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*The Lemko house – architecture of forgotten identity.  
The traditional chȳža, its contemporary reinterpretations  
and the role of architects in the transmission  
of the Lemko heritage*

*Abstract*

The article focuses on the redefinition of the Lemko house in the context of post-war displacement and contemporary attempts to refer to the traditional architecture of the region. The home is understood here as a space deeply rooted in cultural, familial, and emotional dimensions of identity, the meaning of which in the Lemko community significantly changed after the World War II. Particular attention is paid to the concept of the chȳža – the archetype of the Lemko house – and its contemporary reinterpretations in single-family housing.

The aim of the article is to identify the constitutive features of the modern Lemko house and the ways in which architecture can mediate the transmission of heritage. The analysis considers both material aspects (form, proportions, details, materials) and immaterial aspects (language, traditions, relationship with the environment), revealing the tension between fidelity to tradition and adaptation to the contemporary needs of the inhabitants. The paper is based on interviews with representatives of the Lemko community and with architects who have designed buildings inspired by the Lemko archetype, as well as on a comparative analysis of these realisations.

The design strategies outlined in the article range from the preservation of selected traditional features to their deliberate transformation. The role of language, memory and landscape as co-creators of the sense of home is also highlighted. As a result, a definition of the contemporary Lemko house is proposed as a space of cultural continuity – embedded in the region but open and dynamic, where tradition is realised not only through architectural form, but also through the persistence of community, language and culture.

**Key words:** architectural heritage, Lemko house, chȳža, Lemkos/Rusyns, minority architecture

*Introduction*

The house – regardless of its location, construction, or aesthetics – occupies an important place in the hierarchy of human values (Bartmiński 2008, 56). It is associated with family, community, or homeland, encompassing both buildings and the surrounding landscape with clearly defined boundaries and characteristics. Human self-realisation is achieved through the formation of bonds, relationships, and surroundings – made possible by the ability to dwell in and participate in a particular milieu (Heidegger 1970, 322, 323). The loss of the home therefore entails a loss of

belonging, a disruption of stability, and a weakening of identity, depriving the individual of a sense of security and of a place to which their memories are attached.

The Lemkos were displaced first as part of the mutual population exchange between Poland and the Soviet Union (1944–1946) to the territories of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and later through Operation “Vistula” (1947–1950) to the so-called Recovered Territories. As a result, they lost their homeland – the Lemko Region, an ancestral space that constituted the foundation of their cultural identity (Watrak 2019, 53, 54). Forced displacement resulted in alienation, disintegration of communities, and difficulties in rebuilding social life and culture (Wilk 2019, 224–315). Years of assimilation led to a transformation in the definition of the Lemko house: for many, it no longer existed as the traditional wooden house in the Lemko

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Region, but instead endured in the practice of religion, rituals, language, and the memory of former ways of life, forming a component of Lemko identity regardless of their new, unfamiliar places of residence (Sitek 1996, 154–159).

This article aims to define the characteristics of the contemporary Lemko house through an analysis of recent residential projects in the Carpathians inspired by the traditional Lemko house – *chŷža*. The article focuses on the preservation and reinterpretation of elements of architectural heritage within the context of contemporary functional and cultural needs. A distinction between the concepts of “house” and “*chŷža*” is adopted from an identity-based perspective, along with the identification of features constitutive of Lemko residential architecture. Contemporary architectural projects were analysed in terms of their formal and spatial references to the *chŷža* archetype, as well as the elements that have been adapted in response to broader social and technological changes. As a result of the conducted research, a definition of the contemporary Lemko house is proposed as a form of dynamic continuation of heritage, combining enduring components of tradition with elements shaped by the realities of the present day.

### *State of research*

To understand what constitutes the contemporary Lemko house, it is first necessary to consider the universal meaning of the concept of home as a symbolic and emotionally charged space. Home is often described as a “psycho-spatial entity and an emotional warehouse” (Easthope 2004, 134) as it accumulates human experiences. At the level of visual representation, this concept is articulated through a stable and recurrent set of elements, a pattern clearly reflected in children’s drawings. Children most often depict a home according to a similar schema, typically including windows, a door, a roof with a chimney, and a garden enclosed by a wooden fence. Moreover, these illustrations frequently portray not only the building itself, but also its inhabitants, its surroundings, and even atmospheric conditions (Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2017, 23).

In the context of migration, home becomes a synthesis of the culture of the place of origin and the new context, facilitating the preservation of tradition and identity (Ślusarczyk, Pustułka 2017). In addition, home functions as a place of shelter, security, and family bonds, which links it to concepts of identity, belonging, and stability (Gatkowska 2016, 125, 126). From the perspectives of psychology and sociology, home is perceived as an emotionally embedded space that enables the expression of feelings and the reduction of tensions (Kubacka 2018, 201).

The Lemkos’ attachment to their homesteads in the Carpathian region is reflected in the Lemko language, which distinguishes between the terms “home/house” (дим/dim) and “*chŷža*” (хыжа). Prior to displacement, these terms were used interchangeably to refer to the same type of building – a wooden house constituting the space of family life. After the war, these two concepts became differentiated, and *chŷža* came to symbolise the past, associated exclusively with the lost Lemko Region. Under the new post-displacement conditions, Lemkos no longer used the term *chŷža* to describe

their new dwellings in the so-called Recovered Territories. Over time, however, as they formed ties to their new surroundings, these dwellings gradually came to be perceived as a “home” (Misiak 2015, 68).

During the interwar period, research on the Lemko Region intensified with some attention given to the analysis of traditional architecture (Udziela 1934; Falkowski, Pasznycki 1935; Pieradzka 1939; Reinfuss 1946, 1990). According to research, the traditional *chŷža* was characterised by a wooden log construction and an elongated, rectangular form set on a stone foundation (Smoczkiwicz 1968, 8). Windows, small and divided into smaller panes, provided daylight to the living interiors. The ratio of window area to floor area in the main living room reached as much as 1:12, which constituted a high level of daylight for houses dating from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Tłoczek 1985, 75). Houses were covered with high, steeply pitched roofs featuring a characteristic eaves overhang, initially thatched with straw and later covered with wooden shingles (Gosztyła, Mikrut 2017a, 207–210). In the eastern part of Lemko Region, single-building farmsteads predominated (Fig. 1) (Tłoczek 1985, 74, 75), whereas in the west residential and farm functions were separated (Fig. 2) (Reinfuss 1946, 190, 191). The living area occupied one third or up to one half of the livestock/utility part (Tłoczek 1985, 74). According to research, most residential buildings had a one-and-a-half-bay layout (Prokopek 2019, 224; Gosztyła, Mikrut 2017b). The residential part, accessed through the entrance hall (*sien*), contained a stove that formed the functional centre of the house (Fig. 3) (Kępa 1971, 25). Larger houses featured interiors arranged in an enfilade (through-passage) layout. Traditional finishing materials included wood, clay, and straw. Wooden floors were used in the utility areas, while clay floors were applied in the residential spaces (Priadka 2005, 14). The cottages were decorated with limewash, with floral or geometric motifs painted around windows and doors (Gosztyła, Mikrut 2017a, 208–210; Ostrowińska 1986, 126–128). In the Lemko–Boyko borderland, houses were painted in shades of red (Falkowski, Pasznycki 1935, 60).

