

THE HOUSE IN THE CITY AFTER THE CITY

DOM W MIEŚCIE PO MIEŚCIE

A b s t r a c t

The subject of the article is to analyse the changes in ways of defining the concept of a house in the context of reconstruction, and in fact – of building a new Old Town in Szczecin. As a result of World War II, the historic complex of the Old Town has been destroyed. In the mid ,50s, there was a decision made to build a new complex, which was based on the modern ideas. The crisis of modernism and cultural changes caused a new building development of the empty parts of the Old City from the early 90s of the twentieth century. They reconstruct the historic urban layout, and in the aspect of architecture, they are usually a free variation of their creators on the idea of a historical tenement house. In this context, the article analyses the changing ways of defining the concept of originality, usefulness and beauty of the house.

Keywords: residential architecture, contemporary architecture, house, reconstruction, Szczecin

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Tematem artykułu jest analiza zmian sposobów definiowania pojęcia domu w kontekście odbudowy, a w istocie – budowy nowego założenia staromiejskiego w Szczecinie. W wyniku działań II wojny światowej doszło do zniszczenia historycznego zespołu zabudowy Starego Miasta. W połowie lat 50. XX w. podjęto decyzję o budowie nowego zespołu, który oparto na ideach modernistycznych. Kryzys modernizmu i zmiany ogólnokulturowe spowodowały, że na niezabudowanych fragmentach Starego Miasta od początku lat 90. XX w. powstają nowe budynki. Odtwarzają one historyczny układ urbanistyczny, a w warstwie architektonicznej stanowiącej najczęściej swobodną wariację ich twórców na temat wyobrażenia o historycznej kamienicy. W tym kontekście w artykule analizie poddane zostały zmieniające się sposoby definiowania pojęcia oryginalności, użyteczności i piękna domu.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura mieszkaniowa, architektura współczesna, dom, odbudowa, Szczecin

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The dichotomy of the word *dom*

The word “*dom*” in Polish concerns various areas¹, of which, however, the following two seem to be the most important. The first area refers to variously understood building, and the second is the description of the family from which a man is born. This apparent limitation and inaccuracy of the Polish language proves, in essence, its richness and complexity. To become a “*dom*” in its truest sense, it must meet both demands – should apply to both matter and spirit.

The subject of this discussion is an attempt of synthetic analysis of the activities, of which the aim was to rebuild (build) “*dom*” in areas destroyed by the activities of World War II Old Town, located in Szczecin and other cities of Western Pomerania, of which Szczecin in this case can be a symbol. Essentially, this history has become a record of the struggle of architects and urban planners with the concept of “*dom*”, its usefulness, originality, beauty, but as a consequence of something deeper, which can be called a rootedness of architecture.

1. THE FIRES AND THE DEMOLITION

Turkish writer and Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk in his story of fires and demolitions², which was published in June 2002 in the Turkish edition of National Geographic, talks about the changes in Istanbul in the last few decades, which were the result of “the transition to the phase of tenement house.”³ He defines the process of making deliberate devastation, burnings, and in consequence, demolition of wooden architecture from the period of the second half of the sixteenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth century, that in their place they could “build a brick tenement house recognised as a sign of wealth and modernity.”⁴ In the author’s memory, in time, there has become an accumulation of the old and new city. The old buildings related to its past life are combined with multi-storeyed garages and new housing estates. This leads him to conclude that his own individual Istanbul has split in two cities: the outside city and the inside city. “The city has two faces. The outside city contains buildings, monuments, streets and views available to anyone coming to the city as a foreigner. The inside city on the other hand includes bedrooms where we sleep, classes in which we learn, corridors, cinemas, personal memories, smells, lights and colours. A proper spirit of this place is more than visible in the external face similarity of individual districts – it is something that lives in the memory of the people and which reveals the hidden face of the city.”⁵

The poetic vision of Pamuk emphasises one of the most important issues concerning the perception of the concepts of a house and town. The first dimension is external and material, the second – internal and spiritual. Understanding this opposition, or rather a complementary image, is perhaps the key to understanding the recent years of architecture development – its

¹ In Polish language there is only one word for English words *house*, *home* and *residence* – “*dom*”.

² O. Pamuk, *Essays and a Story*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków, 2012, p. 93–99.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 95.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 94.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 97–98.

discoveries, blind paths and shortcuts. For behold since the crisis of modernism problem of *memory and its record in the house* has become one of the main issues of contemporary architecture, still, re-challenged and undertaken by another schools and individual artists.

