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MODERN ARCHITECTURE OF THE 1960's OF THE XX CENTURY RECORDED IN A MOVIE AS AN ELEMENT OF HERITAGE PROTECTION

ARCHITEKTURA MODERNISTYCZNA LAT 60. XX WIEKU ZAPISANA W OBRAZIE FILMOWYM JAKO ELEMENT OCHRONY DZIEDZICTWA

Abstract

The article aims to present the ways in which feature films of the 1960s, with all their beauty, became a canvas of times so important for the history of Polish architecture. Writing about the past exceeds a simple description of a historical object. It is also an attempt to present it on a film reel. In my reflections, I wish to concentrate on the relations operating between a feature film and such an architectural object, which, over the course of time, became iconic for the discipline. I want to focus on considerations regarding the ways of defining film and architecture as an element of spatial and visual memory, in the context of Polish heritage protection of architectural modernism.

Keywords: modernism, heritage protection, film

Streszczenie

Tekst ma na celu ukazanie, jak obraz filmowy lat 60. XX wieku – ze wszystkimi jego walorami – stał się zapisem czasu tak ważnego dla historii polskiej architektury. Pisanie o przeszłości to nie tylko opisywanie obiektu historycznego, to także próba ukazania jego obrazu na taśmie filmowej. Chciałbym skupić się na rozważaniach dotyczących traktowania czy też definiowania filmu i architektury jako elementów pamięci zarówno przestrzennej, jak i wizualnej w kontekście ochrony dziedzictwa polskiej architektury modernistycznej.

Słowa kluczowe: modernizm, ochrona dziedzictwa, obraz filmowy

1. Preliminary considerations, heritage protection of the architecture of the second half of the XX century observed in a feature film

Protection of heritage is a very broad phenomenon in contemporary interdisciplinary studies. However, within the definition of the phenomenon, there are categories that can be applied to the Polish feature film covering the 60's of the 20th century¹. In the case of heritage protection, in the broad meaning of the word, we can, on the one hand, treat the film as a medium in which the history of a particular architectural object or an entire urban concept is saved; on the other hand, feature film becomes for us a record of the era. Moreover, in many cases, it is a record of the times in which the object was created.

Unlike the static photographic image, a movie gives us an opportunity to watch, explore or travel through a particular object whose spatial form has been closed on a film tape and became part of the plot of a film. A motion picture enables to show an object in the same way as it has been seen by a user of the space, a resident, passer or an architect. A static, *a natura rei*, form of a building becomes a spectator's journey into the past. The question arises why exactly the architecture and Polish urban design of the 60's of the twentieth century is so valuable as an element of history that it should be promoted through a film. There are several answers to such a question. The first concerns the quality and some sort of a uniqueness of that period in the Polish history of architecture. Despite many constraints that derived from the circumstance of designing in a socialist political system, after 1956, Polish architects turned themselves back on the road of modernism, in both: European and international means. They were also aware of its limitations, but a passion for simple forms in the landscape of the city remained. The second factor that I would like to emphasize is the fact of the underestimation of scientific and study qualities of a film medium shared by Polish architectural historians and restores. As part of the material heritage of the era, it should be treated equally with such research materials as plans, projects, design documentation and photographs. In many cases, the archives of Polish design studios after 1989 were dispersed or liquidated. This has resulted in a kind of loss in historical sources for the purposes of studies of architecture of this period. For film experts, movie is a natural material for an inquiry, and for historians of architecture, not necessarily². The third reason being the fact that in modern world of media, motion picture appeals to a mass audience much more than a static image.

¹ This text is part of the author's research conducted within the research project "The architecture and the city in Polish feature film of the 60's, 70's and 80's of the twentieth century", stage III, funded within the statutory activity by Ministry of Science and Higher Education in 2016 at the Faculty of Architecture Poznan University of Technology.

² Cooperation on research upon issues of architecture in the Polish feature film and documentary was launched in 2015 within the framework of a nationwide scientific conference "Architecture in Polish feature film and documentary of the 50's and 60's of the twentieth century", which the author has initiated and organized from the side of the Faculty of Architecture of Poznan University of Technology. The conference was organized in cooperation with the Department of Film, Television and New Media of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan.