Thus far, research on Lemko architecture has focused primarily on the historic fabric of *chŷža* dwellings and Orthodox churches, while post-displacement transformations of Lemko architecture remain insufficiently explored. Analyses that consider the changing needs of the community and their impact on the contemporary form and function of houses are largely lacking. As a result, there is no clear definition of the contemporary Lemko house, which makes it difficult to identify its characteristic features and to assess its significance within the cultural heritage of the region.

### *Methods*

After Operation Vistula, between 1948 and 1958, only a small number of Lemkos returned to their ancestral lands in the Carpathians, where they encountered numerous difficulties. The lack of official consent for organised re-emigration, along with conflicts with new settlers arising from cultural differences and property disputes, significantly hin-

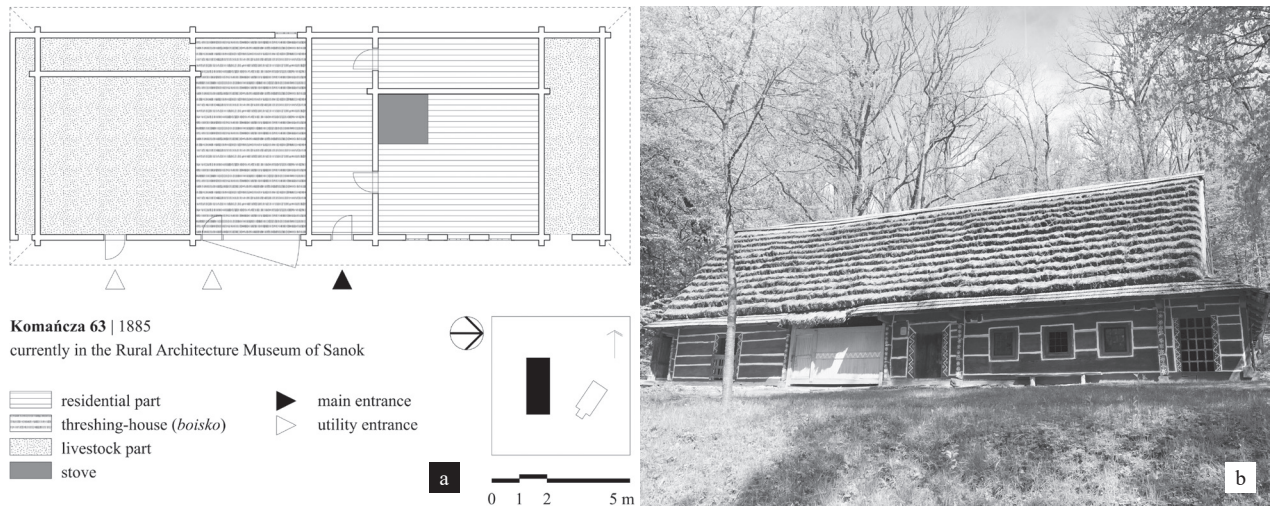


Fig. 1. Chyža from Komańcza 63 (Команча/Команча) from 1885:

- a) plan and orientation of the house (elaborated by D. Cieplak, source: The National Institute of Cultural Heritage, wooden house from Komańcza, the green card, ref. no. PL.1.9.ZIPOZ.NID\_N\_18\_BK.20641, PL.1.9.ZIPOZ.NID\_E\_18\_BK.217622),  
 b) contemporary view, house in the collection of the Museum of Folk Architecture in Sanok (photo by D. Cieplak)

II. 1. Chyža z Komańczy 63 (Команча/Команча) z 1885 r.:

- a) rzut i usytuowanie chyży (oprac. D. Cieplak, źródło: Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa, chałupa z Komańczy, karta zielona, sygn. PL.1.9.ZIPOZ.NID\_N\_18\_BK.20641, PL.1.9.ZIPOZ.NID\_E\_18\_BK.217622),  
 b) zdjęcie współczesne, budynek w kolekcji Muzeum Budownictwa Ludowego w Sanoku (fot. D. Cieplak)

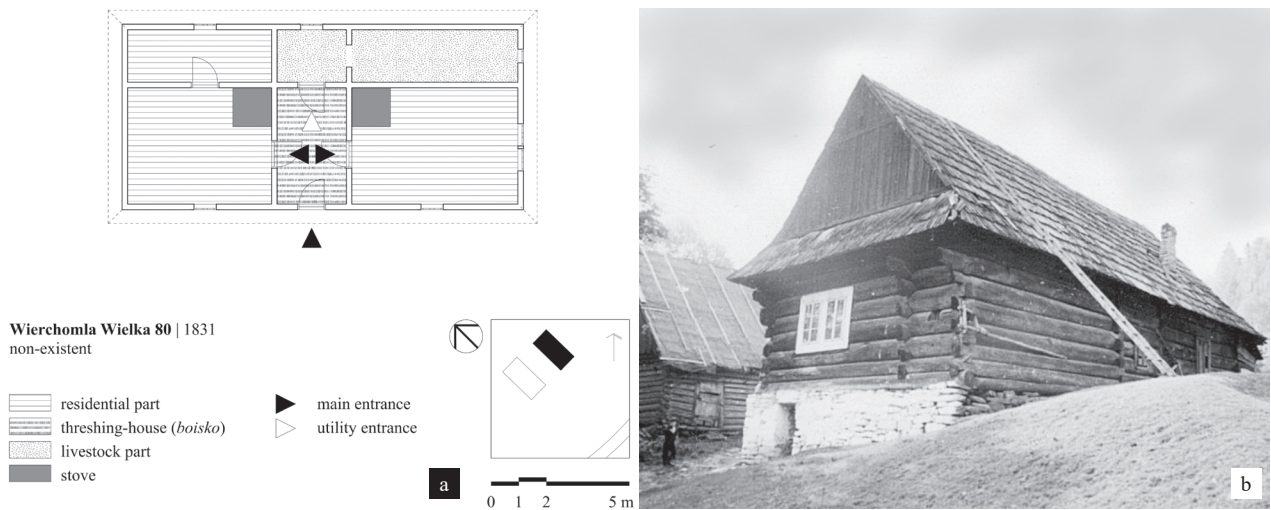


Fig. 2. Chyža from Wierchomla Wielka 80 (Верхомля Велика/Verchoml'ja Velyka) from 1831:

- a) plan and orientation of the house (elaborated by D. Cieplak, source: The National Institute of Cultural Heritage, wooden house no. 80, the green card, ref. no. PL.1.9.ZIPOZ.NID\_E\_12\_BK.383127),  
 b) archival photograph from 1965 (source: The National Institute of Cultural Heritage, wooden house no. 80, the green card, ref. no. PL.1.9.ZIPOZ.NID\_E\_12\_BK.383127)

II. 2. Chyža z Wierchomli Wielkiej 80 (Верхомля Велика/Verchoml'ja Velyka) z 1831 r.:

- a) rzut i usytuowanie chyży (oprac. D. Cieplak, źródło: Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa, dom (chałupa) nr 80, karta zielona, sygn. PL.1.9.ZIPOZ.NID\_E\_12\_BK.383127), b) zdjęcie archiwalne z 1965 r. (źródło: Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa, dom (chałupa) nr 80, karta zielona, sygn. PL.1.9.ZIPOZ.NID\_E\_12\_BK.383127)

dered this process (Kalbarczyk 2005, 72). Return entailed not only the reconstruction of the material and symbolic home but also adaptation to a transformed social environment. Settlement took place primarily in the ruins of former homesteads or through the construction of new, multi-storey houses that met contemporary standards (Koprowski 2016, 147, 206).

