

MODERNISM IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF POZNAŃ AFTER 1945 BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF RESIDENTIAL COMPLEMENTARY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. Seeking context in the post-war architecture of Poznań is connected with the space of a city having its own history. Urban structure rooted in the turn of 19th century is a perfect base where attempts to fight the phenomenon can be observed. The way of interpreting the complementary development must be mentioned here. With respect to historic districts, it means an attempt to come back to certain type of enclosed--complementary development of the existing urban structure with modern architectural artistic means, contemporary to the time of the building construction. Complementary architecture in Poznań after 1945 was profoundly exposed in reference to multi-apartment housing, but much rarer in reference to public utility buildings. The war operations affected many districts of the city but not to such extent that they lost their historic character. Intensity of destruction was distributed in radial lines on the city plan, where it clearly decreased in the direction of the suburban areas, mainly the districts located in the south-western part of the city. Many of the newly erected facilities of complementary nature with respect to their form and function drew on the experience and achievements of modernism and post-modernism in subsequent period. The application of flat roofs, bay windows, retracted or protruding balconies introduced variety to facades and was seen as a determinant of modern architecture.

Key words: modernism, context, complementary development

SEEKING CONTEXTUAL REFERENCE IN THE THEORY OF POST-WAR ARCHITECTURE

Modern theory of architecture recognized the existence of the phenomenon of spatial context at the beginning of the 1950s. It was then when the first attempts appeared to define it in reference to critical reviews of output connected with the end of the first phase of modernism. Casabella Ernesto Rogers, in one of the Italian magazines, started a discussion aiming at the critical approach to modern architectural output. In his view modern architecture through its interference with the city space lost the ability to establish contact with the past.

According to his views, modern architecture should form some kind of continuity, using the values of its existing surroundings and being, in a historical

sense, a continuous integrity. Ernesto Rogers introduced the term 'dialogue with the surroundings' in relation to mental factors and historically continuous process of the creation of the city structure. It must be stressed, here, that his views were in contradiction to the broad meaning of *genius loci*, so expressly exposed in Anglo-Saxon culture. Strong bonds with tradition, past, bygone times were his key arguments in the search for a definition of the context of modern architecture.

Aldo Rossi in a way continued the views propagated by Rogers. In his book 'The Architecture of the City' [1966] Rossi saw context as one of the main factors for architectural artistic output. Investigating into architectural form, both as separate entities and as pieces of a larger entirety, became the main idea of his ponderings. The existing spatial form, the architect has to struggle with, was a kind of a determinant of the past, mathematical function of the land management, speculation trends in construction and historical decline or prime time of a city.

