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TRADITION IN THE ICONS OF MODERNITY ON THE EXAMPLE OF CULTURE ZONE IN KATOWICE

TRADYCJA W IKONACH NOWOCZESNOŚCI NA PRZYKŁADZIE STREFY KULTURY W KATOWICACH

Abstract

Architecture of the 19th century industrial city, interwar modernity and impressive foundations of the socialist era create a diversity that is one of the distinguished features of Katowice. The iconic ‘Spodek’ (‘Saucer’) situated in the centre of the city, as well as the post-mining area with its historic building constitute an important urban context where the Culture Zone is localized. It includes three newly created buildings – icons. Both The Silesian Museum, NOSPR and International Congress Centre are the buildings with a modern formal look. However, in each of them, the architects referred to tradition of constructing and identity of the town in different way. The article analyses how the relation between modernity and tradition in architecture influenced the creation of a new place in the public space..

Keywords: Katowice, revitalization, Culture Zone, architectural form

Streszczenie

Różnorodność architektury XIX wiecznego miasta przemysłowego, modernizmu międzywojennego i wielkich założeń okresu PRL jest jedną z cech rozpoznawalnych Katowic. Położony w centrum miasta ikoniczny „Spodek” i teren pokopalniany z historyczną zabudową stanowią ważny kontekst miejski, w którym zlokalizowana jest Strefa Kultury. W jej skład wchodzi trzy nowopowstałe budynki – ikony. Zarówno Muzeum Śląskie, siedziba Narodowej Orkiestry Symfonicznej Polskiego Radia i Międzynarodowe Centrum Kongresowe są obiektami o nowoczesnym wyrazie formalnym. Jednak w każdym z nich architekci w różnorodny sposób odnieśli się do tradycji budowania i tożsamości miasta. Artykuł analizuje jak relacja pomiędzy nowoczesnością a tradycją w architekturze wpłynęła na powstanie nowego miejsca w przestrzeni publicznej.

Słowa kluczowe: Katowice, rewitalizacja, Strefa kultury, forma architektoniczna

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern architecture the word ‘icon’ is associated with the building of a complex and alternative form, which cuts off from tradition of form. However, it is different in case of modern architectural icons in Katowice localised in the Culture Zone. Apart from formal originality, they are created in a clear way, referring to the architectural context. It is a crucial

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aspect in conceptions of these buildings. The attempt to characterise the architectural tradition of Katowice downtown where the Culture Zone is located was undertaken. Afterwards the analysis on how its modern buildings correspond to it was carried out.

2. KATOWICE – TRADITIONS

Life in Katowice and neighbouring cities was associated with heavy industry, which was rapidly developing since the 18th century. Coal mines and steelworks² were set up therefore transport routes between them enabled the nearby cities to develop. The changes of a small Katowice village into a city centre were based on its location on the East – West route and industry which was developing since the 1740s. These factors influenced the development of roads around the village and since the second half of 19th century also railway. Soon after, in 1865, Katowice received city rights based on the edict of Prussian King Wilhelm I Frederick³.

Progressive industrialisation of the region led to its intensive development before the First World War being the world's potentate in the production of zinc. The production was not energy – efficient and required great amounts of charcoal that is coal. It was mined in the nearby coal mines. Their development brought about population inflow, for whom workers' housing estates called 'familoki' were built. They are scattered in the area of present Metropolis⁴.

After the I World War, a part of Upper Silesia was joined to Poland. In the German part, industry still develops in spite of international economic crisis. The most important cities were: Gliwice, Bytom and Zabrze. The Polish part separated from the German market undergoes stagnation. Katowice are the exception, which in 1922 become the capital of Silesian Province and the biggest city in this region⁵. The peripheral city was transformed into an important national centre⁶.

The development of the city as well as the influence of historic events are visible in its architecture and city planning. The oldest quarter buildings in Katowice, nowadays still constitute the centre of the city. Its development into the north was obstructed due to 'Ferdynand' Coal Mine (later called Katowice). Prussian quarter building ran from Wolności Square through The City Market to Warszawska street. It was also present in the south from the tram rails to Miarka Square. During interwar period, this southern part was intensely developed. Modern multi – family buildings of high standard were built. Their characteristic features were modernist form and functional approach to designing. Large architectural designs were created, which underlined economic, scientific and cultural progress of Polish part of the region⁷. The most important designs which were to highlight Polish identity of Katowice may include: Provincial Office and Silesian Parliament (L. Wojtyczko, S. Żeleński, P. Jurkiewicz,

² Apart from steelworks and mines, production of zinc and calamine developed. Rzewiczok, U., *Zarys dziejów Katowic 1299–1990*, Katowice, 2006, p. 18.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 16–18, 39.

