry of southeastern areas of Belarus (late 19th – first half of 20th centuries), the theses of which were later published as a book [Y. Malikau 2009; Y. Malikau 2016]. An important aspect of the issue studied was the decoration of small-town houses in that area (Gomel region). This research (and its results), carried out under the promoter supervision of Alyaksandr Lakotka (a scholar with a double doctorate in historical sciences and architecture), can be considered an attempt to make a breakthrough in thought

towards overcoming negative stereotypes about old small-town and urban wooden architecture in Belarus. This process is therefore similar to the thought transformation in Poland, although occurring relatively later in time.

Yauhen Malikau continued his research and covered not only the eponymous “southeastern areas of Belarus,” i.e. the Gomel region (Gomelszczyzna), bordering Russia and Ukraine, but also collected rich iconographic material of rural, small-town and urban wooden buildings of the Belarusian-Russian borderland in the more than 300-kilometer strip from Gomel to Vitebsk (especially the so-called Chernivshchyna, Chernihiv region). These materials, now being compiled, are of documentary and archival nature, as some



of the photographed buildings no longer exist, and the current uneasy political situation will probably prevent objective and politically risk-free in situ scientific research of small-town and urban wooden construction in those areas of Belarus for years to come, especially since they are also border areas. Research opportunities and prospects (and the political situation) are even more difficult now (in 2024) in the western areas of Belarus, bordering Poland and Lithuania.

However, regardless of the current war and political turmoil, and perhaps even thanks to this turmoil, a positive ferment has been (and is still being) created in Belarusian intellectual circles, which is conducive to getting rid of the ballast of stereotypes and ossified sentiments and is conducive to all sorts of re-evalu-

ations. Until the Russian-Ukrainian war, small and very active museum and research units created by people with a considerable potential of knowledge and ideas [Y. Malikau 2022] began to function in Belarus outside the state system of large research institutes and open-air museums. Since the full-scale war in Ukraine (2022), and the earlier protests in Belarus (2020–2022), Belarusian scholars thrown into exile by the political turmoil have been working in Poland, Germany, Lithuania or Latvia – in environments that have already travelled the road from the suppression and negation of urban wooden architecture (and ancient culture in general) to its ennoblement as a unique, and therefore valuable, element of culture.





Fig. 13. Cover and one of the pages of the book of Y. Malikau [2016, p. 86] with photographs of old wooden town houses in Gomel

## CONCLUSIONS

The Polish experience seems to indicate that – with regard to the title issue – the potential of grassroots activities (inventory, conservation or simply discourse), including those initiated and developed by charismatic individuals convinced of the value of cultural heritage, grows with the democratization of society and the general civilizational pluralism of social opportunities and attitudes. This probably also applies to Belarus, even at its current unnatural stage of socio-political evolution, where political-administrative hermeticism has by no means stopped the intellectual (and physical-immigration), grassroots drift toward a non-authoritarian culture. Old cultural heritage, including the wooden architecture of small towns, has become, in a way, a warped way of thinking about the cultural autonomy and identity of Belarusians, which may already have an impact on relevant scientific research on the subject, but the actual protection of this heritage will probably still have to wait.

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