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RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE AS A CARRIER OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC HISTORY

ARCHITEKTURA MIESZKANIOWA JAKO NOŚNIK HISTORII SPOŁECZNO-EKONOMICZNEJ

Abstract

This article addresses whether modern architecture serves as a repository of historical information and to what extent it fulfils this role. The research methodology uses a case study approach, examining four suburban housing estates from the last hundred years. These estates were investigated using Panofsky's theory of meaning in art. The findings indicate that modern architecture, even without intricate details, functions as a carrier of historical information and provides insights into socio-economic or ideological contexts from its creation period.

Keywords: contemporary architecture, cultural landscape, history, residential estates, theory of meaning in art

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest udzielenie odpowiedzi na pytanie o to, czy architektura po modernizmie jest nośnikiem historii oraz w jakim zakresie. Jako metodologię badań przyjęto studium przypadku, wybierając cztery podmiejskie osiedla mieszkaniowe powstałe w ostatnim stuleciu. Poddano je analizie przeprowadzonej według teorii znaczenia w sztuce Panofsky'ego. Rezultaty badania wykazały, że pozbawiona detalu architektura po modernizmie jest nośnikiem informacji historycznej i może być źródłem wiedzy o realiach społeczno-gospodarczych czy światopoglądowych w czasach jej powstania.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura współczesna, krajobraz kulturowy, historia, osiedla mieszkaniowe, teoria znaczenia w sztuce

1. ARCHITECTURE AS A CARRIER OF HISTORY

Architecture serves as a repository of history. However, does it solely encapsulate its own historical narrative as a pictorial metalanguage? Does this enable us to describe, encode, and decode its composition, layers of meaning, and functionality?¹ Historically, the predominant attribute of architecture was its style. Even today, we can identify historical edifices, categorise their architectural styles, and enumerate their distinctive features. Furthermore, buildings serving specific functions, particularly institutional ones, traditionally possessed architectural forms that enabled the differentiation of a

¹ M. Tafuri, *Theories and history of architecture*, Granada, London 1980, p. 103.

church from a theatre or an office from a residential structure from afar. These conventions were challenged by modernism, which embraced the doctrine that architecture should primarily address functional and structural considerations. This perspective is also encapsulated in Umberto Eco's assertion that the semantic dimension of architecture is inherently derived from its utility².

A pragmatic approach to architecture, inspired by Louis Sullivan's statement that "form always follows function"³, resulted in a simplification of architectural language and a rejection of ornamentation. Modernism considered the decoration of architecture not only useless, but also saw in it a lack of moderation and common sense, following the opinion of Adolf Loos that "the absence of ornament is a sign of intellectual strength"⁴. The avant-garde of the early 20th century broke with the previous canons of beauty⁵, at the same time abandoning historically established formal and semantic connections, which were the outcome of slow transformations and evolution of successive styles⁶. This shift presents a challenge in evaluating contemporary architecture within a historical framework, as it initially positioned itself as a fundamentally anti-historical phenomenon⁷.

Does contemporary architecture, despite its apparent lack of historical continuity inherent in evolving styles, still serve as a vessel for historical narratives? Insights from landscape studies and Erwin Panofsky's theory of meaning in art suggest that it does. Architecture, fundamentally, shapes the cultural landscape, which reflects the reality of a specific era⁸, and it functions as a metalanguage that describes social organisation, hierarchy, as well as economic conditions and political structures. The landscape acts as a repository of information, akin to how it contains minerals or agricultural wherewithal⁹. And its representations, like any other images, can be analysed using metalanguage to determine their semantic layer. This forms the foundation for an aesthetic approach to landscape analysis¹⁰, using elements of iconographic analysis and iconological interpretation according to Erwin Panofsky's theory of meaning in art¹¹. This theoretical framework delineates three distinct research stages that culminate in the identification of the semantic layer of an image. The initial stage involves a pseudo-formal analysis, which entails a descriptive examination of the image. The subsequent stage is an iconographic analysis, which considers the cultural context and associates the elements of the work with conventional meanings derived

² U. Eco, *Function and sign: The semiotics of architecture* [in:] N. Leach (ed.), *Rethinking architecture. A reader in cultural theory*, Routledge, London 2010, p.174, https://marywoodarchtheory.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/function-and-the-sign-the-semiotics-of-arch_u-eco.pdf (access: 3.06.2025).

