IMAGE OF A HANSEATIC CITY IN THE LATEST POLISH ARCHITECTURAL SOLUTIONS

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Abstract
The problem of the reconstruction of centres of Polish towns and cities after the destructions of the World War II evoke discussions even today. Over the first years after the war, in numerous cases the centres of historical cities and towns were lost; in the place of former market squares and networks of streets with tenements crowned with endwall trims, randomly dispersed concrete blocks of flats were erected, in order to satisfy urgent housing demands. The situation changed after 1980, when in Elbląg, Gdańsk, Szczecin, Kołobrzeg, a rule was adopted according to which the peripheral development of city quarters was to be recreated, restoring tenements located in historical plots of land, but contemporary in style, maintaining the silhouettes and sizes from years before. It is also possible to observe other activities in the solutions of the latest public utility buildings, which - often by using a sophisticated intellectual play - restore the climate and character of cities remembered and known from the past centuries.

In the west and north of Europe there are many towns and cities, predominantly ports, which used to be members of Hansa. The organisation of Hansa, the origins of which reach back to the Middle Ages, associated a number of cities which could decide about the provision of goods to cities within a specific territory, and secure markets for products manufactured in them. Thanks to that, cities that belonged to Hansa were developing more rapidly and effectively, and the beginnings of their development within the territory of Germany and in the Baltic states date back to the 13th and 14th centuries. The peak period of the development of Hanseatic cities, where merchants were engaged in free trade with people from European countries, fell in the 14th and 15th centuries, but already in the 17th century there was a complete decline of Hansa, resulting from the occurrence of competition in the form of associations of Dutch and English cities, as well as the Scandinavian ones. From amongst Polish towns and cities, members of Hansa were e.g. Szczecin, Gdansk, Kołobrzeg, Elbląg, as well as Cracow. In 1980 an association of partner cities of North Europe, dubbed a New Hansa, was established, the objective of
which is to attract attention to the common development of tourism and trade. Nowadays, this New Hansa associates over a hundred cities, similarly to what once was in the medieval Hansa. Numerous Polish cities faced the problem of reconstruction after the destruction of the World War II. The effects varied. By adopting the programme of satisfying predominantly housing demands in the 1960s and 1970s, historical old towns in dozens of cities from amongst nearly 2 hundred destroyed by warfare of the World War II in the north and west of Poland were lost forever. Today we can still encounter ruins of Gothic churches in Głogów or Gubin, where in the place of a market square and tenements of townsmen, randomly located rows of typical four- or five-storey blocks of flats have been erected.

**Elbląg**

The reconstruction of the Old Town in Elbląg, which has been in progress for more than thirty years now, is still not completed. At the end of the World War II, in February and March 1945, the Old Town was destroyed in more than 90%. The first to be reconstructed were partly destroyed historical religious buildings – St. Nicolas Church, Holy Spirit Church, and the Market Gate. The ruined tenements of townsmen were liquidated, because the authentic bricks were transported to the reconstruction of the destroyed Warsaw. In the centre of Elbląg, in the place of the Old Town, once teeming with life, for decades there was only an empty flat space with individual silhouettes of historic buildings protruding in this surrealistic landscape, and several preserved tenements at Wigilijna and Garbary streets. For decades the city existed without its historical centre, and instead an extensive green area was organised. Perhaps it was only for the best, because the space was not covered with blocks of flats, typical for a housing estate. This must have been caused by economic reasons.

