

# The current approaches of interpreting post-war residential architectural history in Poland, as demonstrated by the Złotego Wieku housing development in Krakow

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## Abstract

In Polish history, the post-World War II era saw the greatest expansion of new architectural fabric. The public and residential structures that were mass-produced during that period have now attained an age that need restorations, prompting inquiries regarding conservation protection. The preservation of residential structures, which are frequently not updated to meet contemporary requirements, is a particularly delicate topic. The modernization of such assets goes beyond conventional monument preservation. A significant obstacle in this process is the insufficient comprehension of the values inherent in the legacy of post-war architecture, alongside a deficiency in education and advocacy for this history. The article outlines several initiatives implemented in Krakow in recent years to enhance awareness of the significance of post-war architectural heritage. The initiatives related to the Złotego Wieku housing estate in Mistrzejowice district were comprehensive and may provide support for endeavors in Poland and elsewhere. Their objective was social mobilization and fostering a sense of pride among their community.

**Keywords:** modernism, blocks of flats, estates, housing

Since the onset of the 21st century, there has been an increasing interest with post-war architecture across numerous European countries, particularly modernist housing estates, which were constructed on an unprecedented scale due to the post-1945 reconstruction and the most significant demographic expansion in the history of industrialized nations during that period. Over time, multi-family structures, often created with prefabricated slabs and adhering to modernist architectural principles, are progressively being modernized, reconstructed, or demolished (Carughi Visone, 2018). This worldwide issue significantly affects the urban landscape of Polish cities, where almost 12 million individuals rely on housing constructed in the post-war era (CBOS, 2022). Notwithstanding the magnitude of the situation, residential estates from this era in Poland remain primarily the focus of research and discourse regarding protection in certain instances. The perception of these locations is frequently encumbered by negative stereotypes that obstruct a reasonable understanding of their legacy and the exploration of revitalization strategies.

The article outlines specific study and popularization initiatives conducted in Krakow in recent years, especially focusing on the Złotego Wieku housing estate in Mistrzejowice district. The objective of these initiatives was to address the unfavourable view of post-war housing estates, disseminate information about them, and facilitate interaction with residents and direct users. Their shared assumption was that the preservation of cultural heritage commences with acknowledging its significance and fostering a necessity to safeguard structures and sites among the individuals who interact with them regularly (Ashworth, 2015).

### **Are post-war housing estates our heritage?**

The political transformations of 1989 commenced processes in Poland that led to a substantial alteration in the ownership structure of post-war housing resources, resulting in extensive privatization (Lewicki, 2019). In the 21st



**Fig. 1.** The Złotego Wieku housing estate in Krakow (photo by author)

century, the majority of these structures have been modernized. This broad dynamic process positively influenced the technical state of properties, while concurrently resulting in the visual degeneration of numerous buildings from the period in question. The absence of comprehension regarding the motivations for post-war architecture's evolution and the inability to acknowledge the creative and architectural significance of the housing stock from this era presently hinder the identification of suitable strategies for safeguarding this vital aspect of our legacy. Structures erected post-war are infrequently safeguarded by inclusion in the monument registry or inventory, and the protective mechanism through designation as contemporary cultural assets, when applicable, typically does not extend to residential properties.

The Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities from 2007 (Karta Lipska nt. Zrównoważonych Miast Europejskich) and the New Leipzig Charter – The transformative power of cities for the common good from 2020 (Nowa Karta Lipska. Transformacyjna siła miast na rzecz wspólnego dobra) underscore the necessity for the execution of integrated urban policy aimed at modernizing existing resources, conducted in the ethos of *Baukultur* and aspiring for optimal energy efficiency in buildings. Given that legal protection and thorough consideration regarding the utilization and conservation of post-war architectural heritage are currently applied only to a limited degree, the inquiry emerges regarding alternative solutions that could effectively aid in identifying tools and strategies for the aforementioned issue. Education and dissemination are essential instruments in this process. What are the constraints on their implementation?

