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## ARCHITECTURE. (SALES) TECHNIQUE

### ARCHITEKTURA. TECHNIKA (SPRZEDAŻY)

#### Abstract

The goal of the text is to describe the observations of the real estate market. It concerns the problem of the growth of developer companies' income at the cost of housing quality. While forms of buildings are acceptable, functional solutions raise objections. Generally, one could say that such architecture is going to be nothing but one more commodity to sell. Most discussions on that subject are rather conducted on the level of newspaper articles, and to stress this lack of real research in the field, neither footnotes nor bibliography has been included in this paper.

*Keywords: architecture, income, market*

#### Streszczenie

Celem tekstu jest opis obserwacji rynku nieruchomości, dotyczących sposobów zwiększania dochodów firm deweloperskich kosztem jakości mieszkań. O ile forma budynków mieszkalnych utrzymuje się na akceptowalnym poziomie, o tyle rozwiązania funkcjonalne budzą zastrzeżenia. Architektura mieszkaniowa staje się przez to towarem rynkowym. Rozliczeń w tym zakresie dokonuje się głównie na poziomie publicystyki gazetowej – dla podkreślenia tego w tekście nie ma ani przypisów ani bibliografii.

*Słowa kluczowe: architektura, dochód, rynek*

## INTRODUCTION

Architecture is a product for sale. It does not matter whether it is categorized as art, described as a sign, or explained in terms of its role in the lives of people, nations, and countries. The distinction between modernist or postmodernist, or any other style, also seems irrelevant, as does whether it was criticized from phenomenological or structuralist perspectives; nothing seems to matter except one thing: it needs to be sold.

The use of this word (sell) refers to all its meanings found in the Polish Language Dictionary, occupying a whole 1.5 columns there. The most important of these is: to transfer something to someone for money. This “transfer” applies to every piece of architecture, regardless of function and form, and has always occurred.

Various texts discuss this, focusing on building regulations designed to ensure the common safety of city residents. These regulations also pertain to the management of interpersonal relations among citizens. The smaller the area of a city and the more people it housed, the more significant these regulations became, not least because of the need to protect residents from various disasters that occur in urban environments. These regulations, one could say,

immaterial in their records, physically shaped urban space. By examining these regulations, we gain a more conscious understanding of the work of, for example, Camillo Sitte, who linked the beauty of a city to the skillful and consistent construction of it as a work of art within the rigid framework of an urban plan. Boundary lines, land consolidation, and the placement of dominant buildings, etc., are planning tools he referred to as artistic principles. The plan was both a document of local law and a record (a documented image) of high-quality space. It would seem that in Sitte's time and thereafter, this was a common scheme of action for the common good, but that was not the case.

## CHAPTER 1

Sitte's book on the artistic principles of city building, published in 1889, appeared nearly 25 years after the implementation of James Hobrecht's Berlin plan (1861), which, although it organized public spaces, also opened the door to speculative actions within beautifully designed quarters. It is no wonder that in 1930, Werner Hagemann wrote a book titled "Das steinere Berlin" (Stone Berlin), drawing attention to the largest concentration of so-called Mietkaserne, barracks for housing, in the world. What did this mean? One example suffices: a house measuring 56m by 20m in plan, with partition walls, fire walls, and windowless sides, abutting the walls of adjacent buildings, a sequence of three courtyards measuring 5.94 m by 5.94 m each, seven stories high, housing 325 to 650 residents. Calculating these numbers across all buildings in Berlin resulted in about 76 people per building, making that density a world record at the time (for comparison, Manhattan had 20 people, Paris 38), while Wrocław and Poznań ranked 3rd and 4th, and Vienna 5th. It is therefore not surprising that Berlin adopted new regulations in 1887, specifically concerning the floor area ratio. This could not exceed  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the plot's area, and in new districts it was  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the area. The height of the front building could not exceed the width of the adjacent street. The roof slope could not exceed 5 degrees. Nine years later, the courtyard area was increased to 80 square meters.

There is not enough space here to describe all cases (e.g., Russia, the United States, Great Britain). However, one can conclude that the construction reality and regulations, especially their spirit, were in constant conflict. Never and nowhere did investors and builders accept limitations. This whole process has reached our times and, of course, our country. One might even suggest that the practice of finding ways to circumvent regulations has taken on previously unseen proportions.