The urban planning design, deriving from the medieval layout of the Old Town reaching back to the 13th century, was developed as late as in the years 1980-1983, after the completion of years' long extensive archaeological works, which uncovered the foundations and basements of ca. 600 townsmen’s tenements, tightly arranged along the frontages of streets. In the mid-1980s it was relatively easy to commence the implementation of the project on the empty area.¹ The author of the preservation guidelines was a long-term monument conservation officer in Elbląg, Prof. Maria Lubocka-Hoffmann, who dubbed the proposed principle of the reconstruction of the Old Town ‘retroversion’.² And this is how she explains this phenomenon in her own publications: ‘…… Retroversion is a peculiar replica of what used to be, ‘evoking’ the spirit of the old town…’.³ Thus, new tenements with the predominantly residential function with service outlets on ground floors mushroomed on the medieval layout of the city, sometimes even on the existing foundations. These are mainly houses of craftsmen. It was decided that most buildings were to maintain the proportions of most often Gothic Hanseatic tenements, very narrow and 3 to 6-storey tall, with the endwall trims, to evoke associations with the architecture from ages before. The details, though, are new, contemporary, completely different from the historical ones,

¹ The construction works were commenced in 1985, comprising 1/3 of the historical area of the city on the basis of the conservation guidelines drawn up in 1983; the Local Spatial Development Plan of the city was developed in 1997. www.SkyscraperCity.com/showthread.php?f=272006
² Lubocka-Hoffmann, Maria, 2004.
³ www.cyfrowewm.pl/artykuly/58/retrowersja-na-elblaskim-starym-miescie/

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in order to mark the date when they were built. In several locations it was decided to reconstruct the buildings so as to demonstrate the richness of details and wealth of townsmen in Elbląg, as houses in Elbląg were sometimes equally beautiful as the ones in Gdańsk. All of the new architecture of the Old Town are typical postmodernist compositions, where the forms, with their climate and silhouettes, are only to evoke the character of the broadly understood old architecture. Next to Gothic houses, in Elbląg there were also Baroque, Mannerist, and Art Nouveau ones. This stylistic diversity enabled the designers, Szczepan Baum, Ryszard Semka, Wiesław Anders – to apply all sorts of shapes: sometimes geometrically simplified, sometimes with soft oval forms. Sometimes, the elevations are divided into fragments distinguished with different colours, or using spatial measures. Nevertheless, the front elevations always have distinct cornices, frames of windows, and emphasised portals, sometimes even with too sophisticated details. The material applied on the outside are plasters in different colours or clinker bricks. Some parts of the elevation form reliefs and overhangs, bays or smaller protrusions in various shapes, standing out thanks to their bright colours. Sometimes the elevations are not symmetrical, and such elevations may be quite surprising and evoke discussions. Nevertheless, this was the concept of postmodernism, which reached our country with a considerable delay – as late as in the 1980s, after the social, political and economic breakthrough, whereas the archetypes of this trend could be observed in Western Europe and North America as early as in the late 1960s.

The first stage of the reconstruction brought about 180 tenement houses, which were to evoke the character of a Hanseatic port town. All the time it was important to maintain not only historic dimensions of the buildings, known from photographs and iconography, but also to use traditional materials, to introduce stoops, to reconstruct stone surfaces of streets and the market square. An important factor was to restore the role of the Old Town as a representational quarter; therefore, after some time a multifunctional town hall was erected in a Neo-Modernist style, which does not fulfil any administrative functions, but functions connected with culture. Elbląg was an example of a city that was the first to implement the reconstruction of the city centre with reference to the historical urban layout and to fill up the city quarters with tenement houses, and not typical concrete blocks of flats, as it used to be done in the post-war reconstruction of our country. In subsequent implementations of similar projects, the experiences verified in Elbląg were also applied, for example in the solutions on the Granary Island in Gdańsk, in Podzamcze in Szczecin, in Kolobrzeg, in Głogów.

