CONTEMPORARY RURAL HOUSE FOR KASZUBY REGION

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The house has always been the most important component of the development of the rural settlement. Rooted in the local tradition, the rural house—as a carrier of cultural features—forms evidence of both the development of construction technology, economic situation and the social status of the inhabitants and their material and spiritual culture. In our times, the house in Kaszuby—like in the whole of Poland—undergoes a significant transformation. Its direction is alarming as it contributes to the inevitable breaking up of the continuity of cultural environment. In Kaszuby, quasi-urban development patterns ignoring local tradition and landscape have become popular. Their strangeness lies in both the form of buildings, their functional layouts and in the spatial layouts of rural settlements.

The continuity of tradition, if possible s long as it may be reconstructed, should not consist in uncritical repetition/imitation of traditional development patterns. However, the following question arises: how to interpret tradition in order not to cross an imperceptible borderline beyond which the bonds between the present and tradition cease to be clear and the regionalism of design solutions becomes fiction?

Rural house characteristics

The rural house is predominantly linked to a farm. This means that in the design process specific design guidelines as well as functional and spatial requirements need to be covered thus catering for the contemporary needs of the farmer's family and combining an appropriate standard of the flat with the nature of the occupation. Peculiar to the rural house is an increased area of certain components: a spacious hall and a large kitchen with an adjacent production room. Extended are also back-up facilities in the form of technical and production rooms. A crucial element of the functional and spatial layout is the introduction of traffic improvements such as two entrances (the gala and a separate production one related to the 'dirt lock') and the interrelationship between the rooms (a multi-functional nature of the kitchen and its location permitting easy access to farm buildings). In the rural house—in view of a multi-generation nature of families—there is a need for setting apart independent (additional) residential areas with various degrees of independence. In the case of a family who are not involved in farming, the rural house is characterised by relaxation of some of those requirements. It would, however, be a mistake to identify the rural house with a standard urban single family one.

Contemporary challenges

It is reasonable to utilise the elements of traditional spatial layouts and design guidelines wherever they meet contemporary functional challenges and correspond to the customs and behaviour of users. The variety of their requirements causes the need for seeking flexible functional and spatial layouts, also by developing several variant design solutions recognising, inter alia, a multi-generation nature of the family, the requirements of persons with disabilities and the possibility of introduction of rooms for holidaymakers. There arises, too, the question of the size of the house in view of the peculiarity of its functions. The current changes in the energy conservation potential of buildings present a new challenge for

the architects, this being the taking into account of solutions aiming at the utilisation of unconventional sources of energy.

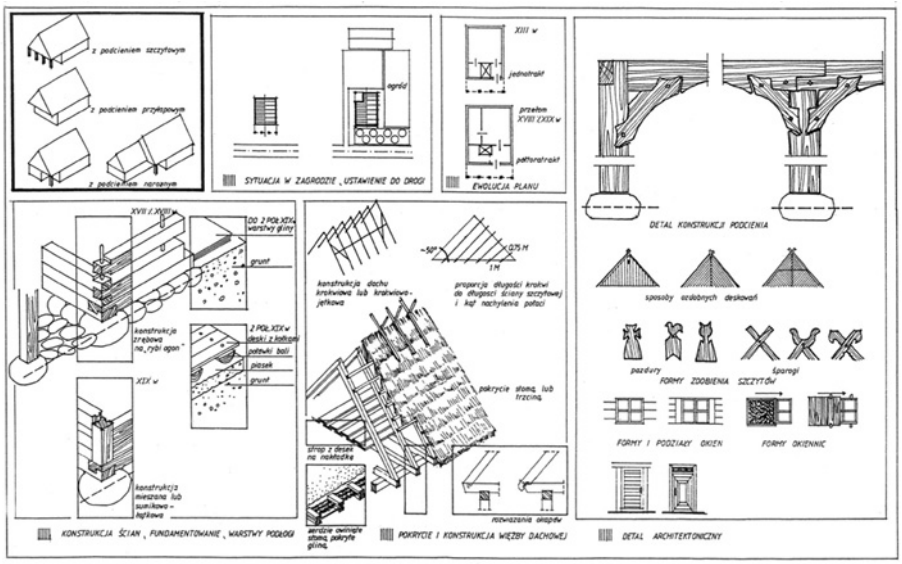
The transformation of an agricultural policy in Poland has been followed by a change of life-style in rural areas thus creating diversified needs of village inhabitants. Agro-tourism has become the main source of living in addition to working away from home (commuting to work) in non-agricultural sectors. In this situation, a standard family house located on a small plot is no longer sufficient. The development of more versatile and flexible forms that would be more receptive to transformations, additions and staging is needed to accommodate rooms for holidaymakers. The traditional form of multi-building farmstead seems to be the best reference and source pattern allowing for accommodating both dwelling, farm and agro-tourist functions.

