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DURATION AND PASSING OF ARCHITECTURAL PATTERNS OF PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL HOUSES – DISCOURSE BETWEEN FORMALLY PROMOTED ARCHITECTURE AND PRIVATE USER’S WISHES

Architecture of a house, built by a private investor, at the expense and on the request of the user, probably fully reflects wishes and aesthetic preferences of the society. Architecture is often a reflection of trends and patterns which exist in certain time and on a particular territory. The question about these patterns is the subject of the presented discourse and the subject of a research project on the contemporary aesthetic preferences in Polish society.

Key words: architecture, residential house, architectural trends, user's preferences

The deepest problem of human life flows from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and the individuality of the existence against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life...

Georg Simmel [1]

A residential house is an architectural form where the society's wishes and tastes are probably reflected to the highest degree. It expresses culture and lifestyle, the place and time of its construction. A residence – *a villa*, being a higher / more expensive form of a detached house, enables an architect to implement his dreams of a perfect form. However, he is not totally independent in his struggle against architecture – he has to think about satisfying the future user's desires and wishes. Formally, contemporary architectural models originate from the modernism of the early 1920s. This architecture still has got quality assurance. It often becomes an

inspiration for houses built contemporarily. Houses are also implemented according to a user – an investor's "own code". The period after modernism brought a new and much more diverse interpretation of a form. The language of architectural record has changed the classical code of architecture. New tendencies produce new formal record. Even a short journey across the Polish architectural landscape shows unchanging attachment to historical models and arises a question about patterns which make the main inspiration for a private investor. The question of the truthfulness as well the cause of this phenomenon became an incentive for research on the tendencies and models functioning in the Polish society.

In search of a model

A search for the models of the contemporary architecture of residential houses showed the difficulty of formulating them in an unambiguous manner. Tendencies, trends and ideas intermingle, while examples of

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implemented objects frequently stand on the border between two or even more literary trends [2]. Studies in this direction were unsuccessful – a search, which could have resulted in an attempt to announce another / new typological classification of a form, was relinquished. There is a true (and rather intuitive) statement about the existence of two general tendencies:

- houses originating from the trend of historical architecture,
- houses originating from the principles of early modernism.

These creative approaches differ in their attitude to defining a space which is best visible in *model houses*. In the former, a residential space develops “centripetally”, inside a closed body – the prototype of Palladio’s *Willa Rotonda*. In the latter, a residential space develops “centrifugally” – Mies van der Rohe’s *Brick House*.

Literary research indicates two further important trends:

- houses originating from a search for accordance with nature,
- houses originating from a wide stream of models shaped by postmodernism.

The separation of houses responding to the distinguished trends in design made it possible to introduce four models to be examined. They became the basis for research carried out among future, potential users. Four tendencies shown by four different buildings are as follows:

The Historical Trend – Continued Tradition

At first, the Palladian villa was a model for shaping an estate residence and then it became a pattern for the wealthy bourgeoisie across Europe. The central layout of an interior and an ancient column portico became a determinant of wealth and good tradition.

In Polish historical architecture, this model had a local material and formal interpretation. Contemporarily, it has become a tendency which seems to maintain

its currency and long, historically revived tradition. The independence of Poland regained in 1918, the then search for a *national style* as well as another constraint of the national identity after World War II (1945-1989) were important for the creation and durability of this trend. A contemporary search for historical models in the estate architecture of private residential houses facilitates new distinguishment of the inhabitants of the plain flats of the socialist epoch. Looking at the contemporary implementations of “the Polish estate manor”, we can notice the influence of the historical trend – the national style – as well as the impact of postmodernism. The *double code* [3] of postmodern architecture, noticed by Ch. Jencks, is limited to some borrowed elements of the historical form. Column porticos, corner towers and even protective elements are becoming a necessary element of a residence, a testimony to its owner’s wealth rather than taste. The form of a building usually results from the investor’s wishes whose implementer is the architect. A reference to local historical forms situates these objects in the ranks of the tendencies of so-called vernacular architecture as well as the postmodernist tendency. The commonness of accepting the so-called *manor style* or *national style* in Polish architecture is most probably an expression of the wishes of the investors of private residential houses.

The Modernist Trend – Young Contemporary Architects’ Esthetics

Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoy in Poissy (1923-31), standing on pillars, grows from the landscape and creates a closed geometrical whole. However, it is the form of this building which creates the context of the place. According to Collin Rowe [4], there is a direct relationship between these two objects: Palladio’s villa and Le Corbusier’s house. Even though they are divided by ideology, both attitudes are equally dogmatic. The need for separating the interior of a house from the outside is evident in the idea of a fence – the

creation of a private protected space. Mies builds his simple, functional houses within a fence, too.