### **The Perception of Post-War Housing Architecture in Contemporary Poland.**

The discourse over the significance and prospective preservation of post-war architecture in Poland commenced in the 1980s and evolved following 1989. In 1994, Adam Miłobędzki introduced the term *socmodernism*, highlighting the perceived inferiority of post-war modernist architecture in Poland (Miłobędzki, 1994). Andrzej Basista subsequently depicted the same phenomenon, particularly post-war housing estates, in a similarly unfavourable manner (Basista, 2001). In every case, these were the testimonies of contemporaneous witnesses who, years later, expressed profound bitterness toward the experiences of their age. Only in the 21st century has a shift in perspective regarding the phenomenon in question become evident, shaped by initial cross-sectional exhibitions and publications, such as the monographic showcase of Oskar and Zofia Hansen's oeuvre in 2005 (Gola Ed. 2005) and the pioneering study by Małgorzata Włodarczyk on Krakow's architecture, released the following year (Włodarczyk, 2006).

Certain instances of post-war architecture exemplifying socialist realism are presently safeguarded in Poland by its listing in the register of monuments. In 2007, it was essential to incorporate the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw into the individual entry of the Register of Monuments of the Mazowsze Voivodeship (Rejestr i Ewidencja Zabytków). In 2004, the oldest section of Nowa Huta in Krakow was incorporated into the Register of Monuments of the Małopolska Voivodeship (Rejestr Zabytków Województwa Małopolskiego). Buildings erected subsequent to 1956 are also encompassed within this item. The oldest ensemble of Nowa Huta was safeguarded in 2019 through the creation of a Cultural Park (Uchwała Nr CXXX/3613/24 Rady Miasta Krakowa) and in 2023 by being designated as a Historical Monument (Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 30 stycznia 2023 r. w sprawie uznania za pomnik historii „Kraków - zespół architektoniczny i urbanistyczny dzielnicy Nowa Huta 2023). The many protective measures have rendered Nowa Huta a laboratory for the legal safeguarding of post-war residential structures.

In the past decade, the urban designs of communities built post-1956 were incorporated into municipal registers of monuments for the first time. The work of Zofia and Oskar Hansen prompted the implementation of this protective

measure for the housing estate dedicated in their honour. Juliusz Słowacki estate in Lublin (Gminna ewidencja zabytków (Lublin)) and the Przyczółek Grochowski estate in Warsaw (Gminna ewidencja zabytków m.st. Warszawy). Nonetheless, on a national level, these remain few and isolated occurrences.

### **Kraków's Cultural Heritage and the Protection of Post-War Housing Estates.**

The prevailing view of Krakow is shaped by its historical districts, notably the Old Town and Kazimierz, which, along with Wawel, were designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 1978. Due to the increasing interest in 19th and early 20th-century architecture in recent decades, districts with structures predominantly developed before 1939 have garnered notoriety, including Podgórze, Kleparz, Wesoła, Dębiki, Półwie Zwierzynieckie, and Krowodrza. The predominant number of the more than 1,000 structures in Krakow, safeguarded by their listing in the Register of Monuments of the Małopolska Voivodeship, are situated in these areas of the city. This location also contains the majority of the approximately 5,000 structures included in the Municipal Register of Monuments (Gminna ewidencja zabytków (Kraków)).

Given that a substantial portion of the historical core of Nowa Huta has been designated for a lesser form of protection, it is important to note that the conventional temporal criterion determining the protection of buildings in Krakow is 1956, marking the demise of Stalinism and notable transformations in art and architecture across Poland and numerous other former Eastern Bloc countries (Galusek, Wiśniewski, 2024). Until date, younger structures in Krakow have seldom received protection. The former Cracovia Hotel and Kijów Cinema complex was notably added to the Register of Monuments in 2016 (Biernat, Zbiegień, 2017: 173–206). In all instances, the structures pertained to public institutions, facilitating their protection. In this context, safeguarding privately owned structures, particularly regarding the management of Krakow's extensive housing inventory constructed post-1956, presents a far more intricate challenge.

Following the end of World War II, Krakow's housing stock was projected to comprise roughly 80,000 flats. One-room apartments were prevalent, typically occupied by an average of 2.5 individuals (Jasieński, 1974: 32–44). Following the conclusion of the war, approximately 300,000 individuals resided in Krakow. The establishment of the Vladimir Lenin's Steel Factory generated significant housing demands; since 1949, Kraków has exhibited one of the highest population and residential construction growth rates in Poland. During the martial law period (1981–1983), Krakow's population surpassed 700,000 individuals (Firlet, 2007: 663–714). The population increase was paralleled by a continuous expansion of housing resources, which, according to later post-war General Plans for Krakow (1958, 1967, 1977, 1988, 1994), were delineated into two zones: one on the northern side of the city, extending from Nowa Huta to Bronowice, and the other on the southern side, stretching from Bieżanów to Ruczaj. In 1991, following the political transformation, Krakow's housing stock was assessed at roughly 270,000 apartments, indicating that around 190,000 apartments were constructed in Krakow during the post-war era (Raport o Stanie Miasta 1991). During the early phase, edifices were erected with conventional techniques. Between the mid-1950s and the early 1970s, large-panel technology featuring large-slab construction prevailed in Krakow. Post-1970, large-panel technology gained prominence and became predominant (Jasieński, 1974: 75–127).