Design framework—potential for continuity of local tradition

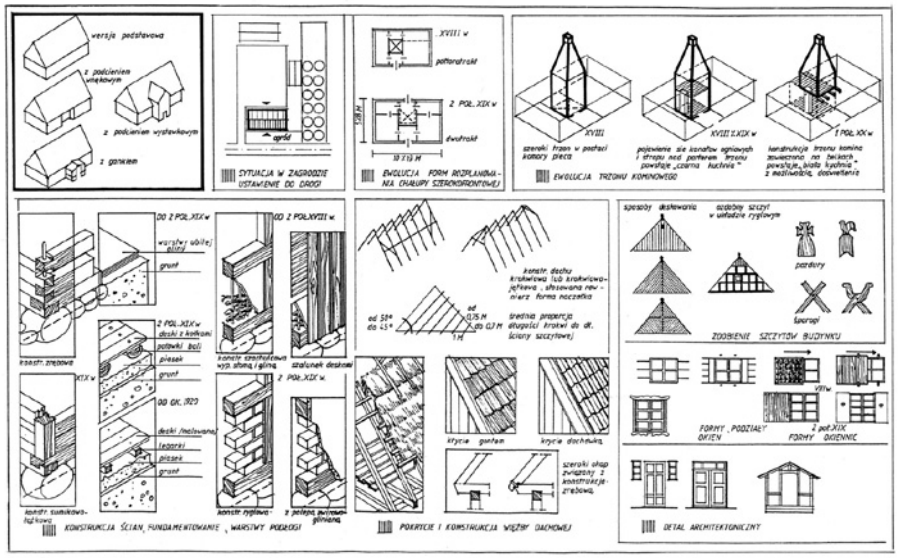
The continuation of local tradition requires the reference in contemporary architectural activity to peculiar site features within the framework of distinct landscape and architectural sub-regions. So far, attempts to continue the local tradition of rural development have usually been limited to copying selected external characteristics: the detail and wooden ornament.

Studies and design documentation prepared by the Rural Architecture and Planning Team at the Faculty of Architecture of the Gdańsk University of Technology (now the Department of Sustainable Architecture) are just one among few attempts going in the above direction.

The first works on the concepts for houses for Kaszuby focussed on distinguishing the peculiarities of the region. In that regard, experience in designing allows us to state that observing the basic proportions of the body of the building plays the most important, simply decisive role in the continuation of cultural tradition. The above role becomes even more important in view of the fact that such role affects landscape considerably. In the context of landscape, the way of shaping the development in the scale of farmstead and the settlement is equally important. Against that background, one should look in a slightly different way at the role of the detail as a carrier of the relationship between tradition and modernity. It seems that in addition to the utilisation of the decorative values of the detail, albeit posing the risk of excess literality of borrowings from tradition, the functional role of the detail verifying the usefulness of some traditional solutions in contemporary architecture is becoming more and more important. Attempts to continue the layout of the traditional house provided the relatively least inspiring material. This is not a rule, however, as an attempt to use e.g. a layout incorporating a load-bearing wall dividing the house into the front and rear section (in Polish the so-called ‘układ dwutraktowy’) referring to the layout with the above wall and a front and back entrance) (in Polish ‘schemat dworkowy’) proved amazingly functional and logical from the point of view of contemporary criteria of the energy saving potential of the layout.



