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CONTEXT OF THE PLACE VS ARCHITECT'S THOUGHTS. TWO EXAMPLES

KONTEKST MIEJSCA A MYŚL ARCHITEKTA. DWA PRZYKŁADY

Abstract

The topic of divagation are thoughts accompanying shaping of two hotels located in Katowice city. The first building, situated in the old city centre, its form in harmony with its surroundings, expresses architectural truth. The second, attempts to incorporate itself into location promising a modernistic city of the future, is an abstract form with an aesthetic solution of façade, which seems to offer a new 'wonderful world'.

Contexts of the sites create situations in which one building shows the search for truth and the second, a beautiful lie of architecture.

Keywords: Katowice, hotel building, architectural design, façade

Streszczenie

Przedmiotem wypowiedzi są myśli towarzyszące kształtowaniu dwóch budynków o funkcji hotelowej w centrum Katowic. Pierwszy jest zlokalizowany w nawarstwiającej się, historycznej tkance ścisłego centrum Katowic. Forma budynku zgodna z kontekstem otoczenia wyraża architektoniczną prawdę. Drugi podejmuje próbę wpisania się w obietnicę modernistycznego miasta przyszłości, jest autonomicznie kształtowaną formą, o estetyce rozwiązań elewacyjnych, które zdają się oferować miastu nowy „wspaniały świat”.

Idea, będąca podstawowym twórczym architekтуры, kształtuje formę i estetykę projektowanego budynku, staje się także myślą przywołującą obraz miasta istniejącego „od zawsze”, lub obraz miasta przyszłego. Kontekst miejsca sprawia, że pierwszy budynek ukazuje poszukiwanie prawdy, a drugi piękne kłamstwo architektury.

Słowa kluczowe: Katowice, budynki hotelowe, projektowanie architektoniczne, fasada

1. INTRODUCTION

The thought, or in other words – an idea, according to Vitruvius, is basic for architecture, however it is not architecture yet.¹ It is the architect's thought which allows us to obtain form-shape of the building we are creating.² Thought – material – place, three main elements of the design process, supported by a direct message fused environmental reality in which the building exists. Relating this information is, in the most general term, what we see as the context of the place.

¹ L. Niemojewski, *Uczniowie cieśli*, Trzaska, Evert i Michalski, Warszawa 1947 (reprint 1999), pp. 6–7.

² Manuscript by N. Juzwa, J. Świerzawski, *Architektura Polska w innowacyjnej współczesności*, 2020.

A pretext for both contemplating as well as showing the thoughts accompanying the creation of form can be seen on an example of two projects being realised by Konior Studio. Both have a similar function but are situated in two different urban contexts. These are:

The Hotel Diament Plaza, situated in the very heart of Katowice city centre. Shaped at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, this part of the city is a place currently undergoing a process of rebuilding and modernisation. The site, despite its varying, modern stylistics, owing to the diversity of the neighbouring buildings, manages to harmoniously blend in with its surroundings.

The Hotel Puro, situated in the conceptual zone, drawn out in the '70s. The modernist spatial concept of the new city centre, which was then taking shape and is now the topic of fierce discussion and ruthless polemic, turned out to be an exceptionally difficult area to adapt to the needs of the dynamically changing city.

It is often the case that a hotel becomes an important structure for the city. It is not only identified by its characteristic form, but first and foremost by the creative role which it plays within the urban tissue. The number of hotels and the quality of services they offer are a benchmark for describing the standards of 'urbanism'.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries – when Katowice had started undergoing a process of dynamic growth, the hotels: *Grand*, *Welt* or *Monopol*, put the city on the map with their international renown. Their quality set the standards for the hotel industry.³ At present, the city of Katowice is once again going through a period of dynamic development and the city's hotel base shall be extended by a number of new, significant venues.⁴ Hotels and their accompanying entities function round the clock, they admit guests at any given moment of night or day.

Usually, the basic function of accommodating guests is supplemented by an enriched program of services. Apart from the diverse portfolio of restaurants and catering offers, allowing you to choose from a variety of culinary options and organize a wide range of events and meetings, hotels play host to conferences, conventions and training sessions. The choice of the place, level of importance and the character of such events is directly linked with the city's position and the quality of rendered services. Nowadays, the hotel is more often associated with a rich portfolio of services of a commercial and entertainment nature, no longer exclusively linked with its function as pure accommodation. The text presents the examples of two hotels – two very different approaches to shaping the material character of the building. In the search for adequate solutions, the following issues have gained significant rank: the context of the place and the architectural concept of the building.

