

How to Shape the Identity of Young People by Implementing an Educational Project? In the Footsteps of a Lost Long Toed Shoe in Old and Contemporary Krakow*

Jak kształtować tożsamość młodzieży, realizując projekt edukacyjny?
Śladami zaginionej ciżemki po dawnym i współczesnym Krakowie

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Abstract: The publication was subordinated to the issues focused on the proposal to read the works of Antonina Domańska in primary schools. The continuation of research on the significant role of regional Polish education is visible here, demanding an answer to the question - how to help school youth to "take root" in a specific topographic and socio-cultural reality in a multiculturally global world? The potential of the cultural heritage of the region is shown on the example of the novel *The yellow long toed shoe* [Polish: *Historia żółtej ciżemki*] by Antonina Domańska, which, based on facts, tells the story of a golden long toed shoe found behind the altar in St. Mary's Church. The literary image of Krakow is complemented by outstanding historical figures and at the same time role models for contemporary students, i.e.: King Casimir IV Jagiellon surrounded by the royal family, Jan Długosz – the famous chronicler, Szymon of Lipnica – a monk of the Bernardine Order – a future saint, Veit Stoss – a great artist, sculptor of the monumental altar in St. Mary's Church. The activities described in the project, carried out in the classroom and as part of a Polish language trip around Krakow, constitute a proposal for "reading" Krakow as a particularly valuable place, a symbol of Polishness perpetuated in literature and culture, as also seen by contemporary youth at school and college.

Keywords: primary school students, college youth, identity, Antonina Domańska, *History of the yellow long toed shoe*, Krakow, Veit Stoss altar, Polish language, cultural heritage of the region

Abstrakt: Publikacja została podporządkowana problematyce skupionej wokół propozycji czytania twórczości Antoniny Domańskiej w szkole podstawowej. Widoczna jest tutaj kontynuacja badań nad znaczącą rolą polonistycznej edukacji regionalnej, domagającej się odpowiedzi na pytanie: jak w wielokulturowym, globalnym świecie pomagać młodzieży szkolnej w „zakorzenianiu” się w konkretnej rzeczywistości topograficznej i społeczno-kulturowej? Potencjał dziedzictwa kulturowego regionu



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ukazany został na przykładzie powieści *Historia żółtej cizemki* Antoniny Domańskiej, która, opierając się na faktach, opowiada dzieje złotego trzewika znalezione go za ołtarzem w kościele Mariackim. Literacki obraz Krakowa dopełniają wybitne postaci historyczne i jednocześnie wzorce osobowe dla współczesnych uczniów, tj.: król Kazimierz Jagiellończyk w otoczeniu rodziny królewskiej, Jan Długosz – słynny kronikarz, Szymon z Lipnicy – zakonnik oo. bernardynów – przyszły święty, Wit Stwosz – wielki artysta, rzeźbiarz monumentalnego ołtarza w kościele Mariackim. Opisane działania projektowe, realizowane w klasie i w ramach wycieczki polonistycznej po Krakowie, stanowią propozycję „czytania” Krakowa jako miejsca szczególnie wartościowego, symbolu polskości utrwalonego w literaturze i kulturze, widzianego także z perspektywy współczesnej młodzieży szkolnej i akademickiej.

Słowa kluczowe: uczniowie szkoły podstawowej, młodzież akademicka, tożsamość, Antonina Domańska, *Historia żółtej cizemki*, Kraków, ołtarz Wita Stwosza, język polski, dziedzictwo kulturowe regionu

INTRODUCTION

A contemporary teacher of Polish is in a sense like a housekeeper who combines the content of the subject with the experience of the student. How should we understand today, in a figurative sense, this housekeeping attitude and the care of a teacher managing cultural heritage in the context of Polish studies? Remembering that the word culture is related to the Latin *cultura*¹, meaning “cultivation of the land,” this process of “management” can be connected with the prudence of the teacher, who decides how to use what he has in his disposal (cultural resources of the region and teaching aids). Therefore, the use of Polish literature and culture during classes and shaping the student’s attitude of responsibility for the student’s closest environment (home, land and homeland), which is so important in the process of forming the identity of young people, should be considered important goals of humanistic education; in accordance with the philosopher’s assumption that: “He who knows what his purpose is has clarity in his mind. And this is called wisdom” (Tischner 2008, 108).

