COASTAL LANDSCAPE

The coast of Poland has over 500 km in length. Its landscape is mainly formed by wide sandy beaches lying over the open sea and separated from the adjacent pine forests by dunes. The area is situated far from big urban centres and urbanized areas so in the summer time it is a major tourist attraction. The conservation of the landscape is mainly based on a total ban on new developments. Its effectiveness depends on the character of the ownership of these areas. The coast is controlled by the Maritime Authority whereas the forests are controlled by the National Forests, state institutions, which in their strategy of activity assume full protection of natural resources. The erosion of the coastline is a threat though, due to the fact that it is a natural process, it does not pose a major threat to the landscape. What had a significant impact on the shape of the Hel Peninsula coastline was the construction of a port in Władysławowo realized at the beginning of the 20th century, which disturbed the natural sand migration towards the beaches of the peninsula, which in turn led to the change of the coastline and threat to the fishermen’s villages situated there. This is, however, the only example of this kind as far as the Polish coast is concerned. The development of large tourist centres, which are usually situated near towns, villages and fishing ports lying along the coastline, might influence the changes of the natural landscape.

Cliffs are an attractive element of the landscape of the Polish coast. They reach the height of up to 50-80 meters and are usually covered by woods. As a dominant feature of the landscape of a relatively short coastline, they constitute a remarkable tourist attraction. Also in this case the structure of the state agencies’ ownership of the area is usually an effective tool to protect the area from intensive tourist developments. This was the case when e.g. the plans to build artificial coastal fortifications of the cliff at Orłowo, a district of Gdynia, constantly damaged by the waves, were dropped so that the natural beauty and uniqueness of the landscape could be preserved. However, there do occur threats like this as one could see in a summer resort of Jastrzębia Góra, set up at the beginning of the 20th century close to the sea cliff. The planning mistakes made while building the settlement, such as marking out plots of land too close to the cliff, selling them to private owners, building hotels and residences, as well as uncontrolled tourist developments, resulted in a significant dynamic overburdening of the cliff. After years of intensive exploitation; planting new installations; lack of suitable drainage and construction precautions; combined with natural erosion caused by the sea and waves; there has been brought about landslides. These have also taken the buildings situated at the tops of the cliffs with them. In recent years there have been several buildings on cliffs that have been threatened by landslides, with one actually damaged. The action of building new protective reinforcement, undertaken in order to prevent the ongoing erosion of the cliff has been successful because the erosion has been stopped. However, the natural landscape has been violated owing to the construction of huge walls of a few dozen metres in height.

The landscape of the sea bays looks quite different. There are no beaches there and the basic element of the scenery are fields, farmland and forests. The area is usually farmed and the low development of the tourist infrastructure contributes to the preservation of the natural scenery. Many years of farming the land and the negligence of the basic norms of environmental protection have resulted in the pollution of coastal waters, which in turn decreased the tourist attractiveness of this area. Paradoxically, the improvement of the condition of the environment in recent years has resulted in the increase of tourism in the region and interest in new developments, which in turn threaten the natural scenery.

ARCHITECTURE

In the close vicinity of the coast, there are fishermen’s villages set up in the Middle Ages. The spatial arrangement of these villages is characterized by the irregularity of houses concentrated along narrow streets. In larger settlements such as, e.g. Hel, historical buildings concentrated along a straight country road, whose frontage was formed by the tops of the houses. The fishermen’s houses were small; they had only a few rooms, brick elevation and tiled gable roofs. The earlier wooden buildings dating from the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century are rare and are normally under protection by including them in the heritage-listed buildings. The houses have small windows and a simple architectural detail. The farming part of the buildings was concentrated around the backyard which
served also as a place for storing fishing equipment, repairs and drying the nets and sometimes preparing or smoking fish.

The traditional spatial arrangement of the old fishermen’s settlements is undergoing fast transformation. The low standard of the houses built at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century do not cater for the needs of the contemporary inhabitants. Many old houses are abandoned. It happens that the extensions of houses with the view to improving living standard and obtaining additional room for tourists, ruins the traditional architecture altogether. The houses are raised, rebuilt; there are new materials used; the traditional historical architectural detail is disappearing. The new architecture sometimes continues the cultural tradition. However, there are examples of architecture being at variance with historical tradition, copying elements of unified modernist architecture or thoughtlessly imitating regional tradition from other regions of Poland, e.g. from the Tatra Mountains, a region lying in the South, several hundred kilometers away from the coast. A plague on the traditional scenery of the fishermen’s villages are standardized and temporary buildings put up with the view to catering for the needs of seasonal tourist services.