The redefinition of the Lemko house, as a key element of identity, thus became a necessity in the wake of post-war resettlements. The destruction of traditional architecture, together with diverse post-displacement experiences, has led to contemporary variations in how the concept of home is understood, reflecting the unique trajectories and living realities of the Lemko community. In order to examine the

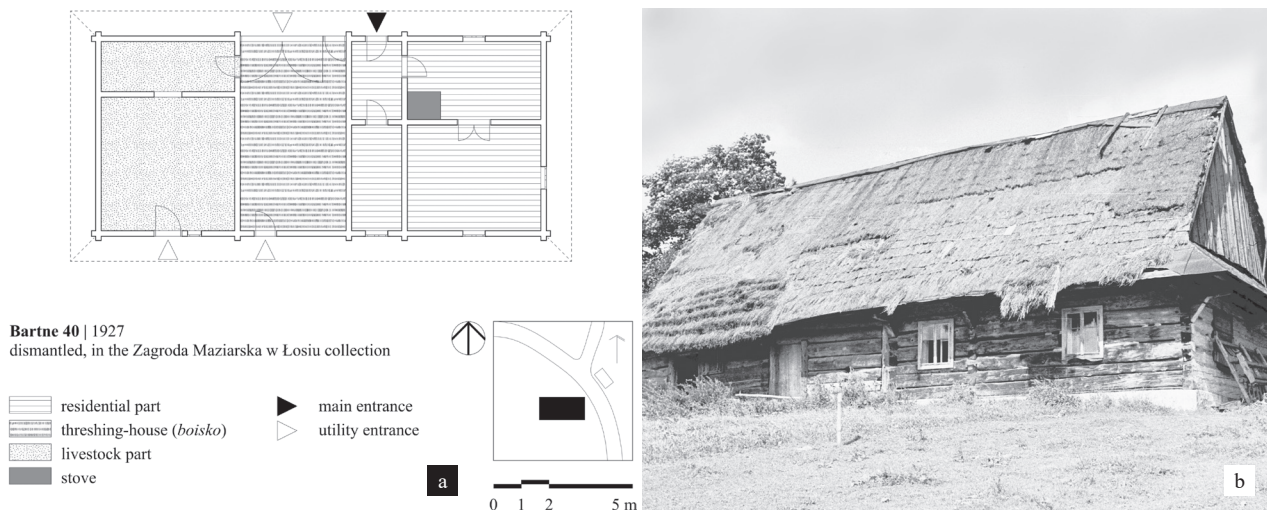


Fig. 3. Chyža from Bartne 40 (Бортне/Bortne) from 1927:

- a) plan and orientation of the house (elaborated by D. Cieplak, source: The National Institute of Cultural Heritage, farmstead no. 40, the white card, ref. no. PL.1.9.ZIPOZ.NID\_N\_12\_ZE.58482, PL.1.9.ZIPOZ.NID\_E\_12\_ZE.29004; Muzeum Dwory Karwacjanów i Gładyszów w Gorlicach. Conservation study. Elaborated by J. Rotko, 2021),  
 b) archival photograph (photo by W. Grzesik, source: Zagroda Maziarska w Łosiu, ref. no. N8-2-07-1)

II. 3. Chyža z Bartnego 40 (Бортне/Bortne) z 1927 r.:

- a) rzut i usytuowanie chyży (oprac. D. Cieplak, źródło: Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa, zagroda nr 40, karta biała, sygn. PL.1.9.ZIPOZ.NID\_N\_12\_ZE.58482, PL.1.9.ZIPOZ.NID\_E\_12\_ZE.29004; Muzeum Dwory Karwacjanów i Gładyszów w Gorlicach. Opracowanie konserwatorskie. Proj. J. Rotko, 2021),  
 b) zdjęcie archiwalne (fot. W. Grzesik, źródło: Zagroda Maziarska w Łosiu, sygn. N8-2-07-1)

current meaning of a Lemko house, eight interviews were conducted with individuals connected to the Lemko community<sup>1</sup>. The study involved the following participants: Aleksandra Chlipała (AC), owner of a house inspired by a chyža in Uście Gorlickie; Olena Duć-Fajfer (ODF), professor at the Jagiellonian University, Lemko literary and language scholar, Lemko poet; Bogdan Karel (BK), Lemko woodcarver; Iwona Iskra-Krynicka (IIK), architect; Natalia Małecka-Nowak (NMN), Lemko activist, president of the Ruska Bursa Association and board member of the Lemko radio station lem.fm; Michał Szymko (MS), PhD, Lemko art historian; Agnieszka Stopka (AS), Lemko from Czarna Woda; Dawid Zdobylak (DZ), Lemko painter and Doctor of Fine Arts. The perspectives of the participants enriched the analysis with cultural and identity-related dimensions. The respondents reflected on the general meaning of home, the role of the traditional chyža in the context of forced displacement, and the characteristics that a contemporary Lemko house should possess. This enabled a comprehensive approach to the research problem. In addition, architects commented on their contemporary projects inspired by the archetype of a Lemko house: Bartłomiej Homiński (BH), PhD, designer of the studio in the Beskid Niski; Maciej Jagielak (MJ), PhD, specialist in ecological construction and designer of the house in Uście Gorlickie; Marcin Janusz (MJan), designer and owner of the house in Oderne; Piotr Krynicky (PK), Lemko architect and translator, de-

signer and owner of the house in Leszczyny; Norbert Mech (NM), designer and owner of a house in Nowica.

### *Towards a redefinition of the Lemko house after displacement*

When defining the concept of home, the study participants most frequently referred to security, intimacy, and a place to which one returns. Home was also repeatedly described as an element of identity that provides direction in life (AC, ODF, NMN, DZ). According to Małecka-Nowak, home connects history with the present – as a Lemko living in a house with a Jewish past, she preserved symbols of the former inhabitants, such as a mezuzah and a menorah, and juxtaposed them with Lemko icons. She also noted that while a house is inseparably linked to its location, it reflects the character of its inhabitants, their interests, passions, and origins (NMN). Chlipała, on the other hand, emphasised that the boundaries of the home extend beyond its walls, encompassing both the surrounding landscape and the local community (AC).

The respondents unequivocally associated chyža with the space of Lemko Region, while emphasising that the Lemko house is constructed through language and culture (ODF, DZ, MS). Małecka-Nowak also noted a clear distinction between her grandparents' place of residence before displacement, a chyža in Vanica (Баниця/Вануця<sup>2</sup>) near Izby (Ізбы/Izby), and their home after returning to the

<sup>1</sup> The interviews were conducted between 2023 and 2025, and the collected research material is stored in the author's archive. The study was carried out with the approval of the Senate Ethics Committee of the Cracow University of Technology (decision no. 11 of 13 May 2025).

<sup>2</sup> To emphasise the region's cultural identity, the author uses Polish place names supplemented with the original Lemko spelling in Cyrillic and its Latin transliteration.

Lemko Region, a house in Gorlice, which did not resemble a *chŷża*, yet remained “Lemko” through the continued cultivation of tradition (NMN). Duć-Fajfer and Zdobylak further emphasised that in the Lemko language, the expression “to go to the *chŷża*” (іти до хыж/ity do chŷż) carries the same meaning as “to go home”, not necessarily to a dwelling resembling the archetypal Lemko cottage. In Polish, by contrast, this distinction is more clearly articulated for them (ODF, DZ). Iskra-Krynicka, aware of this semantic nuance, acknowledged that she associates *chŷża* primarily with Lemko architecture from the pre-displacement period (IIK). For some, the contemporary use of the term *chŷża* to refer to one’s own home constitutes a conscious act of reconstructing cultural identity (AS).

