

Protection of the Cultural Heritage in the Polish, Czech and German Borderland as Educational Challenge

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Dziubacka, K. (2013). Protection of the Cultural Heritage in the Polish, Czech and German Borderland as Educational Challenge. *Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal*, 5/1, 53–63.

doi: 10.2478/cphpj-2013-0006

Abstract: The article is focused on the attitudes of inhabitants of the Polish-German-Czech borderland towards the cultural landscape of the region. Given the historical, legal and administrative or mental determinants, an attempt was made to characterise the formation of the climate of these lands and to show the attitude of the current inhabitants (particularly on the Polish side of the borderlands) towards the cultural heritage of Upper Lusatia. This article also addresses the topic of the need to continue the existing efforts and initiate new ones, indicating their educational dimension.

Key words: cultural heritage; borderland; integrated education

Cultural heritage and the necessity of its protection analyzed in the context of various (often unfavourable) phenomena of the contemporary world becomes one of the crucial aspects of the contemporarily tackled discourses. Reflections accompanying the discussion contribute to the attempts of formulating conclusions calling for initiatives towards educational activities that would minimalize the unfavourable tendencies. The assumption is that aware recollection of own roots and familiarity with the history of place and culture enable preservation and continuity of values important for establishing and sustaining cultural identity, reflected in the cultural landscape. It is the centuries-old synthesis of a nature and culture that shapes – as a consequence of long-term, often centuries-old – processes integrating the communities living in given area, in this case – a borderland. Such landscape is typically defined as historically shaped part of a geographical area, created as a result of integrating environmental and cultural influences leading to a specific structure of regional distinction.¹ It is a synthetic, non-counterfeit image of all that exists and takes place in such an area, whereas information (despite being imprecise) transferred thanks to it allows one to orientate within,

¹ Myga-Piątek, U. (2002): Kulturowy zapis ewolucji krajobrazu Wyżyny Krakowsko-Częstochowskiej, In *Kultura jako przedmiot badań geograficznych – studia teoretyczne i regionalne*. Ed. E. Orłowska, Wrocław, p. 203.

depicting and enabling recognition of the places identity, teaching and causing emotions, stimulating to action.²

The culture of a place is the effect of ongoing process of world creation, composed by elements subject to changes over the centuries, as a matter of fact – still being in the process of change. Some of these elements irreversibly vanished, others changed their character, another in modified or the same form last up until today.³ This is a process also occurring in Polish borderlands, which condition – significantly determined by the function of a border and processes it implies – is reflected in the condition of the cultural landscape. This statement constitutes a basic thesis of this paper, which aim is to draw attention to the meaning of given phenomena in the process of shaping the “ambience” of borderland regions, as well as to emphasize the necessity of initiating actions for the sake of protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of Upper Lusatia, paradoxically endangered by its trans-frontier location.

Upper Lusatia is a region at the junction of Polish, Czech Republic and German country frontiers. This unusual three-point border became a kind of heritage of unique for this cultural area a column-framework architecture (Lusatian half-timbered houses). First such housing appeared probably at the turn of 15th and 16th centuries joining the advantages of Slavonic framework construction with wattle-and-daub technique of German origin. It is said that the authors came from the region of historical Czech and Upper Lusatia, hence the further expansion reached northern Czech and a part of historical Lower Silesia. The peak growth of such architecture took place in the 19th century, as most of the contemporarily preserved objects date back to this period. Their number in all three countries is estimated at over 17 000. In some eastern Saxony cities as Ebersbach, Hirschfelde, Markersdorf they constitute a urban development setting (Umgebindehaus).⁴ The largest settlement of such houses is located in the Czech region (northern

² Pawłowska, K. (2002): Podstawy kulturowe architektury krajobrazu. In *Kultura jako przedmiot badań geograficznych – studia teoretyczne i regionalne*. Red. E. Orłowska, Wrocław, p. 203.

³ With regards to the cultural landscape its role is described by B. Lipińska as follows: “any human action leave a trait in the surrounding environment, particularly noticeable in the three-dimensional sphere, i.e. in the landscape. Such trait signalized for years the economic and intellectual condition of the author in given moment of shaping and creating” Lipińska, B. (2002): *Kultura użytkowania przestrzeni – problemy degradacji wizualnej krajobrazu wsi*. In *Obszary wiejskie. Problemy. Bariery. Wizje*. Ed. E. Raszeja. Poznań, p. 45.