The clear, bright form of Villa Savoy shaped the definition of modernism for long years. The architectonic geometry of this object shaped a clear definition of the standards of modernism which perceives architecture as the formation of a function with a clear, abstract form instead of a *mélange* of decorations and materials. Corbusier's architecture influenced numerous architects' creative activity and initiated many esthetical trends in architecture. Contemporary minimalist tendencies in the architecture of detached houses also promote forms which originate from geometrical simplicity but, toning in with the natural landscape, they often aim at creating architecture more strongly related to a place rather than oriented towards technology (Medusa Group). It can be seen in many houses designed by Mies. Tadao Ando – a genuinely contemporary architect – refers to the esthetics proposed by Corbusier [5] as well, even though he creates a different idea. His houses virtually reversed the idea of a *model*, creating the real world of a dwelling place focused around an internal courtyard. The architecture of a house refers more strongly to its esthetics than to its function, remaining faithful to the principles of geometrical simplicity. The world of a dwelling place presented in houses designed by the young Polish architect Robert Konieczny is shaped in a similar manner. His A-atrium house has become a model type in our research.

The Landscape Trend – In Unity with Nature

Even though Frank Lloyd Wright is considered as a modernist, he designed in *the Gothic spirit* (his own words). He postulated a search for the American society's own style – *the US-onian house* [6]. This style was expected to result from the citizens' needs as well as from the natural relief – a house was supposed to form unity with its surroundings. The domination of the horizontal line was to intensify the impression of con-

necting a building with the surrounding area (the so-called prairie house). The application of natural materials made a reference to the Japanese tradition. An integral element of the architecture of Wright's houses was detail which increased the attractiveness of their form from distant views and the attractiveness of the material, colour solutions and the quality of formal elements in close insights. His flagship design of *Robbie House* presents a layout with the evident domination of the principle of shaping a residential space in accordance with its intended use. Emphasizing the significance of Wright in the process of destroying the idea of an architectonic box, Pieter Oud said that *he scattered bodies, therefore the development of modern architecture will mean its reduction to suitable proportions* [7]. The idea of accentuating the horizontal line in architecture is proven effective in the creation of houses harmoniously contesting their surroundings. In Polish architecture, we can mention many examples whose architectonic form accepts the landscape and even places in the foreground freely playing with a material, like the Silesian houses by the Medusa Group or the villa in Komorowo designed by Dorota and Wojciech Bagiński.

The Fallingwater House acted as a model house in the research. Despite its geometrical simplicity, it seemed to be the most expressive pattern of thinking about a romantic house, a house connected with the landscape.

The Postmodern Trend – A House for the Brave

In 1972, the *death* of modernism was announced. A new style became an expression of nostalgia for the past as well as a reflection of accelerating technical transformations, new thinking in art, literature, painting, sculpture, graphic art, photography, cinematography. Mies' words *less is more* are beginning to mean *less is bore*. To Robert Venturi, architecture is a transmitter expressed in two forms: a building with an insignificant form (an advertisement informs about

its function) – *a decorated stand*; a building whose function dominates over its form – *a duck*. A building becomes *an icon* – its geometry is not related to its function anymore, its symbolic meaning comes to the fore. Architecture often becomes a game which uses all the potential of technology.

Frank Gehry, a contemporary designer, develops many of F.L. Wright's principles although he is rather associated with postmodernism and its aspiration to disprove the traditional outlook on the world. He aims at dismembering the form which was integrated by Wright's diverse materials. This trend has produced numerous objects which demolish the existing world of architectonic forms and refer to the architecture of meanings rather than architectural geometry. The idea of disintegration visible in Frank Gehry's houses, e.g. the Wintons' house where the crush of the plan into six bodies, each with a different geometry and finished with a different material, means the liberalization of family life and the disintegration of the traditional culture of residence. This trend includes a multitude of formal concepts as well as contemporary technical and technological possibilities. We can also add the so-called Snail House designed by the already mentioned Polish architect Robert Konieczny. Including the model house, we called it the House for the Brave.

Summary – Research Results

The research was carried out on more than two hundred people – potential investors of their own

dream house. The survey showed four model types of houses. Moreover, it included some detailed questions concerning the solutions of an interior, concepts of the roof, the entrance to a building etc. General answers, concerning the form and esthetics – a future/potential user's general ideas of the architecture of his/her own house, seem important for the purposes of this paper.

The answers confirm what we can see around us. Sixty per cent of the respondents opted for a very traditional house, whereas more than twenty per cent of them – a landscape house. The rest was torn between the modernist trend and the postmodern trend or had not got a specified opinion.

Architecture continuously derives inspiration from history and tradition. Even if it seems that a given trend is dying out, another one replaces it – history is smouldering somewhere at its beginning.

A review of literature shows that, similarly to the first half of the 20th century, numerous contemporary architects return to the architecture of private residential houses as an important transmitter of an architectural idea. Searching for model houses, we can see an evident diversification of attitudes, both in creative architects and the recipients of architecture – the residents. It is expressed by the diversity of architecture. This diversity is always motivated by the context of meanings which exists in the society as if it was coming into being beyond architecture itself.

ENDNOTES

[1] G. Simmel, [in:] *Rethinking Architecture: a Reader in Cultural Theory*, edition: Neil Leach, London 1997, p. 67.

[2] Ch. Jencks, *Architectural Review*, July 2000, p. 77.

[3] Ch. Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, London 1977.

[4] C. Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, Cambridge 1988.

[5] J. Welsh, *Modern House*, New York 2004, p. 22.

[6] *Op.cit.*

[7] P. Gössel, G. Leuthäuser, *Architecture of the 20th Century*, Cologne 2006, p. 191.