Picture 1 Typology of houses in Kaszuby: type A



Picture 2 Typology of houses in Kaszuby: type B

Design guidelines

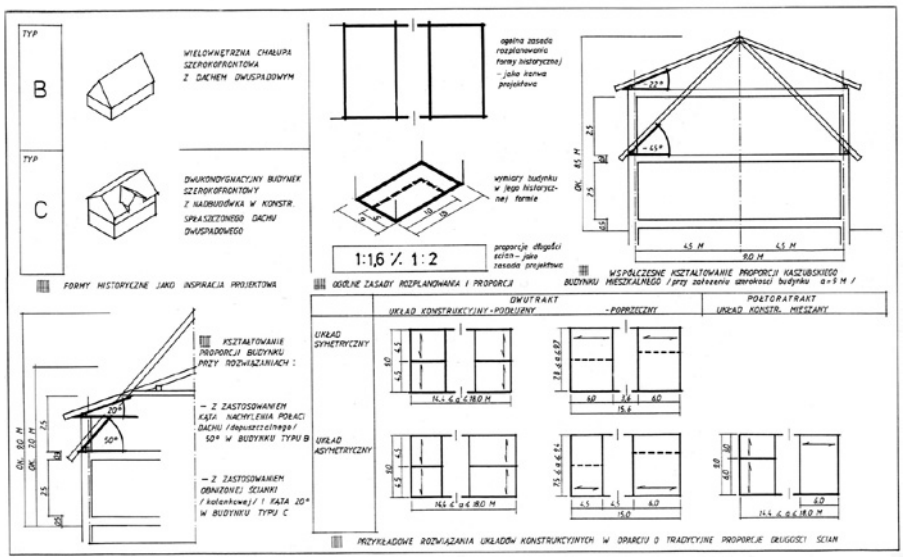
The synthesis of utilisation of the possibilities of shaping the development based on traditional architecture of Kaszuby may be grasped on one sheet of paper. This does not entail, however, the reduction of the scale of the problem but its simplification for the purpose of popularisation.

These guidelines are focused on extracting the most important traditional elements, commonly used throughout the region (i.e. such traditional elements constituting building patterns), however distinct local features are also taken into consideration to allow for a range of variety.

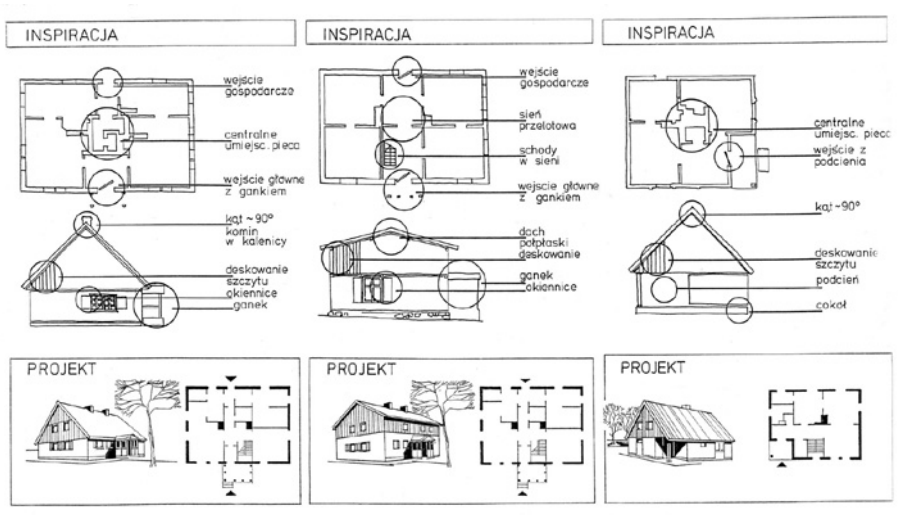
Distinguishing several typical types of development, which may be worked out from the design point of view in many variants and implemented in the region without a need to seek patterns in other regions or even abroad, seems justified in terms of the preservation of the continuity of tradition within the scope of the architectural form. Promotion of construction solutions and materials taking into account local resources of building materials and their

utilisation in construction industry is, too, an important element of the continuation of local tradition.

The design and its implementation is a test of real possibilities of creative and free- from-imitation utilisation of the elements of tradition in the shaping of contemporary architecture. One must however take into consideration the context in which a design is developed; the point here is in both the function of the facility, its design guidelines pertaining to the size and number of rooms, in the investor, user and in construction conditions. In the case of Kaszuby, the above is important in so far as the majority of design solutions attempting to follow various threads of tradition concern on the one hand public utility facilities or residential buildings with a large area and high furnishing standards. On the other hand, a lack of such designs of residential development for an average customer is noticeable. The above designs are most necessary because they form the 'basic substance' of rural cultural landscape. Design works aiming at the satisfaction of those needs are usually disapprovingly received by the investors because of 'unfashionable' simplicity of such works.



Picture 3 Design guidelines for contemporary rural houses



Picture 4 Contemporary rural house - inspirations and design concepts

Contemporary rural house—design concepts

Residential development design concepts for particular sub-regions of Kaszuby recognise assumptions and rules of tradition interpretation in the shaping of contemporary development. Apart from solutions characterised by relatively high fidelity to traditional patterns and by their moderate transformation, there are examples of much freer interpretation of the elements of tradition, however still entering into a dialogue with them. The way of action taken—from the selection of the threads from tradition forming the source of inspiration via its interpretation to design concepts—is presented by design solutions based on the above reasoning. The common assumption of those design solutions is a drive towards simplicity, which is a condition for a large scale of use. In successive solutions, the number of regional features regarded as a source of inspiration was increased and more interest taken in the proportions of the body, facade structure, plan and, finally, in the means of shaping the complexes of buildings. For each of the design concepts, the source of inspiration forming a reference to tradition, area of use, possibilities of variations on the standard version and rules for positioning were defined.