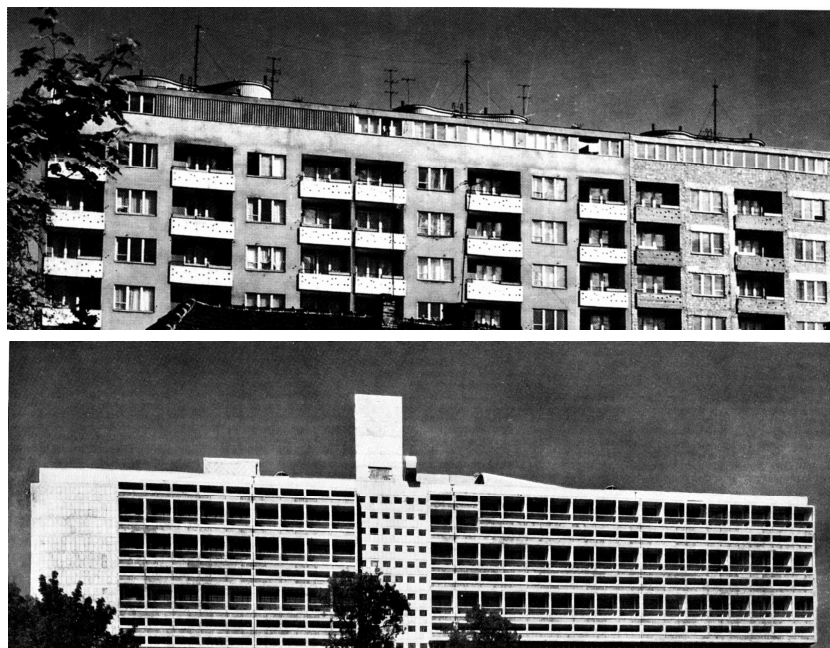


Fig. 1. References to the European modernisms – roof forms and constructions. Upper picture, apartment block in Poznań at the Głogowska street [1966], and L'Unité d'Habitation, Marseille, Le Corbusier

Ryc. 1. Nawiązania do europejskiego modernizmu w postaci formy dachów i konstrukcji. Rysunek górny budynek mieszkalny przy ul. Głogowskiej w Poznaniu z roku 1966, L'Unité d'Habitation, Marsylia, Le Corbusier

Christopher Alexander [1964] attempted to define context as the phenomenon equivalent to environmental space. Architectural form was attributed meaning, and context became the reason for seeking solutions to design problems. The book describes basic criteria which may influence the desirable functioning of the urban space. If the two elements fit together, they are hardly noticeable.

Therefore, neutralization of discrepancies takes place. Form, resulting from human needs connected with the economy of its creation, is the end product of such reasoning. Ch. Alexander is of the opinion that architecture of primitive nations exhibits better adjustment as these nations, using the tradition and experience of their ancestors, can handle the inter-relations between the form and context in a way superior to the ways of other nations. In industrial societies, where technological development is more advanced, adjustment proves more difficult as it is created in the course of academic education and in practical applications. Such activities are deprived of the natural force typical of the self-organization of natural space that, in turn, is characteristic for primitive cultures. Drawing conclusions out of his research Ch. Alexander stated that no system could be introduced at once in its entirety. The introduction of a system is only possible via the implementation of minor independent sub-systems. Further, they may be put together and compiled into one entirety following respective selection.

In his book 'A Pattern Language' [1977] Christopher Alexander introduced the term – „pattern”. Pattern may be understood as the suggested solution to a recurrent problem – constant inter-dependency, applicable to all the solutions. The book refers to the questions an architect is faced with every day. The book is divided into three parts, the first refers to the city spatial, architectural and social aspects. The second focuses on design aspects of buildings. The third discusses structural issues. In the book, the author seeks a pattern of applicable conduct on the basis of omnidirectional analysis of determinants of a given phenomenon, yet, he does not impose the manner of its application. As he writes in the introduction, there is an extensive possibility of selection of the respective patterns – solutions, depending on the problem which has arisen. The possibility to segregate, classify the phenomena irrespectively of the cultural zone of their origin and existence, is an important factor here. The theory of patterns was also presented in the book entitled 'The Timeless Way of Buildings' [1979]. Here, the patterns contributed to the formulation of rules to be applied in the building design processes. The rule of „good match” in connection with the patterns was used for the creation of a building design code.

SEEKING CONTEXT IN THE POST-WAR ARCHITECTURE OF POZNAŃ

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structure with modern architectural artistic means, contemporary to the time of the building construction.



Fig. 2. Apartment block in Poznań 1958, arch. Jerzy Lisniewicz and Henryk Grochulski, view from the *Architektura* magazine and real building

Ryc. 2. Bloki mieszkalne w Poznaniu, 1958, arch. Jerzy Lisniewicz i Henryk Grochulski

Complementary architecture in Poznań after 1945 was profoundly exposed in reference to multi-apartment housing, but much rarer in reference to public utility buildings. The war operations affected many districts of the city but not to such extent that they lost their historic character. Intensity of destruction was

distributed in radial lines on the city plan, where it clearly decreased in the direction of the suburban areas, mainly the districts located in the south-western part of the city. Many of the newly erected facilities of complementary nature with respect to their form and function drew on the experience and achievements of modernism and post-modernism in subsequent period. The application of flat roofs, bay windows, retracted or protruding balconies introduced variety to facades and was seen as a determinant of modern architecture.