⁴ Palm, P. (2009): *Założenia co do budowlano-historycznego rozwoju górnotużyckiej zabudowy ludowej*. Second Edition, Maj.

Czech), Germany (Saxony) and Poland, hence this area, due to the number of such objects was called the Land of Lusatian Houses.⁵

The region is not only a massive open-air ethnographic museum, but a place, where everyday life of the people working and living there takes place. And this it them, who are expected to undertake sustainable, competent and integrated actions in favour of preservation of the unique heritage of this region. In fact, this task is quite a challenge, as particularly in the Polish part of this area the technical condition of the inventory houses⁶ is the most deteriorated, and requires immediate actions enabling their preservation. Of course we may pose a question why actions to protect common goods are considered as challenge for the borderland community, as “mutual interspersion of cultural phenomena” and “sustaining social facts” is in a way inherent part of its definition. To answer this question we are led towards reflections concerning the borderland issues and the widely perceived processes of its contemporary formation. The essential aspect of this analysis is whether the borderland influences desired attitudes towards necessity of undertaking activities for the sake of protection of the cultural heritage, and if it does, how it takes place. On the basis of elaborate literature on the topic an attempt was made to present that both changeability of the borderline fate, as well as its character (the consequence of the function of frontiers), shaped attitude of disinclination and distance, or sometimes even hostility towards diversity and cultural difference. Empowered by the lack of knowledge, competence and creative engagement, these attitudes had constituted a long-term, direct threat to the cultural heritage of Upper Lusatia.⁷ The framework of this paper does not allow to elaborate on this issue, nevertheless I hope it may inspire the answer to the above-stated question, signaling some important aspect of this problem.

⁵ Wszyńska, M.: a draft of a presentation for international conference “Cultural landscapes of rural areas, educational challenges” that took place in Bogatynia in June 2011.

⁶ The Polish borderland had 400 object inventoried, of which half is located within the Bogatynia municipality.

⁷ The issue of protection of the cultural heritage of Upper Lusatia has been frequently tackled by me in publications. I paid attention to the significance of various factors conditioning given activities favouring the protection or causing devastation of the historical objects, with local industry significantly influencing such condition. See: Dziubacka, K. (2011): Cultural Landscape of Upper Lusatia In the Face of Threats. In: Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal, V. 3/2011/2.

Borderland as a research category

Dealing with the borderland issues, the researcher should be humbly aware that it is an area of knowledge subject to many intense explorations from various, numerous academic perspectives, hence becoming a topic of many significant studies. It is worth to emphasize that the addressed issues refer to the attempt of defining the very notion of "borderland", characterization of factors enabling its evolution and processes occurring within, as well as its constitutive features, which – according to the majority of those exploring this issue – include: "continuity, changeability, instability, vagueness of divisions, phenomena and processes taking place in the borderlands."⁸

The above-mentioned multitude of studies shall not favour the idea that undertaking further recognition of the borderlands is not justified. Quite the contrary. Changes that were launched in Poland in 1989, followed by dynamic transformation of social and political origin in given Central and Eastern European countries facilitated the increase in interest towards the processes and issues taking place in borderlands. In the last decades there have been new phenomena occurring, different from the previous ones, followed by another way of their analysis, despite the fact that according to G. Babiński, in the rapidly growing literature the phenomenon of borderland tends to be defined traditionally. It might be just a new way of describing the processes, however there are also new phenomena occurring."⁹ With reference to the contemporarily acknowledged ways of describing this phenomenon in the literature, it is worth to notice that it is commonly perceived as a sphere of the state or regional outskirts.¹⁰ Culturally and ethnically diverse, it becomes a territory where a specific type of coexistence between various cultural groups takes place, mainly affecting ethnographic, linguistic, confessional or national communities.¹¹ It may be concluded, that it is predominantly an area "that is subject to influences and mutual interspersions of cultural phenomena between two neighbouring nations in the relation of superiority, inferiority or equality, without termination of bonds with own national territory."¹² The borderland perceived in such

⁸ Babiński, G. (2005): Tożsamości na pograniczach. In *Tożsamość bez granic*. Ed. E. Budakowska. Warszawa: WUW, p. 99.