An interesting aspect of Lemko building practices in the Western Borderlands, identified in the study by Dawid Zdobylak, is the more or less conscious reference to wooden cottages from the Lemko Region through decorative elements. On masonry houses formerly inhabited by the German population, white-and-brown stripes appeared, inspired by the lime-washed joints between wooden logs. The addition of new rooms further resulted in the elongation of the building mass, bringing its proportions closer to the *chŷża* archetype (DZ).

### *Contemporary projects inspired by chŷża*

When working in the Lemko Region and engaging with the local heritage, the architect is not merely a designer of new forms, but also a mediator in the reconstruction of the identity of place. In designing buildings inspired by the past, the architect makes a conscious choice regarding how deeply to draw on historical models and to what extent they should be adapted to contemporary expectations (NM). Each new project emerging within the Lemko landscape is situated in a place marked by a complex history, where the material traces of former culture have largely been erased by forced displacement, changes in ownership, and years of neglect. Architecture can thus become a tool for recovering memory – not only by reproducing forms, but also by re-interpreting them in ways that restore their meaning within a contemporary context.

When asked to define the contemporary Lemko house and to identify its defining characteristics, the respondents emphasised the complexity and multidimensional nature of this concept. For many of them, the contemporary Lemko house is not merely a building inspired by the traditional *chŷża*, but above all a space that refers to local identity – both materially and spiritually (ODF, NMN, DZ). Some participants argued that a contemporary *chŷża* should constitute an authentic interpretation of traditional forms within new realities (BK, MJan), drawing on historic village layouts (IIK, PK) as well as local materials such as wood, stone, and clay (MJ). Janusz noted that a contemporary home cannot be reduced to a stylistic quotation but rather, it should express the spirit of its time by combining traditional elements with modern technical and aesthetic solutions (MJan). In spatial terms, such a home should be located within the Lemko Region (MS), however, the spiritual and identity-related dimensions of the Lemko

home can also be constructed beyond its geographical boundaries (DZ).

For many, the contemporary Lemko house is above all a space rooted in culture and language – a place where values, traditions, and memory of the past are transmitted (ODF, NMN, DZ, MS, PK). Duć-Fajfer emphasised that a truly Lemko home is one in which the Lemko language is spoken and family bonds are nurtured, and that its essence lies deeper than architectural form alone (ODF). The phenomenon of constructing buildings stylised as Lemko *chŷžas* yet lacking an authentic connection to local culture, often created for tourism or commercial purposes, was also criticised (NMN). Małecka-Nowak further reflected on the problem of the disappearance of traditional architecture and the absence of systemic solutions supporting building practices grounded in local heritage. Consequently, the contemporary Lemko home remains an open category, oscillating between material references to the past and a metaphorical understanding of home as a space of cultural continuity.

Projects inspired by *chŷża* therefore constitute not only an aesthetic reference to the past, but also an attempt to anchor new buildings within a place of strong identity. They involve a balancing act between fidelity to tradition and the need to adapt to a changing world, between material heritage and the requirements of contemporary users (MJan, MS). While the role of the architect in this process is crucial, many designers emphasise that the awareness of investors, who decide to build in areas of cultural and landscape value, is equally important. It is the investors who initiate the design process, articulate their expectations, and thereby shape the direction of dialogue with the architect (MJan, BH). Jagielak nevertheless pointed out that investors often select from familiar and readily available solutions, and that it is the architect’s task to propose alternatives rooted in the culture of the region (MJ).

The analysis of selected projects made it possible to examine this process, including the ways in which traditional forms are reinterpreted, the materials employed, functional solutions, and the ideas that shape the contemporary architectural expression of the Lemko house.

### *Architect’s own house in Nowica*

The house in the hamlet of Przysłup in Nowica (Новиця/Novycja) designed by Norbert Mech<sup>3</sup> was built on the site of a former Lemko farmstead, where the traditional *chŷża* had stood prior to the displacements. The building was located at a distance from the village centre, set back from the road and oriented gable-end towards it, which represents a departure from the local tradition of Przysłup and Nowica, where houses were most often positioned with their long side facing the road (APP, AG, Dorf Nowica in Galizien Jasloer Kreis, ref. no. 56/126/0/-/0897M).

<sup>3</sup> Concept design: Małgorzata Kural-Mech, MSc Eng. Arch.; Norbert Mech, MSc Eng. Arch. Architectural and construction project: Norbert Mech, MSc Eng. Arch. (architecture); Łukasz Sekuła, MSc Eng. (structural design); Marek Sadowski, MSc Eng. (electrical installations); Iwona Hartung-Lenard, MSc Eng. (sanitary installations).

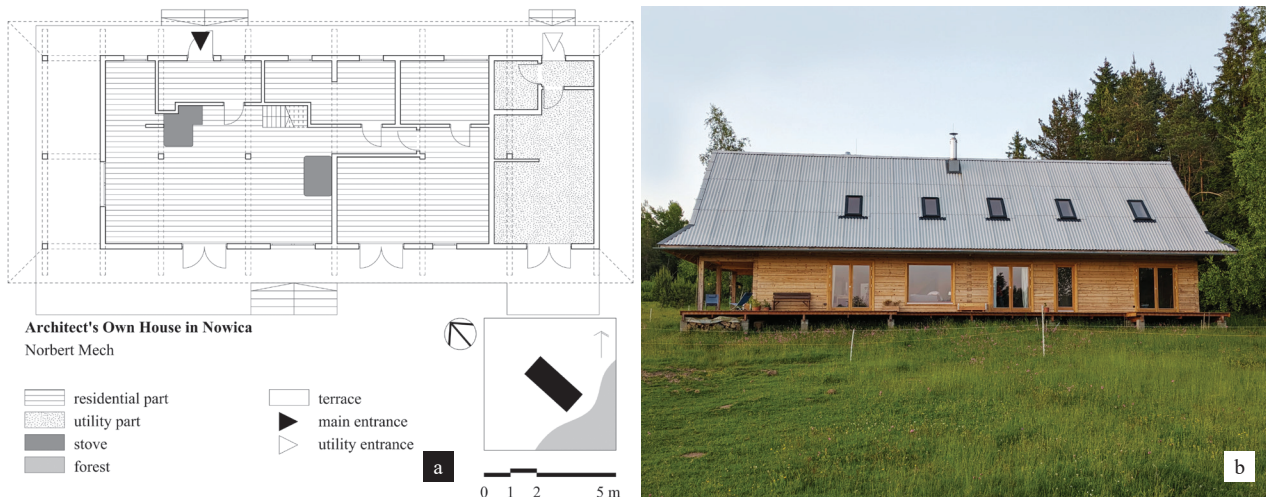


Fig. 4. Architect's own house in Nowica: a) plan and orientation of the house (elaborated by D. Cieplak), b) contemporary view (photo by N. Mech)

Il. 4. Dom własny w Nowicy: a) rzut i usytuowanie domu (oprac. D. Cieplak), b) zdjęcie współczesne (fot. N. Mech)

The architect consciously referred to the regional architecture still preserved within the fabric of the locality. Both the choice of wood as the primary structural material and the applied technical solutions draw on local carpentry traditions. The traditional Lemko house was constructed using log construction, typically in its simplified form with projecting log ends (*ostatki*), extending beyond the corners. In the case of this house, log construction was also employed, albeit in a more compact form – without projecting ends, with the corners finished using a dovetail joint. Although this solution departs from the traditional technique used in the region, it remains consistent with the principles of local carpentry craftsmanship while also influencing the building's aesthetics, giving it a more unified and contemporary character.