³ L.H. Sullivan, *The tall office building artistically considered*, "Lippincott's Monthly Magazine", 1896, no. 3, p. 408.

⁴ A. Loos, *Ornament and crime: selected essays*, Ariadne Press, Riverside 1998, p. 175.

⁵ T. Kozłowski, *Avant-garde and contemporary architecture*, "Space & Form" 2020, no. 43, pp. 55–70.

⁶ M. Tafuri, *Le strutture del linguaggio nella storia dell'architettura moderna* [in:] G. Canella (ed.), *Teoria della progettazione architettonica: Architettura e città*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari 1985, pp. 13–30.

⁷ M. Tafuri, *Theories and history of architecture*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁸ D. Cosgrove, *Palladian landscape: Geographical change and its cultural representations in sixteenth-century Italy*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park 1993, p. 192.

⁹ R. Muir, *Approaches to landscape*, Palgrave, London 1999, p. 245.

¹⁰ S. Daniels, D. Cosgrove, *Introduction: Iconography and landscape* [in:] S. Daniels, D. Cosgrove (eds), *The iconography of landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988, pp. 1–10.

¹¹ E. Panofsky, *Meaning in the visual arts*, Anchor Books, Garden City 1955, pp. 26–54.

from knowledge acquired from external sources, such as literature. Finally, the iconological analysis uncovers the symbolic values of these elements, grounded in a philosophical and epochal context¹².

The research presented herein employs elements of the theory of meaning in art to explore whether contemporary architecture, specifically the architecture of modernism and thereafter, can serve as a conduit for historical narratives and to what extent it fulfils this role.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this study is grounded in iconographic and iconological analysis, as articulated in Panofsky's theory of meaning in art¹³. In accordance with the fundamental assumptions of this theory, the research undertaken sought to interpret historical information embedded within landscapes shaped by contemporary architecture. The analysis focused on the landscapes of four suburban housing estates. The deliberate restriction of the case study to a single function was intended to prevent distortion of the results due to variations in landscape formation arising from spatial factors dictated by architectural utility, such as differences in building scale. The selection of housing estates for the study was based on their suburban nature at the time of construction. The research was confined to the metropolitan area of Poznań to eliminate potential influences of climatic, spatial, or local cultural conditions on the architecture of the housing estates. Furthermore, a predefined thirty-year interval was applied to distinguish the construction periods of the successive building complexes under examination.

As a result of the adopted selection criteria, the study covered four housing estates located in the Poznań agglomeration: the Zawady estate in Poznań from the 1930s, Lubonianka in Luboń from the 1960s, the Cegielskiego estate in Swarzędz from the 1990s, and the Graf-itowe estate in Dopiewo from the 2020s. These estates, exemplifying contemporary architecture and urban planning, were analysed through an iconographic and iconological lens to discern historically conditioned meanings embedded in their landscapes. The research material, comprising notes, sketches, and photographs, was gathered during field visits and supplemented with satellite imagery obtained via the Google Earth Engine plugin (version 0.0.7) in QGIS 3.40 software.

The analysis of each case study was conducted in three distinct stages. The initial stage involved a pre-iconographic description, which enumerated the principal spatial and architectural characteristics of the estate in question. The subsequent stage entailed an iconographic analysis, wherein the observations made were juxtaposed with the existing body of knowledge regarding the factors influencing the built environment during the period of the estate's construction, with consideration given to the cultural context and the conventional perception of space associated with it. The final stage was an iconological interpretation, which sought to identify symbolic values embedded within a broader context.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 40.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 26–54.