**Gdańsk**

The Main Town in Gdańsk was destroyed in 90% over several days in March 1945 by air raids and shell fire of Soviet soldiers. After several years of cleaning of the debris, first of all historic buildings started to be secured, and relatively soon, albeit after numerous discussions and disputes, a method of reconstructing the houses was selected. The first completed tenements were former Hanseatic houses, lining the streets of Długa, Długi Targ. Similarly to Warsaw, already in 1949 the first reconstructed tenements were put into use, and the entire reconstruction

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4 The edifice of the Town Hall, erected in 2009-2010, is located in the western part of the quarter, between Stary Rynek, Kowalska, Przymurze, and Rzeźnicka streets.
of the Main Town in Gdańsk was completed in 1960. According to the adopted rule, predominantly the front elevations located along the longitudinal streets were subjected to reconstruction, whereas the solutions of the elevations along the transverse streets were implemented as more modest and schematic. In nearly each case the proportions of forms with gable roofs were intended to remind of Hanseatic houses. It was decided not to erect houses with outbuildings in order to let more sunshine inside the quarters, designing green areas, playgrounds for children, day cares, and nursery schools there. Contemporary staircases, contemporary layouts of flats were introduced to the layout of the interiors of the tenement houses, and the ground floor was designed to house shops and catering facilities. Along the more representational longitudinal streets, historical stoops were preserved, and the elevations were equipped with rich sculpted details. This way a salon of the city, which had always been formed by Długa and Długi Targ streets, the Royal Route of the Main Town in Gdańsk, with the Town Hall, Artus Hall, the Golden Tenement, Uphagen’s House, was re-created.

Actually, there is still a dispute among monument conservator officers whether the buildings of the Main Town reconstructed in the 1950-70s should be subjected to reconstruction basing on the preserved fragments of ruins and only partially preserved iconographies and photographs, as well as inventories, or whether – as the advocates of the Venice Charter claim, stating that – they should be simplified, solved using contemporary measures.

Figure 1. Gdansk Hotel Hilton

Source: photo: the Author, 2015

such disputes refer to the latest architectural solutions, as well. A Warsaw-based architect, Stefan Kuryłowicz, in the years 2007-2010 erected a spacious Hilton hotel in a place important for

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6 At the Polish Architecture Congress on 7 May 2005 in Bialystok Stefan Kuryłowicz claimed that each of us receives the identity of space in a different manner, [in:] Kuryłowicz, Stefan. Kuryłowicz, Ewa. 2010, p.51-56.
the Main Town, near the bend of the Motława river at the Fish Market. Such a location of the hotel, where the building closes the perspective of the river, makes it well exposed from both banks of the river at the same time. The form of the building is expressed in a contemporary language, closer to the so-called new modernism rather than post-modernism; it makes use of advanced technologies and materials. The architecture, exhibiting more trembling and openwork elevations from the south and monochromatic rather closed ones from all other sides, is an attempt at the recreation of the former urban character of this place. The hotel occupies an entire quarter and it has a floor plan of an irregular pentagon. The facility exhibits the former land division by the clear application of vertical lines, implying individual tenements, which from the side of the Motława river are crowned with partly flat or oblique gambrel roofs. On the external elevations we can find two types of manually manufactured traditional red brick maintaining the proportions of a gothic brick, or slabs of grey basalt. On the ground floor, in front of the building, with an open broad view of a representational pedestrian route of Rybackie Pobrzeże street along the Motława river, a terrace of a restaurant has been designed. The place abounds in elements made of transparent glass, tall vertical windows, and when we take a closer look, we can see rectangular shapes of glass cornices or glass balustrades of the balconies, which paint chiaroscuro on the southern elevation. From the other side, from Grodzka street, in a corner tenement a several storeys’ tall undercut simple transparent glass superstructure has been built, which constitutes a keepsake of a turret that used to be here. Further on six tenements with peak crowning are visible from this side. This architecture has nothing to do with reconstruction; it is modern, elegant, fresh, and most probably easy to accept even by traditionalists. The forms are schematic, simplified, narrow, six-storey tall, with a clear reference to a Gdańsk Hanseatic house. This structure acts as a sort of scenography for a detached gothic Swan Tower, exposed from the front from the side of the Fish Market. In the same period of time, i.e. in the years 2008-2010, right at the Motława Embankment near the Fish Market, but a bit closer to the centre, Stefan Kuryłowicz implemented the project of a Symfonia Residence Apartment Building. The complex consists of 12 apartments and two pent-houses, located opposite the Ołowianka Island and the Baltic Philharmonic. And here yet again the illusion of six five-storey tenement houses has been conjured. The elevations from the side of the Motława river are a sophisticated composition of full patches made of clinker and light plaster, with geometrical straight openings of glazed windows.