The proportions of the building (width/length = 0.35) correspond to those of a Lemko house from Komańcza (relocated to the Museum of Folk Architecture in Sanok), although the threshing-house (*boisko*) was omitted in favour of enlarging the residential part. The house nevertheless includes a separate utility section with an independent entrance. The ridge height exceeds that of the traditional *chŷża*, as the upper floor has been adapted for residential use, significantly altering the character of the building through the introduction of roof-lights and a projecting gable. The protruding eaves, extending 125 cm, form a covered perimeter walkway and provide roofing for a terrace raised above ground level. The roof was covered with modern, environmentally friendly Eternit (fibre-cement roofing), constituting a contemporary reinterpretation of a material widely used in post-war adaptations of Lemko buildings. A gabled roof (*przyczólek*), characteristic of Lemko architecture, was incorporated into the design. The interior is bright due to extensive glazing, while natural wood predominates in the finishes. The central element of the living area is a stove with integrated seating – a contemporary interpretation of the traditional chimney-corner (*zapiecek*) (Fig. 4).

Although the project is not considered to be a direct reconstruction of a Lemko house, its form, spatial layout, and structural logic clearly reference it. The owner does not re-

fer to the building as a *chŷża* itself, emphasising its contemporary character, however, he regards the use of this term as a compliment, indicating that the house integrates well with its surroundings and local tradition.

#### House in Uście Gorlickie

The project in Uście Gorlickie (Устя Руске/Ustja Ruskie), designed by Maciej Jagielak and Anna Leoniak<sup>4</sup>, is a contemporary interpretation of the Lemko *chŷża*. The design combines inspiration drawn from the region's historic architecture with modern technological solutions and an ecological approach. The building, characterised by an elongated plan and a gable roof, refers to the traditional division into residential and utility parts with a wide entrance hall (*sień*), while not attempting to be a faithful reconstruction. Its proportions (width/length = 0.45) reflect the archetypal features of the *chŷża*. The house was oriented parallel to the road, contrary to the traditional gable-end orientation, and set apart from compact village development, reflecting contemporary residential preferences (APP, AG, Dorf Uście Ruskie in Galizien Jasloer Kreis, ref. no. 56/126/0/-/1725M).

The structural system of the house is based on a timber frame, with the wall cavities infilled with straw bales. This material choice results both from an intention to use natural and locally available resources and from the need to achieve adequate insulation performance. Importantly, the technology of straw-bale wall construction does not derive from local tradition – rather, as the designers explain, it was adopted from American models of natural building, indicating a deliberate fusion of regional inspiration with global influences. The ground floor of the building was slightly

<sup>4</sup> Concept design: Maciej Jagielak, PhD Eng. Arch.; Anna Leoniak, MSc Eng. Arch. (Marimo Architects). Architectural and construction project: Joanna Maria Kornecka, MSc Eng. Arch., Maciej Jagielak, PhD Eng. Arch. (architecture); Łukasz Kosecki, MSc Eng. (structural design); Wojciech Potoczek, MSc Eng. – Woinstal (sanitary installations); Karol Liszka, MSc Eng. – KLK Projekt (electrical installations).



Fig. 5. House in Uście Gorlickie: a) plan and orientation of the house (elaborated by D. Cieplak), b) the house during construction (photo by M. Jagielak)

II. 5. Dom w Uściu Gorlickim: a) rzut i usytuowanie domu (oprac. D. Cieplak), b) dom w trakcie budowy (fot. M. Jagielak)

elevated above ground level, responding both to the site's topography and to the need for protection against moisture – a solution characteristic of traditional rural buildings.

The gabled roof of the building and protruding eaves extending 78 cm are covered with green metal sheeting. Although this solution departs from the historic roofing materials traditionally used in Lemko houses, it represents a compromise between contemporary technical requirements and the desire to reference regional aesthetics. Large glazed openings, introduced at the owners' request, provide abundant daylight to the interior, creating a clear contrast with the traditional *chŷża*, in which small and restrained window openings predominated (Fig. 5).

The interior is maintained in a natural aesthetic, characterised by the extensive use of wood and ecological materials. It reinterprets traditional Lemko interiors, in which wood and earthen floors formed the basic elements of finish. The central feature is a clay stove made by a local stove-maker. Although the house draws on traditional form, it represents a conscious reinterpretation adapted to contemporary needs. Ecological principles were fundamental to the project – natural materials were used, and construction work was carried out partly by hand, with the involvement of the owners and local craftsmen.

Both the location on a detached plot and the functional character of the house depart from the historical, compact village layout, which once fulfilled an important social function. At the same time, the owners' activities, such as establishing an orchard and cultivating the land, refer to the traditional relationship between people and their environment. The design thus demonstrates not only a formal transformation of the *chŷża*, but also a shift in its socio-cultural function, aligning with the principles of permaculture and natural building.

#### *Architect's own house in Leszczyny*

The design of Piotr Krynicki's own house in the village of Leszczyny (Ліщыны/Liščŷny) constitutes another con-

temporary reinterpretation of the traditional Lemko house<sup>5</sup>. The building was erected on the site of a former farmstead (APP, AG, Dorf Nowica in Galizien Jasloer Kreis, ref. no. 56/126/0/-/0897M), thereby embedding the project within the historical settlement and landscape context of the village. It is thus the only example discussed in the article of a contemporary house realised in situ. The building is oriented parallel to the road, in accordance with the local spatial pattern. It was constructed on a stone foundation, allowing it to be adapted to the natural slope of the terrain. Its elevated position in relation to the valley enhances the exposure of the southern façade and strengthens the visual opening towards the surrounding landscape.

The form of the building is based on a rectangular plan and is covered with a gable roof with a 45° pitch, clad in metal sheeting. A distinctive design feature is a porch-like space running around the house along the line of the eaves. When the sliding shutters are closed, it reads as a single, compact volume with an eaves-less character. As a result, the building appears to have different proportions when viewed from the road than from the southern, terrace-oriented side. This solution refers to the so-called *zachata* (or *prychata*) – a storage space located between the roof edge and the wall – and the *priczyna* – a type of external corridor or portico conceived as a duplication of the external wall (Reinfuss 1936, 5; 1946, 195). The width-to-length ratio of the enclosed volume is 0.63, while that of the actual external walls of the residential part is 0.53. Unlike the archetypal Lemko *chŷża*, which was a single-storey building, the project described here incorporates a full-height usable upper floor.

The building's elevations are distinguished by a differentiated surface finish – dark, vertically arranged timber cladding on the gable walls and light-coloured plaster on the side elevations. This contrast lends the building a contemporary character while simultaneously referencing the

<sup>5</sup> Concept design and architectural and construction project: Piotr Krynicki, MSc Eng. Arch.