3. HISTORY CONTAINED IN THE LANDSCAPE OF SUBURBAN HOUSING ESTATES

The iconographic analysis of the landscape of selected housing estates was conducted in accordance with the chronological order of their development, from the oldest to the most recent. This analysis adhered to the successive stages outlined in Panofsky's theory of meaning in art¹⁴, which include: (1) pre-iconographic description, (2) iconographic analysis, and (3) iconological interpretation.

3.1. ZAWADY, POZNAŃ

3.1.1. PRE-ICONOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

The Zawady estate (Ill. 1) comprises three elongated residential blocks, two measuring approximately 75 metres in length and one extending to approximately 145 metres. The combined building area of these three blocks is approximately 3200 square metres.



Ill. 1. Deck access blocks in Zawady in Poznań. Satellite image downloaded through Google Earth Engine plugin (version 0.0.7) in QGIS 3.4.0. Collage of photos from on-site visit on 03.07.2025. Own work

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 26–54.

The total area of the estate, delineated by the surrounding streets, is approximately 1.4 hectares. The biologically active area constitutes approximately 45% of this total area and includes 110 trees¹⁵. According to calculations based on local data, such as population density and the number of household members in one apartment, the blocks can be inhabited by about 320 people¹⁶.

The structures consist of four to five floors above ground and are classified as deck access blocks, featuring a single tract of apartments. These apartments are accessible via a gallery located on the north-west elevations of the buildings, while the opposite side is solely equipped with windows, lacking balconies. The architectural design is characterised by simplicity and minimal detail. The elongated blocks exhibit a pronounced vertical articulation through protruding staircases and a horizontal articulation via galleries on the entrance side. In contrast, the opposite façades display a straightforward composition of windows, arranged either individually or in pairs, separated by panels.

3.1.2. ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The character of the Zawady district was influenced by the implementation of Poznań's policy of constructing affordable housing following World War I. This initiative was undertaken in anticipation of exacerbated housing issues due to demobilization and migration movements¹⁷. The Zawady district, which at that time could be defined as a peripheral or suburban location, was located on the sidelines of the main development directions of the city of Poznań¹⁸. A decision was made to relocate certain production functions to this area and to construct affordable municipal housing, commonly referred to as workers' barracks¹⁹.

The deck access blocks located in Zawady, which are the focus of this analysis, represent an iconic project from that era. This project was developed by the Society of Workers' Housing Estates (T.O.R.), and its likely author was Jerzy Tuszowski²⁰. The selection of this particular architectural typology, namely deck access housing blocks, was primarily driven by economic considerations, specifically the low construction costs. Additionally, despite the limited size of the units, they offered residents relatively favourable hygienic and sanitary conditions, including adequate sunlight and ventilation. This issue was a significant challenge for architects involved in social housing during the interwar period.

The architectural design of the deck access housing blocks in Zawady is characterised by simplicity and schematic clarity, embodying the principles of modernism. This approach rejects ornamentation and emphasizes the primacy of the building's function, to which its composition and structure are subordinated. Consequently, the aesthetics emerged as a deliberate outcome of these considerations²¹.

¹⁵ M. Gyurkovich et al., *Assessment of the greenery content in suburban multi-family housing models in Poland: A case study of the Poznań Metropolitan Area*, "Sustainability" 2024, no. 16, art. no. 3266. DOI: 10.3390/su16083266.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ H. Grzeszczuk-Brendel, G. Klause, *Domy socjalne na Zawadach*, "Kronika Miasta Poznania" 2002, no. 2, p. 188.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 190.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 197.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 198.