Since the 1970s, emerging bands faced substantial criticism, frequently characterized as a phenomena at odds with human needs and without aesthetic merit (Bielecki, 1978). An additional issue was the inferior quality of the apartment finishes and the extended duration necessary to acclimate to the surroundings (Jarosz, 2010). The unfavourable view of post-war housing complexes escalated during the imposition of martial law and was exacerbated by the political transformations of 1989. The modernization of infrastructure,



window replacements, and thermal enhancements of post-war blocks, executed on an expanding scale in the 21st century, failed to alter this perspective. The absence of regulations and supervision in this unplanned and extensive process has resulted in numerous adverse changes, especially concerning the colour palettes of building facades.

Currently, aside from the previously noted instance of the oldest section of Nowa Huta, the post-war residential developments in Krakow lack protection. *The Study of Conditions and Directions of Spatial Development of the City of Krakow* (Studium uwarunkowań i kierunków zagospodarowania przestrzennego Miasta Krakowa), established in 2003 and revised in 2014, includes a catalogue of Contemporary Cultural Heritage Sites for Krakow (Studium uwarunkowań i kierunków zagospodarowania przestrzennego Miasta Krakowa – Dokument ujednolicony 2014). Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that it is confined to public edifices and provides negligible actual protection. Following the expiration of the General Plan for Krakow in 2003, the municipality is formulating new local spatial development plans. Existing plans encompass over 80% of the city's area. Current planning documents incorporate measures for the safeguarding of items recorded in the monument registry or included in the municipal monument register. Examination of specific plans, including the *Bieńczyce – Osiedle* local spatial development plan ratified in 2013 and the *Mistrzejowice – ks. Kazimierza Jancarza* local spatial development plan ratified in 2017 fails to ensure the safeguarding of the multi-family residential structures erected in the 1960s and 1970s. In 2011, the Krakow municipal administration conducted an analysis assessing the value of specific housing estates in Krakow (Jeżak et al., 2011), intended to serve as a foundation for pilot rehabilitation and revitalization programs for designated complexes. Nonetheless, the program did not result in cohesive investment initiatives.



**Fig. 2.** Conceptual design of the Mistrzejowice district, designed by Witold Cęckiewicz and team, 1963 (from the Witold Cęckiewicz archive)

### **The Złotego Wieku housing estate in Mistrzejowice.**

The paper aims to analyse options that can enhance the preservation or public perception of post-war housing estates without necessitating official administrative actions. In 2024, two study and dissemination projects were conducted in Krakow, focusing on housing estates, including the Złotego Wieku housing estate in Mistrzejowice (Wiśniewski, 2018). The residential complex accommodating around 12,000 to 15,000 individuals was constructed in the Mistrzejowice district from 1967 to 1974. This constituted the fourth phase of the urban planning team's development in Nowa Huta, executed subsequent to

the establishment of its oldest section, together with the residential complexes on the Wzgórza Krzesławickie district and the developments in Bieńczyce district

The design of the Złotego Wieku housing estate originated from the victorious submission in a 1963 competition, which included the entire Mistrzejowice district, intended for roughly 50,000 residents. The primary accolade in the competition was conferred to a team directed by Witold Cęckiewicz, affiliated with the Faculty of Architecture at the Cracow University of Technology (Karpińska Leśniak-Rychlak Wiśniewski, 2015a: 14–21). In 1956, this designer, newly appointed as the chief architect of Krakow, attended a multi-week course in France. He visited Paris, Le Havre, and Marseille, where the Unité d'Habitation, conceived by Le Corbusier, was already established. In subsequent years, Witold Cęckiewicz emerged as a principal advocate for modernist architectural styles in Krakow. The Mistrzejowice housing estate's design resembles a tree depicted on the facade of the Unité d'Habitation, created by Le Corbusier in West Berlin in 1958, which Witold Cęckiewicz visited immediately after its completion. In his description of Mistrzejowice district urban plan, he underscored that he was formally influenced by the form of a branch. In reaction to the allegations directed at the Bieńczyce district project, perceived as subordinate to the monotonous cadence of extensive housing developments, Mistrzejowice district was intended to devise a more human scale approach to urban planning solutions (Szczerek et al., 2023).

