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CONTEMPORARY STUDENT HOUSES  
AS A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE  
OF COMMUNITY HOUSING SHAPING  
THE BASIS OF STUDENT LIFE

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WSPÓŁCZESNE DOMY STUDENCKIE,  
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**A b s t r a c t**

Home is the most important place in the life of every person. This is the place from which since the Middle Ages young people have set off to begin a new chapter in their lives. According to the recent data from the Polish Central Statistical Office, in Polish universities there are 1.469 million students. There are places for only 10% of students in state-owned dormitories. The existing situation has become a driving force for the so-called student real estate market. Looking at the contemporary realizations of European student houses, we can make a bid for the statement that living in them is beginning to be almost synonymous with comfort and eliteness. They represent a high level of architecture, interesting construction, material and technological solutions. Inscribing into the tissue of a city – the context of a place, the natural and developed landscape – they try to reconcile usability and aesthetics.

Many young people cannot imagine studying without a possibility of living in a dormitory. These are places which, at least partially, may become second homes, because home is not only a building.

*Keywords: student housing, city, usability, aesthetic, architectural form*

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

Dom stanowi najważniejsze miejsce w życiu każdego człowieka. To z tego miejsca już od czasów średniowiecza młodzi ludzie wyruszyli, by rozpocząć nowy rozdział swego życia. Według ostatnich danych Głównego Urzędu Statystycznego na polskich uczelniach studiuje 1.469 mln studentów. Miejsc w państwowych domach studenckich starcza zaledwie dla 10%. Zaistniała sytuacja stała się motorem dla rozwoju

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tw. studenckiego rynku nieruchomości. Przyglądając się współczesnym realizacjom europejskich domów studenckich, możemy pokusić się o stwierdzenie, że mieszkanie w nich zaczyna być wręcz synonimem komfortu i elitarności. Reprezentują wysoki poziom architektury, ciekawe rozwiązania konstrukcyjne, materiałowe i technologiczne. Wpisując się w tkankę miasta próbują pogodzić użyteczność (funkcję) z estetyką (pięknem i finezją).

Wielu młodych ludzi nie wyobraża sobie studiowania bez możliwości mieszkania w akademiku, który choć w części staje się drugim domem, ponieważ dom to nie tylko budynek.

*Słowa kluczowe: dom studencki, miasto, użyteczność, estetyka, forma architektoniczna*

*There are apricot trees. There are ferns and blueberries. But beauty? Is beauty a specific property of a thing or object, which can be described and named, or is it rather a state of mind, a human experience? Is beauty a special feeling, which is evoked by a unique form, a shape or a way of shaping, perceived by us? What is, in its essence, the thing which awakens the feeling of beauty in us, the feeling of experiencing beauty at a given moment, of seeing beauty? Does beauty have a form?<sup>1</sup>.*

Home is the most important place in the life of every person. This is the place from which since the Middle Ages young people have set off on a journey, often a long, dangerous path to a city, where they hoped to begin a new chapter in their lives.

In western culture, the notions of the house and home are interconnected, they are mutually intertwined, determining the place of living. In other cultures, the idea of home has not always been related to a building. It has most commonly been identified with the actual place of stay – a territory. In western culture this notion may also be associated with the place of origin, birth, for others it may mean the city in which they are currently living or the nearest neighbourhood<sup>2</sup>.

According to recent data from the Polish Central Statistical Office, in Polish universities there are 1.469 million students, whereas the number of dormitories is merely 504 (462 public and 42 private ones). There are places for only 10% of students in state-owned dormitories<sup>3</sup>. The situation is similar in other European countries. The existing situation has become a driving force for the so-called student real estate market. This developing market offers an opportunity for cooperation between universities and the private sector – the investor.

Looking at the contemporary realizations of European student houses, we can make a bid for the statement that living in them is beginning to be almost synonymous with comfort and eliteness. Not only do they host accommodation, but also culture, entertainment, education, and sports. They have very good connections with the university by public transportation. At the same time, these objects represent a high level of architecture, interesting construction, material and technological solutions. Inscribing into the tissue of a city – the context of a place, the natural and developed landscape – they try to reconcile usability, function,

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<sup>1</sup> P. Zumthor, *Myślenie architekturą*, Wydawnictwo Karakter, Warszawa, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> A. Bańka, *Spoleczna psychologia środowiskowa*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Departament Badań Społecznych i Warunków Życia US Gdańsk, Ośrodek Statystyki Edukacji i Kapitału Ludzkiego, *Szkoły Wyższe i ich finanse w 2014 roku*, Warszawa 2015, ISBN 1506–2163.

aesthetics and beauty. They form a unique urban landscape, expressing the “genius loci” of the place and highlighting its character<sup>4</sup>. With the aid of good architecture, respecting the above features and taking care of the needs of residents, one can boost the quality of the urban space.