3.1.3. ICONOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

The spatial and architectural characteristics of the Zawady housing estate, as previously described and contextualised within the current state of knowledge, possess symbolic values encompassing social, ideological, economic, and aesthetic dimensions. The typology of the buildings is particularly noteworthy. Deck access houses, while primarily adopted in social housing for economic considerations, were also regarded during the interwar period as an appropriate form of development for the emerging society²². According to the common belief of the time, the working class preferred living in a collective, which justified the emphasis on common areas that were to stimulate neighbourly contacts²³. The lack of individual balconies in the apartments, replaced by a common gallery and a common green area between the blocks, has a similar meaning. Life after work was to take place in the community, in accordance with the epochal philosophical assumptions and the social policy pursued.



Ill. 2. Lubonianka estate in Luboń. Satellite image downloaded through Google Earth Engine plugin (version 0.0.7) in QGIS 3.40. Collage of photos from on-site visit on 03.07.2025. Own work

²² *Ibidem*, p. 197.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 201.

The modernist architectural language employed in shaping the district's landscape was deliberate. The architectural avant-garde of the interwar period drew upon principles of social equality, aligning with the ongoing democratisation. Concurrently, it articulated the avant-garde's ideals concerning modernity and the hygiene of daily life. Indeed, the avant-garde extended beyond a mere artistic and architectural movement; it represented a worldview intricately linked to contemporary realities and socio-political doctrines²⁴.

3.2. LUBONIANKA, LUBOŃ

3.2.1. PRE-ICONOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

Within the scope of the analysis, there are 12 rectangular buildings, each measuring between 45 and 54 metres in length (Ill. 2), with 11 of these structures serving residential purposes. The total approximate building area is 7,300 square metres, while the estate, delineated by the surrounding streets, encompasses approximately 3.8 hectares. The proportion of biologically active area in this section of the Lubonianka estate is 49%, and the number of trees inventoried in 2023 is 214²⁵. Based on local data, the estimated population of this part of the estate is approximately 1,144 residents²⁶.

The residential blocks exhibit a cuboidal form, comprising three to five above-ground storeys. Access to the apartments is facilitated through internal corridors, with each block featuring two or three distinct staircases. The architectural design of the oldest section of Lubonianka estate is characterised by minimalism and a lack of ornamental detail. The windows are systematically arranged in a repeated vertical pattern, mirroring the symmetrical configurations on the facades. There is uniformity in the arrangement of windows and balconies across the individual storeys. The facades are devoid of embellishments such as window frames or panels between them. The only notable features in the façade articulation are the vertical strips of balconies and the protruding roofs at the building entrances. In several blocks, a dynamic interplay of light and shadow is achieved through the alternating use of balcony strips and loggias recessed from the façade's surface.

3.2.2. ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The area under investigation was developed during the first and second phases of the Lubonianka housing estate construction, which took place in the 1960s²⁷. The district's character is defined by the simplicity of its architecture, which lacks intricate details, aligning with the functionalist principles of modernism. This minimalist architectural style of the residential blocks exemplifies typical suburban workers' estates from the 1960s. The construction of these blocks was initiated by the Housing Cooperative "Lubonianka," established in 1959, following contracts it secured for construction projects serving nearby workplaces²⁸.

²⁴ S. Fauchereau, *Avant-gardes du XXe siècle. Arts et littérature 1905–1930*, Flammarion, Paris 2010, p. 533.

²⁵ M. Gyurkovich et al., *op. cit.*

²⁶ *Ibidem.*

²⁷ R. Graczyk, *Architektura modernistycznych osiedli wielorodzinnych miasta Lubonia przełomu XX i XXI wieku. Studium przypadku* [in:] R. Ast (ed.), *Arche & Psyche 9*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Poznańskiej, Poznań 2023, p. 96.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 96.



