

11th PA Culture Workshop on preservation of cultural heritage in the Baltic Sea Region "**Wooden architecture and sustainable cultural tourism**"

19th November 2020

Summary of the meeting: common position and recommendations - *proposed by Marcin Poprawski (session moderator) and edited by workshop participants*

The workshop's main aim was to provide the space for experts' discussion on current challenges of protection, conservation and promotion of wooden architecture cultural heritage in Baltic Sea region countries. Three-part session provided eight perspectives, with diverse cases and practices from Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, Norway, Poland and Sweden. Workshop participants shared experiences and formulated current needs that create some common grounds in terms of the old wood and wooden architecture preservation within the Baltic Sea region. The meeting captured some recommendations when taking into account multidimensional contexts of conservation and promotion of wooden material cultural heritage. The topic extended to the rationales of regional identity, knowledge of traditional architecture and visibility of wooden heritage focused on cultural tourism. The topics of preservation, protection, conservation, conversion, restoration and maintenance regarding wooden churches, temples, houses, public utility and industrial buildings as well as entire town districts and villages were seen in the light of realities of sustainable tourism paradigm. Local examples, institutional approaches as well as systemic solutions and policies were reflected during 4 hours of discussions.

There are some key needs that might be seen as common for all national contexts represented in cases and stories on wooden heritage, provided by participants representing Baltic Area countries.

Answering the question on what is missing or what is raising discussion in particular countries, we might sum up that there are at least 3 main areas of concern:

- MATERIAL (TIMBER) and TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE. Original material, timber is less and less available and thus more and more valuable and in need of protection. One of the key wooden heritage activities' aim today is to protect the original material, documentation and techniques including maintenance of protected objects. It is also essential to include and foster the learning of craft skills within the education system. It occurs that newly trained professionals are not capable of restoring and preserving wooden cultural heritage, making it difficult to assure enough labour force that is needed (signalled in Norway). Among other things, an ICCROM's international course on Wooden Conservation Technology could be provided, which would help to maintain the wooden architecture and to create space for future collaboration.

- POLICIES. What is certainly needed over existing regulations is to integrate them into policies or reflect them in the wider context. There is an expectation of extending legal regimes of protection into long-term policies and programs. Another problem is the fact, that still, in most of the BSR countries law does not cover all the aspects of wooden architecture protection.

Conservation needs policy, and not just technical work aspect supervision and bare regulations.

- FUNDS. The policies are in a sequence with stable, reliable fund sources for wooden architecture heritage protection. There is a need for fund on the EU level - a separate financial support or subsidies program for wooden architecture conservation and protection. It is a necessary condition, a necessity for this fragile, sensitive part of European and world cultural heritage. A separate program that respects the specificity and acknowledges the urgency of needs regarding wooden architecture heritage. In this regard, an EU Wooden Architecture year, like the Industrial Heritage year 2015, might be an useful solution as it could draw attention to wooden architecture in broader terms.

- ACCESS. Not a satisfactory number of wooden heritage buildings are open to the public, due to several reasons, mainly their poor technical condition.

- EDUCATION & VISIBILITY. There is a need for education, promotion, advocacy/campaigning regarding the value of the protection of wooden architecture cultural heritage, that is fragile and unique. Every single story of wooden heritage (private or public site) is a phenomenon, but it is rooted in local ecosystems that needs to be analysed, learned and treated as a reference. Heritage architecture sites need to be seen through the context of the local community. The clue is in engaging local inhabitants and activists in the protection and dissemination of knowledge on that type of architectural treasures.

Additionally, to above-pointed areas, there were several observations provided by the workshop participants that focused on particular practices, solutions, key issues that provide additional dimensions to the protection of wooden cultural heritage.

Among them were:

- LOCAL COMMUNITY engagement. The role of community and a reflection on how wooden architecture heritage may impact the local community and how local community impacts the architecture. It usually starts with a stimulus from outside the community or on rare occasions from the inside. The sequence of good partnerships and events might change positively the attitude and perception, build the trust and engagement of wooden architecture neighbours. The key role lies within the local interpreters of heritage (providing the tool of the dialogue with private owners). The decision of opening (for safety measures) of wooden buildings surroundings, spaces to local inhabitants and local schools helps to raise interest. This may strongly change attitudes and opinions. Local community will have a chance to treat the wooden heritage as part of their everyday responsibility. A role of storytelling and narrations about wooden architecture might also help in building relations within community. It is worth activating the notions of story hunters and storytellers who may engage local communities in heritage interpretation, research, documentation and protection. Local communities could be engaged by proper professional facilitators in the fieldwork, searching for local specialists and enthusiasts, volunteers who will dig up local stories and archives, integrating that effort with local cultural organisations.