## CHAPTER 2

Since 1989, we have observed in Poland an unrestrained and quite common exploitation of every opportunity to increase income from investment activities, particularly in residential construction. It is sadly noticeable that this occurs to the detriment of future residents of the buildings being constructed. The technique of selling apartments has become paramount, with as many units as possible squeezed onto the plot where they are built.

Firstly, the plot is developed in such a way that no more than the allowed 4 meters remain from each boundary. Of course, regulations concerning the maintenance of undeveloped

land, as it is elegantly called, biologically active surfaces, are generally followed, but even here clever manipulation of numbers occurs to reduce this area. Furthermore, there are known cases of maintaining the borderline of permissible regulations regarding the lighting of apartments – but it can also be argued that poorly lit areas will not be intended for permanent residency but for hotel-type spaces, short-term rentals, service use, etc. The width of the houses intended to fill the plot is generally greater than that which allows for rational and sensible use of their area. Thus, buildings have exaggerated lengths of corridors, dark storage spaces, and deep (but narrow) rooms. All of these are square meters for sale, and they sell. Sales techniques, refined by real estate agents, greatly assist in this.

Secondly, some rooms that were once considered essential in an apartment are now becoming obsolete. The kitchen, as a separate room with real doors, must be mentioned first. For decades, functional design education in architecture departments included the skill of locating kitchens with windows on the outer wall of the building. Today, the kitchen has been transformed into an annex in the living room or anywhere else in the apartment. This greatly simplifies design and frees external walls from “losing space for a window” in their length. In place of the former kitchen, another room can be proposed. Is it good to live with a cooking area in the living room? Even with the best ventilation, one might have concerns about that. The well-fed fashion of cooking with guests or washing dishes while watching television or engaging in other forms of entertainment helps a lot. The fact that a significant portion of meals is not prepared at home, replaced by trips to restaurants – if we can afford it – also contributes. Sales techniques, refined by real estate agents, greatly assist in this.

Thirdly, the price per square meter of apartments remains at a very high level and, despite proposals coming from various corners of the political scene, is not expected to drop. The result is an overproduction of small apartments, even below standards. Many people, including families, opt for living conditions that are not conducive to family or neighborhood life. The discussion surrounding apartment sizes is very lively, and it suggests that apartments of, for example, 17 m<sup>2</sup> should not be built, or there should even be a ban on their construction. But again, we delve into sales techniques. Many people believe they cannot afford larger apartments. This is unfortunately true, especially when we accept that an apartment is a commodity like any other item on the market.

Fourthly, carelessness in project execution, cheapness of materials used, and savings on anything below the basic equipment of buildings are rampant. Only in projects advertised as exceptional (as indicated by the price per square meter) are expensive and better materials and exceptional design utilized. However, this does not guarantee the solidity of the building's construction.

### CHAPTER 3

It is difficult to say whether the practices described above, in broad terms and only selecting a few of them, occur more frequently among large development companies or smaller firms. Certainly, much depends on the integrity of the company owner. One can also question the reliability of the designer. In both cases, money lurks in the background. Conversations with many architects reveal their dependence on developers and the awareness that refusing to

design in a way that “works for everyone” will not improve the situation and will not allow their office to earn a profit.

## CHAPTER 4

This journalistic description of the problem should end on a more optimistic note. A positive example can be found in a residential complex at the intersection of Mińska and Kamionkowska streets in Warsaw. This complex, closing off the block of buildings at the intersection of the aforementioned streets, was integrated into the urban fabric near “Soho Factory,” a former factory complex in Warsaw’s Kamionek district.

The execution continues the character of the existing development while respecting the historical context of the place. The façade is made up of reddish-brown and black panels of various sizes and shapes, referring to the industrial character of the surroundings. In the courtyard, which constitutes a common space for residents, railway tracks have been incorporated into the pavement design, indicating the direction of movement. An additional decorative element is the landscape sculpture “Carousel” – metalwork showcasing human figures. This motif has been replicated in the entrance area from Kamionkowska Street and in the interiors of the common areas of the buildings. The preservation of context is also evidenced by the rescue from oblivion of the well-known Warsaw mural called “Castle,” which was created in 2013 as part of the Street Art Doping 2013 festival. The building with the mural had to be demolished for technical reasons, and the photographic documentation was used to decorate the common areas of the building at 12 Mińska Street.