To continue with Tischner’s language: The wisdom of management is not so much the ability to select means to achieve a goal, but the ability to accurately discover the hierarchy of things, matters, and values. The wisdom of management is a way of thinking that creatively links nature with the values of life.

Every farmer becomes attached to his world – his household. What does this attachment consist of? It is simply expressed in the words: I am from here. Where are we from? We are from here. This is my home, my farm, my homeland (Tischner 2012, 218).

From the ability to carefully observe people and the surrounding world of culture, interesting conclusions can be drawn for the practice of Polish studies implementation, including the discussion of school readings.

¹ Dictionary recognition allows us to state that: *gospodarny* – “able to manage well.” while *gospodarka* means “to run a farm; to manage,” but also in the figurative sense “to decide on the way of using what one has;” *gospodarski* – “appropriate for a good host.” “A business perspective on something” (Gospodarować 2021, 273). See the entry: *kultura*, in which as many as seven meanings of this word were distinguished (Kultura 1997, 621).

Assuming that an essential element of getting to know and understanding oneself is getting to know one's closest place on earth, one's small homeland – one must consider how, in an interesting way, to conduct Polish lessons, focused on creating bonds with other people and with the place where students live. How can we introduce young people to the world of humanistic values and the contemporary socio-cultural life in a specific local environment and region in an interesting way?

2. SHAPING THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF A YOUNG PERSON

It is worth emphasizing the influence of school education, especially literary and cultural education, on the formation of a young person's cultural identity. The impact of the values of each culture on a person is related to their upbringing. Following Henryk Skorowski's opinion (Skorowski 2006, 96), it can be noted that the entirety of regional cultural values in a particularly close (direct) way creates space for a person to think and develop in the plane of truth (intellectual development), beauty (spiritual development), goodness (moral development) and holiness (religious development). The belief that "culture is a set of qualitatively different values, the recognition and explanation of which, but also the evaluation of which, take place in acts of consciousness, which consist of both the cognitive and intuitive-emotional-volitional spheres of a person (...) requires the activation of the whole person" (Myrdzik 2006, 133-134). What does it mean? According to Barbara Myrdzik, it means that "the communality of culture does not spread without the participation of learning and imitation, without the internalization by the individual of specific norms and patterns, assessments and behaviours" (Myrdzik 2006, 133-134). Therefore, culture, which has both an individual dimension (it constitutes the internal, mental equipment of a person) and a social dimension (it favours building bonds and interpersonal communication) can give a sense of home in the world. In relation to a person, this means that they are shaped by a common tradition and language, but they contribute "themselves and their own concepts" to the interpretation of cultural phenomena (Myrdzik 2006, 134). A decisive role in this is played by person's upbringing, understood as the process of integrating a person with the values fundamental to the national community, also for European as well as global integration.

The fundamental tasks of Polish language education are often associated with activities that make young people put questions about their identity: Who am I? Where am I from? What are my roots? What tradition do I identify with? Let us note that these are questions about a person's cultural identity built on a common origin and culture, a way of life, and the approach to tradition. Leaving aside detailed considerations on the subject of "identity," understood as self-awareness, the ability to determine who one is, what group one identifies with, what is most important to an individual, let us analyze ways of shaping the socio-cultural identity of a young person? The matter becomes somewhat complicated if we consider the mutual interpenetration of the planes of local (regional) identity with identity and global and intercultural identity (Rypel 2021, 55-59).

A good organization of axiological education and a good relationship between the teacher and students play an important role in the process of introducing the student to the world of values present in various cultural texts, both those created in the past and today. Let us emphasize that the role of the teacher in the process of shaping the cultural identity of the student cannot be overestimated. He should be aware, as it was noted in the interwar period, that theoretical knowledge alone “does not take root in the soul.”