The designs captured the main aspects typical of the rural house.

(1) The first question concerns the specific characteristics of design guidelines, spatial and functional layout of the rural house, especially of the farmer's one. In the concepts of the rural house to have been developed, a production zone was designed by putting a 'dirt lock,' ancillary rooms, stores, boiler room, laundry etc. on the side of the production entrance. In addition, the basement was completely or partially abandoned and an optimum total area and the possibility of its enlargement by extension were proposed.

(2) The second question is the crucial issue of the relationship between contemporary architecture and local tradition. This is not only the issue of knowledge of regional features of traditional construction industry but first of all of their interpretation, ranging from exact following (simple imitation) via moderate transformation of those features to total freedom of their combination, transformation and deformation. The continuation of tradition was based on the assumption of the dominant role of the basic proportions of the house body and on the drive to the maximum achievable simplicity in its shaping with sparing operation with the detail selected from the point of view of its usable values. It was deemed reasonable to refer to some types of layout of the traditional Kashubian house but, at the same time, exact copying in the shaping of the form and detail was avoided.

(3) The third question which cannot be underrated is a number of issues related to environmentally friendly construction. Energy saving potential is of overriding importance here. That issue strongly modifies conventional thinking about building design and architecture, the point being in both its functional, spatial, material, construction, technology and economic aspects (the costs of the project—those of operation). Energy saving potential is an important issue in architecture. One should draw special attention to internal thermal zones of the building by shaping a protective zone (substantially identical with the production zone) with reduced thermal requirements on the northern side, to the improvement of thermal insulation power and to the possibilities of introduction of new energy solutions (passive utilisation of solar energy, heat accumulation etc.). As assumption has been taken that whereas energy saving solutions may be graded by their incorporation in the basic conventional building body, the design should be open to solutions aiming at the utilisation of unconventional energy sources. The spatial layout of the building based on zone separation depending on temperature in the rooms, the 'greenhouse' systems, solar collectors, use of immersion in soil are only some implications of environmentally friendly shaping of development in rural areas. Buildings designed in a modern way, equipped with plant, should continue architectural aesthetics in a manner preserving the values of regional construction industry thus taking advantage of house proportions with a steep or semi-flat roof.

If taken further, design concepts will require more studies on correct association of conventional functional and spatial requirements with the factors following the energy saving regime and the possibility of introducing new energy supply systems.

Dissemination of knowledge

Spreading knowledge on the features of cultural tradition and setting out desirable directions of its continuation is of crucial importance for the maintenance of the continuity of such tradition in shaping contemporary rural architecture. It should be considered reasonable to prepare the development shaping principles to be binding at a specific area for particular landscape and architectural micro-regions. With regard to particularly attractive and valuable ones, such principles should include detailed guidelines pertaining to single buildings and their layouts at plots, such guidelines taking at the same time the heritage conservator's requirements into account.

Popularisation of design solutions implementing the above idea requires educating the society in traditional spatial culture and in the principles of its continuation. One of the forms of education may be a good practice manual whose finalisation should be related to consultation with potential users thus testing reception and comprehensibility of the text. The severe difficulty here is an implication of the need to present in an appropriate manner the issues which sometimes require simplification. From the clarity point of view, dissemination of information in the form of drawings with reducing the text to the required minimum is the most appropriate. Development of a publication promoting the principle of tradition continuity in contemporary architecture in Kaszuby should be an excuse for the presentation of the material in the form of a pattern-book pointing out the architectural and landscape standards and preferences.

Utilisation of the elements of tradition in designing the development in rural areas of our region is presented in the documentation made by the team of the Department of Sustainable Architecture at the Faculty of Architecture of the Gdańsk University of Technology. The convention taken for the presentation of particular issues by means of sets of drawings instead of single drawings is to demonstrate the issue and its circumstances and not an individual case without a larger context. Typology enables the investor to take an attitude to several key questions accompanying the designing of a contemporary rural house: the presentation of a relationship between the shaping of development and its surroundings, commencing with the principle of dividing land into building plots, through the spatial layout of the complex of buildings at the plot to the definition of an optimum size and proportions of the building.