Witold Cęckiewicz's idea delineates the Mistrzejowice district into four distinct sections separated by major thoroughfares or green belts. The district occupied the high point of the basin where Krakow is situated. The idea proposed the construction of five-story strip blocks at the base of the slope. Green spaces, public facilities, and clusters of five-story residential buildings are proposed above. The tallest eleven-story buildings are proposed near the valley's summit. The abstract urban composition, viewed from above, was designed to mimic the crown of a fruit tree, featuring a cluster of *leaves* at the base and *fruits* at the apex. The residential developments were designated names corresponding to the seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. They were subsequently assigned names that more accurately reflect the historical policies of the period: Tysiąclecia (The Millenium Housing Estate), Złotego Wieku (The Golden Age Housing Estate), Obrońców Września (The September's Defenders Housing Estate) and Piastów (The Piast Dynasty Housing Estate). The urban design was created by Maria Czerwińska, while the architectural concepts were formulated by a team directed by Jerzy Chronowski and Maria Chronowska, comprising Tadeusz Bagiński, Stefan Golonka, Ewa Podolak, and Olgierd Krajewski. Witold Cęckiewicz served as the consultant supervising the team's design efforts.

The Mistrzejowice development commenced in 1967, initially encompassing the Tysiąclecia and Złotego Wieku housing estates, with the majority of buildings finalized by 1974. During this period, the most significant public edifices were also inaugurated, including service and commercial pavilions at Złotego Wieku housing estate 14 and 19-20 (Smaga, 2021: 103–138). The first one gives space to the Kuźnia Club, a branch of the C.K. Norwid Culture Centre, designed by Jerzy Chronowski and Maria Chronowska, which has been in operation for almost fifty years. The second design, created by Olgierd Krajewski, fulfils several service functions, primarily of a commercial nature. Upon its completion, the building had one of the city's largest metalwork embellishments, an abstract piece entitled *Wind Phantasmagoria* by Janusz Jutrzenka Trzebiatowski (Chabowska-Reca, 2011).

The estate operated in its original state until the late 1990s, when initial measures were implemented to modernize the structures. The residential blocks, along with the previously mentioned service and commercial pavilions, were subsequently renovated, followed by the school and kindergarden buildings modernizations. Consequently, the buildings' original colour scheme and adornments vanished, including the gigantic piece *Wind Phantasmagoria*. The modernization efforts were executed by the Mistrzejowice Housing Cooperative, founded in 1990 following the division of the Hutnik Housing Cooperative, established in 1958 to facilitate the construction of the discussed development.

Subsequent to 1989, the predominant section of the cooperative's housing inventory transitioned to private ownership, although a lesser segment, including service structures and communal spaces, continues to be owned by the cooperative.



**Fig. 3.** Janusz Jutrzenka Trzebiatowski at the front of the *Wind Phantasmagoria* decoration, Złotego Wieku housing estate, 19–20, Kraków, (illustration source: Chabowska-Reca, 2011: 144)

### Popularising knowledge about post-war housing estates in Krakow.

In 2006, Małgorzata Włodarczyk's publication on post-war modernism in Krakow was issued, followed by other research by the author on this subject in later years (Włodarczyk, Włodarczyk, 2017). A year prior, the Historical Museum of the City of Krakow (now the Krakow Museum) inaugurated the New Huta History Branch (now the Nowa Huta Museum), which embarked on ground-breaking study about the architectural history of Krakow during the specified period (Salwiński, Sibila, 2005). Concerning the discussed subject, it is pertinent to note the exhibition entitled *Nowa przestrzeń. Modernizm w Nowej Hucie* (A New Space. Modernism in Nowa Huta) (Jurewicz, 2012) and the show titled *Osiedleni. Mistrzejowice* (Settled. Mistrzejowice) (Smaga, 2021).