Today, especially in the view of the features of the world of “liquid modernity” defined by Zygmunt Bauman as “the culture of non-involvement, discontinuity and oblivion” (Bauman 2006, 14-15) it is worth helping the contemporary teenager find his way among the challenges of the global world, so that he feels “at home,” at home and “rooted,” and in consequence, happy. Regionally focused Polish education creates special opportunities to prepare a young person for the role of an active, responsible co-host of a region, a country or a wider community. “herefore – as Piotr Petrykowski notes – one of the fundamental goals of regional education is to shape in young individuals a sense of their own regional identity as an attitude of involvement in the functioning of their own environment and genuine openness to other communities and cultures” (Petrykowski 2003, 52).

Regionally focused Polish education should: on the one hand – be associated with shaping the attitude of national identity rooted in the “small homeland,” strong patriotic feelings, pride and national bonds; on the other hand – avoid the danger of arousing strong nationalist attitudes and separatist aspirations. The outlined tasks of the Polish language therefore require the selection of appropriate content and comparative treatment of various cultural texts. They primarily encourage the evaluation of literary texts in three important dimensions: regional, national and universal (Petkowska 1999, 141). Each region of Poland has its great distinguished compatriots, outstanding creators, places preserved in literature and culture. Biographies of (extra)ordinary people “from here,” their activities and works can today educate and help people “take root” in their “small homeland,” at the same time opening them to the values of national culture and also encouraging reflection on their own lives.

3. SELECTION OF SCHOOL READINGS FOCUSED ON THE VALUES OF THE “SMALL” AND LARGE HOMELAND

A particularly valuable educational reading, introducing primary school students to the literary image of the “small” and large homeland, was considered to be Antonina Domańska’s book – *The yellow long toed shoe* [Polish: *Historia żółtej ciżemki*] (Domańska 1971)². The choice was not accidental. The novel was first

² Other stories by the author and novels for children and young people written in the years 1909-1914 include: *Hanusia Wierzyńkówna* (1909), *Marysia z Grzegórzek* (1909), *Płaszcz królowej* (1910), *Paziowie króla Zygmunta* (1910), *Trzaska i Zbroja* (1913), *Krysia bezimienna* (1914). It is worth emphasising that *Historia żółtej ciżemki* (1913), discussed in detail here, is considered an

published in 1913, over a hundred years ago, when Poland was still under foreign partition. It is therefore not surprising that contemporary researchers of Domańska's literary output pay attention to the themes she raises, including: patriotic education for the future with respect for the past; childhood heroes, most often fictional, equally outstanding adults co-creating the proud history of Poland, taking part in important historical events for the country; education for national tradition, bringing closer the customs and traditions of the inhabitants of Krakow (Kosowska 2012, 41-45). The so-called retroactive reading is proposed, where retroactivity is "reading from the biography and work of Antonina Domańska important, inspiring, current content and messages, but also reading the writer's life and work into the cultural realities of the 21st century" (Wądolny-Tatar 2019, 8). The result of literary research, including discovering the relevance of the writer's novels, is the monograph *Re(constructions) of the past in the prose of Antonina Domańska*, which will certainly spark interest in teachers. It shows young and old the literary topography of Krakow, role models of historical figures and saints, examples of local and national patriotism combined with civic attitudes (Niemiec 2018, 7-10). In addition, the numerous educational values of Domańska's historical prose include: 1) the language, which in its lexical and stylistic layer lasted almost unchanged from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century; 2) the shaping of national identity – similarly to Henryk Sienkiewicz, the works of the Krakow writer became a socially approved idea of "strengthening hearts;" 3) the pursuit of responsibility by literary heroes, promoting the ability to behave boldly in critical situations (Kosowska 2012, 43-44). The strong position of the writer's work is evidenced by the number of over fifty editions of *Historia żółtej cizemki* in various publishing houses (since 1913) as a school reading in 1961, filmed by Sylwester Chęciński. The book has also seen a theatrical adaptation. The "absence" of an educationally valuable historical novel from the ministerial proposal for the 2017 school reading list is therefore justifiably surprising.