Ill. 3. Cegielskiego estate in Swarzędz. Satellite image downloaded through Google Earth Engine plugin (version 0.0.7) in QGIS 3.40. Collage of photos from on-site visit on 03.07.2025. Own work

The functional, architectural, and spatial solutions implemented in the estate project align with the standard designs of contemporary workers' estates. The buildings are compact and nearly identical, with all apartments constructed during the first and second phases being two-room units, each featuring a separate bathroom, kitchen²⁹, and balcony. The east or west orientation of the apartments also adheres to the prevalent standards of the times, which prioritised hygienic living conditions while maintaining cost-effective construction and compliance with the housing standards established at that time³⁰.

The development project for the area surrounding the blocks also exhibits typical characteristics. The entrances to the staircases lack distinct emphasis or differentiation, and the pedestrian pathways and access streets are replicated in an identical configuration. The blocks are organised in two rows, with vehicular access provided by streets that encircle

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

³⁰ M. Motak, *Wielkie osiedla mieszkaniowe jako fenomen architektoniczny i urbanistyczny XX wieku. Geneza, rozwój, zmierzch* [in:] J. Czapska (ed.), *Zapobieganie przestępczości przez kształtowanie przestrzeni: teoria – badania – praktyka*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2012, p. 174.

the perimeter of the estate. The central area has been allocated for green spaces, which include a playground, walking paths, and benches.

3.2.3. ICONOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

The characteristics of the estate reflect the social and economic factors that influenced the architectural design of workers' estates in the mid-20th century. The housing standards imposed during this period restricted the diversity of apartments in terms of layout and size, leading to a repetition and uniformity of facades. The monotony of the estate's landscape mirrored the socialist vision of society. The urban planning of the estate, featuring a centrally located green area accessible to all residents, embodied the concept of integrating the working-class community, which was encouraged to embrace collective living.

3.3. CEGIELSKIEGO ESTATE, SWARZĘDZ

3.3.1. PRE-ICONOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

The Cegielskiego estate in Swarzędz comprises seven units of interconnected blocks, each varying in size and shape, including rectangular, L-shaped, and U-shaped configurations (Ill. 3). The total built-up area of these blocks is approximately 12,700 square metres, while the entire estate spans approximately 5 hectares. Forty per cent of this area is designated as biologically active, with an inventory of 215 trees conducted in 2023³¹. The resident population of the estate is estimated to be approximately 1,700, based on local data³².

The principal axis of the housing estate, which nearly serves as the axis of symmetry, is oriented in a north-south direction. However, the street axes, and consequently the lines delineating the blocks, are positioned at an angle of approximately 45° to this axis (Ill. 3). Consequently, blocks with varying outlines were formed, tailored to the shapes of fields created by the superimposition of the main vertical axis and the diagonal grid.

The buildings consist of three to five storeys above ground level, with their elevations exhibiting vertical articulation through window columns of varying widths, alternating between single and double. The façades prominently display the balconies of the apartments, whose floor shapes are reminiscent of the projections typical of urban tenement houses (Ill. 3). The staircases are characterized by distinctly marked gable roofs, supported by columns, and featuring a triangular gable wall at the front. One of the quarters is notable for its pronounced projections with balconies, culminating in a steep gable roof on the uppermost story. Along the main axis of the layout, there is an evident attempt to establish a dominant feature in the form of a triangular tympanum, positioned on the axis above the passage beneath the building (Ill. 3).

3.3.2. ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The Cegielskiego estate in Swarzędz exemplifies the architectural and urban planning characteristics prevalent during the political transformation period in Poland after 1990. The configuration of the residential blocks is a consequence of the design standards implemented for buildings serving this function during the socialist era, as previously discussed with reference to the Lubonianka housing estate, and the diagonal urban grid. In terms of urban design,

³¹ M. Gyurkovich et al., *op. cit.*

³² *Ibidem.*

there is also a focus on achieving a human scale and privacy, exemplified by the formation of courtyards enclosed within the interiors of quarters.