In 2018, the C.K. Norwid Culture Centre active in Nowa Huta released a guidebook entitled *Nowa Huta. Architektoniczny portret miasta drugiej połowy XX wieku* (Nowa Huta. The Architectural Portrait of the City of the Second half of the 20th Century) (Klaś, 2018). The institution also implements a regular educational program for residents, entitled *Study of the Heritage of Nowa Huta*. The team from the Institute of Architecture Foundation produced a monograph on Witold Cęckiewicz's oeuvre in 2015 (Karpińska, Leśniak-Rychlak, Wiśniewski, 2015a; 2015b), the principal architect of the Mistrzejowice development, and organized a monographic exhibition of his work in 2017 entitled, *Odwilż 56 – Cracovia 65. Architektura Witolda Cęckiewicza* (The Thaw of '56 – Cracovia '65. Witold Cęckiewicz's Architectural Works). The architecture of Nowa Huta district and Mistrzejowice district are the focus of a project commenced in 2014 by the Institute of Architecture Foundation and the Przestrzeń – Ludzie – Miasto Association, which includes the website *Krakowski Szlak Modernizmu* (Kraków Modernism Trail) and has been supplemented by a guide to modernist architecture in Krakow since 2022 (Krakowski Szlak Modernizmu).

The previously mentioned scientific and popularization projects, conducted by public institutions and non-governmental organizations, constitute a component of



a wider phenomenon of research focused on Nowa Huta district, which, along with its adjacent districts, has been the focus of a notably extensive array of initiatives in Poland aimed at promoting the architectural and social significance of post-war housing developments. Their shared focus was the proliferation of knowledge and discourse regarding the unfavourable reception of post-war architectural legacy.

The projects elaborated upon in the subsequent sections of the text originated from a similar conviction. In 2024, the Architecture Institute Foundation, with funding from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, partially administered by the National Centre for Culture, initiated a project titled *Osiedla mieszkaniowe Krakowa - społeczna i architektoniczna historia miasta (Housing Estates in Krakow. A Social and Architectural History of the City)*, aimed at collecting and organizing information about specific housing estates in Krakow. Dr. Dorota Leśniak-Rychlak, Dr. Dorota Jędruch, Marta Karpińska, and Dr. Michał Wiśniewski contributed to the project's preparation, while Agata Kokoryn, Zofia Grząślewicz, Maciej Rodak, and Wojciech Pietrucha participated in both the preparation and execution of the implemented actions. Investigations of archival materials and literature, alongside workshops with inhabitants of designated housing estates, facilitated the development of an outdoor exhibition scheduled for October 2024 at four sites in Krakow: the Złotego Wieku housing estate, the *Praca* Workers' Cooperative housing estate, the Rydla Street housing estate, and the Centrum E housing estate. A website named *Osiedla mieszkaniowe Krakowa (Kraków's Housing Estates)* (Osiedla mieszkaniowe Krakowa) part of the *Krakowski Szlak Modernizmu* (Krakowski Szlak Modernizmu) was developed with the exhibition, and a publication titled *Miniprzewodnik. Osiedla mieszkaniowe Krakowa* (Leśniak-Rychlak, 2024) has also been created. The project aimed to capsule the historical evolution of housing complexes in Krakow over the 20th century, showcasing various exemplary instances that are pivotal and indicative of the city's cultural setting.



**Fig. 4.** El Besòs and El Maresme housing estate in Barcelona (photo by author)



Workshops were conducted in selected housing estates in Krakow, specifically Dębniaki housing estate, Ugorek housing estate, and the Centrum E housing estate, over the summer and autumn of 2024 as part of the project. The sessions enabled the organizers to engage with the communities, acquire supplementary historical data, and gain oral testimonies from those associated with the chosen sites. Collaborative endeavors with local populations enabled us to discern a robust bond between the participants and their local environment. The gathered narratives and social interviews indicated an affinity for the estates and a favourable perception of their architecture. They also highlighted a neglected and inadequately researched aspect of the social history of 20th-century Krakow, pertaining to the evolution of mass housing.