Can Antonina Domańska, who lived at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (1853-1917), be considered a regional artist? Probably yes. She was rooted in Krakow, although her work leads readers to the great homeland. As a curiosity, it is worth getting students interested in fragments of the author's biography, connected with Krakow in various ways. She lived here from the age of twelve, strongly marking her presence through creative, social and charitable activities and various family connections. Antonina Domańska was the daughter of physician Aleksander Kremer, niece of art historian Józef Kremer and architect Karol Roman Kremer; wife of Stanisław Domański, a physician and Krakow city councilor; aunt of the then famous poet Lucjan Rydel. Stanisław Wyspiański preserved the portrait of the outstanding author, although slightly distorted (caricatured), in *The Wedding* [Polish: *Wesele*], when he made her the prototype of Radczyni, a character skeptical of the intelligentsia's peasant mania (Wądolny-Tatar 2019, 8)³. This unfavorable

outstanding masterpiece of children's and young people's literature (Pietrzyk 2001, 197-202).

³ Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński wrote about Domańska in *Plotka o Weselu* "a temperamental kostyczka

literary image overshadowed the real image of a creative, charitably involved, and generally respected person.

In contemporary times Domańska should be included in the outstanding group of people recognized for Polish culture. One can reflect on the life of this colorful character at the writer's grave located at the Rakowicki Cemetery in Krakow or sit on a bench with her name and surname in Planty – the Krakow City Park. It is also worth taking an interest in the Żółta Cizemka Award, established on the centenary of her death (in 2017), founded by the Krakow Library, awarded to outstanding authors of works for children and young people.

The image of Krakow as an (extra)ordinary place, preserved in legend and in the pages of the novel *Historia żółtej cizemki*, will remain at the centre of the further argument. Both this mythical – intriguing image of the place and the real one, offering attractive places of interest to visit, merge into the experience of primary school students.

The choice of reading material consciously proposed by the teacher of Polish required detailed consideration of project activities focused on the historical novel *Historia żółtej cizemki* by Antonina Domańska and capturing the seventh-graders' abilities. Questions arose: how much time will be devoted to school work over the novel, and how much to homework? The students, future Polish language teachers, were already aware of the effort of organizing students' work with the school reading material in such a way so that it would appeal to specific teenage readers; introduce students to a text from a tradition that is distant today; bring them closer to the cultural heritage of the region thanks to the discussed content of the work and the place of residence of the young people.

4. "FIRSTLY – DON'T BE BORING," OR AN IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

From the philosophical inspirations of Father Józef Tischner, who often suggested how to live (experience) with humor and a gift of gab, comes a contemporary pedagogical recommendation: "Firstly – don't be boring" (Bonowicz 2010, 8). It became the motto of didactic classes, and at the same time it closely reflected the ambitions of students who began to develop literary and field journeys around Krakow at the beginning of the summer semester 2023/2024 as part of mid-year exercises in a Didactics of Polish literature and language course in primary school. The challenge for 2nd year students of Polish philology at UKEN in Krakow – future Polish language teachers, was associated with undertaking and developing a group project that would go beyond the classrooms in which they had previously observed and conducted Polish language lessons. The classes were designed as an innovative Polish language project: "In the footsteps of Wawrzus Skowronek," carried out as a joint task by the students of the Institute of Polish

and weredyczka (a woman who tells the truth regardless of the consequences)", known in the Krakow community for her sharp tongue and directness (Baluch 2017, 56).

Philology UKEN in Kraków and seventh-grade students of Primary School No.7 in Kraków to follow in the footsteps of the literary text *Historia żółtej cizemki* by Antonina Domańska.

It is worth explaining the idea of the project, included in the title of the publication, which guided the educational activities carried out. In the project method in Polish language education described in detail by Ewelina Strawa-Kęsek, one should appreciate the effective tool for developing socio-cultural competences of young people, assuming creativity of the pupils (Strawa-Kęsek 2015, 141-179)⁴. An interesting “four-step recipe for the project” assumes an implementation of the project method, including: 1) creating a situation motivating to read the set reading and a participation in the project, 2) appropriately “keeping the fire going.” This interest in the project was undoubtedly facilitated by a skillful distribution of accents on the content of the text – on the one hand concerning the past of Krakow, and on the other – contemporary times, close to the youth of today; 3) presentation of the effects of the activity; 4) (d) evaluation, i.e., an evaluation of educational activities. At the same time, it should be noted that the described didactic activities used elements of this method, i.e.: selection of an interesting reading material and a case to solve (searching for a lost shoe), planning and a division of work involving all team members, an observation of students’ interests and abilities, collection and preparation of teaching aids, and finally an evaluation of the project (students own statements). They turned out to be extremely inspiring, although the project in action was not free from minor shortcomings (e.g. organizational ones). “Thinking according to the project” sometimes involved overcoming unforeseen difficulties; it mobilized the students to perform many tasks in a short time, developed cooperation skills and shared responsibility for the safety of a group walking through a crowded city.