Several hundred metres further, at the Crane, towards the Fish Market, a row of new tenements was constructed over the recent years. Some of them are the Maritime Culture Centre, which is a Department of the Central Maritime Museum, located at 21-25 Tokarska street, and therefore accessible from two sides, i.e. from Tokarska street and from Rybackie Pobrzeże street. The design by Mirosław Frąszczak came into being in connection with an architectural competition from 2005, and its construction was completed in 2012. The conservation officer proposed the division of plots, frontages, as well as shapes of triangular gable roofs. The finish-

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8 The oval five-storey Swan Tower, dating back to the 16th century, is the northernmost part of the fortifications of the Main Town. In the 15th century it was the largest crane in medieval Europe, used for reloading and erecting tall masts on ships. Destroyed during the World War II, it was renovated in 1957-59, resembling the condition from 1442-1444.
ing material of the external elevations is a manually manufactured brick, exhibiting the proportions of a Gothic brick, but two of the tenements are complete glass forms made of transparent glass, inserted into a metal structure. The asymmetry of the brick peaks from the side of the Motława river and the double wall with empty window openings do not disturb the composition at all; on the contrary, they only emphasise the plastic effects of the elevation. The frames of the window openings and the blinds are made of dark wood, and the roofs have been covered with ceramic monk and nun roof tiles. Inside the museum, a multimedia interactive technology has been used, illustrating the knowledge in the scope of maritime technology. In a 3-storey tall open hall, with draw bridges and footbridges, attractive models of boats have been suspend-
ed.¹⁰

Figure 2. Gdansk Maritime Culture Centre

Historical towns and cities attract us with their atmosphere, climate, often with the scale of their architecture, and the thicket of narrow streets, as well as traditional materials used on walls and surfaces of streets. In contemporary attempts at solving urban spatial systems, as well as new buildings in towns and cities, we have been observing attempts of intellectual references to the past.¹¹ Sometimes the recipient is unable to guess the intention of the designer right away.

He needs to get accustomed to them first. Nevertheless, there are some historical schemes, which are to facilitate this process of understanding and feeling. For town houses, they are most of all oblique roofs, narrow and tall elevations, vertical window openings. For public utility buildings, on the other hand, these are protruding buttresses, which used to transfer the loads from ceilings and enabled to cover larger and broader surfaces.

In Gdańsk, in the direct vicinity of the remains of the preserved medieval municipal walls in the place of a former moat, in September 2014 a new Gdańsk Shakespeare Theatre opened. This location, inscribed in the urban order, became an attempt to put this part of the city in order. The exposition of the skyline of the Main Town is still carefully protected. A discussion was evoked by the location of the Elizabethan Theatre, whose low body spreads along the walls form the side of Ogarna street, exposing the silhouette of the Main Town. The author of the design is an Italian architect working in Venice, Renato Rizzi. We observe numerous references to tradition in this project. Most of all, the finishing material of the building – it is a manually manufactured dark anthracite brick, imported from Belgium. It covers all the walls, floors of internal yards, stairs, and passages, as well as the terrace, which is located on the roof. The building is a prolonged body, which actually bears minimalistic features, but it has buttresses and is surrounded by a 6-metre tall wall. Those buttresses, which display the play of light and shade on the elevations, are a characteristic element of the Gothic architecture, which appears in churches in Gdańsk, many of which – according to Renato Rizzi – used to be built using such dark bricks. A broad entrance from the north leads to an internal courtyard, whence we can reach the stairs and narrow internal passages, resembling piazzas and backstreets of a medieval town.

