

## Search for identity of Pomeranian house by means of educational activities

**Agnieszka Kurkowska<sup>1</sup>, Robert Idem<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Gdańsk University of Technology Faculty of Architecture, ul. Gabriela Narutowicza 11/12, 80-233 Gdansk, Polska

<sup>2</sup> Gdańsk University of Technology Faculty of Architecture, ul. Gabriela Narutowicza 11/12, 80-233 Gdansk, Polska

[agnieszka.kurkowska@pg.edu.pl](mailto:agnieszka.kurkowska@pg.edu.pl), [robert.idem@pg.edu.pl](mailto:robert.idem@pg.edu.pl)

**Abstract.** Architecture is a universal phenomenon and is a culture-creating field closely related to other fields of art. Hence, experiencing and feeling identity are also conditioned by the proper formation of architectural objects, which are carriers specific values which co-decide about the possibility of this experience occurring in connection with a specific place and the fulfilment of a specific need in it. In the era of ubiquitous thoughtless consumption and common avoidance of the written word, objects belonging to the material culture that architecture co-creates become essential objects in the process of conveying ideas and specific content. Belonging to a place, cultural group, community or regional community is reflected in consciously designed spatial forms. However, in order to ensure this awareness, the above-mentioned issues should be included in the general education as part of expanding knowledge about regional planning, but also the knowledge of regional architectural forms and settlement systems. The Pomeranian home experience can be related to two contrasting situations. First of all - a former Kashubian village with its regional buildings, where the house was a wooden Kashubian cottage. This architecture, arising from local conditions and culturally embedded in the consciousness of Kashubians, strengthened the sense of identification with the inhabited region and a specific place. Secondly - a contemporary Pomeranian housing estate, built up with multi-frame, prefabricated blocks. It seems that this type of development, devoid of cultural roots in regional traditions, impoverishes personal identification with the inhabited building / apartment. The space of housing estates, as well as neglected buildings in some villages await revalorization. A lost identity can be searched for by caring for valuable housing based on knowledge of architecture and regional settlement. The authors will present a publication made as part of the project entitled "ZASPA: house in a block of flats. The spaces of architecture. " In line with its assumptions, the issue of the residence of inmates in the region was raised. The book entitled "Block and hut: wandering" is an educational material for children from higher grades of primary schools. It provides knowledge about the regional form of the Kashubian house and settlement forms typical of the area. At the same time, contemporary settlement forms are shown - housing estates with blocks of flats that fill them as the houses.

## 1. Introduction

What is the extent to which a person can identify with home? Identity is conditioned by the multidimensional embedding of a human in the society, his/her place of origin and place of residence. A strong relationship exists between the sense of identification with a place and proper creation of architectural objects. Belonging to a place, cultural group, community or regional community is reflected in spatial forms designed and implemented in a conscious manner. Rather than being only buildings, houses also serve as carriers of specific content. Understanding them as media explains their role in shaping the sense of spatial identity.

## 2. House and experiencing identity

As noted by Augustyn Bańka, “architectural space is axiologically indifferent for two reasons. Firstly, it is a specific product of human culture and, secondly, it provides a human being with living space. In other words, it serves as an anthropological space. This means that at every step of creating an architectural space, values that determine the stance (position) of a person in space and the ways of using thereof are nearly automatically <imprinted> into objects [Author’s own trans.] [1]. Houses contribute to material culture. They exist, indispensable, in the space that surrounds us, as they have been a place of residence for centuries. Once we realize the fact of their multidimensional impact on humans, we become aware of the scale of their participation in cognitive processes and experience of the surrounding space. That is why it is so important to properly shape the forms of architectural objects that constitute the living space. Houses, to a large extent, condition the experience of belonging to or identification with a place and its context. Archetypes contained in the forms and patterns of residential buildings refer their recipients to meanings derived from the history of mankind, though these symbols may be felt and understood these days as well. As Vladimir Czumalo suggests, the house can be related to the architectural image of the family [2]. In this way, belonging of the house to the place should be understood as the source of individual identity, whereas belonging of the house to the settlement, seen as the identity of the place, can be treated as the core with which to integrate all the characteristics and values of the place; both spatial and humane ones [2]. As noted by Magdalena Żmudzińska-Nowak, values are layered in the processes of duration, experiencing place and building a shared memory. According to this way of thinking, identity can be considered a value that determines the authenticity of such a place and its uniqueness. [3]