The stages of work on the text were well thought out in advance. Before starting the reading, the students were asked to perform a directed reading task, which dealt with marking especially those fragments that concern places in Krakow familiar to them and recorded in the historical novel by the writer who once lived “here” in Krakow.

Part I of the project was implemented at school. A two-hour Polish language lesson conducted in the seventh grade of primary school by a Polish teacher Irena Rejduch was to assess whether and to what extent the students had read the reading material, and also what they could read (understand) from it. The topic of the lesson was: “Will a modern teenager easily understand the content of the novel *Historia żółtej cizemki*? – elements of the world presented in the story.”⁵

The students were most intrigued by the main character Wawrzuś Skowronek, a poor but talented boy from the village of Poręba near Krakow. He could carve

⁴ Descriptions of interesting projects in Polish language education can be found in the study (*Więcej niż lekcja* 2023).

⁵ The lesson in the classroom was conducted on 7 May 2024, while the project in the field was carried out in consecutive weeks: 14th and 21st May 2024. They were accompanied by photographic documentation, of which a selection was posted on the Facebook pages of both educational institutions.

various figures in wood. Once, while busy carving, he forgot to look after the cows that unattended caused a lot of damage in the priest's field. Chased by the parish priest's servants, he got lost in the forest. After various adventures (i.e., bravely catching a thief, staying at and leaving a family of jugglers), he reached Krakow. Here, fate clearly smiled on him. First, he was taken care of by the Bernardine monk Szymon of Lipnica, who put him in the service of Jan Długosz. When the latter discovered the boy's sculpting skills, he sent him to learn the trade with master Wit Stwosz. Then after a few years, as the best student, he accompanied the artist in carving the St. Mary's altar and took part in the ceremony of its unveiling on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On that solemn day, 15 August 1489, he lost his yellow long toed shoe (particularly valuable to him, because it had been given to him in Vilnius by King Casimir himself) while putting the crosier into the hands of the sculpture of Bishop Stanisław, something that the apprentices assembling the altar had forgotten about earlier. One shoe slipped off the boy's foot and fell behind the altar. Unfortunately, it could no longer be retrieved. Wawrzus was left with the other shoe, which, from then on, he would wear on a ribbon around his neck and treat as his most precious treasure⁶.

During the lesson, the students' attention was drawn to the bracketing story structure of the novel, which is a literary intrigue in which the motif of the missing shoe is intertwined with reality. The students read aloud the report of the supervision of the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary from 1867, with great interest, "The altar was completely dismantled (...) Then the amount of dust that had accumulated over the centuries was moved and floated around, some important items were found, a shoe of a medieval worker covered in cobwebs, lost 400 years ago, was found... (...) Where did it come from? Who could it belong to? Was he a craftsman who used morocco leather shoes? Did he deliberately throw the shoe behind the altar? But why? Could an adult man have such a small foot? Or maybe it was a boy? Maybe it was a child?" (Domańska 1971, 6).

The journey into the world of school reading required answers to questions that once bothered the author of the novel and recognition of the features of the world presented in it: When do the events presented in the school reading take place? What historical figures appear in the novel? What interesting historical events are described in the book? Where does the action of the novel take place? Who is the main character of the work? Which adventures of Wawrzus are particularly worth remembering and why? What is the connection between the title and the content of the school reading? It is worth explaining that the titular *cizemka* of the story was understood as "soft leather shoes, shallow or with a low upper, often with elongated and upwardly curved toes, commonly worn in the 12th and 13th centuries" (Cizemka 1997, 183). There was also an intriguing suggestion to interpret this school reading as a mysterious and full of secrets treasure, which, like... a yellow (golden) *cizemka* – should be protected from being lost (being forgotten), because it has many benefits to offer contemporary readers,

⁶ In conversations with students about the famous lost long toed shoe in literature, it is worth using the interesting study by Krakow author Alicja Baluch (2012, 6-9).