2. A HOUSE AS A SCENOGRAPHIC HISTORY MATERIAL

In the space where today is an area of Szczecin Old Town (Altstadt), forms of settlement appeared in the early medieval period. In the twelfth century there was a Slavic settlement, consisting of a castle and the borough. At the same time, German settlers arrived, who have created their own community, founded in 1187 by St. Jacob's church. In 1243, Szczecin has been existed under the Magdeburg Law, which merged the city into one body. Knowledge of architectural forms of medieval and modern residential houses in Szczecin was limited. This is caused mainly by wars and the devastation of wars, which have become a frequent part of the history of the city.

In 1637, after the death of the last Pomeranian duke Boguslaw XVI, Szczecin with Western Pomerania came under the reign of King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden. The turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth century was another time of war and destruction for the city. After successive sieges and battles in 1720, due to an agreement in Stockholm, Szczecin was acquired by Prussia. On the basis of the cadastral census made in 1721, there were only 92 parcels with damaged or non-existent buildings. In practice, this meant a complete overhaul of the city. Since the mid-nineteenth century has began the process of expanding municipal boundaries of the new districts, with a simultaneous partial replacement of the old Town buildings. Especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it came to its compaction, reaching up to 90% of the building area, which was a result of progressive industrialisation and the demand for new apartments.

Another breakthrough in the history of the Old City was the end of World War II. As a result of the Allied air raids aimed primarily at the harbor and the shipyard, which bordered the old town, it came to its destruction. Fights in the city lasted until 26 April 1945 and Szczecin become occupied by the Soviet army. On July 5 1945, Szczecin has been transferred to the Polish authorities, which was confirmed by the findings in Schwerin on 24 October 1945.

Assessing the history of the old Town in Szczecin from the Middle Ages to World War II, we should emphasise its variability and interchangeability of houses that have become scenographic history material. This lack of stability has changed after 1720. More than two hundred years of Prussian presence finally managed to develop a recognisable urban organism, which after 1945 had its next cataclysm.

3. A DETACHED HOUSE

Comparing considerations of Orhan Pamuk with the processes, which took place in Szczecin, one major difference should be noted. Istanbul, as many other cities, has changed as a result of the sovereign decision of its inhabitants. It happened under the pressure of



economics and literally understood need for modernisation. In this city, however, the memory has been continued and was transmitted from generation to generation. While the issue of the destruction and replacement of buildings is nothing special in the history of urban planning, the difference in Szczecin and other western Polish cities is a process of specific *Transfer!*⁶, which involved the total exchange of people, and consequently, termination of the city memory. For new residents, the city was like a tabula rasa.

Although destruction of the Old Town area was serious, because of the preserved fragments of buildings, and what is most important – preserved urban layout, it was possible to attempt to return to historical forms of the city development. In the Polish architecture of the late 40s and 50s, the examples of Warsaw and Gdansk testify to the fact that with the will of the society and politics, that process could be carried out. In the case of Polish western territories, there was no such will. For many years, in a sense of temporariness remained in Western Pomerania, which later was replaced by the need to mark the presence.

Hence, in the mid '50s won the concept proposed by the architects gathered around Szczecin City Project⁷. In the place of the urban plan dating back to the thirteenth century, they proposed the concept of loosely referring to history (ill. 1), introducing a housing estate with free-standing buildings, with a single entrance and entry series, disposed in the open green spaces. The authors of the studies were the architects W. Furmańczyk, L. Kotowski, W. Michałowski, W. Jarzynka. Later on, similar ideological principles came to building an old town in Stargard (design work started in 1957, the project team of architecture and urban planning: Waclaw Furmańczyk, Witold Jarzynak, Renata Fyda – Karwowska), in Gryfino (Commencement of realization in 1960, the project team of architecture and urban planning: Władysław Michałowski, Józef Bogdalski, Henryk Okrój, Józef Pokrzywicki) in Goleniów (design work started in 1959, the project team of architecture and urban planning: Emanuel Maciejewski, Leonard Kotowski, Eugeniusz Ryżewski, Romuald Cerebiez – Tarabicki), in Gryfice (design work started in 1956, the project team of architecture and urban planning: Gertruda Czarnecka, Zdzisław Kasprzak, Henryk Okrój, Wojciech Pluciński, Kazimierz Stachowiak, Ryszard Wróblewski), in Pyrzyce (design work started in 1957, the

⁶ In 2006 on the stage of the Contemporary Theatre in Wrocław Jan Klata directed loud spectacle *Transfer!* The show talked about the postwar fate of displaced Polish and German people, which effected a complete replacement (title *Transfer!*) of inhabitants in Wrocław.

⁷ The project in a closed competition defeated, among others, projects in the style of socialist realism.