Dormitories are inseparably connected with universities. All the examples presented have been created over a few last years in Paris – a city playing host to one of the oldest and most important universities of Mediaeval Europe. It is also a city which is rich in terms of the diversity of architectural styles.

An example of an object which maintains the above ideology and is also original is the student house designed by the LAN Architecture Office<sup>5</sup> and completed in 2011. The plot on which the object was raised is situated in Quartier La Chapelle (the 18<sup>th</sup> district of Paris, 1.5 km from the Montmartre hill) at the crossroads of the streets Rue Philippe de Girard and Rue Pajol<sup>6,7</sup>. The dormitory is located in a very diverse, functionally and densely developed tissue of the city, close to transformed and unused SNCF railway areas. In the nearest neighbourhood, apart from Haussmann’s characteristic residential buildings, we can find factories, workshops, as well as commercial, cultural and entertainment objects<sup>8,9</sup>.

The building is composed of three six-floor cubic blocks adjusted to the nearest vicinity in terms of height, size and geometry of the windows of the main facade, and the withdrawn level of the roof (ill. 1, 2). Individual elements are separated by two slits which play the communication role of the building. The height of the building on the side of the inner courtyard was adjusted to the neighbouring constructions to ensure the best illumination of the spaces open to general use, study and leisure rooms. The 15 x 15 metre inner space of the courtyard comprises a buffer between what is private and a busy, public street. It makes up the “green lungs” of the quarter. Visually and aesthetically, the goal of the project was to create a dualism between two spaces, realized through a choice of elevation materials. As a result, the facades, instead of imposing one image, penetrate each other, creating a different atmosphere in separate spaces. The front facade is made of dark-grey plated bricks (ill. 3), whereas the interior was made of larch formwork (ill. 4). The elevations between the buildings were also lined with larch, which was supposed to indicate a feeling of an inner space. The intention of the architects was an endeavour to ensure durability and neutrality juxtaposed with the sophisticated and classical character of the project. It was also important to maintain the idea

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<sup>4</sup> Europejska Rada Urbanistów, *Nowa Karta Ateńska 2003 Wizja miast XXI wieku*, Towarzystwo Urbanistów Polskich, Lizbona, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> LAN – Local Network Architecture – was created in Paris by Benoît Jallon and Umberto Napolitano in 2002, with the idea of exploring architecture as an area of activity at the intersection of several disciplines. This attitude has developed into a methodology enabling LAN to explore new territories and forge a vision encompassing social, urban, functional and formal questions. LAN’s projects seek to find elegant, contemporary answers to creative and pragmatic concerns. LAN has received several international awards – [www.lan-paris.com](http://www.lan-paris.com).

<sup>6</sup> BigMat International Architecture Award/Claud Coutant – [www.architectureaward.bigmat.com](http://www.architectureaward.bigmat.com)

<sup>7</sup> Detail inspiration – [www.detail-online.com/inspiration/student-dormitory-in-paris-107212.html](http://www.detail-online.com/inspiration/student-dormitory-in-paris-107212.html)

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> Inhabitat – [www.inhabitat.com/high-performance-housing-for-parisian-students-weaves-into-the-urban-fabric](http://www.inhabitat.com/high-performance-housing-for-parisian-students-weaves-into-the-urban-fabric)



of sustainable growth. The project is consistent with the VHEP specification described by “Habitat and Environment”<sup>10, 11</sup>.