⁹ Babiński, G.: op. cit., p. 100.

¹⁰ Bukowska-Floreńska, J. (1994): Pogranicze jako kategoria wewnątrzspołeczna i wewnątrz-kulturowa. In *Pogranicze jako problem kultury*. Opole, p. 165.

¹¹ Nikitorowicz, J. (1995): Pogranicze. Tożsamość. Edukacja międzykulturowa. Białystok, p. 11.

¹² Wrześniński, W. (1980): Tradycje pogranicza polsko-niemieckiego i jego znaczenia dla kształtowania stosunków polsko-niemieckich. In *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie. Integracja i rozwój ziem zachodnich i północnych*. Red. B. Jałowiecki, Katowice, p. 12.

way – according to W. Wrzesiński – is a region with occurrence of social facts related to two competitive cultural patterns with concurrent process of generating new, different values derived from their confrontation, with such new phenomena never particularly related to one nation only. Hence, we may speak of borderland when at least two neighbouring nations are in contact with each other, creating opportunity to mutually get to know each other and make selection of values present in the surroundings, in consequence referred to as crucial ones. As Z. Kurcz claims, “borderland perceived in such way is the result of existence of various influences of linguistic, economic, ethnic, settlement, cultural and political origin.”¹³ Simultaneously, according to J. Róg, a borderland is a category that stimulates the social life, shaping new patterns of behaviour.¹⁴

Analysing the borderland as a research category, according to J. Nikitorowicz, there may be five ways of its understanding. The first refers to the notion of an area-territory, with a specific type of coexistence of at least two cultural groups, different in linguistic, ethnographic, confessional and national sense. “Given specific local features retain its distinction despite the fact the historical contact of cultures and the process of mutual radiation make stark contrasts blur.”¹⁵ Content-cultural borderline implies functioning with reference to the multiculturalism, as “applied systems of values imply a specific fusion of various cultural systems. The material and cultural values determine the bond as well as directly influence the continuity and cultural identity. In the third of the recalled ways of describing borderland, Nikitorowicz indicates that interactive borderland is “a result of communication between individuals, which in consequence acquire the skill to life and coexist, despite the difference between them”. The borderland of state and acts of the consciousness refers to the intellectual and research area which is considered forbidden, isolated or neglected. “Individuals’ functions at the meeting point of many cultures enables thee consciousness to move beyond the area determined by settlement, reaching towards alternative solutions”. Finally, there is formally and legally conditioned inter-ethnic borderland that constitutes a ground for diverse interpersonal interaction

¹³ Kurcz, Z. (1996): *Problemy społeczno-gospodarcze na polskich pograniczach*. In *Problemy rozwoju lokalnego, regionalnego i na polskich pograniczach*. Ed.: W. Patrzatek, Wrocław, p. 143.

¹⁴ Róg, J. (2001): *Relacje społeczno-ekonomiczne na pograniczu polsko-czeskim*, Opole 2001, p. 20.

¹⁵ Leszkowicz-Baczyńska, Ż. (1997): *Matżeństwa polsko-niemieckie na pograniczu*. Zarys problematyki badawczej. In *Transgraniczność w perspektywie socjologicznej*. Ed.: L. Gotdyka, J. Leszkowicz-Baczyński, L. Szczegółła, M. Zielińska, Zielona Góra, p. 144.

in a way undoubtedly – as Ź. Leszkowicz-Baczyńska claims – reflected in the relations between the partners of mixed marriages.¹⁶

In the opinion of M. Skrzypczyk, “the unusual increase of works and studies tackling this issue in the 1990s brought about interesting – according to the dialectic principles – attempts of its synthetic perception, far from dogmatic closure, as applying various typologies, apart from classically territorial concept, the borderline is presented in psychological meaning too.”¹⁷

The south-west Polish borderland in the process of shaping

It may be stated with certainty that the existence of widely perceived border is the crucial condition of shaping borderland. The function it serves determines both the borderland character, as well as the specificity of the mentality of its inhabitants. Despite some obviousness of this statement, I shall dare to claim that in the Polish circumstances of the previous social and political system, sole existence of the border was insufficient to shape a typical borderland.¹⁸