Complementary architecture of Poznań at the end of the 1940s and in the middle of the 1950s was, without doubt, connected with the prevailing, at the time, sociorealism. Traditional in content, classical in form, architecture matched the historical context almost perfectly. Duplicating the traditional building model with visibly exposed and rusticated stub wall around the entrance zone, architecture reflected the expectations both of the building users and the architects. Seeking context here was mainly connected with shaping the building block as a certain type of complementary development to the existing spatial structure. The aim of shaping the block was to introduce possibly the smallest disparity between the facilities. Both the designed architecture and the structure of the facade were simple, almost synthetic. Yet, from the perspective of 'good match' the trend was absolutely correct and most natural in the context.

After 1956 sociorealism trends became less popular and a certain type of come back to pure modernism of the interwar period could be observed. After a few years of seeking the form, the search was directed towards new trends. Complementary development of the period is characterized with the building facade slightly referring to a traditional facade of a tenement house typical of the turn of the 19th century. Balconies were introduced to increase the variety of facades. The building entrance zone became deprived of the space designated for retail and other services. A residential building of the era makes the impression as if it were not complete, deprived of a certain visual and structural balance.

Complementary architecture in Poznań of the 1960s and the 1970s was in a way connected with communism, the political system prevailing in Poland at the time. Contrary to the previous years, the architecture was consistent and uniform, and the period was the time of artistic search and experiments. The architects professionally active at the time, on one hand, had to conform to the norms and standards imposed upon them by the communist legal regulations, on the other hand, though, drew inspiration from prime examples of the European architecture. The architecture of the residential facilities of the time cannot be said to be branded with communism. Many of those buildings give evidence to the artistic search for the form and function of the block. As a result of the time lapsed from the day of their erection, the ideology connected with them ceased to exist. The quality of the complementary architecture of that time varies, as in communism as well as in capitalism, the investor is a crucial determinant in this respect. In Poland, in case of this type of architecture, availability of construction materials and technologies was another factor. Sometimes, due to the short-

age of the construction and finishing materials, an original design had to be changed.

Architecture of complementary buildings of that period is characterized with the application of minimum architectural decor – box-like block is supplemented with a number of balconies and loggias. Geometric rhythm of the windows stressed the monotonicity of the facade, the basement part, similarly to the previous era, was not completely matched, which made the buildings look unattractive.

Architecture was to follow the functions of the building and, via a number of artistic means, to grant new quality to building structures. The architecture of buildings can be said to have created a certain code. In compliance with the code, new approach to the issues of multi-apartment development was attempted. The approach raises a number of questions on the borderline between particular types of development in the context of space in a historic city. Today, we can claim that the borderline was effectively created. Balancing on the border between taste and simplicity is a phenomenon typical of the architecture of the 1960s and the 1970s. The created architectural decor was deprived of the historic background. An architect, designing an object in a historic context, created his own world view. This object was to be his business card, an advertisement for his work style and talent. Many architects failed to reach this goal though. The only point of contextual reference they observed was to match the designed building to the development around it on the basis of the principle of placing a foreign body in some, already existing spatial environment.



Fig. 3. Apartment block in Poznań 1957–1962 at the Wierzbicice street in Wilda district, arch. W. Mieszkowski and J. Klimaszewski, Apartment house at the Porte Molitor, Paris 1926–1927, arch. Le Corbusier

Ryc. 3. Bloki mieszkalne w Poznaniu 1957–1962 przy ul. Wierzbicice na osiedlu Wilda, arch. W. Mieszkowski i J. Klimaszewski, Blok mieszkalny w Porte Molitor, Paryż 1926–1927, arch. Le Corbusier

To define complementary architecture of that period in Poznań means to define a certain type of world view. For the fact that many years have passed since the construction of many of those buildings, they can be analyzed and examined without the emotions involved at the time when they were under construction. The past has turned into the present, an attempt to analyze the phenomenon in the history of Polish architecture seems rational. I'm afraid time acts against many interesting creations. The approach to the modernization of the buildings constructed in the 1960s and the 1970s, in many instances, has proved destructive for good architecture which has been replaced with cheap architecture aimed at profit bringing.