⁴ International Building Exhibition (IBA) Fürst-Pückler-Land, *Transforming Landscapes. Recommendations based on three industrially disturbed landscapes in Europe. An Italian – Polish – German project "Restructuring cultural landscapes"* REKULA (INTERREG III B CadSES). Großräschen 2005, pp. 22–30.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 30; U. Rzewiczok, *op. cit.*, pp. 103.

⁶ E. Chojecka (ed.), *Sztuka Górnego Śląska od średniowiecza do końca XX wieku*, Katowice, 2004, p. 325–330.

⁷ U. Rzewiczok, *op. cit.*, pp. 135, 139–141.

1924–1929), Skyscraper (T. Kozłowski, 1929–1934) with surrounding housing estate and non-existing Silesian Museum (K. Schayer, 1934–1939)⁸.

During the II World War, the city together with the region were joined to Germany. In order to provide raw materials necessary to carry on war, heavy industry undergoes intense development. After the war the region returns to Poland and in the course of time becomes Silesian Province.

Katowice becomes the icon of modernity of Polish People's Republic period (PRL) in the 60s and 70s. Heavy industry was developing very dynamically. Large buildings were to highlight the prestige of the city and symbolise the rightness of politics of that time⁹. New buildings were often introduced at the expense of existing city tissue. For example fragments of downtown were demolished in order to introduce the great architectural axis of Korfanty Avenue¹⁰. It's worth citing the words of Filip Springer describing the intentions of architects: *What they proposed, referred to solutions forced by Le Corbusier and his imitators. This was the modernity seen in their eyes*¹¹. Buildings characteristic in the downtown of Katowice were created namely: commercials buildings 'Skarbek' (J. Jarecki, 1972–1974) and 'Zenit' (J. Jarecki, M. Król, 1958–1962), large residential building 'Superjednostka' (M. Król, 1965–1972), and the symbol of the town 'Spodek' (M. Krasieński, M. Gintowt, J. Hryniewiecki, A. Zórawski, 1959–1971). The latter one is the example of architects creativity. The projection is based on amphitheatric layout of the scene, which surrounds the stage. The stage is situated asymmetrically to the building outline, which makes the audience at one side higher. This creates a very dynamic character to the buildings form. The hall is adjusted to sports and entertainment events as well as conferences and trade fairs. Additionally the complex includes skating ring, gym, swimming pool and a hotel. The construction is based on the system of 120 truss-bar grating in which the stretched and compressed elements mutually stabilise. In the centre of this complex system the dome is suspended. The construction and form of 'Spodek' are still admired¹².

It is evident that the downtown of Katowice underwent several alternations. The buildings which were modern at one time replaced the traditional assumptions, sometimes even cutting off from them. However, the traditions of town are well seen in case of industrial architecture which function after the 1990s lost its economic rationale. Coal mines, steelworks and heavy industry plants, which for over 150 years created the character of Silesian landscape lost their importance. These alternations were followed by the change of the social and urban structure. The scale of changes is observed in mining where employment fell from the level of 388,000 people in 1990 to 98,000 people in 2015¹³. In Katowice between 1979 and 2013 the employment fell from 91,440 people to 27,518 people. The mining fell from the level of 17.4 million tons in 1989 to 8 million tons in 2012¹⁴. The towns underwent depopulation as a result of decline of industry. Post-industrial areas, piles, devastated, and often depopulated

⁸ E. Chojecka (ed.), *Sztuka Górnego...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 326–328, 330–333.

⁹ M. Żmudzińska-Nowak, I. Herok-Turska (eds.), *Reflektory. Interdyscyplinarne spojrzenie na dziedzictwo architektury Górnego Śląska drugiej połowy XX wieku*, Katowice, 2017, p. 182.

¹⁰ A. Borowik, *Nowe Katowice. Forma i ideologia polskiej architektury powojennej na przykładzie Katowic (1945–1980)*, Warszawa, 2019, pp. 202–223.

¹¹ F. Springer, *Księga zachwytyłów*, Warszawa, 2016, p. 330.

¹² A. Borowik, *op. cit.*, pp. 202–223.

¹³ A. Szpor, K. Ziółkowska, *GSI REPORT, The Transformation of the Polish Coal Sector*, International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2018.

¹⁴ Medialab *Apetyt na radykalną zmianę*, Notes na 6 tygodni, 2015, no. 99, May/June.