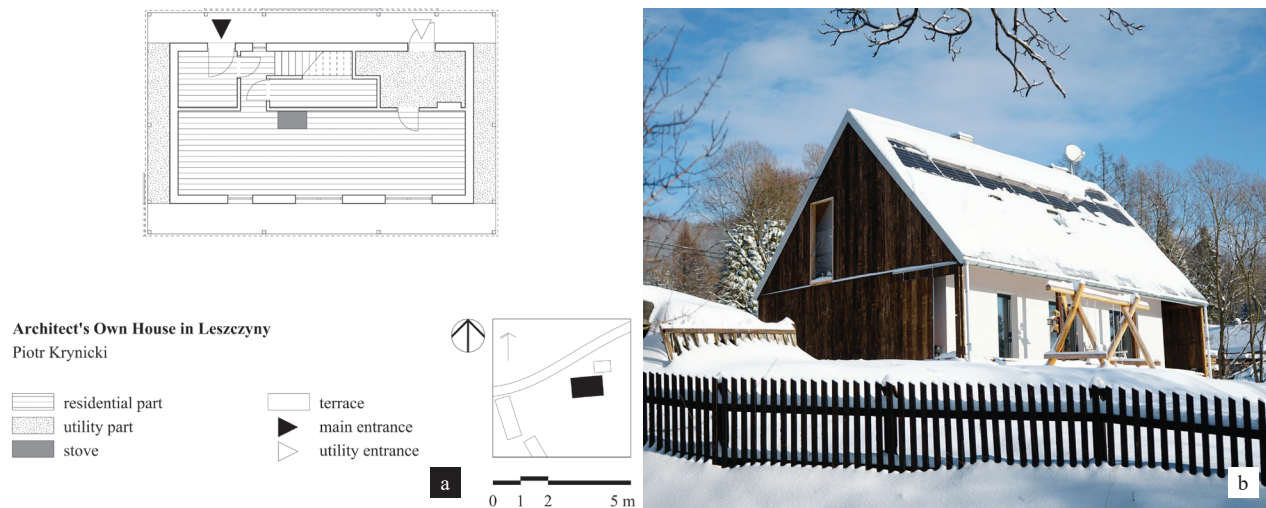


Fig. 6. Architect's own house in Leszczyny: a) plan and orientation of the building (elaborated by D. Cieplak), b) contemporary view (photo by I. Iskra-Krynicka)

Il. 6. Dom własny w Leszczynach: a) rzut i usytuowanie domu (oprac. D. Cieplak), b) zdjęcie współczesne (fot. I. Iskra-Krynicka)

log-building tradition, in which natural timber was combined with whitewashed joints. It constitutes a subtle evocation of the aesthetic of the Lemko house, translated into a modern architectural language.

The southern elevation is extensively glazed: three large terrace windows open the interior towards the landscape and provide daylight to the living area. On the northern side, the entrance zone accommodates auxiliary rooms and vertical circulation – a separate entrance to the utility section is also provided. The living area is organised as an open plan, where the kitchen, dining space, and living room form a single spatial sequence, with a stove located at the centre (Fig. 6).

Krynicki emphasised that a key intention of the project was for the house to resonate with the village and its spatial structure. The building was positioned at a point closing a visual axis extending from the road, thereby becoming a significant landscape element within the local settlement structure. Moreover, the designer is of Lemko origin, and the Lemko language is used in the house in everyday life. It is precisely this identity-based dimension – which, as the architect himself noted, he considers sufficient – that allows the project to be regarded as a contemporary Lemko house. In this sense, the design goes beyond formal references to tradition, becoming an expression of cultural continuity and of personal engagement in its contemporary persistence.

### *Studio in Beskid Niski*

The studio project in the Beskid Niski by 9780 Architekci<sup>6</sup> is composed of two building volumes connected by a single roof and separated by an unheated entrance hall (*boisko*). When the large shutters are closed, the building appears as an almost windowless structure. Although the

extensive glazing departs from the traditional Lemko house, characterised by small windows, it responds to the needs of contemporary users. Despite its formal inspiration drawn from the Lemko *chŷża*, the building does not serve either a residential or an agricultural function and instead, it is conceived as a space dedicated to work.

Homiński emphasised that the site location had a decisive influence on the project, both in cultural and technical terms. Difficult access to the plot, requiring the crossing of a ford, determined the choice of timber as the primary structural material due to its light weight and ease of transport. The clay-rich, poorly permeable subsoil necessitated raising the ground floor to protect the building from moisture, a solution that recalls historical construction practices. Due to the lack of precise locational data, it is not possible to relate the building's orientation to the traditional village layout. The width-to-length ratio of the enclosed volume is 0.31, which corresponds more closely to eastern patterns of Lemko architecture.

The selection of materials in the analysed building was guided by criteria of durability and the reduction of maintenance requirements. The roof covering was made from a single sheet of titanium–zinc metal, eliminating the risk of leakage at joints. The eaves, with a projection of 75 cm, were designed as part of a plain gabled roof without a gablet, a feature that distinguishes this project from both historical and contemporary interpretations of the Lemko house. The façades are clad in untreated larch boards, whose surfaces undergo a natural patination process in accordance with the design intent. The plinth and external paving were executed in locally sourced sandstone, while the steel elements were left in their raw, galvanised finish, further minimising the need for subsequent maintenance (Fig. 7).

The interior, like the external form, is characterised by simplicity and functionality. The bright space, dominated by timber, supports creative work, while large areas of glazing open it towards the surrounding landscape. The design harmoniously combines contemporary architectural language

<sup>6</sup> Concept design and architectural and construction project: Bartłomiej Homiński, PhD Eng. Arch., and Michał Jezierski, MSc Eng. Arch. (9780 Architekci). General contractor: BATPOL.

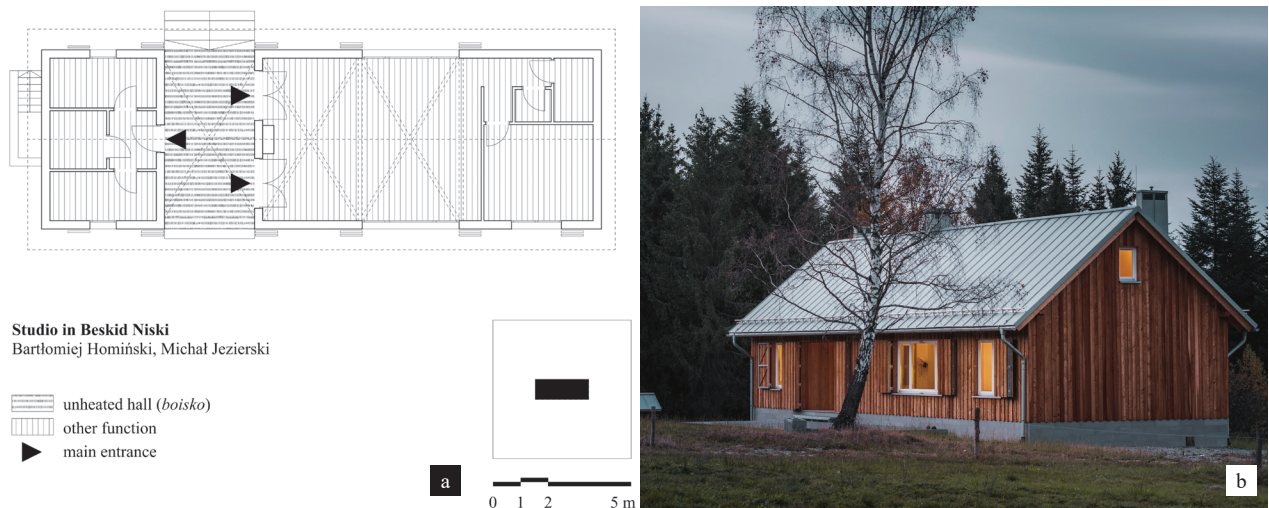


Fig. 7. Studio in Beskid Niski: a) plan and orientation of the building (elaborated by D. Cieplak), b) contemporary view (photo by B. Kutniowski)