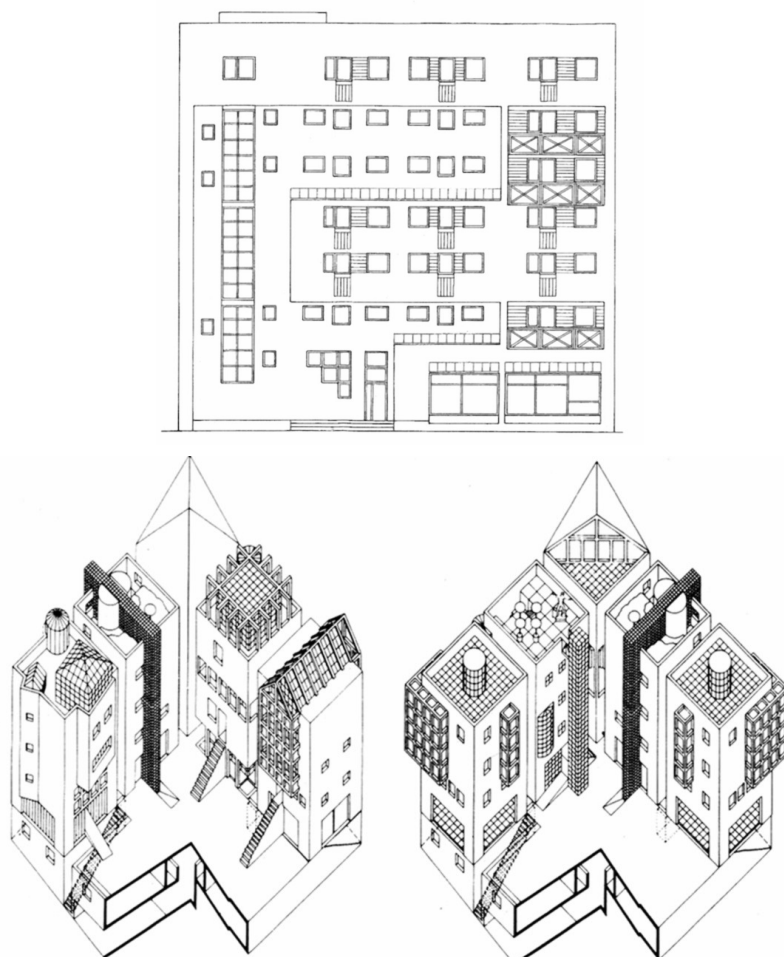


Fig. 4. Apartment block in Poznań at the Dąbrowskiego street in Jeżyce district, arch. Eryk Sieński and Mariusz Wrzeszcz. Matias Ungers, houses types for city of Marburg 1976

Ryc. 4. Bloki mieszkalne przy ul. Dąbrowskiego w Poznaniu na osiedlu Jeżyce, arch. Eryk Sieński i Mariusz Wrzeszcz. Matias Ungers, typy budynków w Marburgu 1976

The 1980s in case of Poznań show architectural activities with respect to complementary development. Shortage of building materials, long lasting construction process and the decline of communism without doubt branded the architectural artistic output. Since the political transformations at the end of the 1980s, space in Poznań, the city centre in particular, has become the object of architecture aimed at the complementary development of the existing structure of the city. Originally, on a small scale, complementary development has turned into an organized system over the years. Development complementary to the city space spreads on several layers, starting from single facilities, ending on the entire urban systems, shaping a new city image and character at the beginning of the new millennium. Seeking spatial context is still visible in the activities of an architect, yet it is more rooted in the mental and aesthetic sphere.