The second interesting example is a dormitory designed by VIB Architecture<sup>12</sup> and completed in 2015. The object was located in one of the busier, northern parts of Paris – Belleville<sup>13</sup>. The district, situated on one of two main altitudes of the city, is characterized by the non-uniform structure of the development, coming from various epochs, of different styles, heights and utility programs. The building proposed by VIB consists of a few blocks (fig.5) (new or revitalized), which connected two functions – living (a dormitory for 89 students) as well as educational and pedagogical (a children’s care centre for 66 pupils). Student rooms were situated on the side of the main street (up to the 7<sup>th</sup> floor), whereas the centre was located in the rear of the complex on a more peaceful and sunny courtyard. The front part of the building was divided into two parts. The first one – the closest to the park – is characterized by rounded corners and a perforated, aluminium “skin” (fig.7). The second part has a geometry which refers to the neighbouring development and descends into the plot as far as the building of the care centre and a playground. The interval between the two blocks

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<sup>10</sup> ArchiTravel–onlinearchitectureguide–www.architravel.com/architravel/building/student-residence-in-paris

<sup>11</sup> BigMat International Architecture Award/Claud Coutant – www.architectureaward.bigmat.com

<sup>12</sup> It was once the independent commune (municipality) of Belleville which was annexed by the City of Paris in 1860. Historically, Belleville was a working-class and immigrants neighborhood. During the 1980s Parisian artists and musicians, attracted by the cheaper rents, the numerous vacant large spaces, as well as the old Paris charm of its smaller streets started moving there. Many artists now live and work in Belleville and studios are scattered throughout the *quartier*. Some abandoned factories have been transformed into art squats, for alternative artists and musicians. The biggest and best known is ‘La Forge’ – Buttes-Chaumont – Belleville, Paryż – Przewodnik – Okolice Airbnb – www.airbnb.pl

<sup>13</sup> The office appeared on the international radar in 2005, when it awarded the Prix de la 1ere oeuvre by the Moniteur. Was created by architects: Bettine Ballus and Francka Vialet. Above mentioned student housing was nominated to ArchiDesignClub Awards 2016 in “Housing and mixe-used” category – www.vibarchitecture.com

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- III. 1, 2. Geometry of the windows of the main facade, and the withdrawn level of the roof
  - III. 3. Dark-grey plated bricks – the front facade facing
  - III. 4. Interior facade made of larch formwork
  - III. 5. The front facade of the building
  - III. 6. The interval between the two blocks constitutes the main axis of the composition.
  - III. 7. Characteristic perforated, aluminium “skin” facade facing
  - III. 8. South elevation – shifted with respect to the main wall, fragments of the elevation allow a proper illumination of student rooms.
  - III. 9. Western facade acting as acoustic insulation.
  - III. 10. Characteristic east façade with “overlaps” which give an effect of depth and an impression of mobility.
  - III. 11. The eastern elevation create an effect of arranged wooden baskets and hence, made of bamboo laths.
  - III. 12. Open gallery from the west, covered by a metal net, which in the future is supposed to be a support for creeping plants.

constitutes the main axis of the composition (ill.6). The surroundings of the building were designed as a unified area of a garden connected with the neighbouring park. This procedure was meant to soften the urban landscape and the inner divisions and define the status of the area from public to private. The whole constitutes an individual response to the specificity of the place and takes part in the multi-faceted picture of “Belleville Village”<sup>14,15</sup>.

Among the projects that respect the aforementioned features, there is also the student house designed by Jacques Ripault Architecture<sup>16</sup> and requested by RIVP<sup>17</sup>. The object was located on an atypical, triangular plot, spanning between SNCF railway tracks and Porte de Vanves in Paris. It was completed in 2014. The form and shape of the 10-floor tower was adjusted to the plot. The unusual shape of the building plays an important role in the nearest neighbourhood, mainly due to “overlaps” (ill. 10), which are easily recognizable for local residents. The eastern elevation, due to the details mentioned above, was visually divided into five parts, which following each other give an effect of depth and an impression of mobility. Shifted with respect to the main wall, fragments of the elevation allow proper illumination of student rooms and ensure a view of the city (ill. 8). On the other hand, the western elevation is a uniform plane, having a small number of window openings – as a result it forms effective acoustic insulation against troublesome noise from the railway track (ill. 9). The top floor plays a function of a large, open dining room, fully glazed. The whole object is very comfortable and has numerous facilities available for residents. Just like most new objects of this type, the building meets the energy objectives of the climate plan of Paris and has a BBC Qualified Effinergie label<sup>18,19</sup>.