Il. 7. Pracownia w Beskidzie Niskim: a) rzut i usytuowanie pracowni (oprac. D. Cieplak), b) zdjęcie współczesne (fot. B. Kutniowski)

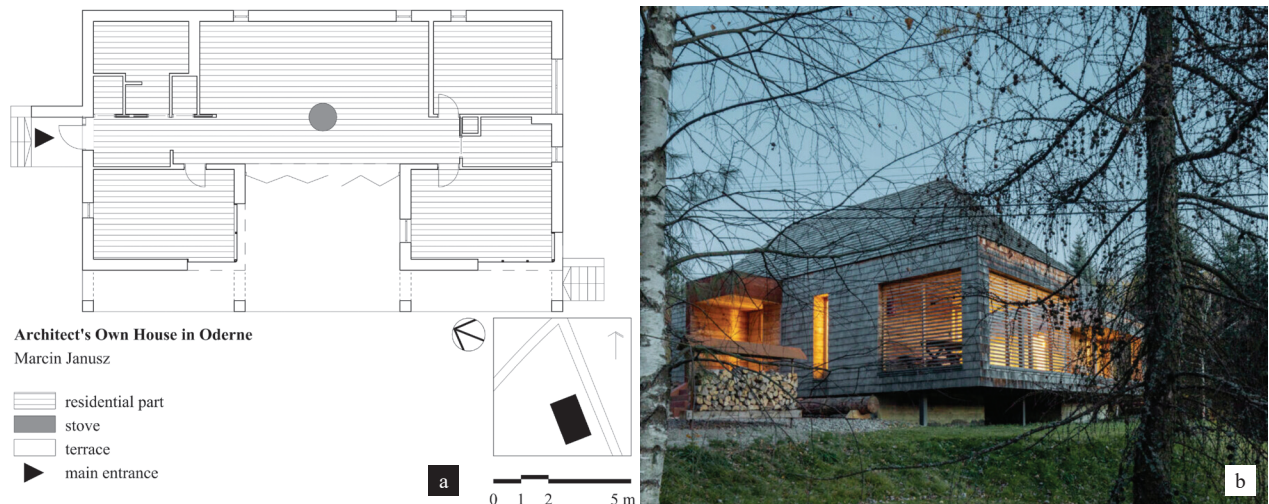


Fig. 8. Architect's own house in Oderne: a) plan and orientation of the house (elaborated by D. Cieplak), b) contemporary view (photo by M. Grabowiecki, E. Mrozińska)

Il. 8. Dom własny w Odernem: a) rzut i usytuowanie domu (oprac. D. Cieplak), b) zdjęcie współczesne (fot. M. Grabowiecki, E. Mrozińska)

with the principles of vernacular architecture, responding to the current challenges of building in the Lemko Region.

#### *Architect's own house in Oderne*

The final project discussed is the house designed by Marcin Janusz<sup>7</sup> in the hamlet of Oderne (Одерне/Oderne), located in the municipality of Uście Gorlickie in the Beskid Niski region. The building represents a contemporary interpretation of the traditional Lemko house. It retains the key characteristics of vernacular architecture, reworked to meet

the needs of contemporary users. The house serves a residential function, with an unused attic and a large terrace that opens the building towards the surrounding landscape – an element absent from the traditional *chÿża*.

Its proportions (0.55) refer to those of smaller Lemko houses. Originally conceived as an elongated rectangular plan (0.25), the layout was ultimately formed into a U-shape, allowing for the creation of an 80-square-metre internal terrace. The orientation of the gable towards the road recalls the historical village layout (APP, AG, Dorf Uście Ruskie in Galizien Jasloer Kreis, ref. no. 56/126/0/-/1725M). Although the façades are clad in timber, they do not reproduce the traditional log construction, and the roof, with a 45° pitch, lacks the characteristic eaves. A reference to tradition is provided by the use of wooden shingles – not only on the roof but also on the façades (Fig. 8).

<sup>7</sup> Concept design: Marcin Janusz, MSc Eng. Arch. Architectural and construction project: Marcin Janusz, MSc Eng. Arch. (architecture); Wolarek i Zatorowski (structural design). General contractors: Hazbud Gorlice; El-Bud Gorlice; Dan-Ko.

The central element of the interior is a fireplace, referencing the traditional stove located in the main living room. These adaptations highlight an effort to integrate regional patterns with contemporary architectural solutions. While this project departs most markedly in its form from the traditional Lemko *chýža*, it remains consistent with the principles of regional architecture through the use of natural materials and its harmonious relationship with the Lemko landscape.

## Discussion

The analysis of contemporary projects inspired by the traditional Lemko house reveals a range of design approaches that combine elements of the region's architectural heritage with the requirements of contemporary construction. The table below (see Table 1) presents 23 features characteristic of traditional Lemko houses and examines their presence (“+”), absence (“-”) or partial/modified occurrence (“±”) in

Table 1. Comparison of the characteristics of the traditional Lemko *chýža* and the degree of their presence in contemporary projects (elaborated by D. Cieplak)

Tabela 1. Zestawienie cech tradycyjnej chyży łemkowskiej oraz stopnia ich obecności we współczesnych realizacjach (oprac. D. Cieplak)

Analysed architectural features	Nowica (1)	Uście Gorlickie (2)	Leszczyny (3)	Beskid Niski (4)	Oderne (5)
Location in the Lemko Region	+	+	+	+	+
Residential function	+	+	+	-	+
Separate utility function	+	+	+	-	-
Residential function limited to the ground floor	-	-	-	-	+
Orientation consistent with the archetypal village layout	-	-	+	-	+
In situ location on the site of former buildings	-	-	+	-	-
Unheated entrance hall ( <i>boisko</i> )	-	+	-	+	-
Timber construction	+	+	-	+	+
Log construction	+	-	-	-	-
Raised ground floor	+	+	+	+	+
Stone foundation	-	-	+	+	+
Elongated rectangular form (width/length = 0.3–0.6)	+	+	±	+	±
Gable roof	+	+	+	+	-
Roof covered with thatch or wooden shingles	-	-	-	-	+
Roof with extended eaves	+	+	+	+	-
Gabled roof ( <i>przyczólek</i> )	+	+	-	-	-
Side canopy ( <i>zachata</i> ) or porch ( <i>priczyna</i> )	-	-	+	-	-
Small windows	-	-	-	-	-
Divided window glazing	-	-	-	-	-
Decorative detailing around doors or windows	-	-	-	-	-
Centrally located stove	+	+	+	±	±
Wooden or clay interior	+	+	+	+	+
Clay floor in the residential part	-	+	-	-	-

Legend: (+) – feature present, (-) – feature absent, (±) – feature partially present or occurring in a modified form.

five selected case studies: Nowica (1), Uście Gorlickie (2), Leszczyny (3), Beskid Niski (4) and Oderne (5).