### Post-war housing estates as a common asset and resource.

Comparable workshops were conducted in 2024 concerning the Złotego Wieku housing estate. The WECARE scientific project, conducted in 2024 and 2025 with the support of the European Union's Creative Europe program, examined the reception of post-war housing and its associated social, architectural, and environmental values. The project was led by a scientific team under the direction of Prof. Adolf Sotoca from the Polytechnic University of Barcelona. *Warding Environmental Commons through Action Research and Education* (WECARE) is a project that emphasizes the common resources present in residential areas, aimed at enhancing the quality of life for inhabitants. Two teams from Krakow participated in the project's development, representing the Department of Urban Planning and Architecture of Urban Structures A-9 (Prof. Mateusz Gyurkovich, Dr. Agnieszka Matusik, Dr. Eliza Szczerek, Dr. Tomasz Jeleński, Dr. Damian Poklewski-Koziół, Dr. Filip Suchoń, Monika Fronczak, Krzysztof Klus, Rafał Oleksik), the Faculty of Architecture of the Cracow University of Technology, and the Institute of Architecture Foundation (Dr. Dorota Leśniak-Rychlak, Dr. Dorota Jęduch, Marta Karpińska, Dr. Michał Wiśniewski), alongside collaborators from Barcelona and Bucharest, including the Polytechnic University of Barcelona (Prof. Adolf Sotoca, Prof. Marta Serra, Aritz Villalba) and the artistic workshop MITO Collective (Quim Bonastre, Joan Deulofeu, Enrique Baeza), the urban planning workshop ATU – Association for Urban Transition, and studioBASAR (Daniela Calciu, Alex Axinte, Cristi Borcan).

The research entailed an examination of three residential districts: El Besòs and El Maresme in Barcelona, Crângași in Bucharest, and Złotego Wieku housing estate in Krakow. The previously stated complexes, situated in various regions of the continent yet finalized over a comparable timeframe—the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s—are presently encountering markedly distinct social and architectural challenges. In each instance, workshops and discussions with residents and users were conducted in the spring of 2024, with participation from representatives of all project partners. Existing environmental, social, architectural, and historical resources were evaluated. Utilizing these insights and discussions with residents, diagrams were developed to illustrate the tools available to inhabitants when addressing their immediate environment.

The El Besòs i el Maresme neighbourhood was constructed between 1959 and 1966 and consists of around 5,000 housing units (Sotoca, 2025). The idea for several thousand inhabitants was conceived by the Catalan architectural team Giráldez, López Íñigo, and Subías. The housing estate marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of architecture in Spain, following 1958, when General Francisco Franco's dictatorship opted to engage in collaboration with other Western nations. The emblem of transformation was a resurgence of modernist aesthetics. The proposal's authors recommended constructing residential blocks featuring a contemporary skeletal framework and modernist designs on either side of the Rambla de Prim. From the outset, the neighbourhood accommodated migrants, initially from within the country, specifically from Andalusia or Galicia. The neighbourhood is predominantly populated by individuals who have immigrated to

Catalonia from many countries, including Senegal, Morocco, and India. The local community communicates in more than 30 distinct languages. The issues include the legal status of immigration, elevated unemployment rates, and criminal activity. Workshop participants, convened in April 2024 as part of the WECARE project, said that the estate has long been a site where city authorities have been relegating social and economic issues. A further disadvantage of residing in El Besòs i el Maresme is the persistent issue of asbestos in structures, which is deteriorating and accumulating across the district. The subsequent issue is the push from developers along the adjacent coastline, resulting in escalating rents.

The Crângași district in Bucharest was constructed during the systematization mandated by Nicolae Ceaușescu in the late 1970s, influenced by his visit to North Korea. With the implementation of the new economic policy, Romania aimed to achieve complete self-sufficiency and eliminate foreign debt. During that period, the capital of Romania resolved to construct two substantial water reservoirs, Lacul Morii and Văcărești, along with major residential developments surrounding them, including Crângași, situated on the city's western side.

The new housing estate was constructed on the location of the former village of Crângași, which had been home to suburban development and a modest residential area of single-family dwellings used by railway workers since the early 20th century. Prior to the formation of the town, a local community flourished in the area, cultivating robust interpersonal relationships and a profound attachment to the location. A limited number of structures were relocated during the construction of the reservoir; the majority were either demolished or inundated. The development of a new home estate commenced in this altered setting. In accordance with the new state policy, initiatives were undertaken to enhance efficiency by increasing building density while minimizing construction costs (Sistematizarea unei comune suburbane. Crângași și modernizarea socialistă (1970 – 1990). Raport de cercetare). The estate features a subpar



**Fig. 5.** The Crângași housing estate in Bucharest (photo by author)

finish and a unique, compact architectural design that resembles the blocks of a traditional urban environment.

