Polish Intangible Cultural Heritage List

Niematerialne Dziedzictwo Kulturowe
Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa
WARMIA DIALECT AS A CARRIER OF ORAL TRADITIONS

Depositaries: native residents of Warmia, contemporary residents of the Southern Warmia region, Izabela Lewandowska, Edward Cyfus, Łukasz Ruch
Location: Southern Warmia
Domains: Oral traditions and literature
Date of origin: 15th-18th century
Year of inscription to the National List: 2016
The Warmia dialect was formed as a result of various linguistic phenomena overlapping one another — starting from the Old Prussian language, through the language of German and Polish settlers, Old Polish that was widespread across the Prussian land in the early modern era, to Germanisms introduced in the 19th century.

The Warmia dialect was mostly spoken at home, by Poles and Germans alike. This made it easy for neighbours to communicate with one another. The situation changed after the Second World War. Until the war, the Warmia dialect was considered to be a variety of the Polish language. After the war, however, it came to be associated with the German language and almost disappeared in the subsequent period. When Warmiaks began leaving for Germany and aspired to modernity, the tradition, including the language of ancestors, was left behind. Only from the 1990s onwards can we observe a return and willingness to rediscover the local dialect of Warmia.

Rather than making it compulsory for everyone to learn the Warmia dialect, it is a better idea to enable the local residents to get to know and understand particular words, phrases, short texts and dialogues. In this way, they will acquire some knowledge about traditional customs, values and mindsets of previous generations. Valuable elements of the cultural heritage will thus be transferred to the modern, globalized society.

The protection and popularization of the Warmia dialect is very important for post-war generations. Looking openly into the future, they are trying to find their place in Warmia. However, one cannot build one's future without knowing the past and without being able to identify with it. In recent years the local dialect has been popularised through