We can take this route to reach the terrace on the roof of the theatre and see the greatest secret of this facility – an opening roof over the main auditorium. …‘The problem that had to be solved did not actually refer to building of the opening roof in practical terms, but rather to the spirit of rituality which was to reside in the very movement of the roof opening...’ In these spaces, in narrow open corridors, plays can be staged as well; they can be stages for mystery plays, processions, parades, passion plays. The architect has designed ‘an art town’ for us, where the real world intermingles with the world of illusion and mystery. The interiors, with their floor plan referring to English Shakespearean theatres, surprises with different colours, dominated by the whites and beiges of light wood and marble. Our epoch often blurs the limits of traditional spaces; nevertheless, as the examples cited above imply, our longing for the past forces designers to undertake an intellectual play, from which the recipient can read the dreams remembered from the old times.

The body of the theatre, which attempts to illustrate the development of the European theatre in the city over the span of a thousand years, as Jerzy Limon writes, can astonish and surprise recipients. So as to prepare the inhabitants of the seaside areas and tourists to the reception of the Gdańsk Shakespeare Theatre, upon the initiative of Andrzej Wajda and Jerzy Limon two happenings were held in the city, bringing the art of William Shakespeare closer to recipients. Upon an invitation of Andrzej Wajda, two conventions of Polish actors who played the role of Hamlet in different theatres all over Poland were held in Gdańsk. On 23 April 2012, two unique shows were held in the city centre.

The first one took place at noon, where in ten spots along Długa streets on balconies and stoops actors were reciting parts of Hamlet’s monologues for one hour. In the evening on the construction site of the theatre, right at the entrance to the Main Town, among newly erected concrete walls, a multimedia Shakespearean play was staged on four specially prepared platforms, with the accompaniment of modern music and lights. The cranes and scaffoldings present in the site were to act as medieval siege engines, and on smooth surfaces of concrete walls, using the most advanced technologies of digital imaging, an illusion of a ready production was created.

The borders between fiction and reality were successfully blurred, as the real figures of actors were constantly intermingling with the images of statues and persons absent from the scenes, displayed on the screens. ‘...This illustrates great flexibility of theatre as the art and the medium, where everything is based on conventionality, and new technologies not only undermine the rules, but also create new conventions and lead us to uncommon modes of perception that nobody has ever even dreamed of. Or perhaps they were only dreams. ...’ These events demonstrated a traditional historical show and the contemporary theatre of the 21st century to which the Italian architect had been preparing us.

14 Gostyńska, Maria. Ratkiewicz-Syrek Anna (ed.), 2012 p.122
In the latest architecture of buildings of culture, erected in recent times in quite a large number, also in Poland, we frequently observe a creative approach towards the past. The context and tradition of the place become a superior thing.
Szczecin

As a result of an architectural competition from 2007, a design of the new Mieczysław Karłowicz Philharmonic in Szczecin by architects from Barcelona, Fabrizio Barozzi and Alberto Veiga was selected for implementation. The year 2015 brought a great success of the project; it received the first award in the most prestigious Mies van der Rohe competition for the best building erected in Europe over the last two years. Thus the Philharmonic became a new icon of Szczecin. And here again, the body of the edifice is inspired by forms of several-storey tall Hanseatic tenement houses. The plot is located at Małopolska street, in the vicinity of the Oder river and the Old Town with the Castle Hill. The new edifice of the Philharmonic fills the entire quarter, where from the side of the today Solidarności square since 1884 there was *Konzert und Vereinshaus*, designed by a Berlin-based architect, Franz Schwechten. After the World War II only Neo-Renaissance elevations remained, which for many years waited for a decision about their reconstruction for the purposes of a philharmonic or a theatre. As late as in 1962 it was decided to disassemble the ruins completely.¹⁶ And in this place a car park was organised, which operated until the new edifice was erected. The neighbouring plot towards the Oder river houses the edifice of Police Headquarters, erected in 1905 in a Neo-Gothic style, inspired by medieval architecture of Szczecin, which in the communist period became infamous due to the fact that it was the seat of the Militia, the Security Service, and the Security Office. From this building shots were fired towards demonstrating workers in 1970, 16 of whom died and 100 were injured.¹⁷