- III. 1. The view from the inside of the quarter of free-standing building at Sołtysia 5 street in Szczecin, built at the turn of the 50s and 60s of the twentieth century. In the background we can see medieval Cathedral of St. Jacob
- III. 2. A view of the fragment of the frontage at Panieńska street in Szczecin, built in the early twenty-first century. An example of free composition of facade, representing authors variations on the idea of a old town house
- III. 3. Details of the front facade of the building at Grodzka 13–19 street. Tectonics of the facade is formed by reinforced concrete ceiling – pillar and retracted brick filling
- III. 4. Detail of the front elevation of tenement house at the Fish Market designed by Kuryłowicz & Associates studio. One of the few contemporary examples of attempts to minimize formal means

project team of architecture and urban planning: Henryk Okrój, Konstanty Kozłowski, Zdzisław Kasprzak, Henryk Nardy) and other cities of Western Pomerania.

What, in fact, were those concepts and the designed houses? Their genesis reaches the modernist vision of Le Corbusier and his Plan Voisin, which has been adapted to the specific needs of localisation. The ideal was a detached building with a centrally located staircase or with more residential sections, arranged in a manner that created a substitute for historical frontage. The realisation took place in times of dramatic demand for new housing, hence the dominance of residential functions and perceptible marginalisation of service functions⁸. The technical difficulties of realisations can provide memories of Witold Jarzynka, one of the authors of the project, who as a personal success recognised, among others, forcing the authorities to agree to the use of pitched roofs⁹. It should be emphasised that, at the time of implementation, creation of a new building complex met with relatively good social acceptance, as evidenced by the awards for the authors. It was one of the first realisations arising in the post-war Szczecin, which in parts was still covered with rubble. Besides appreciating functional values, attention was also on the symbolic importance of the implementation and on the contribution of new residents in the new development of the city.

4. FRONTAGE

At the turn of the 50s and 60s was built the west and centre part of the Old Town. In the eastern part, running along the Odra river, was built a wide transport artery, which cut off and still separated the Old Town from the river. In this lane was expected a continuation of the free-standing buildings, including setting high-rise buildings that were supposed to dominate the new city skyline. This concept was not carried out due to the relatively poor soil conditions, which would require the use of expensive technologies. Paradoxically, it was the technical conditions that stopped the modernist realisation and gave the opportunity for new ideas that triumphed a few decades later.

Due to the soil conditions, the eastern riverside area was for many years a reserve terrain. At the same time, the European architecture and urban planning went through ideological redefinition. Modernism was in crisis and the ideas of postmodernism became increasingly popular. Modernist radicalism associated with the transformation of the Old Town has been criticised and more sustainable solutions have been sought. Due to these circumstances, in 1983, an architectural and urban competition on the undeveloped parts of the Old Town was organized. During the competition, the first prize was not chosen, but one of the two main prizes went to the team from the Technical University in Szczecin, led by Dr. Eng. arch. Stanisław Latour. This concept sought to the fullest the possible restoration of the urban plan and the execution

⁸ The problem of insufficient amount of service points and dominance of residential functions in the buildings of the late 50s and 60s, with simultaneous limitations of architecture that in practice made it impossible to perform the adaptation of housing into public functions, it is today one of the major constraints of revitalization of this part of the city.

⁹ Problems in the implementation of pitched roofs stemmed from restrictions on the possibility of using wood in constructions. This has resulted that in some cities of Western Pomerania in the area of the Old Town buildings were made with the use of flat roofs.

of new tenement houses on the basis of the cadastral division and preserving the foundations of old buildings. These assumptions were the basis for urban plans and conservation principles, approved in the '90s, which in general terms have continued to this day.

What was the new house in Old Town of Szczecin since 1989? At its basis, there was nostalgia for the historical foundation. In the downtown, the lack of traditional architecture was noticeable, there was a need for detailed and intimate urban interiors, and other elements that were not the subject of the modernist discourse. Was the architecture of the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries able to meet this challenge? In over twenty years, there variations on the historic tenement house were implemented by dozens of architects (Figure 2). They received many individual responses that still did not create a coherent vision. It may be due to an unfinished construction process, but even that does not change the sense of fragmentation, separateness, and even artificiality of the new establishment.

5. FACADE

Drawing of a facade used proportions and details determined the styles and architectural trends of historical houses until the period of modernism. Proposed by the modernists, the idea of a detached house was supposed to erase from the dictionary of modern architecture, the concept of highlighted facade and replace it with equivalent elevations. Robert Venturi questioned the idea, restoring architecture the facade and the magic of symbol. However, further development of architecture has become a sequence of consecutive occurrences and mutual denials, and careful reading into individual projects can lead to surprising conclusions.

The creators of the establishment in Szczecin in the late 50s and 60s, in spite of using free-standing buildings, in their solutions, they tried to establish a compromise that would also be a tribute to the historical layout of the city. Their concept provided the use of rubble that filled a large area of the Old Town. They developed the concept of construction design assuming the execution of reinforced concrete ceilings and columns using ground debris, and putting between them brick walls and glazing. The structure of the pillars created a tectonic of the elevation (Figure 3), which according to the assumptions of their creators was supposed to provide an afterimage of the old town architecture¹⁰.