Shaping the borderland is of longitudinal nature, relating to the integration and cooperation processes participated by communities living on each of the borderland sides, whereas culture fusion – a condition for shaping and building the identity – is considered a fundamental criterion designating the borderland.¹⁹ Nevertheless, in the recalled period, we dealt in Poland at the borderland areas with peculiar situation, particularly on the border on the river Odra and Nysa Łużycka, which was established not as a consequence of a long-term historical processes, but on the basis of the treaty of Potsdam conference.²⁰ Hence, the new Polish borders established after the Second World War were artificial, and

¹⁶ Leszkowicz-Baczyńska, Ź.: op. cit., p. 145.

¹⁷ Skrzypczyk, M. (2002): Społeczność pogranicza polsko-czeskiego i jej grupy odniesienia. In *Wybrane problemy życia społecznego na pograniczach*. Ed.: Zb. Kurcz, Wrocław, p. 27.

¹⁸ Such thesis was proposed with regard to Polish and Czech border by J. Tutaj, See: Tutaj, J.: *Rozwój kościołów i ruchów wyznaniowych nierzymskokatolickich na pograniczu polsko-czeskim*. In *Wybrane problemy życia społecznego na pograniczach*. Ed.: Zb. Kurcz. Wrocław: WUJW, p. 59.

¹⁹ Skrzypczyk, M.: op. cit., p. 38.

²⁰ Although the current frontier of Czech Republic is quite an old one (it was outlined in 1919), the Polish and Czech borderland is relatively new. From the end of the Second World War it functioned in unchanged way until the revolution bringing about dissolution of Czechoslovakia leading to the establishment of Czech and Slovakia. This fact provided a ground for the process of building a new borderland. See: Babińska, M.: op. cit., p. 43 and next.

their automatic shift towards the West made this borderland – as Koćwin stated – “unusual in comparison to other European borderlands, as in this borderland Poles did not speak German and Germans did not speak Polish, in contrary to most of the European borders where the inhabitants were bilingual. The reason was the artificiality of such borderland, whereas the real Polish-German borderline remained on the old border, i.e. in the Poznańskie, Pomorskie and Silesia region.”²¹

The new border was crucial as for the way of thinking and feeling among the inhabitants of all the parts of the borderland. Poles, Czechs and Germans found themselves in a brand new life situation. Dealing with new – in territorial, cultural and mental manner completely unfamiliar – borderland was particularly challenging for Poles coming from far east corners of Europe. The new inhabitants of the new borderland did not have the knowledge on the primary regional belonging of these lands, therefore were not mentally prepared to take care of the culturally unfamiliar, generally negatively perceived “inheritance”.

The area of Lusatia was not associated with the region, and the area of this historical land within new Polish borders was too small to establish separate integrity in social or economic way. Lack of emotional bond with the new place, combined with negative attitudes towards all that is German, along with long-lasting sense of temporality, did not facilitate consideration for the cultural heritage of this area. Function of the country frontiers of that time, as well as political relations between each of the country belonging to the Soviet block also affected the process of shaping borderland relations and the character of the borderland.

It is worth to emphasize that Polish borders had been used in the past as a barrier dividing, or even entirely excluding contacts between the communities on both sides. Despite the slogans of trans-frontiers cooperation, that sometime would bring about objectively positive results, the general circumstances and atmosphere of superficiality of such actions had nothing in common with the authenticity of human activities or national needs of the neighbouring nations.²² And although the existing borders of that time were referred to as “the borders of friendship” (e.g. the Polish-Czech friendship route” or “bridge of friendship” in Zgorzelec), in fact they borders were heavily guarded, whereas the inhabitants sometimes living close to each other for decades, had been separated by

²¹ Koćwin, L. (1993): *Polityczne determinanty polsko-wschodniemieckich stosunków przygranicznych 1949–1990*, Wrocław, p. 27.