- SUSTAINABILITY values. Wood is a durable material and wooden architecture is ecological and energy-efficient. Inspiring examples come from Sweden that has a research program for energy efficiency in buildings of cultural and historical value. There is a profound sustainability principle in protection and restoration of existing wooden buildings – keeping them instead of replacing with the new construction make more sense in the perspective of CO2 balance or energy efficiency. The sustainability topic that is in the air now – it is just there - in wooden architecture. It just needs to be well narrated.

- PROTECTION CONSULTANCY for PRIVATE OWNERS. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT and CURATION of the role of PRIVATE OWNERS in the wooden heritage protection and its promotion. The majority of wooden architecture heritage is in private hands. That is the reason why it needs more support regarding knowledge and competencies that need to be transmitted to the owners. They need funds but even more they need expertise, education, professional support, access to right materials and its proper use. Private owners need to know historical conservation norms, understanding the heritage protection legal terms or building documentation reading competencies, some timber technology knowledge and other rules and norms that respect the local context. In this context we could apply the reference to the credo of Freeman Tilden (Interpreting our heritage, 1957): "through interpretation understanding, through understanding appreciation, through appreciation, protection". The rich range of consultancy activities might be the best solution tested by some of the members of the panel. One of Estonian panellists provided an example of support: standard drawings, restoration aid or research (history, colour studies), conservation techniques. The complexity of every wooden building when renovated needs consultancy, expertise, research. A challenge is when owners cannot or do not want to understand regulations or just do not want to do anything, not even mention rare cases of owners' absence or no intention of using the building at all.

- LARGE SCALE PROJECTS like entire districts, wooden town centres, temples (large churches like The Church of Peace in Świdnica, Poland) have a special role as benchmarks, disseminators, promoters, campaigners for wooden architecture protection. Usually, they have more visibility, public attention. Regardless its essentiality as icons and 'spotlights objects' – there is a serious challenge embedded in large scale complex architecture restoration projects. In most of such cases, there is also the urgency of restoration and a massive amount of timber material needed. Wood can not wait and a massive amount of wood can not even wait more.

There are other points reflected by meeting participants. They seem to have a common ground for all countries involved in the partnership.

(1) First of all, there are many successful cases of restoration, conservation and protection taking place in all BSR countries.

(2) There is a struggle on how to improve the visibility of the best cases and how to establish them as standards that would be available to every wooden architecture owner.

(3) The quality needs to be improved by availability of consultancy service accessible to private owners. Still, there is an evident necessity of the promotion of such service to neighbours, local communities.

(4) There are examples of very successful cultural and art activities: concerts, festivals, exhibitions, cultural events of different art and culture genres that are strongly raising interest in wooden architecture. This might be the solution for raising more funds and other support to protect the heritage.

(5) There are institutions and organisations that are integrating local community around wooden heritage, there are community events as drivers and initiators of the urban wooden architecture museums.

(6) There is an urgent need for intersectoral synergy: private, public and civic organisation to support the quality and scale of the restoration of private buildings, especially regarding materials, colour palette, windows and doors, etc.

(7) The examples of wooden architecture given in the workshop – show the preference to the restoration *in situ* – in the local context (not necessarily the relocation – if not required due to external conditions).

(8) We need tourists who respect the sustainability values. There is a strong potential of support for renovation from tourism – without tourism, there is no support to the continuation of renovation in many places.

(9) There are few recommendations in regard to the larger wooden architecture districts, expressed through the goals of coordinators of city wooden architecture district goals: (a) maintain the historical districts comprehensive; (b) maintain the original or replace it with an exact copy; (c) rise awareness; (d) maintain as an attractive area for visitors and inhabitants. Attract them. This is accompanied by the list of challenges: replacing instead of restoring/simplifying; changed landscaping, parking norms; pressure from developers and modernization; fitting the modern architecture, etc.

(10) The best example of wooden heritage restorations should be promoted. for Private owners of the wooden heritage could get help from professional consultation services, provided by the heritage protection institutions.

The above highlighted list of issues, needs, proposals, comments and recommendations proves that there are very good conditions and tools for transnational Baltic Sea Region sharing of experiences, policies, advocacy, ready solutions and frameworks. There are ready channels to exchange and support for BSR countries, with some formats for designing the local processes or including systemic solutions for protection and promotion of wooden architecture heritage that might be also integrated with examples of sustainable cultural tourism.