Another example of good architecture is the complex of dormitories designed by Slovenian architects from the OFIS Arhitekti<sup>20</sup> design office. The buildings were raised in the 19<sup>th</sup> district of Paris at the edge of the La Vilette park at Route des Petits Ponts. They are part of the reorganization plan of the district which is the responsibility of the Reichen&Robert Architects

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<sup>14</sup> ArchDaily – Plataforma Networks Broadcasting Architecture Worldwide – [www.archdaily.com/776211/student-housing-and-nursery-for-paris-vib-architecture](http://www.archdaily.com/776211/student-housing-and-nursery-for-paris-vib-architecture)

<sup>15</sup> Strona główna biura – [www.vibarchitecture.com](http://www.vibarchitecture.com)

<sup>16</sup> The office was created by architect Jacques Ripault. Besides the design practice, for several years he taught at the École nationale supérieure d’architecture de Versailles and was a visiting professor at the University of Montreal and Ecole Centrale d’Architecture. Winner of many awards and honors, including the Medal of the Soufache Foundation Academy of Architecture. He died in 2015 – [www.jacquesripault.com](http://www.jacquesripault.com)

<sup>17</sup> The Régie Immobilière de la Ville de Paris (also known as the RIVP) is a public housing agency created in 1923 for the construction of low cost and affordable housing in Paris, France. Its purpose is to manage, build and rehabilitate social housing, student residences and more recently business incubators. It is a semi-public company whose main shareholder is the City of Paris – [www.rivp.fr](http://www.rivp.fr)

<sup>18</sup> ArchDaily – Plataforma Networks Broadcasting Architecture Worldwide – [www.archdaily.com/596809/65-rooms-for-student-housing-jacques-ripault-architecture](http://www.archdaily.com/596809/65-rooms-for-student-housing-jacques-ripault-architecture)

<sup>19</sup> [www.rivp.fr](http://www.rivp.fr)

<sup>20</sup> The office was established in 1996 in Ljubljana by Rok Oman and Špela Videčnik. Architects have received a lot of international awards and honors, for example AR+D awards, biennial miami 2005 award. European Grand Prix for innovation awards in 2006, silver medal. IOC/IAKS award for Football stadium Maribor. Many of their projects have been nominated for awards including the Mies van der Rohe award – [www.ofis.si](http://www.ofis.si); WPKultura – [www.kultura.wp.pl/title,OFIS-Arhitekti-slo-wenska-pracownia-architektoniczna-na-wystawie-w-Muzeum-Architektury,wid,14927912,wiadomo-sc.html](http://www.kultura.wp.pl/title,OFIS-Arhitekti-slo-wenska-pracownia-architektoniczna-na-wystawie-w-Muzeum-Architektury,wid,14927912,wiadomo-sc.html)

studio. The shape and form of the building was imposed by the dimensions of the plot dedicated to this investment (11 metres wide and 200 metres long) and so all the elements the complex is made of were arranged in a line, between sports areas and a tram line with a pedestrian-bicycle communication path. The form of the student house is composed of two rectangular blocks divided into modules. They differ in size and rotation angle. Arranged one upon another – they form an original and fluent façade<sup>21,22</sup>. Despite the irregular elevation, all student studios are of the same size, have the same elements (for design optimization purposes) and access to a loggia – a natural extension of the inner space. They are equipped with anti-solar filters for a greater control of the incoming light<sup>23</sup>. The eastern elevation was meant to form an effect of arranged wooden baskets and hence it was made of bamboo laths (ill. 11). The open corridors running along the western elevation are expected to form an additional, common space for residents. An additional advantage of the open corridor is a view of the city and the Eiffel Tower. The gallery was covered with a metal net (fig. 12) which in the future is supposed to be a support for creeping plants. For the sake of safety and effective management, the main entrance is situated in the central part of the assumption<sup>24,25</sup>. The goal of the architects was to integrate the inner and outer environment of the buildings and create friendly meeting, study and leisure sites. Therefore, we can dare to claim that the proposition of the OFIS office has fitted very well into the atypical surroundings, preserving the existing context. It also connected functionality and aesthetics, maintaining originality and meeting the requirements of the “green policy” of Paris<sup>26</sup>.

Since the beginning of human civilization, man has looked for beauty. Vitruvius in his work wrote that beauty can be ensured through proper proportions based on the rules of symmetry, whereas the function (*purposefulness*) will be provided by a proper spatial layout, not limiting various possibilities of its use<sup>27</sup>. Currently, ideas, just like in the ancient times, are based on similar features – proportion, shapes, aesthetics, harmony, and colour. They are relative terms, inseparable, subjective, since people’s likes and preferences differ. Regularity in relations between these elements may be helpful in creating unity<sup>28</sup>, considered combinations of forms, order, preserving beauty and aesthetic level.