The elevation and its form has also become a hallmark of houses designed from the 90s to modern times. Trying to make a synthesis of the solutions proposed by architects for over twenty years, we can point to three basic trends: the reconstruction, geometric reductionism and an eclectic variation. For a number of buildings, with the initiative of conservation services based on the preserved historical records (mostly photographic), there were made the reconstruction of the front elevations. In this case, we can talk about the reconstruction. The first tenement houses were created in the mid 90s of the twentieth century. They were characterised

¹⁰ Nowadays part of elevations has been subjected to thermal renovation. As a result of these actions became a loss of their characteristic tectonics.

by restraint, reduction of detail and the use of large, only plastered surfaces¹¹. They formed the second of the trends, which can be defined as the geometric reductionism. However, very soon, the leadership got the third, by far the most numerous forms of solutions, which were lax and most eclectic variations on the front elevation. When composing, the creators of these solutions used both the ordinal architectural elements (classic pilasters, porticos, cornices, etc.), as well as forms that abandoned the traditional typology, creating a kind of “fairy-tale architecture.” Among the last realisations also appeared new interesting examples of solutions, which may give the start of the fourth stylistic trend. Their common feature is a reference to the form of archetype of the old town tenement house facade. Solutions are minimalist and restrained, but enriched, compared to the current geometric reductionism, by a wider range of material (usually brick). One of the few examples of such solutions is the tenement house at the Fish Market, designed by Kuryłowicz & Associates studio (Figure 4).

6. ORIGINALITY

Understanding of the originality in architectural creation has changed over the centuries. However, in the twentieth century and mainly in the twenty-first century, we can watch the cultural dichotomy. We live in an era of repetitive objects, produced in multi-million dollar series. At the same time, the cult of uniqueness and the need to manifest originality are developing. These trends also apply to the realisation of the Old Town in Szczecin.

How the originality was understood by the creators of the modernist conception of the late 50s and 60s?

As architects reproducing the contemporary cultural patterns, they probably saw it as the antithesis of the historic urban layout and a departure from the standard of a house in a compact building development, which was designed for a cadastral plot. One of the constituent of modernism was, after all, the struggle with too dense building development and opposing it to the vision of houses located in greenery.

How the originality was understood by the creators of modern concepts from the 90s?

In this case, the starting point was also the opposition. And here, the starting point was the opposition. This time, however, the new architecture was to be the antithesis of the modernist vision of a detached house. Besides the urban aspect, there was also the issue of individual elevations, absent in the modernist concepts, in which architects have been trying to express their own ambitions and ideas.

7. UTILITY

To understand the two concepts, the issue of a varied ways in different periods of defining utility is also important. The modernist concept was understood according to the

¹¹ Such solutions were in part the result of financial constraints and used technologies. It boils down to plastering the thermal layer and to the very cost-effective implementation of details (polystyrene cornices) and cladding.

provisions of the Athens Kart, providing the houses with appropriate sizes of rooms, sunshine, ventilation and access to green spaces. The flat and its functionality has become a central axis of the modernist research. Also, at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the usefulness has become an important criterion. This time, however, sunlight and ventilation were replaced by a belief in the phenomenon of space, and functionality of a single apartment was subordinated to a historical reconstruction. Usability was understood in this case even as scenographic of the creation of space for tourists and the recreation area for its residents.

8. BEAUTY

In the face of such complex social and historical processes, it is reasonable to question the search for beauty in architecture? The answer must be a clear yes. It was considerations about what is beautiful and important in a particular era that determined the design choices in the subsequent periods. However, the beauty of the house extended beyond the aesthetic zone. It refers to a wider, Aristotelian definition, which associates beauty with goodness and pleasure.

9. AMNESIA OF ARCHITECTURE

“The ruined cities disappear from our memory. First, blurs out a single memory, but because we are not yet aware of progressive amnesia, we still would like to recall the missing items. Then we forget that we have forgotten, and the old town is no longer able to remind us about itself”¹² – concludes his considerations of the Istanbul Orhan Pamuk.

This is also a process, though in a slightly different dimension, that takes place today in Szczecin. In the city lives the third generation of residents, who do not remember Szczecin before World War II. For them, the historical buildings of the old city, industrial warehouses and granaries standing directly at the Odra riverside, it is only the views of the old photos and postcards¹³. Today’s reality is different, it merges into a common image that is readable only for those who are interested. The most important, however, is perhaps that in the meantime, the *buildings* have become *houses* to the city residents, they were tamed and pulled into their own stories.

¹² O. Pamuk, *Esseys and a Story*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków, 2012, p. 98–99.

¹³ For several years very popular are portals and memorial albums featuring historical views of Szczecin.

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