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## THE GAME OF ARCHITECTURE IN THE URBAN SPACE OF SMALL TOWNS IN WIELKOPOLSKA

### ZABAWA „W ARCHITEKTURĘ” W PRZESTRZENI URBANISTYCZNEJ MAŁYCH MIAST WIELKOPOLSKI

#### Abstract

Each region has its own individual approach to shaping architectural and spatial forms. It has many patterns that attest to its distinct identity in the country. In small towns, new buildings and developments negatively affect historical buildings. Many designers and building owners seem not to notice the risks to the urban structures of small towns and their physiognomy.

*Keywords: regional architecture, detail, architectural form, variability*

#### Streszczenie

Każdy region posiada własne indywidualne podejście do kształtowania form architektonicznych i przestrzennych. Dysponuje wieloma wzorcami, które świadczą o jego tożsamości w przestrzeni kraju. W małych miastach powstająca obecnie zabudowa i nowe zagospodarowanie negatywnie wpływa na historyczną zabudowę. Wielu projektantów oraz właścicieli budynków zdaje się nie zauważać zagrożenia wynikające dla historycznych układów urbanistycznych małych miast i ich fizjonomii.

*Słowa kluczowe: architektura regionalna, detal, forma architektoniczna, zmienność*

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A designer's actions always refer to the existing spatial context and neighbourhood. It should force respect for a specific space and cultural environment [12, p. 41], but while experiencing a small town, we can observe quite the opposite. Many contemporary designers working in such a space necessarily want to distinguish the design of their buildings. Small towns are very sensitive to such experiments. This leads to the degradation of the historical and cultural spatial systems by repeating negative patterns. In contrast to the big cities, where examples of such a play with form and shape are present in every new plot, in small towns such experiments can, for a very long time, disrupt their normal sustainable development and aesthetically destroy the immediate surroundings. Space that should be subordinate to the existing historical traditions of building and planning quickly degrades.

Determinants of the identity of a city are represented by its cultural characteristics and unique atmosphere resulting from the preservation of historical complexes, mainly in the centre, as a local cultural heritage with a number of outstanding architectural dominants in the urban space [13, p. 24]. In small towns, you can find immutable traits of spatial structure, such as a separate built-up urban area with clear boundaries, the human scale of the city, an often picturesque location, and the use of local building materials. Urban interiors – squares and streets – usually with irregular contours, give the impression of the scenic spatial systems and determine the specificity and identity of the urban context. A characteristic feature of modern small towns is a growing spatial disintegration, or the lack of connections between recent and historical buildings. Historic buildings in small cities were partly replaced in the second half of the 20th century by a new, often styleless architecture, and as a result, most of it constitutes prefabricated housing developments that disturb the existing harmony of the space and change the composition of small towns.

The emerging residential building in Kostrzyn (Ill. 2) totally denies the understanding of the neighbourhood and the scale and size of buildings. Details and forms of buildings of all historical European eras can be found in the facade and form of the mentioned building. The question may be asked: Can such play with architectural shapes be beneficial to the urban space? The answer is simple, 'No!'. Architectural forms were assigned to the era in which they were created. The same historical period demarcated the corresponding details on the facades of the building [1, p. 7]. The investor in this case probably wanted to show off his social status and wealth. The resulting object screams with its form and dominates the surrounding. The space which was created following the impact of this building on the environment will dictate the quality of other further buildings. How can another architect approach designing buildings in this area? Probably by erecting further "original" buildings with no respect for the history of the city in which it is founded.

Such misunderstood play by designers in small towns will continue until the regulations are changed – these should allow cities to draw up a law for spatial development plans and oblige investors to follow them strictly. Another challenge is the aesthetic education of society. Raising awareness and knowledge about the role of harmonious building so that new developments do not result in spatial chaos.

Many of the developments that treat design as fun – a game without rules – have never even seen the hand of a designer. These are ideas that originated in the imagination of the investor and his lack of understanding for spatial context. Renovation and thermo-modernization of one of the family houses (Ill. 1), resulted in an amusing result – by decorating the cubic house facade with polyurethane mouldings. It is not known why the owner of the facade decorated it with these items. We can only guess that it was a kind of advertisement

for the capabilities of such a product. Projects – such as house insulation – that are repeated in small towns (Ill. 3) often show what process those buildings went through. In this case, thermo-modernization forced covering the clinker facade of the building. However, according to the law, a place for the administrative number had to be preserved, so the contractor did not add the insulation where that number was located.