‘familoki’ buildings, required and they still require renovation. Otherwise they deteriorate. Their value is rooted in tradition and history. It constitutes **genius loci of the place**. It is crucial for the identity, culture and tradition of Upper Silesia. Mining associated with the ethos of work, customs and language became the lifestyle¹⁵. It was the period of looking for a new image for Katowice and the whole region as well as for its architecture¹⁶.

It is worth quoting one of the conference theses: *The past is murdered by non-memory; as long as the thing, including the architectural one, is remembered – it exists beyond the past. This does not mean that it exists in the present. It rests in a kind of abyss in the World Museum of Imagination.*¹⁷ Industrial architecture, interwar modernism and the modernism of the period of the People’s Republic of Poland were inscribed in the consciousness of the inhabitants and the cultural heritage and traditions of the city.

3. REVITALISATION OF KATOWICE COAL MINE

The Ferdinand Coal Mine (since 1935 KWK Katowice) was established in 1823, more than 40 years before Katowice was granted city rights. In the middle of the 19th century, the first steam machines in Katowice were used here and the first shaft was installed¹⁸. When the mine was closed in 1999, its area located in the immediate vicinity of the city centre required a new function. Here, in the close neighbourhood of the Silesian University and Spodek, the Culture Zone was created. It is a big venture, which is to complement cultural offer of Katowice and help to change the image of post-industrial city into a modern one associated with culture. Three objects were elaborated and then created as a result of an international contest, namely: the **Silesian Museum** (Riegler Riewe Architekten, 2007–2012), **National Symphonic Orchestra of Polish Radio NOSPR** (Konior Studio, 2008–2014) and **International Congress Centre** (JEMS Architects, 2008–2015).

The first building in the Culture Zone was **the Silesian Museum**. A several-storey building structure was placed below the surface with multifunctional exhibition space, auditorium, library and educational rooms. Next to revitalized historic buildings on the surface high glass cuboids have been designed. They house offices, entrances to the museum or technical equipment. They are illuminated at night, which creates a specific character of this place. The area of the museum was created as a park to preserve the views on historic building and create viewpoints. The mineshaft was adapted as an observation tower¹⁹. Placing 6,000 sq. m of exhibition surface underground has both a symbolic and a practical dimension. On one hand it

¹⁵ International Building Exhibition (IBA) Fürst-Pückler-Land, *Transforming... op. cit.* p. 33.

¹⁶ E. Chojecka, *Paradygmat innowacji a dziedzictwo kulturowe Górnego Śląska* [in:] I. Kozina (ed.), *Sztuka i przemysł. Paradygmat innowacji – dziedzictwo kulturowe na obszarach przemysłowych Niemiec i Polski*, Katowice, 2013, p. 25.

¹⁷ D. Kozłowski, M. Misiągiewicz, *Tradition and modernity in architecture* [online] International Conference – Defining The Architectural Space. Accessed: May 2019, <https://dpa.arch.pk.edu.pl/thesis-2019/>

¹⁸ U. Rzewiczok, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–17.

¹⁹ L. Jodliński, *Nowe Muzeum Śląskie. Architektura, rewitalizacja terenów postindustrialnych, program wystawienniczy* [in:] E. Chojecka (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 35–47 and M. Mozga-Górecka, *Silesian Museum* [in:] J. Purchla, J. Sepioł (eds.), *Form Follows Freedom. Architecture for Culture in Poland 2000+*, International Cultural Centre, Cracow, 2015, pp. 216–223.

brings associations with the old function of the mine, on the other one it freed the surfaces in front and around the historic buildings. Due to that, new buildings do not obstruct the buildings which constitute genius loci of this place²⁰.

The new building of **NOSPR** neighbours with the Silesian Museum. It was built on the grounds of the wood square of the closed down mine. The building has a form of a rectangle, with irregularly spread, glass spans. The structure recalls a 'box within a box' scheme. The inner 'box' is a concert hall put into a bigger 'box' of the building. The area around and between them serves as a public space. It shapes zoning in the building. The outer zone – the ring for musicians, inside the atrium for music lovers and in the middle the hall / room for music²¹.

The outer layer refers to Silesian tradition drawn from the workers housing estate Nikiszowiec from the beginning of 20th century. The use of various types of brick enabled to obtain the texture, which is rough in façade and glossy and red in bays. From the entrance hall we move on to the atrium – passage, which surrounds the concert hall. This space brings associations with the street in town. Natural materials are used: stone floors, wooden handrails with the brick in the background. Here the entrance to the Great Concert Hall, the heart of the building, is placed. It may hold 1,800 listeners. In the atrium it is seen as an anthracite, monolithic concrete block. Inside the hall it has smooth and soft shapes associated with the inside of a big instrument. Wooden finish emphasises the effect²². The space of the big hall is shaped in a similar way as Scharoun philharmonic in Berlin. The stage space is partly surrounded by the audience. Sitting there one gets an impression of full participation in the performance. The solution of the hall provides not only good visibility, but also excellent acoustics of the interior²³.