The identity of the place depends on the contemporary understanding of spatial relations and on familiarity with possible tools, as well as anticipated effects of adopted spatial decisions. This approach requires commitment and competence on the part of both, the creator/architect and decision-making institutions responsible for legal regulations in the field of spatial management, especially in the field of formation of building development layouts, as well as individual objects. Moreover, educational activities targeted at various age and social groups play a significant role. The feeling of cultural identity means a responsible understanding of belonging to a place, social group, or cultural field. This sense of belonging can be associated with formal aspects of fitting correctly into the existing place with respect to its history, values, structure, local patterns, and current needs. Such an approach often requires incorporating natural elements into architectural structures or urban planning assumptions, following place topography and consenting to participation of such aspects in creating the place of residence.

In the case of various contemporary Pomeranian houses, it is difficult to find traces that prove the continuation of the old, traditional forms, patterns and details. Such houses often offer housing facilities impoverished by the lack of the sense of identity of the place. In addition to diminishing the quality of live, this situation exerts a negative impact on the perception of historical spatial context. The situation applies to both towns and villages.

### 2.1. Home and inhabitable place

It seems obvious that a house is devoted to habitation. But what does that mean? Inhabiting may be understood as fulfilling the need for shelter and "being at home". This assumption implies that a house requires both the presence of people, i.e. residents, and objects, i.e. objects that isolate the inhabited space. Thus, a home could possibly be defined as a tool for fulfilling the need for habitation. In turn, habitation is understood as being at home; it is a feeling of being identified with a house. It refers to more than just satisfaction and a sense of comfort; it is rather a partial identification, an emotional relationship, a feeling of "being at home". Rather than being a constant, unchanging experience, inhabitation is a process. This indicates an evolution that results from the changing needs and expectations of inhabitants and follows their requirements. Several elements of this process can be noticed. Firstly, security; secondly, the need to ensure freedom and comfort. Finally, then requirement to experience a sense of identity. Most importantly, however, the broadly understood multi-layered experience of being rooted stands out. The sense of rootedness consists of certain values, continuity of events that occur in a specific space, experiencing the desired, expected feelings, a sense of belonging. All these elements affect the inhabitants' quality of life, their well-being and social relations. The abovementioned aspects are also significant for the neighborhood and local community that reside in the vicinity of the house.

People change places of residence. These changes are often necessitated by external necessities, as young people mature and start families. Frequently, a new, separate space to live in is required. Some youth travel or emigrate, thus creating a new home in a novel location. In this process, two aspects should be reconciled, namely the residents' expectations cultural-spatial conditions of the area in which the house is to be erected. Migration can be associated with a disturbing feeling of being uprooted, as having a home and being able to participate in the rituals associated with it strengthen the sense of identity. Such participation leads to stabilizing a person's relationship to the cultural situation in which he or she is to stay. How is one to move home elsewhere and retain the sense of rootedness? How to recreate a house? Finally, how to "improve" an imperfect house, such as one of numerous Pomeranian houses? It seems that in order to achieve these goals, the key factor lies in the awareness of values that contribute to a Pomeranian house and the knowledge of its structure. Other significant aspects include the ability to adapt to new conditions, the ability to revalorize it by restoring lost and overlooked values. Experts, including architects, certainly provide support, but raising spatial awareness among future residents is a necessary element in the process.