Thermo-modernization of existing facilities is a complex problem. Every small town has in its spatial structure multi-family building blocks from the 1960s. This was due to the creation of state-owned farms (PGR). These buildings are often modernized in many ways, more or less successfully. Usually they receive styrofoam facade cladding and are then painted. The problem that seems to be unseen by the municipal authorities is the colouring of the facade. A kind of “work of art” that appears to be advertising building companies and facade paints is created. The colours and shapes of those buildings become a negative dominant disfigurement of the landscape [7, p. 56]. Almost every building has a facade painted in patterns and colours that are foreign to small towns. It spoils the physiognomy of the city and disturbs its panorama. Block buildings scream with colour, preponderate in the city and create a negative contrast to the historic centre [5, p. 221].

In single-family developments, semi-detached houses that are subject to modernization can often be found. A common example is the treatment of the halves of those buildings as separate buildings, which creates two versions of the facade of the building. Some of the buildings are also equipped with canopies and artificial elements aiming to beautify them. The building is not treated as a whole. A visual artist and e.g. a lawyer will treat their shares differently, each of them with a need to express himself, and show their profession and prestige with a different symbolism. These examples show that the aesthetics of the building is of secondary importance for users [6, p. 55]. However, designers should take care of this important element of the building.

Such activities in space and specific play with materials takes place in all small towns. Regionalism and the typical construction of specific forms for specific regions is in decline. To a large extent the reason for this lies in typical projects, which, like blocks in the hands of a small child, are placed without rhythm or context – loosely thrown into space. Such play, ending in complete spatial chaos, is displayed by modern ‘developer’ buildings. As an urban planner, let me say that issuing building conditions is an investor’s game in the design of the city. The lack of local spatial plans in most cities results in the issuing of vague and broad building decisions. The result is inconsiderate and intensive residential building. Clearly, these changes are visible in most of the vacant lands in small towns. Plots on which stand-alone buildings have been created are dominated by new terraced developments of high intensity. Islands of housing are created – a collection of buildings in a tight arrangement, in many cases without the legally required biologically active space, which has been converted into car parks. Such actions result in the disappearance of exposed panoramas of the city, which, due to the natural and cultural values, are attractive to tourists and should be protected. An example of such negative practices is permission to build single-family houses in the buffer zones of national parks, which destroys exposure zones. Another aspect of such ill activity by designers result in neighbourhood misunderstandings.

These examples show the importance of diverse detail for users of this architecture and space in the city, which has arisen from playing with architecture. Residents are looking for uniqueness and ways to express themselves. This is largely due to a lack of positive imitation and education on the part of the majority of the population. An example of the use of stucco



- III. 1. Added alien forms to the facade of a family home, Kostrzyn, phot. by author, 2015
- III. 2. Emerging family home, Luboń, phot. by author, 2015
- III. 3. Finishing detail: numbering on family home, Kostrzyn, phot. by author, 2015
- III. 4. Added 'beautifying' form on a 'cube' family home, Kostrzyn, phot. by author, 2015
- III. 5. Highlighting the entrance to private terrain, Kostrzyn, phot. by author, 2015

in the form of leaning out figures and body parts clearly shows the homeowner the manner of expression. The flat facade of the 'cube' house had to be distinguished from the environment. These types of buildings are often furnished with various special additives that are more or less disfiguring (III. 4). The same can be said about places for advertising on the facades of buildings. The matter is even worse in the case of historic buildings, in small towns and cities there are old spaces for advertising on those buildings. These are usually accented by a border of concrete forms; however, these designated places are often wrongly used, for example,

advertisements extend beyond the borders etc. The placement of such advertising space in a place that is not adapted to it disfigures the style of the building. There is a lack of consistency in the layout of mullions or colours in the woodwork of buildings. Clearly, small towns are scarred by a lack of respect for historical forms.

There are also positive examples of architectural play that promote the city and arts and crafts. In Nowy Tomyśl, the Museum of Wicker and Hops, which is engaged in the promotion of wicker crafts, has organized an annual open-air wickerwork festival for several years. Objects – from abstract forms to useful – different in size, entirely made of wicker, are created in the urban space. They are virtually everywhere, from the Market Square, Old Town streets, to parks, squares and traffic junctions. The success of this event caused the residents to begin to identify with the city. Individual wickerwork elements added to the fences and windows enhance the charm of the streets and single plots.

Wielkopolska has a rich history and building traditions, and many examples of this are preserved. It is strange that designers do not study them. Many of the mentioned negative examples could have been avoided. The hardest thing is to maintain moderation in bulky objects, in which colour, detail and additives are random and ad hoc. Playing with these tools in the wrong hands, especially young designers, wanting to make a name for themselves, leads to changes incompatible with aesthetics. You cannot create a city in negation of its traditional layout. It seems important to establish the basic rules of composition and respect for the history and traditions of the place where new buildings are designed. Only then does a small town have the opportunity to be a finite whole and not an area of games for the designers.

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