*Figure 6. Szczecin Philharmonic House*

¹⁶ Żyński, Tomasz. 2014, p.34.
¹⁷ Today, under Solidarności square, which is located opposite the Philharmonic, where this tragedy took place, there is an underground museum *Dialogue Centre 'Upheavals'* according to the design by Robert Konieczny, and in 2005 the statue of the *Angel of Freedom* by Andrzej Dźwigaj was placed on the square. At the foot of the statue there is a plaque with names of the 16 workers who died here.
The brick and stone edifice of the police headquarters, adjacent to the building of the new philharmonic, had to have a direct effect on the scale and composition of the new project. The entire quarter of the philharmonic is filled with dozens of forms resembling narrow soaring tenements of a Hanseatic city. There are no unnecessary details besides vertical divisions and triangular peaks, and multi-layer walls made of milk glass are covered from the outside with densely arranged aluminium slats painted white. The composition of triangular roofs covered with aluminium sheets constitutes the fifth elevation, equipped with several skylights which add light to the interiors. The search of the climate of the place, carried out by the Barcelona-based architects, is presented in the solution. ‘…Considering the nearly unlimited opportunities offered by the contemporary reality, where no shape has any meaning any more, we believe that what is essential is not so much the purity of the design as the purity of thoughts, the purity of concepts…’\textsuperscript{18} The entire body astonishes with its white colour, which creates a somewhat abstract form, clearly separated from the surrounding area, which is responsible for the fact that the city residents have dubbed it ‘an iceberg’. This quality of white colour is continued inside in the main hall and in all of the side corridors. Here, we encounter a completely different atmosphere than that of the external elevations. Archetypal forms clash, are drilled through, building subsequent sequences close to modernism. The omnipresent white evokes associations with shapes created by Louis Kahn or Le Corbusier. The concert halls, on the other hand, have been equipped with completely different colours. It seems that the decisive element was the clear and obvious declaration of the colours and symbols, adopted in advance. The large concert hall, dubbed the Sun Hall, is gold-coloured, whereas the chamber hall, called the Moon Hall, is all black in colour.

\textbf{Figure 7. Szczecin Philharmonic House}

\textit{Source:} photo: the Author, 2015

\textsuperscript{18} Veiga, Alberto. 2014, p.39.
Summary
In the process of historical development, European cities created forms which were accumulating over centuries. Rich shapes and details, deriving from sometimes very distant epochs, add to the beauty of willingly visited urban complexes. Their characteristic diversity, resulting from their location, land relief, culture of the communities inhabiting the cities, account for the different atmosphere and identity of cities, which should definitely be secured and protected. Hans Georg Gadamer, a contemporary German philosopher, claims that the greatest gift that Europe can offer to the entire world is the cultural diversity of its inhabitants. The depletion of the tissue of urban architecture results from various factors. The most tragic and the greatest are losses resulting from the warfare. All losses in the structures of cities, therefore, call for diversified contemporary interventions, connected not only with the observance of conservation principles and rules, but also due to the constantly changing demands of city inhabitants. The love of recollections, of things well known, remembered from the past, has been becoming the foundation of proposals of considerations devoted to visions of the future world for many years now. The multitude of the directions of creative approaches of avant-garde architects, observed over last years, allows for the adoption of diversified solutions. Fascination with history and the past, drawing from them, and the contemporary creative interpretation thereof, as well as attempts at establishing a dialogue with the context of the surrounding spaces, result in diversified original designs. The examples presented herein, implemented in Poland recently, demonstrate that they are more valuable solutions than a complete rejection of tradition, observed in the 1960s and 1970s in our country. The return of a historical city, regarded more intellectually and irrationally than realistically, is a dream of contemporary mature societies.

Figure 8. Szczecin Philharmonic House The large concert hall “Sun Hall”

Source: photo: the Author, 2015

19 Bauman, Zygmunt. 2011, p.102-103.
References