Home is a personal and unique place of importance. Homes are housed in buildings that differ from one another, but are also distinguished by their interior. Rather than being only an architectural form and equipment, home provides also an immaterial sphere - our experiences, memories and dreams. Deprived of inhabitants, the building would not be home. It is the presence of residents that enriches a house and makes it unique

## *2.2. The Pomeranian house*

Gdańsk Pomerania is an area diversified in terms of forms of settlement ranging from small hamlets to cities. Various forms of houses are to be found here. The form and condition of the house is of significance, not only to the residents themselves. Perceived as elements of settlement structures across a larger systems, form and condition influence the assessment of residential areas. They provide an element of the landscape, namely its cultural layer, and co-create the composition of an area. The house contributes to the history of the inhabited place or region. In the forms of buildings, reminiscences of historical forms may be traced: rural huts, noble mansions, town houses, foresters' lodges. Technical progress is changing homes, but its form may still reflect the context of the region's history. This, in turn, influences the inhabitants' identification and well-being.



A question arises: what are Pomeranian houses like? An attempt at characterizing them can be made by referring to two models of living in the past and nowadays. Firstly, the buildings development characteristic of the past village. The dwelling in such hamlets was usually established in the form of a wooden cottage. This architectural form stemmed from local conditions and was culturally embedded in the minds of the inhabitants; it strengthened the sense of identification with the inhabited region and place. The second model, that is built-up, prefabricated blocks of flats, can be found in a modern Pomeranian housing estate. This type of development is devoid of cultural roots in regional traditions. As such, it does not support identification with the inhabited building/apartment. Despite great differences between the two, the block of flats and the cottage, constitute an equally important place when understood as a space for inhabitants: that is home. Both the Kashubian and the Słowiński cottages provide a historical model for the indigenous form of a regional country house established with tradition in mind. Both types of cottages provide a model, a point of reference for the inhabitants of the region. Nowadays, they often serve as inspiration. Such houses evolved over the centuries, but still remain small buildings adapted to the scale of the family's needs. Meanwhile, in its spatial expression and the concept of living in Pomerania, the block of flats is a foreign form. "Imported" as an element of a global trend, it was to implement supra-regional social, economic and ideological assumptions. The introduction of the block form as a residential house, being a sign of the times and the result of progressive urbanization, interrupts evolution of the existing architectural forms of local residential houses, such as cottages, tenement houses, villas, palaces, manors and mansions.

### *2.3. Educational and research context*

An attempt to look at a cottage and a block of flats in the context of the connotations that accompany them nowadays may provide an educational trail for considering a home as a place where a family lives. This understanding served as the starting point for the project entitled "ZASPA: dom w bloku. Przestrzenie archiTEKTURY [ZASPA: a house in a block of flats. The spaces of architecture]" implemented in the field of general architectural education. As part of this task, the authors conducted various lectures and workshops, including activities in cooperation with Instytut Kultury Miejskiej w Gdańsku [Institute of Urban Culture in Gdańsk] and with Department of Contemporary Art of Muzeum Narodowe in Gdańsk [National Museum in Gdańsk], as well as Muzeum – Kaszubski Park Etnograficzny im. Izydora i Teodora Gulgowskich [Museum - Kashubian Ethnographic Park by the name of Izydor and Teodor Gulgowski] in Wdzydze Kiszewskie. The project "Blok i chata: wędrówki [The block of flats and the cottage: wanderings]" resulted in workshops and a publication of educational material for children who attend higher grades of primary schools. It was implemented thanks to the Cultural Scholarship of the City of Gdańsk (2018, 2nd edition), intended at activities to co-create materials for the making and subsequent publication of a book.

The workshop part (four series of two meetings, in groups of 7, 9, 11 and 12-year-olds, September 2018) and the field part (each group took two trips: to a housing estate and a meadow, October 2018) of the project were concluded with an exhibition. It was held in May 2019 at the Plama Club that belongs to Gdański Archipelag Kultury [Gdańsk Archipelago of Culture]. Works made by the participants were presented, namely models of blocks and cottages, as well as photographic documentation of field activities was displayed. The book was published in July of 2019. This publication offers a stance in the discussion on living in Kashubia and Gdańsk, but also on various forms of home. It is an attempt to seek answers on how to live better. The aforementioned project was based on showing the two aforementioned elements, i.e., a country house and an urban housing estate house in their natural contexts. The book is enriched with an accompanying narrative story that presents the inhabitants, specific heroes of the region. Let us take a closer look at both models of habitation.