especially the young ones⁷. The next part of the project activities was subordinated to this idea, which aimed to carefully “look at” selected places in Krakow recorded in the school reading. The materials could concern the Old Town and the area where the students live. For this purpose, they could rely on already known Krakow legends, e.g. *The Wawel Dragon and the Wise Shoemaker* (Polish: *O smoku wawelskim i mądrym szewczyku*), *Sigismund's Bell* (Polish: *O dzwonie Zygmunta*), *The Wawel czakra* (Polish: *O czakramie*), *The King Krak* (Polish: *O królu Kraku*), *The legend of Wanda* (Polish: *O pięknej i dzielnej królownie Wandzie*), *The Footprint of Queen Jadwiga* (Polish: *O stopce królowej Jadwigi*) (Adamczewski 2021) and various studies on: a) historical figures appearing in the text, i.e. the historian Jan Długosz, Szymon of Lipnica, King Casimir IV Jagiellon and his family; b) the artist Veit Stoss – his biographical facts, interesting information about the altar of St. Mary's Church in Krakow.

A week was set aside for the project, so that the students could comfortably reflect on the task, gather materials, think about and propose a route for a trip around Krakow following in the footsteps of *Historia żółtej ciżemki*. An idea of a project participant – an attentive walker – who is exploring the city once again, and yet with a both “fresh”⁸ and exploratory look was considered worth implementing.

Part II of the project was carried out in the open. Krakow became a place distinguished by the literary traces of the hero – Wawruś Skowronek. The boy's path from the village of Poręba to Krakow “is both a road to walk and a life journey of the hero, who gradually acquires the goods most valuable to him, and in the end, thanks to his talent and work, builds his own identity” (Czabanowska-Wróbel 2009,10). Krakow, considered the centre of Polishness, gradually became important with time. In Domańska's work, the gradual learning of an unknown place is depicted in a downright exemplary way: “You see. The city in front of us is called Krakow” (Domańska 1971, 77). It is accompanied by the method of questions of the unaware boy and answers of people who know the city, e.g.: “Oh bother... And what is that? This huge... – The biggest church in Krakow; the church of the Virgin Mary” (Domańska 1971, 78). Late medieval Krakow is shown from the moral perspective, as the seat of kings – King Casimir IV Jagiellon surrounded by his sons and wife Elizabeth, but also as a seat of prominent residents of the city, including: Jan Długosz (the king's sons tutor, the author of *Chronicles*); St. Szymon of Lipnica, a monk of the Bernardine Fathers – a future saint who cares for the fate of the poorest; Veit Stoss – a great artist, a woodcarver of the most magnificent work of medieval art – the altar in St. Mary's Church.

The proposed educational activities served to extend students' knowledge of their small homeland and strengthen their sense of local belonging. Field trips were combined with creative play activities. The students prepared exercises and attractive “stops” – selected places where the excursion participants stopped for longer, read

⁷ The suggestions of Alicja Baluch, a researcher of children's and youth literature, who suggested interesting ways of analyzing set books in schools (Baluch 2017), were considered didactically inspiring.

⁸ The model here was the outlook of a pilgrim stopping at the threshold of a myth and of strolling city dweller. See Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek (2009, 234-243).

selected fragments of the novel, solved rebuses, crosswords and quizzes related to the read text. The following “stops” were visited: “Pilgrim” (Florian Gate), “The Wiłów Family” (Main Market Square and Cloth Hall), “Monastery and Church of the Bernardine Fathers,” “Wawel,” “Veit Stwosz” (the artist’s house), “Veit Stwosz altar in St. Mary’s Church.” A walking tour from the school building to the indicated places was proposed. The first stop, “Pilgrim,” drew the students’ attention to the figure of Black Raphael – a villain and a thief who received a well-deserved punishment. The students were asked to draw a portrait of a wanted criminal. The Krakow Market Square was another important place where students recalled numerous Krakow legends and traditions related to them as described in the book by A. Domańska. The trip participants also reached Wawel Hill, one of the seven places on Earth endowed with a chakra, to touch the wall with the legendary stone, then, within the walls of the royal residence, they talked about King Casimir IV Jagiellon and his royal family and acted out improvised scenes from the novel, which were watched and applauded by tourists. Then the students stopped in front of the Bernardine Monastery, where Wawrzuś was found by Father Szymon of Lipnica, who was the first to offer him shelter. The future saint – the patron saint of Krakow and the academic youth – “was buried under the threshold as the most miserable sinner” (Domańska 1971, 78), which greatly surprised the seventh-graders. The last stage of the tour in the footsteps of the novel’s characters took the project participants to the Wit Stwosz House, where students created selected figurines (e.g. angels) from a modeling compound. The last important place to visit was St. Mary’s Basilica with the outstanding work of Master Wit. In this holy place, the young people could take a closer look at the monumental altar and then present interesting facts about the work of the great medieval woodcarver⁹. Walking along the streets of the unique city of Krakow, which is a symbol of Polishness for many, they tried to capture in practice the meanings and values contained in the school reading and the important cognitive directive – “you have to know what you grow from” (Jędrychowska 2009, 35).