2. Polish feature film from the 1960's as a source of research upon an architectural heritage protection of the second half of the XX century

Polish architecture of the 1960s, as we well know, has become a topic of research in recent decades. That undoubtedly picturesque and dynamic period in the history of Polish architecture has left its mark on many buildings of the epoch. Having that in mind, it is crucial to mention that, in Polish feature films of that period, we can see pictures of architectural works, which in retrospect are recognized as iconic for Polish post-war architecture. At the very beginning, I wish to present a selection of Warsaw examples, for which a film became the record of their history. A building, which appeared quite frequently in movies of the era, was Supersam. Although it ceased to exist, it continues to operate within public consciousness in such films as *Sam pośród miasta* [Alone among the city] (1965), *Lekarstwo na miłość* [Remedy for love] (1966), *Dzięcioł* [Woodpecker] (1970) and others. Thanks to motion pictures, we can travel along with the characters of the movie throughout its interiors, observe the breath-taking design of its sales room or participate in their meetings under a distinctive sign of the façade.

Another object, which, on the one hand, has been firmly inscribed in the landscape of the city and simultaneously is also considered iconic, is a complex of buildings called The Eastern Wall. This composition, bearing the stylemarks of modernism, became a favourite *en plein air* of filmmakers in such movies as mentioned above *Lekarstwo na miłość* [Remedy for Love] (1966), *The Game* (1968) or *Człowiek z M3* [The man from M3³] (1968).

The object, which, for its scale and architectural quality, is perceived as a cult building, that appeared in movies of the era, was a so-called the CDT "Smyk" Department Store⁴. Its slender and characteristic form with horizontal windows, and a recognizable cafeteria suspended over the street appeared in such movies as *Wyrok* [The Sentence] (1961), *Lekarstwo na miłość* [Remedy for Love] (1966) and others.

The cinema called "Atlantic", with an expressive neon on the front facade, which was a synonym of fascination with electric light in the Polish architecture, appeared in the following films: *Do widzenia, do jutra* [Good bye, see you tomorrow] (1961) *I ty zostaniesz Indianinem* [And You Will Become an Indian] (1962). The object, which is also regarded as an achievement on the ground of Polish modernist architecture, is the Central Olympic Training Center in Warsaw, the hall of boxing and wrestling. The building with a characteristic hanging roof structure appears inter alia in the feature film *Hasło Korn* [Password Korn] (1968).

On the list of objects presented above, it can be deduced that only Warsaw was the scene of film shoots in the 1960s. This was not true, though. Along with large cities, which appeared on the screen, namely Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź, also smaller centers have their place in the history of cinema. Bielsko-Biała is one such example – whose swimming pool "Panorama" appears in the movie *Jutro Meksyk* [Tomorrow Mexico] (1965). Following the trace of sport, one should mention a no longer existing complex of swimming pools, on Polanka Redłowska in Gdynia, which has been shown in the aforementioned film.

³ According to PRL [PPR] nomenclature, M3 is a flat designed as a habitat for 3 people; its program, though, was limited to 2 rooms and a separate kitchen.

⁴ Centralny Dom Towarowy = Central Department Store.

At this stage of reflection, I wish to draw attention to the fact that, in the case of the films of the 1960s, modernist architecture was presented as a kind of manifestation of modernity. In the motion pictures of the era, Polish architecture is perceived as very interesting and intriguing. In my view, this is another proof that, through film, we can try to preserve our architectural heritage of this period.



Fig. 1. Joanna (Kalina Jędrusik), main character of the film entitled „Lekarstwo na miłość” [‘Remedy for Love’], against the background of the modern building of the Super Sam store in Warsaw, which no longer exists 1-F-2306-280

3. Polish feature film from the 1960’s as a source of research upon the heritage protection of urban design of the second half of the XX century

The city with its modernistic ideas, proclaiming love for geometry, form and function, was in opposition to the traditionally perceived city with a winding network of streets and squares. Modernism promoted open space, less intimate than a historical city. The post-war wave of urbanization of Polish cities during the 1960s as we know proceeded in two directions. Firstly, there were still works concentrating on a reconstruction from the war damage of the historic centers of Polish cities. In the meanwhile, in the peripheral districts, spatial structures of housing estates were created – based on the principles of modernism.