### *2.4. Cottage and its residents*

In a chronological order, the cottage was assumed as the initial element of the project. Here, it was specially a Kashubian cottage, i.e., the former home to villagers. Such a cottage was a one-story, wooden, traditional building erected in a specific place by a few people - craftsmen "on a primitive foundation made of field stones" [4]. The drawing of stones, the arrangement of beams and reeds topped with wooden trestles in the ridgepole, adequate to the intimate scale of the building, had a characteristic pattern. It was articulatively matched with the accompanying cultural elements.

The building had a high gable roof with a wooden structure, usually covered with straw, reed or heather. The house was functional, but small in size. Single, small, window openings in the walls were protected against wind and cold by wooden shutters. The eaves of the roof show a thick layer of covering, while the ridgepole is crowned with a rhythmically arranged pattern of diagonally crossed trestles. Mounted at equal spaces, the trestles protect the roof cover against the adverse effects of snow, rain and wind. In the corner of the house, an arcade may be found. It served as an external entrance hallway, and offered shelter from the sun and rain, leave tools outside, and observe the yard from a small bench [5].

Originally, several rooms located around one hearth were often inhabited by three generations of a given family. The families were large. Hence the well-planned equipment made by craftsmen, adequate to the needs of residents, which consisted of multifunctional furniture. The bench for sitting on was converted into a bed at night, also serving as a box to store garments. In line with the realities of the time when lower standard of living than the one today were commonplace, the house lacked a separate bathroom with running water, toilet, and no electricity. As mentioned previously, the windows were small, as heating the house, as well as glass itself, was expensive. The house was decorated modestly, with handmade objects. The design of the house, its construction and layout have been repeated over the decades. Possible modifications reflected the wealth of the owner. Possible differences included the arrangement of rooms, the location of the entrance to the building, as well as "*having or not having any arcades and aligning the house with the road, construction details, material*" [Author's own trans. ] [4].

Fields and forests are in the vicinity of the cottage, while orchards, vegetable gardens, and flower gardens enriched with utility herbs were established near the houses. There were farm buildings near the house, such as: a barn, a pigsty, a stable or a henhouse.

As noted by Jerzy Knyba [4], traditional houses modeled on regional forms were erected until the outbreak of World War II. Later, in Pomerania, a tremendous development in the construction industry was observable. A change occurred in terms of technology and materials used for building, both constructional and interior equipment ones. Universalization of forms throughout the country can be perceived. Architecturally new buildings are no longer distinguishable depending on the region in which they are erected. The form, pattern and detail break with the local tradition [4]. Marek Kowicki [6] refers also to the period of implementing modernist architecture in the countryside, but he assesses this period critically. He accuses architects and builders of an ignorant attitude towards regional conditions within history, culture and landscape. He criticizes the rejection in diversity and distinctive uniqueness [6].

### *2.5. Blocks of flats and inhabitants thereof*

At the beginning of the 20th century, the idea of using prefabrication in the construction of multi-family housing units emerged, and mass production started already in the 1950s. The first so-called "house factory" in Poland was launched in the 1970s. Building elements made in it were used to erect buildings whose forms resulted from the assumptions of modernism. The construction of facilities is based on prefabricated, large-format elements of concrete. This means that such buildings can be

mounted quickly. In this way, dozens or even hundreds of similar apartments were built next to each other. Individualization in the interior layout was not envisaged. Residents were left with furniture and interior furnishings to be chosen according to their own concept of the house.

This technology was a very common practice on the Polish housing market until the 1980s. Over 4 million flats were built in Poland in this way. With no participation of residents, with no account to their individual expectations. But the technology was modern, fast and yielded optimal results. Obviously, these flats were necessary in the face of the widespread shortage of flats. Piotr Biegański [7] aptly notices that modern civilization, which makes our life more comfortable and simpler, will not compensate for no account to the psychological needs of people in designing. In his opinion, the most acute deficiency emerges in the area of the sense of order and harmony of the environment [7]. The proposed form of building development in the case of the aforementioned housing estates evokes a feeling of impersonality of space. It still requires support through specific interventions. Such houses fail to live up to the hopes put in them by the inhabitants. It is difficult to build social relations in these buildings, it is difficult to identify with them.