2. CONTEXT OF THE PLACE

One definition of architecture is that it is the materialization of a concept, of idea. One may as well say that in architecture, similarly as in culture, the here and now mean that buildings which were once created have been imprinted in our memory. However, when we create

³ Pre-design research conducted by the author's team in the PURO hotel chain.

⁴ Interviews in the Katowice City Hall.

a projection or a vision of the future, we simultaneously see the world of today, the one that surrounds us, as well as the previous, historical one. It is then that our memory allows us to use our imagination in shaping a new place and a new architectural form and expression, it creates a broad context of place for the both hotel designs.

The location of Katowice in the centre of the Upper Silesian coal mining basin influences the landscape of this city. The capital of the agglomeration, along with its neighbouring cities and 'townships' create an urban area concentrated around the extractive industry.⁵ This is expressed in a mixed urban structure, including mining buildings, steel mills and other industrial sites. For dozens of years, Silesian architecture was dominated by housing estates built for the mining industry, known as *familoki*, which were groupings of relatively small houses built from brick, usually covered with a double-sided slanting roof, arranged in rows or grouped in geometric patterns, with 2 to 4 houses. The facades used to be 'decorated' with small windows, whose niches would be painted red. Such pictures have become the hallmark of the region's identity, and in fusion with the characteristic image of the head-frame mine shaft tower, are still a typical image of Silesia. For years, Upper Silesia has been a border region of significant economic prowess, characterised by a mix of Austrian, German and Czech influences. Over the decades, all this resulted in the region developing a specific local tradition. It also attracted large numbers of active and creative individuals.

After 1918, Katowice found itself under the influence of the trends of Polish Modernist architecture from the interwar period, in effect bringing about the creation of a number of buildings which, to this day, adorn the city with their 'uniqueness'. Singled out fragments of the city were created with respect to urban quarter-based development and the concept of the street frontage. Because of this, they successfully provided a continuation of the urban tissue.

After the Second World War, in the period between the '50s and '70s, Upper Silesia, with its capital city, went through a period of dynamic development, largely due to the key role played by heavy industry. The urban plan of the city of Katowice was expanded by new districts and spectacular buildings, which due to their prominence have become symbols of that period in the city's history. The monumental axis, which runs north-south from the old Town Square to the Roundabout and the legendary *Spodek* Arena (1971), marked out a vast new central zone, with loosely dispersed, modernist architecture. The scale was defined by the gigantic residential building known as the *Superjednostka*, modelled on Le Corbusier's famous *Unité d'habitation* in Marseille. In the late '90s, the region's coal-based monocultural economy, with its heavy industry, saw its final downfall. There came the times of great change, which, along with a political and economic transformation at the turn of the century, changed the direction of the agglomeration's development.

Today, Katowice is regaining its status of a modern city, this time based not only on industry but also on culture and education. On the vast expanses of a long decommissioned coalmine, adjacent to the city centre just east of the *Spodek*, a new concept has arisen, symbolising this dynamic period of transformation. In less than 15 years, this post-industrial brownfield site has morphed into what is known as the Katowice Culture Zone. Here we find buildings reaching in their significance far beyond the city and the region, such as the Museum of Silesia (2012), the seat of the National Symphony Orchestra of the Polish Radio – N0SPR (2014) or the MCK International Congress Centre (2016).

⁵ An area of over 2,500 km², inhabited by approximately 2.5 m people.

Each of the periods in Silesian history saw the creation of buildings with a very clear form, which gave the region its architectural identity.

Even in the period between the '60s and '90s, when Polish architecture clearly felt a regress connected with the unification and impoverishment of building materials, buildings were created here which left their mark on the history of modern architecture. Use and functionality connected with the utilitarian tradition of industrial buildings as well as the reference to the heritage of interwar modernism have become a clear trademark of modern Silesian architecture.⁶ The constant discovery of beauty in historical heritage and its transformation and processing in the creative mind lie at the source of the Silesian identity of place.

3. ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPT

In order to transform thought into a realistic image – and an architectural concept, apart from a place we also need a content, one whose essence is the functionality of the designed building.

Hotel Diament Plaza has existed in the very heart of the Katowice city centre for decades, occupying a 19th-century tenement house, present here even before the city's dynamic development. Today, the neighbouring historical building of the old Art Deco railway station and the stately structures of the tenement houses surrounding the railway station's square create a very attractive location. Mentioning the key role of the railways in the development of Katowice, one might metaphorically comment that the railway track in Katowice resembles a river inserted into the urban landscape. It is important for the design that the site which the hotel neighbours with, adjacent to the old railway station shall, after rebuilding this part of the city, become a representative part of urban space.