²² Jakubiec, J. (1994): Euroregion „Nysa” (geneza, struktura, funkcjonowanie). In *Podstawy rozwoju zachodnich i wschodnich obszarów przygranicznych Polski*. Biuletyn nr 7. F. Adamczuk i Z. Przybyła (Eds.), Warszawa, pp. 1–16.

a practically non-crossed barriers. Hence, people living behind such borders remained strange to each other, not only verbally, but also because they were unable to read the needs and expectations of the neighbours."²³ The borders were also impermeable as far as ideas, lifestyles, cultures or economic concepts are taken into account.²⁴

The relations between neighbouring countries were also unfavourable, "in the last century, the relations did not exist in the political strategies not only as dominating but also nor as secondary, locating and isolating the countries on the other sides of the line".²⁵ Besides, personal Polish, Czech and German experiences were affected by negative stereotypes referring to the period of the Second World War²⁶ and historical resentments (1938 in Transolza or invasion on Czechoslovakia in 1968)²⁷, disabling fast and painless creation of a new borderland. It all limited possibilities to establish linguistic-national, territorial or social borderland, hence fusion and creation of new values (as a result of aware borrowings of the values from the other side) were impossible or seriously handicapped.

Therefore, despite many similarities, cohesion of interests and aspirations of the Polish-Czech-German borderland dwellers (constituting perfect ground for shaping positive relations), many decades had to pass before the idea of integration and cooperation stimulated social life and creation of the new behaviour patterns.

Polish borderlands in their current shape began its creation as late as in 1990s. After 1989, not changing its borders, Poland gained (excluding the sea border) completely new neighbouring countries. Until 1990 Poland had had borders with USSR, GDR and Czechoslovakia, whereas from 1993 it has been country neighbours with Russia, Lithuania, Belorussia, Ukraine, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Germany. This new "neighbourhood" arose in modified social, political and economic situation determined by the market economy and liberal ideology affecting all spheres of social life and stimulating civil liberties. "The new changes to the surrounding reality made each societies, previously separated by a barrier-frontier, subject to political transformation, opening them towards the neighbours. Suddenly, "the ideological and economic barriers determining almost a half century-long impermeability, were

²³ Kurcz, Zb. (1997): *Polskie pogranicza w cieniu przeszłości. Odra* nr. 3, pp. 17–23.

²⁴ Kurcz, Zb. (1996): *op. cit.*, p. 142.

²⁵ Tutaj, J.: *op. cit.*, p. 60.

²⁶ Koćwin, L.: *op. cit.*, p. 26 and next.

²⁷ Tutaj, J.: *op. cit.*, p. 60.

annihilated,”²⁸ and their opening revealed number of problems resulting from years-long negligence, lack of contacts and no cultural merging.

Integrated education in the new borderlands

“The area where we live and function on a daily basis significantly influences the perception of what is happening around us, but also the way we perceive people we interact with.”²⁹ The type of interpersonal relations of those living in borderland significantly influences the process of overcoming or strengthening given stereotypes – simplified vision of the world and people – arose for the purpose of protection of own identity or state belonging”.³⁰ Such vision of the world as a result of direct experiences, as well as assumptions or beliefs, is empowered by given decisions undertaken at authorized level, and may become a serious obstacle for the participants of interactions on borderlands.

Being aware of the significance of the cultural heritage for establishing and sustaining regional identity and shaping positive relations between neighbouring borderland communities, after years of inertia, the local governments – within framework of integrated actions – launched a cooperation, including project enabling the preservation of Lusatian house architecture as an element unique for the region, simultaneously conditioning increase in its economic and touristic attractiveness. A common concept on regional development has been worked out (Open days of Lusatian houses), touristic brand (holiday in a Lusatian house) or the campaign “Love at second sight”, which goal is to find new owners for the abandoned or neglected Lusatian houses.³¹

Although activities undertaken in various countries, or ways of accomplishing different projects vary (Czech local governments and owners of given houses deal with refurbishment and renovation of the buildings, in Germany the focus is on finding new owners for the buildings renovated after 1990 thanks to the funds received after unifying Germany, whereas in Poland educational initiatives are launched in order to change the way borderland is perceived), the goal is common. In each of the three countries non-governmental organizations and academic centers

²⁸ Kurcz, Zb.: op. cit., p. 144.

²⁹ Babińska, M. (2002): Cecha pogranicza czesko-polskiego, jego autostereotyp i postrzeganie nie tylko najbliższych sąsiadów. In *Wybrane problemy życia społecznego na pograniczach*. Ed. Zb. Kurcz, Wrocław WUW 2002, p. 51 and next.