The examples above illustrate well how large the effect of understanding the context of a place and respecting the identity when designing is. The buildings meet all functional and usability, constructive and technological assumptions, and, most of all, fit in the surroundings, constituting a coherent whole – at the same time not losing anything in originality.

Despite the relatively pessimistic initial predictions provided by scientists and analysts, claiming that the sudden increase in the interest in dormitories, which we have seen over the last few

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<sup>21</sup> Bryła.pl – serwis o architekturze: projekty, budynki, architekci – [www.bryla.pl/bryla/1,85298,60002\\_81,Studenckie\\_M1\\_od\\_Ofis\\_ArHITEKTI.html](http://www.bryla.pl/bryla/1,85298,60002_81,Studenckie_M1_od_Ofis_ArHITEKTI.html)

<sup>22</sup> Dezeen magazine – [www.dezeen.com/2012/10/11/basket-apartments-student-housing-by-ofis-arhitekti](http://www.dezeen.com/2012/10/11/basket-apartments-student-housing-by-ofis-arhitekti)

<sup>23</sup> ArchDaily – Plataforma Networks Broadcasting Architecture Worldwide – [www.archdaily.com/9442/student-apartment-studios-in-paris-ofis](http://www.archdaily.com/9442/student-apartment-studios-in-paris-ofis);

<sup>24</sup> I. Szefer, *Zasady zrównoważonego rozwoju w kontekście projektowania domów studenckich*, Zrównoważony rozwój – debiut naukowy 2013, redakcja naukowa – Kretek H.A., Jemczura T, Wydawnictwo Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Naukowej w Raciborzu, Racibórz, 2014

<sup>25</sup> Dezeen magazine – [www.dezeen.com/2012/10/11/basket-apartments-student-housing-by-ofis-arhitekti](http://www.dezeen.com/2012/10/11/basket-apartments-student-housing-by-ofis-arhitekti)

<sup>26</sup> Bryła.pl – serwis o architekturze: projekty, budynki, architekci – [www.bryla.pl/bryla/1,85298,60002\\_81,Studenckie\\_M1\\_od\\_Ofis\\_ArHITEKTI.html](http://www.bryla.pl/bryla/1,85298,60002_81,Studenckie_M1_od_Ofis_ArHITEKTI.html)

<sup>27</sup> Witruwiusz, *O architekturze ksiąg X*, Prószyński i S-ka, Warszawa, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Nowicki M., *Kompozycja w nowoczesnej architekturze*, Architektura i Biznes, nr 12, Kraków, 2010.

years, is like a soap bubble, investing in such forms of accommodation will continue to be a profitable enterprise for a few basic reasons. Firstly, it is predicted that the number of students in the world will systematically increase. The data from the last decade indicate that the number of students has grown from 98 to 165 million. Secondly, the infrastructure and student accommodation itself in the majority of academic cities is still at a very low level, not only in terms of standard, but also insufficient number of places that would meet the demand. Thirdly, year on year the number of foreign students increases and as a result the need for high class accommodation options grows too (especially in such cities as London, Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, Munich, Utrecht, Prague, Madrid, Bologna, Hamburg, Edinburgh and Zurich)<sup>29,30</sup>. Fourthly, many young people cannot imagine studying without a possibility of living in a dormitory, which, apart from the accommodation function, allows broadening the horizons, stimulating establishing contacts, forming housing cooperatives. These are places which, at least partially, may become second homes, because home is not only a building, but also a community – people who live there, identity.

According to Alan de Botton “no house provides solutions to all possible problems both-ering its residents, but its rooms are testament to happiness, a special contribution to which is also offered by architecture”<sup>31</sup>. A true home is not a building, but memories, friends, family, shared life. Such a vision of home will accompany us regardless of whether this is a family home or an academic home.

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<sup>29</sup> PROPERTY RECRUITMENT COMPANY – [www.propertyrecruitmentcompany.com/student-accommodation-salary-survey](http://www.propertyrecruitmentcompany.com/student-accommodation-salary-survey)

<sup>30</sup> PROPERTY RECRUITMENT COMPANY – [www.propertyrecruitmentcompany.com/student-accommodation-long-term-investment](http://www.propertyrecruitmentcompany.com/student-accommodation-long-term-investment)

<sup>31</sup> A. de Botton, *Architektura szczęścia*, Czuły Barbarzyńca Press, Warszawa, 2010.



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