The newly designed part of Hotel Diament will fill a gap in the frontage created by the deconstruction of a tenement house which had previously occupied this space, directly next to the hotel. By combining both parts, we shall obtain a modern hotel complex with 135 rooms and an attractive, supplemented hotel program. The inner courtyard, with its glass roof, shall be the site's star attraction. The design also envisages a general renovation of the older part of the hotel, situated in the 19th-century tenement house. The ground floor will house the entrance, with a lobby and florist's, a summer garden and a restaurant, connected directly with the public space of the square in front of the old railway station. The top floor, above the existing structure of the building, shall house a number of apartments, with terraces overlooking the south side of the city, beyond the railway tracks.

Façade of the new part of the building is finished with a hand-crafted, fired brick veneering from the historical Patoka brickworks. This material, so characteristic to Silesia, has been arranged in a regular, deeply set lattice of window frames, which points to the division of hotel rooms and accentuates the arcade of the main entrance, with the entry gate to the underground part of the building.

⁶ J. Świerżawski, *Przemiana* [in:] B. Stelmach, K. Andrzejewska-Batko (eds.), *Tożsamość. 100 lat polskiej architektury*, Narodowy Instytut Architektury i Urbanistyki, Warszawa 2019.

The Hotel Puro will be built in the very heart of the city centre, along the Town Square-Roundabout axis. The building's location will create a new frontage for the vast Korfańty Avenue, thus alluding to the design by Konior Studio from 2006, the winner of the competition for the reconstruction of the Katowice city centre.⁷

The new, autonomously shaped venue shall be the first serious incursion into the architecture of this part of the city. It will be an attempt to redefine its foundations, the intellection of which is no longer known today. This shall be dependent on future steps undertaken by the city's administration and by future investors. It is worth mentioning that the area along the Roundabout axis has for years been the focus of challenges characteristic for modernist solutions. Filip Springer writes about this in his *Book of Awe*,⁸ in the essay *Modernism to a Fault* "...the architecture along Korfańtego Avenue between the recently modernised Katowice Town Square and the Jerzy Ziętek Roundabout is one of the most interesting and most humbling examples of how modernists envisaged the modern city. Modernism, especially in its soc version, is an outmoded era." We are now observing the painful consequences of something which, despite the passing years, has failed to assimilate with the city. It would be in vain to search for the concept of street here in its traditional definition. The area has been dominated by heavy traffic and the spaces around independently erected, widely dispersed buildings are difficult to adapt for newly arising needs. The project for the transformation of this area included in the urban coordination plan has been waiting to be implemented for years.

The location, with its concept of building a hotel with an enriched accompanying program, is well suited to the plan of creating an attractive setting for a big-city avenue. The nowadays empty areas neighbouring the site of the new hotel shall create a high-quality urban central space. The standard hotel program has been upgraded here through the introduction of a number of functions accessible to the public, including a café, art gallery, restaurant and a conference centre. The area shall also house a fitness centre and spa, and even a bakery. The majority of these functions shall be situated in the lower, open part of the building. The main entrance shall be accentuated with a deep arcade formed by the overhang of the building's superstructure, which is to incorporate all the floors of the hotel. The roofs have almost entirely been dedicated to terraces, transformed into green enclaves within this urban architecture.

The ground floor remains open to the public and shall be interconnected by a staircase shaped in the form of a monumental sculpture. The character of the interior, apart from the use of natural materials such as concrete, brick, steel and wood, will also be emphasised by references to the architecture and tradition of the region.⁹

Concept-form is expressed by the fusion of the lower structure with the higher one, situated on a pedestal, providing a scale continuation for the neighbouring high-rise buildings.

The Avenue will provide a view of the higher part of the structure, 56 m in height, with 14 floors – similarly to the neighbouring *Superjednostka* or the *Ślizowiec* building. On the western side, the lower part of the building relates in height to the *BWA* art gallery. This way, shaping of the hotel's structure is influenced by neighbouring architecture, being an element which remains in relation to it, but at the same time changing the urban composition of the

⁷ Urbanistic competition for the reconstruction of Katowice city centre, organised by the Katowice City Hall, 2006.

⁸ F. Springer, *Księga Zachwytów*, Agora, Warszawa 2019, pp. 230–231.