³⁰ Babińska, M.: op. cit., p. 51 i n.

³¹ <http://www.domyprzyslupowe.pl/>

cooperate with each other.³² The online notice-board presents a good practice for translocation of the Lusatian houses, advertising them on the real estate market.³³ In comparison to other borderland areas, technical condition of the houses in Poland is the worst, whereas level of awareness as well as the level of identity with the culture of Upper Lusatia the lowest. Therefore, initiatives launched by local associations and organizations are particularly valuable, as through educational activities they encourage the inhabitants and owners of the Lusatian houses to carry out renovations and general improvement of their technical condition.³⁴ There are actions of individual renovations initiated, combining traditional form with modern interior and equipment. It stimulates and empowers the social support for the idea of „the Land of Lusatian houses” also on Polish side, raising the level of identification with the region.

Widespread popularising, social and educational campaign carried out concurrently in all three parts of the Polish-Czech-German borderland is projected to make the owners, inhabitants and dwellers of the region aware of their inheritance and contemporary role in taking care of the good of the deal and harmony of cultural landscape of his part of united Europe.

Conclusions

With reference to the previously posed question on the significance of the character and ambience of the borderland in shaping given attitudes of its inhabitants, we may conclude on the basis of the carried out analysis, that the negative approach towards the heritage of Polish-

³² The research on such type of architecture are carried out by the Department of Architecture at Politechnika Wrocławska.

³³ The pioneering enterprise of Elżbieta Lech-Gotthardt from Zgorzelec may set such example, as she has recently bought the last Lusatian house in the area of the currently non-existing village of Wigancice Żytawskie. She bought a devastated and nearly damaged, abandoned house „Dom Kołodziejka”. Having the acceptance and support from the restorer and conservation authorities of all levels she did a model work of entire cycle of the demolition, translocation and reconstruction of this object in its new location – in Zgorzelec, where she works as a renovator. See: Dodatek do *Gazety Wyborczej*, *Wieża Ciśnień*, dated 7th May 2010.

³⁴ Initiative of the Towarzystwo Miłośników Ziemi Bogatyńskiej is worth emphasizing, as in 8th September 2010 they organized a workshop on cleaning and conservation of the Lusatian houses for the inhabitants of the areas flooded during the flooding in August 2010 (See: <http://www.tnzb.e...coctakt<eor.mid=9>).

Czech-German borderland was determined by many factors. The political frontier played a significant part, since functioning as a border it had been dividing for decades the historically, infrastucturally and culturally joined spheres.

Not until the character of changes took place in Europe at the end of 20th centuries, the transformation of state border did begin, shaping new image of the borderland areas. Thanks to it "the borderlands are contemporarily more about cultural fusion than domination, interspersions and completion than completion or confrontation of various centres. (...) The role and significance of the notion "country frontier", has also significantly changed in Europe, as – within European Union – they became solely administrative. Many new borders, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe were established or re-created where their borderland-generating potential was minimal."³⁵ The processes initiated by Poles in 1989 influences the increase of integration aspirations of other Central and Eastern European countries. And although they gradually diminished, they were of different dynamics, hence establishing differentiated borderlands in this regard. Luckily for the cultural heritage of the Polish-Czech-German borderland, the communities were profoundly engaged in the integrative process.³⁶

The relations between neighbours, the positive and the negative ones, are predominantly shaped there, where the neighbour lives in the closest vicinity, i.e. on the borderlands, whereas their quality and character always depends on the initiatives undertaken both by the authorities of the local governments from all sides of the frontier, as well as by those from the local communities living in such area. The inter-dependent individuals and groups, such as the societies of borderland, accomplish given tasks and reach aims together, contributing to the increasing level of integration and – by established cooperation – make the region more attractive.

³⁵ Babińskori, G.: op. cit., p. 101 and next.

³⁶ In December 1991, shortly after the Berlin Wall collapsed, the first in the entire Central and Eastern Europe Euroregion "Nysa" was established among the neighbouring districts and counties of Poland, Czech and Germany, under the patronage of V. Havel, R. V. Weizsacker and L. Wałęsa, See: Jakubiec, J.: op. cit., p. 2. and next.