Fig. 5. Apartment blocks at Poznańska street in Jeżyce district in Poznań, 1991–1995

Ryc. 5. Budynki mieszkalne przy ul. Poznańskiej na osiedlu Jeżyce w Poznaniu, 1991–1995

First constructions, which triggered the come back to the idea of complementary development of the historic city centre, were erected in Poznań in such districts as Łazarz, Jeżyce and Wilda. These are the areas, where despite the war destruction and post-war urban planning, the city structure typical of the turn of the 19th with specific division into lots and characteristic layout of development has remained. Construction boom in that part of the city was caused by several factors. The first was convenient location of undeveloped lots and separate access to the technical infrastructure of the city, followed by such factors as: regulated legal status of the lots, easy way to obtain the development conditions plan.

One of the most explicit examples of residential development at the beginning of the 1990s is a group of buildings at ul. Poznańska in Jeżyce district. In the very street, where many new buildings were erected, many examples of the 19th century development still remained, starting from tenement houses of rich merchants, ending on half-timbered constructions. Vacant space was developed with new residential buildings, whose leitmotif was strong reference to the architecture of modernism and post-modernism. In the case of a city so conservative as Poznań, such architecture was extremely controversial and inspired heated discussions in daily newspapers.



Fig. 6. Apartment blocks at Wierzbicice street in Wilda district in Poznań, 2004–2005

Ryc. 6. Bloki mieszkalne przy ul. Wierzbicice na osiedlu Wilda w Poznaniu, 2004–2005

Despite the fact that development of vacant lots was designed by many different architect's offices, architecture of the development was characterized with the application of similar architectural expression means and, on the other hand, with some kind of reference to the existing spatial context. Not all the attempts succeeded in reaching the expected effect. It often turned out that despite the fact that the design of the building block was appropriate, yet it was blemished with some wanting detail or banal, or in some cases even repulsive, colors of the facade or lining material. Such was the atmosphere of the emergence of the phenomenon of new complementary development. After the end of the 1990s the post-modern architectural decor was replaced with architecture following the

principles of classical minimalism with eclectic details. An example of this architectural style is a multi-apartment building at ul. Wierzbicice in Wilda district. As was the case with the already discussed examples, here as well we can observe an attempt to establish dialogue with the surroundings.

Success of the designers was the result of the application of such means of expression which tried to refer to historical connotations under the decor of new architecture. They were further complemented with precious finishing materials and modest but at the same time sophisticated details. Therefore, from the moment the first such residential facilities were constructed in the city structure, tastes and expectations of users with respect to standards, room layout and finishing have changed. Due to such changes in tastes a residential building in compact municipal development no longer serves only the dwelling purposes, it has become space which is supposed to ensure proper comfort. Design of such a facility shall be, to a great extent, flexible so that, if need be, it could be turned into a monofunctional object of the city structure.

SEEKING CONTEXT SUMMARY

From today's perspective, the relations between the context and form are the cause of the discussion over the influence of the architectural form on the city space. An American critic Michael Sorkin said that: „the consequence of care for context modern architects show is mutual trust and possibility to add details. It must be concluded that these architects are rightly and skillfully reluctant to add details anywhere” [translation from Polish]