The workshops organised in June 2024 in the neighbourhood space showed that one of the most important challenges facing Bucharest today is counteracting the effects of housing policy implemented after the political changes of 1989. The process of privatising spatial and construction resources in Romania has taken on a scale rarely seen in other countries in the region. In the residential area inhabited by nearly 15,000 residents, one of the last points enabling the implementation of cultural activities is a small library. A separate issue is access to green spaces. In a city with one of the highest car ownership rates in the European Union per capita, green spaces are constantly being converted into parking lots. Small gardens in the immediate vicinity of apartment blocks are being appropriated and fenced off. A separate issue is the condition of the buildings, which have not undergone major renovations for many years. The result of these processes is social atomisation and a lack of grassroots initiatives to improve the environment.

In May 2024, international workshops were organised dedicated to the space of the Złotego Wieku housing estate. The main organiser of this event was the Architecture Institute Foundation and Kuźnia Club, a branch of the C.K. Norwid Culture Centre. The workshops included meetings with residents and representatives of institutions and organisations operating in the district, including housing cooperatives, schools, and cultural institutions in the neighbourhood, as well as a nearby allotment garden. They demonstrated the strong involvement of residents in the life of the estate and in caring for its space, they also highlighted the role of public institutions, including educational and cultural ones, in activating the local community, as well as the care of the Mistrzejowice Housing Cooperative authorities in maintaining buildings, infrastructure, and green spaces.

The workshops also highlighted the escalating social issue in numerous Polish housing developments. Individuals who relocated to Mistrzejowice



**Fig. 6.** Participants of the WECARE project, Kraków, May 22, 2024 (photo by Jan Chotoniowski)



district in the 1970s are now classified as elderly citizens. In lower buildings without elevators, a situation known as *fourth-floor prisoners* arises, referring to those who cannot independently exit their flats situated on higher floors.

Another issue addressed was the preparation of the estate for the challenges presented by climate change. Adjacent to the estate is a park that complements the structures of the 48 Batowice Artillery Fort, constructed in the late 19th century for the Austrian army. Nearby, there is also the Złotego Wieku Family Allotment Garden. Involving inhabitants in the development of these spaces may be a crucial factor in fostering social resilience and enhancing awareness of the complex's overall value in the future.

The workshops conducted under the WECARE project in the specified locations facilitated the development of a comprehensive map of the challenges confronting housing resources throughout Europe, together with a proposed framework for actions and interventions. The project was recorded through a series of film documentation of workshop participants and related activities, along with a collection of publications in leaflet format. The project outcomes have been disseminated on the project website (WECARE). The subsequent phase of the project involved the formulation of a cultural events program, which the project partners intended to execute to enhance the social engagement of inhabitants. The procedures in all three cities occurred in April 2025. The discussions and workshops in Barcelona and Bucharest focused on the greenery that occupies neighbourhood spaces and resides within residents' houses.

The intervention in the Złotego Wieku housing estate in Krakow was extensive, conceived by a collaboration between the Institute of Architecture Foundation and the Kuźnia Club, a branch of the C.K. Norwid Culture Centre. On April 12, 2025, an event entitled *Cztery Pory Mistrzejowic. Spotkanie z architekturą krakowskiego osiedla* (*The Four Seasons of Mistrzejowice. An Encounter with the Architecture of the Krakow's Housing Estate*) took place, focusing on the architectural history of Mistrzejowice. The initial segment featured an architectural tour focused on the evolution and historical significance of the Złotego Wieku housing estate. The second segment comprised discussions with architect Maria Chronowska, the designer of the architectural plans executed within the estate, and Janusz Jutrzenka-Trzebiatowski, the creator of the unexisting today decoration *Wind Phantasmagoria* (Dybała 2025). The event culminated in an artistic occurrence featuring animated mapping centred on the themes of greenery and Mistrzejowice architecture, created by Barbara Nawrocka and Dominika Wilczyńska from the *Miastopracownia* studio (Miastopracownia).

The event garnered significant interest among the participants, mostly the estate inhabitants. The walk attracted numerous individuals. The aim was to interact with individuals engaged in the estate's creation, provide a reminder of the buildings' history, give an exposition of the foundational concepts guiding the complex's construction, and facilitate discourse regarding the absence of the *Wind Phantasmagoria* declaration. Exposition of the historical narrative and the artistic and architectural significance of the location, engagement with participants in historical events, and artistic interpretation were among the other important tasks of the project. The program consisted of varied and complex exercises designed to interpret cultural heritage. Freeman Tilden posits that the dissemination of knowledge serves primarily as an introduction to heritage interpretation, whose ultimate objective is to uncover meanings that are not readily discernible upon initial engagement with a location. This technique is achievable by stimulating contemplation and involving the participant. The proposed activity program implemented at the Złotego Wieku housing estate adheres to all the attributes of the cultural heritage interpretation process delineated by Freeman Tilden and was formulated in alignment with his action framework (Tilden, 2019).