The analysis reveals several distinct trends. All of the contemporary projects discussed above are located within the territory of the historical Lemko region, and the majority serve a residential function (1, 2, 3, 5), indicating continuity in the original role of the *chýža*. In many cases, the separate utility section has been omitted (4, 5), although in some projects it has been retained – in Nowica and Uście Gorlickie – while in Leszczyny it takes the form of a contemporary reinterpretation of the so-called *zachata* and *priczyna*. In all of the analysed houses, the residential function extends across both the ground floor and a usable attic, with the exception of the house in Oderne, where it is limited to the ground floor.

Orientation in relation to the traditional village layout was preserved in only two cases (3, 5), while the remaining projects (1, 2, 4) were located at a distance from the compact settlement structure, often on plots of a recreational or residential character. The house in Leszczyny is the only one among the analysed examples that was built on the site of a former *chýža*.

From a constructional perspective, timber buildings predominate, however, log construction was employed only in the Nowica project. The remaining examples are based on timber-frame or hybrid structural systems. All of the houses feature a raised ground floor, referencing solutions historically used in the region in response to high ground moisture. Stone foundations are present in the buildings in Oderne, Leszczyny, as well as in the studio in the Beskid Niski, recalling the traditional foundations of Lemko houses.

The massing of each house is based on an elongated rectangular plan, with width-to-length proportions ranging from 0.3 to 0.6. An exceptional case is the project in Oderne, where the unusually long volume was articulated into a U-shaped form, altering its proportions towards those more closely associated with western architectural models. Gable roofs are present in most of the analysed examples (1, 2, 3, 4), although their material finishes vary. Traditional wooden shingles were used only in Oderne, while in the remaining cases – metal roofing (2, 3, 4) already encountered prior to the post-war displacements – or Eternit sheets (1), recalling the appearance of post-war altered Lemko houses, were applied. Protruding eaves appear in four projects (1, 2, 3, 4), whereas the traditional gablet is present only in the buildings in Uście Gorlickie and Nowica.

The interiors of the houses differ markedly from traditional examples in terms of daylighting. All of the analysed projects abandon small windows in favour of large areas of glazing, responding to contemporary expectations regarding daylight and openness to the landscape. In two cases (3, 4), sliding or operable shutters were employed, allowing the large, glazed openings to be closed, which constitutes a modern reinterpretation of earlier practices aimed at protecting interiors from cold and excessive light. Traditional window glazing subdivisions were not retained in any of the buildings, nor were decorative details around doors and windows, which have disappeared entirely from contemporary design.

The stove, as a key element of the Lemko house, appears in the majority of the analysed projects: as a clay stove in

Uście Gorlickie, a stove with seating in Nowica, a fireplace in Oderne, and a kitchen stove in Leszczyny. Its location at the centre of the living area indicates the preservation of its integrative and symbolic role. Interior finishes are most often executed using natural materials, primarily timber and clay, representing a continuation of traditional finishing techniques.

From an identity-related perspective, the house in Leszczyny stands out most clearly. Its designer is of Lemko origin, uses the Lemko language in everyday life, and regards the building itself as a contemporary manifestation of a Lemko house. In the remaining cases, cultural references are primarily formal, structural, or landscape-based in character.

## Conclusions

Contemporary projects inspired by the Lemko house demonstrate that the house is no longer merely a material structure, but also a carrier of cultural, emotional, and identity-related meanings. In the examined examples, tradition is neither uncritically preserved nor entirely abandoned – instead, it becomes the subject of conscious transformation, a dialogue with the past, and a response to contemporary needs. Architecture thus functions as a mediator between memory and modernity, while the boundary between reconstruction and reinterpretation becomes increasingly blurred.

The Lemko house in its contemporary interpretation is not a closed category but assumes diverse forms depending on the intentions of designers and inhabitants. For some, its Lemko character resides in language, ritual, and family narrative, for others, in the deliberate use of forms, proportions, or materials rooted in local tradition. Regardless of the strategy adopted, each of the analysed projects represents an attempt to renew the relationship with heritage – both through its presence and through its transformation.

In light of the analysis conducted, the following definition may be proposed: a contemporary Lemko house is a residential space rooted in the cultural context of the Lemko Region, in which tradition and identity are articulated through both architectural form and social, symbolic, and linguistic relationships. It may assume diverse forms – from material reinterpretations of the *chýža* archetype to immaterial acts of cultural continuity – yet it invariably refers to Lemko identity through its relationship with place, memory, and community.

The conclusions presented open up a broad research perspective, indicating the potential applicability of the adopted methodology – combining an analysis of the house archetype, its symbolic meanings, and contemporary reinterpretations – to other minority, ethnic, and refugee groups. Such an approach makes it feasible to capture both the diverse definitions of home within particular communities and the role of contemporary architecture in processes of identity reconstruction and the sustaining of cultural heritage.

In the Lemko context, this line of inquiry will be continued through research planned in Lower Silesia – a region of post-war settlement for a significant part of the Lemko community. An analysis of this area will allow for an examination of the phenomenon of the “house in exile” and an assessment of the extent to which elements of the Carpathian

archetype have been transferred, as well as how contemporary projects engage with Lemko tradition when confronted with the local, complex cultural context of Lower Silesia, shaped by both pre-war heritage and post-war migrations. These studies also have an applied dimension, as they may provide a basis for formulating planning and design guide-

lines for rural areas inhabited by Lemkos. Understanding contemporary strategies for reinterpreting tradition makes it possible to identify architectural characteristics that not only integrate into the cultural landscape but also support processes of reconstruction and revitalisation of Lemko spatial identity.

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## Streszczenie

### *Łemkowski dom – architektura zapomnianej tożsamości.*

#### *Tradycyjna chyża, jej współczesne reinterpretacje oraz rola architektów w transmisji dziedzictwa Łemków*

W artykule podjęto problem redefinicji łemkowskiego domu w kontekście powojennych wysiedleń oraz współczesnych prób nawiązywania do tradycyjnej architektury regionu. Dom rozumiany jest tu jako przestrzeń głęboko zakorzeniona w tożsamości kulturowej, rodzinnej i emocjonalnej, której znaczenie w społeczności łemkowskiej uległo istotnym przekształceniom po drugiej wojnie światowej. Szczególna uwaga poświęcona została pojęciu chyży – archetypu budownictwa mieszkalnego Łemków – oraz jego współczesnym reinterpretacjom w architekturze jednorodzinnej.

Celem autorki była identyfikacja cech konstytutywnych dla współczesnego domu łemkowskiego oraz rozpoznanie sposobów, w jakie architektura może pośredniczyć w transmisji dziedzictwa. W analizie uwzględniono zarówno aspekty materialne (forma, proporcje, detale, materiały), jak i niematerialne (język, tradycje, relacje z otoczeniem), ukazując napięcie między wiernością tradycji a adaptacją do współczesnych potrzeb mieszkańców. Podstawą opracowania były wywiady z przedstawicielami społeczności łemkowskiej oraz z architektami projektującymi budynki inspirowane łemkowskim archetypem.

Zarysowane w artykule strategie projektowe rozpięte są między zachowaniem wybranych cech tradycyjnych a ich świadomym przekształceniem. Podkreślona została także rola języka, pamięci i krajobrazu jako współtworzących sens domu. W rezultacie zaproponowana została definicja współczesnego domu łemkowskiego jako przestrzeni kulturowej ciągłości – osadzonej w regionie, lecz otwartej i dynamicznej, w której tradycja realizuje się nie tylko poprzez formę architektoniczną, ale także poprzez trwanie wspólnoty, języka i kultury.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dziedzictwo architektoniczne, dom łemkowski, chyża, Łemkowie/Rusini, architektura mniejszości