If, however, we focus on the development of complementary architecture in Poznań after 1945 we may conclude that in each of the presented periods, architects attempted to design structures which were to interoperate with the relevant spatial context. The range of architectural forms in the development of the period was small. Cuboids became the dominating element. Equally spaced windows and balconies were added to it. Entrance, placed symmetrically in the building block, was to serve as the linking element of the entire composition. Therefore, should we talk about context at all, isn't the reference to the height of the surrounding buildings the only contextual reference? Aldo Rossi, already introduced at the beginning of this paper, stressed the autonomy of architecture – its independence from the society, history and politics. Yet, was he right? If we have no possibility of creative shaping of space, then, this space is inert. Perhaps, the spatial context remains the same, and only the architecture as such changes in correlation with time, which is invisible to us. Zvi Hecker in his interview for Archivolta said „Aalto claimed architecture was art for the man and therefore man should be in the core of architecture. There is also another architecture, the architecture I'm not really fond of, the architecture which focuses on itself only, behaving like a woman who looks in the mirror and demands confir-

mation of her beauty. The problems of this self-centered architecture consist in issues of technical and aesthetic nature, for example, placing glass and concrete together, concrete and steel, steel and stone etc. Man-centered architecture, in turn, focuses on totally different issues. In my view, these are two absolutely different types of architecture.”

Opinions of architects on spatial context should also be presented to juxtapose them against the above ponderings. Charles Jencks in 'Architecture of late modernism' [1980] quoted Peter Eisenman's claim that he cares nothing for the building function, its context, or sometimes even the owner. According to him, architecture reports to nobody, is governed with its own laws, its own beauty and its own abilities. Thus, is the addition of new buildings to the city structure really an act connected with context? Isn't it just a game an architect plays with the recipient? Isn't it just a ruthless game played to win commercial success, prestige and splendor?

Looking back at the last 50 years of architecture in Poznań, such examples are possible to find. Still, personally, I am inclined to agree with the words Rem Koolhaas said in 1989, to comment upon the award of contract after the architectural contest for the design of the National Library Building in Paris. „But is this container linked with the city in any way? Should it be? Is it of any importance? .., To sum up, the statement that context exists only in correlation with the existing spatial form, if there is none, architecture should serve as context and art as such seems the right one.

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MODERNIZM W ARCHITEKTURZE POZNANIA PO ROKU 1945 NA PRZYKŁADZIE
ZABUDOWY MIESZKANIOWEJ WIELORODZINNEJ O CHARAKTERZE
UZUPEŁNIAJĄCYM

Streszczenie. Poszukiwanie kontekstu w powojennej architekturze Poznania związane jest niewątpliwie z przestrzenią miasta historycznego. Struktura urbanistyczna, której konotacje sięgają okresu przełomu XIX i XX w. jest doskonałym polem, na którym można zaobserwować próby zmagania się z tym zjawiskiem. Należy tutaj wspomnieć, w jaki sposób należy interpretować zabudowę uzupełniającą. Jest to w przypadku działania w odniesieniu do dzielnic historycznych, próba powrotu do pewnego zamknięcia-uzupełnienia istniejącej tkanki urbanistycznej, za pomocą współczesnych dla czasu powstawania środków wyrazu architektonicznego. Należy zwrócić także uwagę na fakt, w jaki sposób kształtowano to zjawisko w odniesieniu do tendencji projektowych w architekturze europejskiej. Architektura uzupełniająca w przypadku Poznania, po roku 1945 była silnie eksponowana w odniesieniu do budownictwa wielorodzinnego, rzadziej do obiektów użyteczności publicznej. W wyniku działań wojennych wiele dzielnic miasta uległo zniszczeniu, jednak nie na tyle, aby zatracić swój historyczny charakter. Nasilenie rozmiarów strat układało się na planie miasta promieniście, z wyraźną tendencją malejącą w kierunku dzielnic peryferyjnych, a przede wszystkim dzielnic położonych po stronie południowo-zachodniej miasta. Wiele obiektów, biorąc pod uwagę formę i funkcję, czerpało z dokonań oraz osiągnięć modernizmu lub postmodernizmu w okresie późniejszym. Zastosowanie płaskich dachów, pasmowych okien, cofniętych lub wystających balkonów urozmaicających elewację stało się wyznacznikiem architektury w pewnym sensie nowoczesnej.

Słowa kluczowe: modernizm, kontekst, zabudowa uzupełniająca