The architecture of the estate simultaneously draws from the patterns of socialist housing estates and seeks inspiration from the region's more distant architectural traditions. This dual approach aligns with the postmodernist trend that emerged in Poland during the 1980s, characterised by the incorporation of "richer and more diverse architectural detail," referencing historical forms and creating compilations and variations thereof³³. Here, such variations in architectural detail include gable roofs over entrances, projections finished with a gable wall and gable roof, and vertical articulation and balcony forms reminiscent of old tenement houses.

3.3.3. ICONOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

The architectural and urban design of the Cegielskiego estate in Swarzędz reflects the socio-economic aspirations and transformations at the turn of the 1990s in Poland. The architectural details, inspired by historical forms, reflect a desire to reconnect with cultural roots and a quest for local identity. The estate's urban planning indicates a shift from the previous universalist approach to public space design in residential areas, emphasising the psychological needs of individuals. The spaces within the blocks are not communal to the entire estate but are instead shared by the residents of each specific block, thus possessing a semi-private nature that fosters a sense of belonging and security. The creation of enclaves within the block interiors also echoes the urban fabric of the old town. In summary, the architectural and spatial characteristics shaping the Cegielskiego estate's landscape embody symbolic meanings associated with the expression of identity and social belonging.

3.4. GRAFITOWE ESTATE, DOPIEWO

3.4.1. PRE-ICONOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

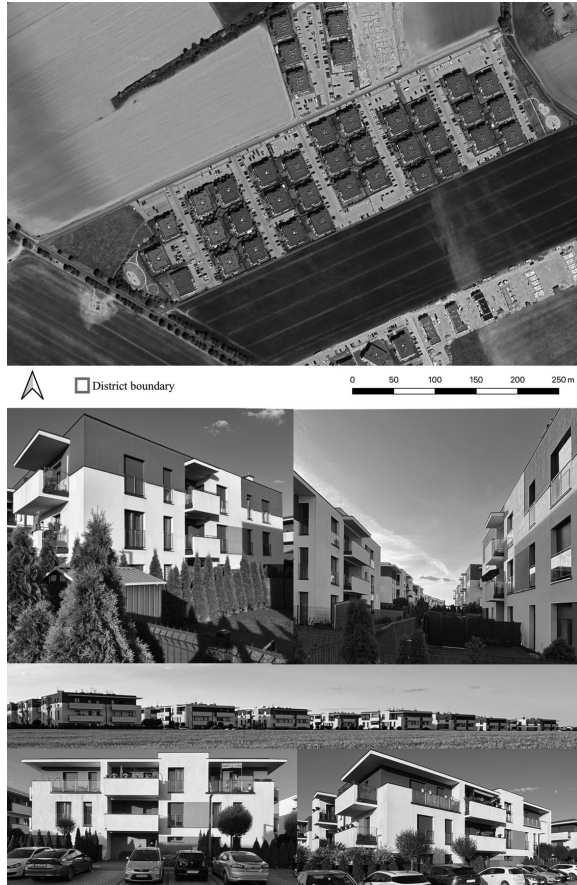
The Graitowe housing estate (Ill. 4), located in the Dopiewo commune, comprises 33 small, single-staircase buildings, encompassing a total construction area of approximately 16,400 square metres. The estate is situated on a plot of approximately 7.5 hectares, of which 40% is designated as biologically active surface. A total of 347 trees have been planted within the estate, predominantly consisting of grafted ornamental trees of small stature. It is estimated that the district can accommodate approximately 1,500 residents³⁴.

The estate's buildings exhibit uniform shapes and rectangular outlines, closely resembling squares, resulting in all four façades having similar proportions. Their design incorporates modernist elements, such as asymmetrically protruding balconies and cantilevered roofs, along with rectangular façade segments, for instance between windows, which are accentuated with colour.

