

POLAND – HERITAGE @ RISK!

In Poland the heritage items and urban districts, listed in the register of monuments and found in legally protected areas or in private as well as public collections are included in the government legislation concerning cultural objects and sites dated 15 February 1962. Its text has been frequently revised, including as recently as in 1999.

The Minister of the National Cultural Heritage together with the General Conservator of Monuments, are working based on this new Act (based on the remarks and comments of the parties interested in the subject).

Those responsible for the protection of cultural monuments are:

- at the central, government level – the General Conservator of Monuments with his Office and the Minister of Culture and National Heritage with related institutions dedicated to protecting cultural heritage places, monuments and sites.
- at the provincial district level – the Monument Protection Agency acting within district detachments of 16 provinces administrated by their responsible Provincial Heritage Conservators. These detachments have their own delegations placed in 34 locations at village and county levels.
- the responsibility of taking care of heritage places lies with the owners and users.

Principal Dangers

In Poland dangers to monuments vary with type and kind of monuments:

- Fire hazard to heritage built of wood.
- Dangers created as a consequence of modernisation as well as the transformation of the ownership of industrial heritage sites.
- Dangers to military cultural heritage places.
- Deterioration of heritage places due to the lack of use or the lack of sufficient funding.
- Danger of theft and smuggling.

Scale of danger and prevention

1. Fire hazard concerns above all the many still preserved wooden churches, built between the 14th to 19th centuries, including now and then buildings of highest heritage value (among them a complex of wooden churches in Malopolska prepared for nomination to the World Heritage List or the unique Orthodox churches in south east Poland). Yearly in Poland, 3 to 5 of these wooden churches fall prey to fire. This danger also overtakes generally somewhat preserved and populated cultural rural wooden buildings and even palaces. The conservation of heritage items made of wood lies in above all proper fireproofing and use. In Poland educational programmes and training courses are implemented, whose goal is to minimise the danger in this field. Unfortunately there are known cases of deliberate burning of wooden churches motivated by a desire for the acquisition of space to build a larger church occasionally activated by ideological

reasoning. Incidents like this are the subject of legal investigations, called on by the church hierarchy to combat these acts of vandalism.

2. The changes in the political climate in Poland following 1989, caused revolutionary changes both in the organisation and the ownership of factories, whose construction and equipment, based on their 19th century origins, were suddenly rapidly modernised or liquidated. This is especially the case with textile factories, foundaries and mines, as well as workers' housing. Proper documentation, renovation and finally adaptation is a long, ongoing process, demanding wise policy from the state and local administration.
3. Taking into consideration Polish history of the last 300 years, there are large numbers of fortresses and fortifications representing various ideological as well as military styles (Polish, Russian, Austrian, French and Prussian) in our country. Not long ago they were army property, but presently, as a result of staff reduction and modernisation in the army, they have not been renovated or rebuilt but simply left alone, and finally destroyed. Heritage conservators often make an effort to find new tenants suitable to the primary purpose and historic values of these heritage places.
4. As a result of the political changes in Poland, many heritage places lost their tenants or changed hands. In rural areas, this concerns mainly government farms, wherein a very small percentage of the tenants used to take care of the heritage buildings and land they occupied. The government agency responsible for the state farming property systematically finds the new tenants, but faces serious difficulties concerning the integrity of this heritage. In Poland, the process of privatisation is not legally defined, while legally unclear situations make it difficult to find new tenants. In the cities, most cultural heritage places are reprivated, but the owners frequently do not have money for renovation. The system, which helps in the renovation and conservation of heritage monuments in Poland, needs clarification in terms of ownership and an increase in government funding. The above concerns are in regard mainly to the heritage places from the 19th century, particularly in the cities near the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Potential changes are relative to legal regulations and the modernisation of cities.
5. The danger of theft pertains mainly to private and church collections, archives (including libraries) and public collections (particularly museums). It has especially grown over the last few years, and is connected with Poland's central geographical situation in Europe, the freedom of transfer and anachronistic alarm systems. Similar to fire danger, the danger of theft can decrease when more funds are allocated to security systems, the education of potential tenants (users) and persons responsible for heritage places. A project concerning security and education is in the hands of the special Centre for Public Heritage Collections in co-operation with the police.