### **3. The search for identity and common architectural education**

Common architectural education, including the issue of residence, is conducive to supporting a sense of identity inasmuch as it leads to the identification of residents with the inhabited place. This role is played by the aforementioned project entitled “ZASPA: dom w bloku. Przestrzenie archiTEKTURY [ZASPA: a house in a block of flats. The spaces of architecture]”. Children from a primary school in Gdańsk, divided into several independent groups, participated in the project. The topic of the house as a living space in Kashubia was discussed. As mentioned, the project included lectures and experimental workshops, as the participants in the second part were given an open task.

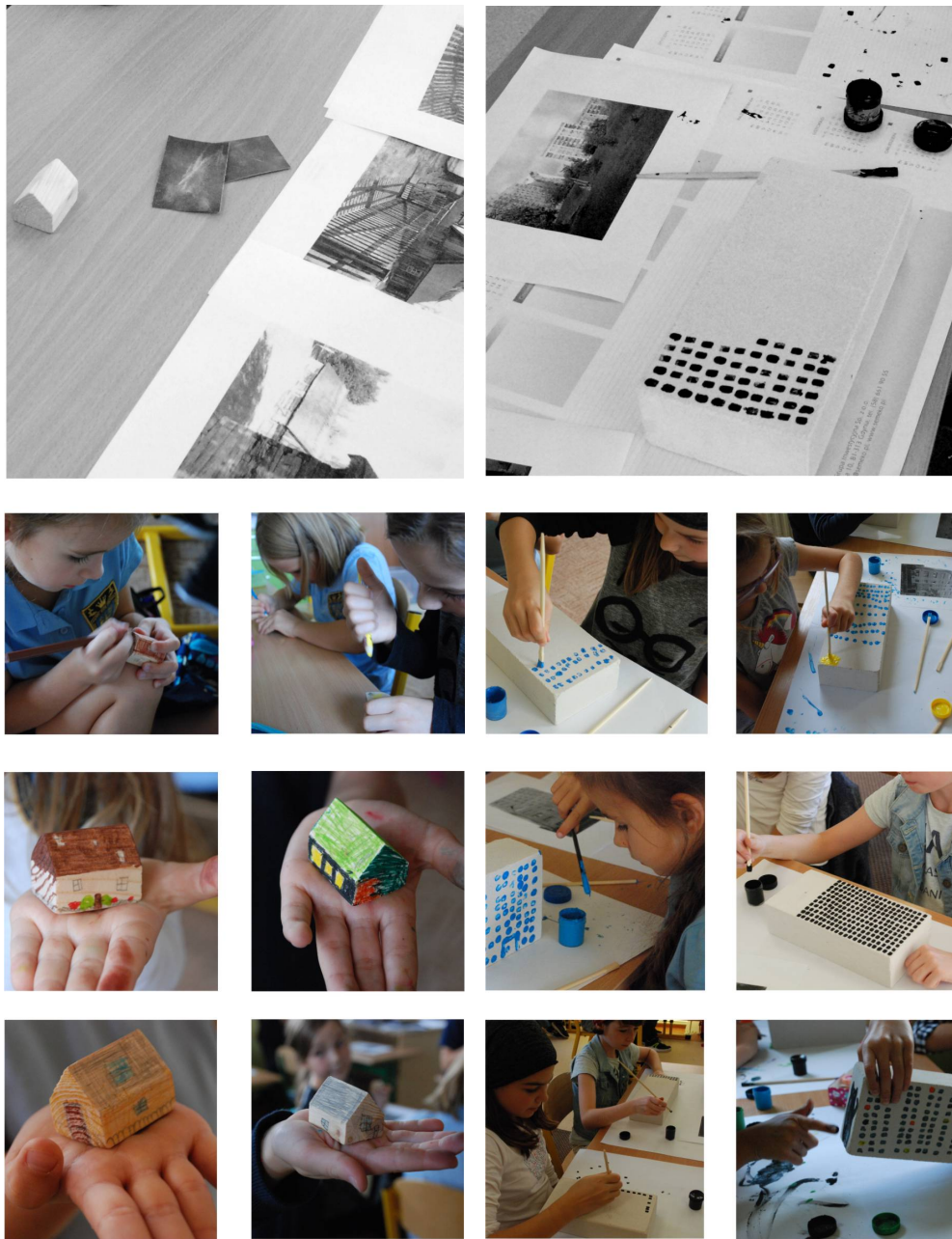


Figure 1. Workshops for children as part of the project entitled “ZASPA: dom w bloku. Przestrzenie archiTEKTURY”: tworzenie modelu chaty i bloku mieszkalnego [ZASPA: a house in a block of flats. Architecture spaces"': creating a model of a cottage and a residential block of flats (author's own archive)

The first task concerned an attempt to create a model of a cottage and a block of flats based on the examples presented in the preceding lecture. It was carried out in accordance with strict guidelines. Participant were to become a craftsmen-builders and manufacturers for a while. They were thus to make a reduced model of the house (Figure 1). The house was created its two versions: a traditional country cottage and a prefabricated multi-family block. The Kashubian was made of a wooden, polished block with a drawn layout of structural elements as well as windows, doors and remaining details. However, in the case of the block of flats, a massive silicate brick was used as the preliminary

material to work on. Windows were stamped onto it in order to resemble a large number of identical apartments.



Figure 2. Workshops for children as part of the project entitled “ZASPA: dom w bloku. Przestrzenie archiTEKTURY” [ZASPA: a house in a block of flats. The spaces of architecture]”: wanderings (author’s own archive).

The second task, on the other hand, consisted in finding non-obvious landscape contexts for the previously made models conducive to good habitation. This was supported by guidelines that only directed the course of the task within the outlined thematic framework, with no suggestions to the desired effect. Then the participants traveled with hand-made houses. Attempts were made to locate the cottages in a housing estate, whereas the blocks were placed in a meadow (Figure 2). It was necessary that the participants try to supplement the previously noted shortages. The participants made