The buildings are three storeys high, with each ground floor connected to the surrounding area through the introduction of private gardens. A notable distinction from the previously discussed estates is the substantial presence of paved roads and parking spaces for vehicles, which encircle

³³ M. Motak, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

³⁴ M. Gyurkovich, J. Kołata, M. Pieczara, P. Zierke, *Assessment of the Greenery Content in Suburban Multi-Family Housing Models in Poland: A Case Study of the Poznań Metropolitan Area*, "Sustainability" 2024, no. 16, art. no. 3266. DOI: 10.3390/su16083266.



Ill. 4. Graftowe estate in Dopiewo. Satellite image downloaded through Google Earth Engine plugin (version 0.0.7) in QGIS 3.40. Collage of photos from on-site visit on 04.07.2025. Own work

the buildings on all sides. The greenery within this urban layout is predominantly privatized, except for small green areas located on the periphery of the estate. On both sides of the estate, there are two fenced playgrounds. Additionally, pedestrian pathways have been designed between the blocks, serving as communal spaces where residents of the estate can walk past each other.

3.4.2. ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The landscape of the Graftowe housing estate aligns with contemporary trends in the development of suburban districts. The architectural design of the buildings is modern, reflecting the current fashion by drawing inspiration from the modernism of the 1920s. This is achieved through a minimalist approach that “reduces the number and scope of expressive elements while employing high-quality form and detail”³⁵. From an architectural perspective, the estate blocks exhibit uniformity. The replication of the same design, facilitated by the computer tool “copy-paste,” results in a cohesive yet monotonous landscape. This “desert of order,”

³⁵ M. Motak, *op. cit.*

as described by Michael Ende in his book for children entitled *Momo*, characterises the austere, minimalist nature of contemporary suburban estates, which could be situated in any global location, reflecting the dominant international trend.

The urban planning of the Graitowe estate markedly differs from that observed in previous examples. Although the estimated population is comparable to that of the Cegielskiego estate in Swarzędz, the Graitowe estate is characterized by a division into four times as many individual blocks, which are smaller in scale and distinctly separated by fenced private gardens. Concurrently, the communal areas of the estate have been minimized to a basic standard.

3.4.3 ICONOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

The Graitowe estate is a model example of modern suburbanization. Unlike previous examples, the Graitowe estate was not created on the initiative of the city or a housing community but rather implemented by a developer for individual clients. The estate's functional and spatial characteristics reflect the value system embraced by modern society. Following a period of seeking local identity, a new era has emerged, characterized by a focus on ownership, privacy, anonymity, and economic efficiency.

The district's landscape is characterised by high fences surrounding private gardens, a limited number of communal spaces, and a substantial proportion of paved surfaces designed to facilitate parking in close proximity to residences. This configuration reflects contemporary emphasis on private property and domestic privacy. The minimalist, repetitive architectural style further underscores the significance of economic considerations in the investment process, highlighting a societal focus on optimisation and efficiency across various aspects of life.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Residential architecture of modernism and thereafter, contrary to initial perceptions, serves as a metalanguage reflecting the era of its inception. While modernism introduced the potential for architectural design based on broad compositional principles, rejecting historical ornamentation, it did not eliminate the layers of meaning and symbolism inherent in architecture. Indeed, one might argue that modernism enhanced the clarity of this symbolic layer by emphasising functional authenticity and rejecting the application of artificially selected historicising details. Pre-modernist architecture communicated through intricate details; after modernism, the carrier of historical information became the building layouts, typologies, and the development of surroundings and landscapes.

The means of decoding historical data in contemporary architecture is no longer found in architectural detail, but in the functional and spatial characteristics of the development. Urban planning has thus become more informative regarding symbolism and historical meanings related to social realities and political and economic systems. Architecture, even when stripped of elaborate details, remains a vessel of history, not only of its own evolution as a metalanguage but, more importantly, of socio-economic transformations. The landscape serves as a chronicle of human history, irrespective of architectural style. Consequently, even within the seemingly homogeneous architecture of contemporary housing estates, one can discern a comprehensive historical narrative.

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