It is worth noting the pro-social idea of enhancing the aesthetic value of the inner courtyard by eliminating the unsightly external dumpster belonging to the neighboring housing community. In exchange, a new dumpster room has been provided on the ground floor of the new building. The complex does not stand out for its great scale; the intensity of development has not been exaggerated, and no one has fought to increase it. The number of apartments and the amount of developed area were not the primary goals of the designers. The intention was to create traditional apartment buildings in their expression, while still incorporating elements of modernity. This can be stated with full confidence, as the same investor is independently reevaluating part of a historic Italian town, following an identical approach. In both cases, there is an understanding of the character of the place and respect for what we call the *genius loci*. This way of interacting between the investor and the site of their activity can be referred to as a special technique aimed at enticing potential residents to purchase the proposed properties.

## CHAPTER 5

The lack of respect for the *genius loci* is evident on a large scale in a place like Jurata. Here, the technique of selling “architecture” has been perfected. It is worth recalling that Jurata, as it exists today, was established when the joint-stock company Lasmet leased 180 hectares from the State Forests to organize a resort. It was intended to compete with Sopot, and although it had a different character than the city of Sopot, since its founding in 1928, and especially since the first tourist season in 1931, Jurata had become a vacation spot for

the elites from across the country. Out of the leased land, 100 hectares were designated for building plots, while 50 hectares were reserved for common areas (market square, park, etc.). An elegant railway station with a café, a rail siding, and a two-hundred-meter platform were built relatively quickly. A health resort (kurhaus), hotels, a restaurant, a hall and concert shell, a glass gallery protecting against strong winds during seaside walks, tennis courts, a promenade, and even waterworks and sewage systems were also established – everything that demanding holidaymakers could expect. Two types of residential buildings were developed, or rather bungalows, one-story and two-story. Their architecture largely derived from the materials used in their construction, namely wood, but it also embodied the spirit of modernism that was already fashionable at the time. The roofs had a slight slope, large windows, and terraces. It was important to hide the buildings within the existing forest and to keep their sizes relatively small, but they also couldn't be denied a touch of luxury, hence their high prices. Despite this, those who could afford to buy were eager to do so. On one hand, the constant temperature, much milder due to the cover of forests protecting against the wind, was an incentive, compared to the entire seaside. An even greater difference was made by the number of sunny days with high insolation. This version of Jurata lasted until the war. After the war, Jurata maintained its holiday character, but between 1960 and 1975 many company, resort, and union centers were built here. This marked the beginning of changes in the town's landscape, initially small.

On a massive scale, changes began after 1989, alongside shifts in the social and economic life of the country. While maintaining Jurata's status as a unique place, construction began for increasingly wealthy individuals. Pre-war bungalows were demolished, plots changed owners, and the new owners sought to maximize their profits by constructing multi-story apartment buildings. The architecture of these buildings also evolved. Expressive glass surfaces emerged, and the initially used wooden facades were replaced with plastic panels. The earliest, unrestrained postmodernism (difficult to tolerate) was replaced with designs from Miami (but not from the art deco era) or Las Vegas, or simply with models reflecting the new wealthy Poles' imaginations about local architecture. In terms of protecting its historic space, Jurata has no partners, especially since the local authorities based in Jastarnia approve of every excess, including the cutting down of larger tracts of forest. The sales techniques for apartments in these elaborate structures are simple: it's expensive, therefore it must be exceptionally good and suitable for showcasing to other owners of similar architectural masterpieces. There is no doubt that buildings constructed after the war or just before do not meet expectations for holiday comfort. This concerns the size of the rooms, the standard of the bathrooms, the lack of spacious terraces or balconies. It is also difficult to notice any effort from the owners of older buildings to address these shortcomings.

## SUMMARY

It can be said that an atmosphere of selling at the highest possible prices has taken over architecture. Discussions about the latter, despite appearances, are scant and focus on statements that architects can do nothing, that architecture is governed by money, and that those who control money can ultimately destroy our cities and smaller towns. Unfortunately, as examples show, we do not have many arguments in this discussion.

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