An example of such developments realized in defiance of any spatial planning or the guidelines of the conservator of monuments and wildlife is the issue of a coastal village of Karwieńskie Blota. Dutch settlers set it up in the 17th century and making use of their land improvement skills they created a unique settlement in Europe. A spatial arrangement based on a three kilometre axis of a country road and equal perpendicular divisions of farmland with boundaries based on a system of drainage ditches that naturally provided the fields and farmland with proper irrigation. The historical buildings concentrated exclusively along the main road. Up to the year 1990, the regulations of the spatial planning protected the area. The changes in legal regulations introduced in the year 1990 made it possible to perform new divisions of property and sell small plots of land to people interested in summer holidays at the seaside. Accordingly, there were as many as 1500 new plots separated on the basis of plans prepared by geodesists. With time there appeared substandard buildings in spite of the fact that according to the spatial planning for the area, there should be fields and farmland with a status of a total ban on building of any kind. As a result, there appeared developments designed either by the farmers themselves or the geodesists hired by them that were completely at variance with the settlement continuity of the area and that were violating the natural countryside. Although the new owners have been trying for years to influence and press the state offices to have the legal acts changed or omitted, they have not managed to get the protection regulations referring to the region withdrawn. Nevertheless, the buildings constructed at variance with the existing legal regulations are an example of one of the biggest in Poland of building wilfulness.
A fisherman’s house at Jastarnia built in the second half of the 19th century.

Fishermen’s houses in Puck built at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Karwieńskie Błota, a location plan of the village made at the end of 18th century, showing a country road and regular division of fields and irrigation canals.

Karwieńskie Błota, a contemporary plan showing hundreds of new property divisions.

The new sub-standard building on the land adjacent to the seashore in the region of Karwieńskie Błota.
An important element of the traditional spatial planning of the Polish coast are ports and fishing boats marinas. The marinas along the open sea are just the places where the boats are drawn up onto the beach. Owing to storms and changes of the coastline, the back-up facilities for these marinas are situated within the villages. From the side of the bay, there are situated small ports and fishing boat marinas with basic technical equipment. They provide mooring and servicing facilities. It is also here that repairs and major overhauls are carried out as well as reloading, preparing and smoking fish. The marinas, although they do not have any building of historical value, constitute one of the most valuable elements of the preserved traditional spatial development. Unfortunately, the marinas undergo ever bigger transformations; there appears urbanization, increased tourism, and accordingly they adapt to new functions. The old methods of fishing vanish and the traditions of everyday life and navigation become history. It happens more often that the living, tourist and fishing functions overlap. An ordinary building of no individual style features, gains significant non-material values and becomes a tourist attraction merely because of its location in the historical context.

It is an essential issue to properly inscribe the principles of conservation protection of those areas in the plans of spatial development. A valuable whole is composed of parts which taken out of their natural context, separately and individually, do not constitute a big cultural value. A chance to preserve the places in accordance with their natural and historical tradition is to place services and tourist developments outside the protected area, which sometimes does happen, allowing for using historical places according to tradition.

The bigger towns and ports of the Polish coast, which due to their size outstrip local tradition, are not the subject of this study.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

An important element of the coastal cultural heritage are lighthouses and other remains connected with sailing and navigation. Up to the end of the 20th century there were 17 large lighthouses preserved lying along the Polish coast. There are also other older lighthouses, either reconstructed or preserved only partially, which for a long time now have not fulfilled their traditional functions. Most of them, being under control of the Maritime Authority, are in good condition and could still fulfill their historical functions. Some of them, especially in summertime, fulfill tourist functions; they become museums and viewpoints. It also happens that the old lighthouses are taken over by various institutions or even individuals, who plan to transform them and adapt to individual or tourists’ needs.

There are still many marinas and fishing boat stations with traditional arrangement, coastal equipment
and boat equipment. Old tools once used for fishing are gradually withdrawn from use. There are new fishing materials and techniques appearing whereas the objects connected with fishing traditions are at best placed in regional museums or ethnographical collections. It is a natural process which cannot be stopped.

Other important elements of the coastal culture are the traces of non-material values, such as e.g. clothes, customs and rites, the tradition of building crosses and wayside shrines, cult places and memorials. Beside the preserved monuments and material traces of using the area, they are a significant completion of the landscape and architecture of the coast.

The industrialization and urbanization of the present day is gradually dislodging tradition and the process is irreversible. The attractiveness of the coastal area and the beaches brings about the development of tourism, which is not only a threat but also a chance for the protection of the cultural heritage of the coast.

At present it is important that the tools of effective protection should be introduced. Among them are primarily the plans of spatial development preceded by studies on the cultural heritage of the region together with a clear definition of the legal and financial tools of the protection. It is absolutely necessary that the central government’s policy towards the issue be decisive and that sustainable activities be undertaken on the level of self-governments. It is also important that social awareness as well as local programmes and education should be developed. International programmes and cooperation within the European Union are also of great significance since they create a chance for sustainable development and protection of the coastal landscape, architecture and cultural heritage.