CONCLUSION

The project activities briefly discussed focused on reading Antonina Domańska’s historical novel shaped the identity of young people by reinforcing their bonds with their closest socio-cultural environment. They also provided personal models: a just and wise ruler; a chronicler and an intellectual monk devoting his life to the poor, a benefactor; an artist distinguished by extraordinary diligence and perseverance. In such a perception of the role of the school, operating in the specific home environment of the student, a special emphasis was placed on: a) duties of the school and teachers of Polish studies; b) shaping the student’s identity; c) education in the unique values of the “small” homeland and “treating the homeland as the centre of the world” (Yi-Fu 1987, 189). It is worth noting that the need to form young

⁹ The altar in St. Mary’s Church, its literary image and significance in education and culture, will be the subject of separate considerations, hence only a reference to this important place appears here.

people's regional identity in the face of the processes of worldwide globalization was strongly emphasized by the Ministry of National Education, which in 1995 issued the document *Regional Education. Cultural Heritage in the Region*. It was emphasised at the time: "A strong sense of regional identity is the most important path leading to an identification with the great homeland through rooting in the small one" (*MEN o edukacji* 2000, 24). It was rightly assumed that "an effective protection of what is closest, requires education" (*MEN o edukacji* 2000, 4). Let us note that the current core curriculum wrongly omits the issue of regional education, based on building a bond between the student and the place of his residence. Due to the importance of the process of "rooting" young people in their "small" homeland, it is worth calling for the restoration of formal provisions in the field of education in literature, language and culture – the cultural heritage of the region – to school practice. The written statements collected from students on the project under discussion, which clearly left a permanent place in the consciousness of future Polish teachers, also speak in their favour. In total, they see a great potential for didactic and educational activities that combine the practice of reading and the culture of the region inhabited by the student, when they list the following features of the implemented project: 1) "a great way to engage students in learning through play and physical activity," 2) use of local resources (specific geographical locations that have historical and cultural significance), 3) integration of knowledge from various school subjects, i.e. the Polish language, history, geography, mathematics, and art; young people see how knowledge is combined with practice and helps to understand the world better, 4) the value of education conveyed by intrigued students, involving them in active participation in games and outdoor activities related to the content of the set book, 5) emotional involvement of project participants, which serves the comprehensive development of students and is a creative way of spending time¹⁰.

John Paul II once drew attention to the need for "wise management" of the culture of the region and the nation as fundamental values of a person living in a topographically defined community, where tradition, history and modernity coexist. The words of the saint express the timeless universal message that man is the heir, the host and the continuator of the cultural heritage that he co-creates. Today, let us recognize them as a particularly important request of the former resident of Wadowice and the Polish Pope: "Before I leave – I ask you to accept once again with faith, hope and love this entire heritage, which is called 'Poland,' (...) – so that you never doubt, tire or become discouraged, – so that you do not cut the roots from which we grow" (Modzielewski, Sadzik and Szumska 1980, 235).

¹⁰ I collected written statements from eight students a week after the project had ended. During that time, targeted conversations with students about the Polish language trip were also conducted. It is no exaggeration to say that the statements of seventh-graders allow us to think effectively about didactic projects that help contemporary teenagers understand the content of the set reading and, thanks to culture, understand themselves and the world around them.

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