attempts at situating and verifying the building models with the results, looking for the potential of various locations.



Figure 3. The book entitled " DOM: blok i chata. Wędrowki. [HOME: block of flats and cottage. Wandering]. ", VII. 2019 Gdańsk (author's own archive)/PLAMA GAK exhibition, Gdańsk-Zaspa, May 2019, curator: A. Kurkowska

As a result of the project, the aforementioned book was commenced. An exhibition in PLAMA, a part of Gdański Archipelag Kultury [The Gdańsk Archipelago of Culture] provided the summary to the workshop part (Figure 3). The exhibition presents photographic documentation of the sequence of individual elements to the project, as well as sample models of blocks and huts.

#### 4. Conclusions

The designers of Pomeranian housing estates erected in the 1970s and 1980s fail to use historical forms as prototypes. The blocks contain no references to traditional buildings of cities or villages. Unfortunately, except for some unique individual examples, following landscape and regional specificity of the place can hardly be noticed in this case. The contemporary Pomeranian village also

leaves much to be desired. However, architects are increasingly considering old Kashubian huts. Reminiscences of traditional cottages can be seen in contemporary objects. The coherence of this architecture with the landscape proves purposefulness of returning to long-established and valuable tradition, referring to it as a source of values that strengthen the sense of identification with the inhabited place.

To improve the current situation, it is necessary to introduce competent external intervention and bottom-up pro-community actions. There seems to be room for general architectural education, which would introduce the topic of home as a place of residence. Living based on the awareness of residents who want to inhabit a house located in an accepted and understood cultural context should be discussed. Residents interested in this problem ought to participate in a dialogue that strengthens the need to search for their own home formula with which they would be associated by a sense of identification. Restoration of the sense of identification may strengthen the development of the process aimed at good habitation in Pomerania.

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