On July 5, 2025, the public exhibition of projects developed by students from the Faculty of Architecture at the Cracow University of Technology was once again held at the Kuźnia Club, in relation to the WECARE project theme.

**Fig. 7.** The event titled The Four Seasons of Mistrzejowice. An Encounter with the Architecture of the Krakow's Housing Estate, from left: Monika Kozioł, Janusz Jutrzenka Trzebiatowski, Maria Chronowska, Michał Wiśniewski, Kuźnia Club, a branch of the C.K. Norwid Culture Centre, April 12, 2025 (photo by Jadwiga Bryś)



The projects undertaken by the students encompassed the design of designated public areas for social integration and the modification of specific residential structures to address emerging difficulties. Students showcased concepts for a communal parking facility and a new shared services center adjacent to the current bus stop. A crucial aspect of these studies was the consideration of greenery inside the complex and the exploitation and enhancement of existing resources. Moreover, emphasis was placed on the potential for enhancing current housing assets through modifications within the structure of certain blocks and units. Structures erected in the 1970s with prefabricated components are situated in a setting conducive to volumetric expansion and the incorporation of conservatories or elevators. The challenge of upgrading this style of building to accommodate the needs of the elderly and individuals with disabilities is a significant issue in current residential architecture. The workshops offered a varied selection of prospective options for future implementation in Krakow and in Poland. The gathering convened the local community and stakeholders engaged in the district's affairs. This was also a component of a series of events summarizing the project, conducted in all three cities.

The deterioration of post-war buildings, the aging demographics of communities inside these estates, climate change, the migration crisis, and insufficient social infrastructure are among the issues identified in the estates examined in the WECARE project. The initiative initially encompassed the examination of existing historical and geographical data, with meetings and workshops with residents and users of the housing estates. The last phase entailed creative interventions aimed at stimulating locals to engage in discourse about their immediate environment and to highlight the historical context of the locations under consideration. The outcome was the development of architectural designs that illustrate potential enhancements for the quality of living spaces and urban layouts. Residents and representatives of institutions engaged in the analysed locations participated in the execution of the subsequent phases. The initiative enabled the participants and stakeholders to compile recollections and thoughts from locals, gather local histories, perform research studies, and suggest actions to include individuals in community life. The Złotego Wieku housing estate efforts comprised a year-long program that integrated the experiences of residents and users with knowledge and a research initiative. The ultimate outcome is a framework for operations that can be executed in numerous analogous sites across Poland.

The previously referenced The Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities from 2007 (Karta Lipska nt. Zrównoważonych Miast Europejskich) emphasizes the significance of education in revitalizing Europe's urban housing inventory. The proposed projects demonstrate the collaborative dedication of public institutions and non-governmental organizations to engage in initiatives that enhance public awareness and motivate individuals to actively participate in creating their environment. Formulating strategies to address the escalating issues is a paramount responsibility confronting European towns today. This approach entails convening a group of local and external specialists, delineating the scope of activities, selecting a comparative framework for the proposed initiatives in the designated area, facilitating workshops with both experts and residents, orchestrating an artistic intervention to involve the local community, formulating architectural solutions for site revitalization and presenting them to residents, engaging in discussions regarding the outcomes with external specialists, and juxtaposing these findings with analogous endeavors undertaken in other sites. This structured program can assist decision-makers, municipal officials, and property managers. The activities conducted at the Złotego Wieku estate exemplify a laboratory for potential interventions and future proposals. On a local or national scale, they can be considered a prototype for programming revitalization processes within post-war housing estates, implemented in a responsible manner that engages the local community.



**Fig. 8.** The art installation accompanying the event titled The Four Seasons of Mistrzejowice. An Encounter with the Architecture of the Krakow's Housing Estate, Barbara Nawrocka and Dominika Wilczyńska, Miastopracownia, Kuźnia Club, a branch of the C.K. Norwid Culture Centre, April 12, 2025 (photo by author)



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