⁹ The Puro chain is cooperating with the British studio Salles Flint, which, together with Konior Studio, is responsible for interior design.

general concept of the area. The pedestal, with its high arcade leading to the entrance and its massive windows, is a transparent space which opens up onto the surrounding area and creates a connection between the main entrance and the walkway at the back of the building.

The image and trademark of the architectural concept is its frontal elevation, parallel to Korfantego Avenue. It is characterised by its dynamically overhanging hotel structure, suspended above the pavement. This part of the edifice possesses specific tectonics. Instead of a flat wall, here we shall find a 'pleated' mirror surface made of glass, which is created by a grand glass bay brattice, in line with the hotel room windows. The windows, fitted diagonally in relation to the façade, open up a wide perspective – to the whole city. The rhythmic flow of the vertical glass pleats creates a dynamic elevation and provides a show of mirrored reflections of light.

The frontal elevation is a reference to the first Polish skyscrapers,¹⁰ for which the characteristic feature is the emphasis of the vertical articulation of the facade through the use of vertical lesenes and the insertion of the windows in a rhythm of towering perpendicular stripes. In the design of the Hotel Puro, we come across a processed version of this motif. The pleats of the glass facade are almost like facets of a gemstone, bringing to mind the structure of a crystal – thus forming the impression of nobility and elegance.

Pro-ecological trends in urban transformation is a pretext for the creation of a friendly space in the very heart of the city centre. To achieve this, a large roof garden is proposed which shall create green enclaves 'suspended' above the city buildings. The lower garden on the roof of the pedestal from the western side, separated from the busy street below, ensures peace and quiet and will support the recreational part of the hotel. The highest situated garden in the city will find its home on the roof of the taller part of the building, connected by spiral staircases with a sky bar situated below. These green roofs are one of the many sustainable construction solutions introduced as part of this concept. Modernity is expressed through the architectural material, as well as through the perturbation of scale, which is the effect of obliterating any window divisions and the height of the tiers in the vertical rhythm of the mirror frontal facade.

4. SUMMARY

In the second decade of the 21st century, the hotels Diament Plaza and Puro form part of the reconstruction of the city centre of Katowice. Both are being created through a conceptual dialogue with their surroundings. Yet, they serve as evidence of the fact that in architecture the sense of truth and falsehood can, to an equal extent, be based on form, style, époque, structure and architectural language, as well as on the relation between buildings and their surrounding spatial context. Both truth as well as lies become in architecture secondary when faced with architectural creativity. The thought pursued by the architect seems to be the most important aspect. We might say that creativity always has been characteristic of design, however, at some points in architecture, many more designated rules and regulations had been executed. Nowadays, we more often indulge in the creative imagination of the architect,

¹⁰ During the interwar period, the first Polish skyscrapers appeared in Silesia. Worth mentioning are two of the region's high-rise buildings: the skyscraper on M. Curie-Skłodowskiej Street, in its time the tallest residential building, or the building of The Communal Bank in Chorzów.

since the algorithm has become that which, more often than not, controls our lives, also in architecture, creativity is fast becoming a fascinating challenge.

Undertaking new tasks, we would like to believe in the creative power of the imagination, which transforms our lives and elevates them to a higher level. As Marcus du Sautoy beautifully puts it: “The incredible thrill of excitement is the lure of creativity...those who attempted to determine meaning (of the word) ... usually revolve around three ideas ...the drive to come up with something that is new and surprising and that has value.”¹¹

References

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Born 1968. Architect, graduate of the Faculty of Architecture at the Cracow University of Technology. In 2019, he defended his doctoral thesis entitled *Evolution of public space in buildings for music*. Since 1995, he has been running his own architectural office Konior Studio. Author and co-author of public buildings, including the Centre for Music Science and Education “Symfonia” in Katowice, the seat of the National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice, the Music School Complex in Warsaw, the extension of the National Library in Warsaw and the Brno Philharmonic.

He is a member of the Polish Chamber of Architects and the Association of Polish Architects SARP. During the term of office of 2012–2015, he was the Chairman of the Coordination Team of Competition Judges at the Main Board of SARP. He is a member and co-founder of the Institute of the Modern City. He is involved in social initiatives for environmental protection (LIBRA Association) and music promotion (Katowice Natura Kultura Association).

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¹¹ M. du Sautoy, *The Creativity Code. How AI Is Learning to Write, Paint and Think*, Fourth Estate, London 2019, transl. note.