The **International Congress Centre** is the closest to the 'Spodek'. It is a huge, black cuboid, which was cut across. The cut was defined by the architects as a *green canyon*²⁴. Visually it resembles an irregularly shaped green grassy valley. It enables the passage above the building on the pavement and stairs. It is a public space with viewpoints overlooking the architecture and the town/city. On top there is an observation deck. Grassy cut contrasts with the black block of the building and breaks its large scale²⁵.

Facades are covered with dark net, screening the majority of windows. Due to that the buildings has a homogenous visual character. This black net was also used inside where the cut is visible as a depressed vaulting. The character of the interior and dark colours bring associations with the mine, which existed here²⁶.

Revitalisation of post mine is not yet completed. Building and designing works for housing investments take place on undeveloped premises. One should believe that new buildings would create a friendly city space with the existing ones.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ Tomasz Konior in: T. Malkowski, M. Szczelina (eds.), *Dotknąć muzyki. Opowieść o powstaniu nowej siedziby NOSPR w Katowicach*. Katowice, 2014, and Konior Studio (online) koniorstudio.pl/projekt/siedziba-nospr-katowice/ accessed: May 2019

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ JEMS architects, International Congress Centre, (online) <http://jems.pl/en/projects/selected-works/international-congress-center.html#text>, accessed: May 2019.

²⁵ Tomasz Malkowski, *International Congress Centre Katowice* [in:] J. Purchla, J. Sepioł (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 234–243.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.



- III. 1. National Symphonic Orchestra of Polish Radio NOSPR (Konior Studio, 2008–2014), Katowice, photo by Dominika Zieleźnik, October 2018 (used with kind permission)
- III. 2. International Congress Centre (JEMS Architects, 2008–2015). Katowice, photo by Dominika Zieleźnik, October 2018 (used with kind permission)
- III. 3. Silesian Museum (Riegler Riewe Architekten, 2007–2012), Katowice, photo by Dominika Zieleźnik, October 2018 (used with kind permission)

4. SILESIAN ACROPOLIS

Monumental buildings, which would nowadays be called icons, have always been created in the history of architecture. At present such buildings are characterised by astonishing, complex (sometimes curvilinear) form, which distinguishes from the surrounding. The famous examples are Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao or more recent ones, public use buildings in Georgia or Philharmonic Hall in Paris. Such buildings are to change the identity of place or draw attention of inhabitants and visitors to their extravagant form. In creating Silesian icons a different approach is noticed. Most formally surprising elements are usually not seen at first sight. Building conceptions in Culture Zone vary in the way the thoughts on tradition of place and modern architecture are approached. They may be characterised in the following way:

- **Silesian Museum** – Minimalistic form of glass cubes is the background for historic, brick post-industrial building. The aim of such procedure is to preserve the Silesian cultural landscape and enhance the post-industrial character of place²⁷. Dialogue between modern and traditional architectural forms takes place, which should contribute to the revitalisation of the area²⁸.
- **NOSPR** – the building seems to be a simple, geometrical form from outside. Yet it hides a surprising and curvilinear geometry inside. Modern character of the building is expressed by its form, however a lot of its elements such as: wood, stone, concrete and brick refer to traditional ways of building. It is highlighted by bay windows painted red.
- **International Congress Centre** – Apart from a large building, and modern, clear form, it does not dominate either the surrounding or the ‘Spodek’. It enables to observe the icons from a different perspective. The building signs in Silesian traditions associated with mining and underlines valuable architecture from the past.

Neither of these architectural conceptions negates the context, but refers to it. The example of Culture Zone shows that although traditional architectural aspects are taken into consideration, it is possible to design modern buildings. Tradition of the city architecture is based on experiences taken from history so that ‘commonness’ and ordering are the differentiators of these buildings. It is a reliable, modern architecture, which does not cut off from tradition. That is why an eminent architect Stanisław Niemczyk called the Culture Zone in Katowice ‘*Silesian Acropolis*’²⁹.

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²⁷ New high rise buildings are being built on the former coal mine. A discussion about the heritage of this landscape was recently described in K. Jagodzińska, *Muzeum broni postindustrialnego krajobrazu*, Architektura i Biznes, 2019, no. 6, pp. 142–153.

²⁸ Leszek Jodliński, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–47.

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