The application of this style referred to newly constructed, both: fragments of downtowns, as in the case of The Eastern Wall in Warsaw, as well as new districts located outside of the city center. A result of that period in the Polish town planning are the numerous examples of housing areas erected in the so-called large panel system (constructed of pre-fabricated,

pre-stressed concrete). Such a not entirely realistic view of that new urbanism was depicted in the movie *Mocne uderzenie* [Hard strike] (1966). The main characters were captured on the background of a habitat Sady Żoliborz designed by Halina Skibniewska. This in a sense intimate area has become synonymous with modernity recorded in the movie frame.

Another important factor in Polish post-war town planning was the ideology according to which the new socialist society can and should in fact be modern. This modernity in the ideological sense were translated into urban aspects. Urbanization and modernity were very well attuned to the official language of the system, which promoted the image of a country, which was developing greatly, and at many levels. I would like to recall the words of Adam Kotarbiński, who in 1985 diagnosed in the following words the achievements of socialism in this area: “Realized (erected) achievements of urban design are reflected most clearly in the major complexes of buildings made publicly available as a finished whole, in the form of important urban systems, new structural and architectural objects along with orderly environment” (Kotarbiński 1985, p. 123).

An example of a motion picture in which we can grasp an idea of the changes in the centers of Polish cities is, for example, the film *Pieczone Gołąbki* [Baked Stuffed Cabbage] (1966), in which the camera captures the image of the newly created units on Bielańska Street in Warsaw. Another graphically valuable sign of modernity is the film *Gra* [The Game] (1968), through which we have the opportunity to see the process of demolishing the XIX century structure of the downtown of Warsaw for erection of a housing area of the Eastern Wall.

Urbanization of Polish cities in the spatial sense also carried an important social aspect. Modernism, to some extent, influenced the formation of a new society, new representatives of a post-war Poland. Fascinated by modernity, the otherness of the Modern City, the metropolitan character, the hubbub, as well as the play of light and shadow in space. In a sense, all these elements that were in use of the film of that period.

4. A reconstructed city in a feature film from the 1960's as an element of the heritage of the second half of the XX century

The reconstruction of the historical city centers in Poland in the 1960s proceeded towards the restoration of their spatial as well as visual and, in a sense, spiritual values – as a testimony of the past and national heritage. In many cases, the historical fabric of the city was complemented with modern forms, especially in these fragments, which did not have sufficiently preserved source materials.

However, in many cases, reconstruction proceeded as a result of assumptions, whose primary goal was to restore in a historical city (in example Warsaw, Gdansk or Poznan) as many historical buildings and historical parts of the downtown as it was possible. Thus, feature films produced in the 1960s can be treated in the means of cinematographic actions, thanks to which an information on the time of their reconstruction or the way of functioning is recorded, in the moment just after the process of their rebuilt.

As an example, I would use the film *Do widzenia, do jutra* [Good Bye, See You Tomorrow] (1960) where we have the opportunity to walk through the old town of the historic Gdansk, in

different stages of its reconstruction. Another movie, which provides the trace of documentation of the past of a reconstructed city, is *Matżeństwo z rozsądku* [Marriage of convenience] (1966). In that movie, the main characters live their adventures in Warsaw's old town.

Motion picture is, in my opinion, a very valuable comparative material for an architectural researcher. In many cases, it becomes a suitable complement of a story behind a particular work of architecture or urban design.

5. Summary

The research on the architecture and urban design of the 1960s can never be performed without an attempt to analyze an architectural and urban design of the period recorded in films. A great number of publications of urban as well as architectural works in journals such as, say, *Architecture, City* and other, give us the opportunity to trace the evolution of modern trends in design. From the standpoint of a researcher in the area of architecture, a film can be regarded as an important source of iconography. It surely is a great complement to archival materials and photographs.

One of the most natural features of an urban structure – similarly to an architectural object – is its stability in a city space. At the same time, it is spontaneously perceived by its user through walks and passing by. A static image of architecture, rendered on a photography, drawings and plans, does not always allow for an adequate transposition of all the values of an object that are possible to be depicted in the movie. Therefore, a feature film should be treated as an important element of the architectural and urban heritage of the second half of the XX century.

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