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## A NEW POLISH ARCHITECTURE AFTER THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMICAL CHANGES IN 1989 TOWARDS CRITICAL REGIONALISM

### NOWA ARCHITEKTURA POLSKA PO ZMIANACH POLITYCZNYCH I EKONOMICZNYCH W 1989 W KIERUNKU KRYTYCZNEGO REGIONALIZMU

#### Abstract

This paper explores the role critical regionalism which could play a role in the continued development of global-era Polish architecture, and the advancements achieved by those few contemporary Polish architects who have sought to combine modern tastes and techniques with culturally meaningful designs. The new culture of Poland is very much reflected in the design of many of its new buildings that have been completed since the political and economic changes in 1989. The architecture of Poland appears to have lurched from an inappropriate socialist modernism that was so horridly imposed during the communist era to an equally inappropriate post modernist hegemony in the new enterprise culture. This paper suggests that with its new found freedom, Poland should be careful that it does not suffer a loss of identity and that in its architecture it should seek a way forward through a Critical Regionalism<sup>1</sup>.

*Keywords: polish architecture, communist era, critical regionalism, globalization*

#### Streszczenie

Przedstawia się rolę, jaką odgrywa krytyczny regionalizm w rozwoju architektury polskiej po 1989. Zwraca się uwagę na kierunki twórcze obecne w polskiej architekturze współczesnej po zmianach politycznych i ekonomicznych, będące odbiciem trendów w architekturze światowej. Przecistawiając tej tendencji dążenia do zachowania specyficznej odrębności, wskazuje się koncepcję krytycznego regionalizmu jako sposób na zachowanie indywidualizmu wynikającego z położenia geograficznego i specyfiki kulturowej. Rozpatruje się twórczość architektoniczną wybranych projektantów, która wykazuje cechy rozumiane jako świadome podejście uwzględniające dążenia do zachowania tożsamości poprzez rozumienie wartości lokalnych. Krytyczny regionalizm postrzegany jest jako właściwe podejście do tworzenia współczesnej architektury w Polsce.

*Słowa kluczowe: polska architektura, czasy komunistyczne, krytyczny regionalizm, globalizacja*

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<sup>1</sup> Critical Regionalism is an approach to architecture that strives to counter the placelessness and lack of meaning in Modern Architecture by using contextual forces to give a sense of place and meaning. The term Critical Regionalism was first used by Alex Tzonis and Liliane Lefaivre and later more famously by Kenneth Frampton put forth his views in *Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six points of Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance* (1983). Critical Regionalism is different from Regionalism which tries to achieve a one-to-one correspondence with vernacular architecture in a conscious way without consciously partaking in the universal.

## 1. Introduction

Since 1989, Polish architecture has lurched from an inappropriate socialist modernism imposed during the communist era to an equally inappropriate post-modernist style, making parts of Warsaw indistinguishable from other world cities. The prevalence of glass and steel skyscrapers is no coincidence, owing to deliberate choices to harmonize with the West rather than spontaneous adherence to elementary architectural ideas. The forces of globalization – common trade, communication, and education continue to eradicate traditional boundaries separating architectural styles and techniques, prompting those who believe Polish architecture should reflect local culture to question whether the country should adopt Western modes of architectural expression so uncritically.



III. 1. New skyline of Warsaw with Daniel Libeskind's first project in Poland – under construction (visualization Studio Libeskind – ORCO)

In the last two decades, a number of Polish architectural practices have gained prominence in their field, and their work has been featured regularly in professional journals. However, as noteworthy as their work has become, very little of it upholds the architectural features unique to Poland.

Those who believe this architectural homogenization does not reflect Polish identity adequately and that it stalls advances in the state of Polish architectural art align themselves with the theory of critical regionalism, pioneered in 1983 by architectural critic Kenneth Frampton. This paper explores the role critical regionalism could play in the continued development of global-era Polish architecture, and the advancements achieved by those few contemporary Polish architects who have sought to combine modern tastes and techniques with culturally meaningful designs.

## 2. Polish architecture after 1989

The end of the communist era provided enormous new opportunities for the development of Polish architecture. Following independence, Poland had a great demand for new buildings and interiors as virtually all past building works had been financed by the state to serve certain social purposes such as housing, education, health services, and employment. Contrast that with conditions today, where nearly all buildings are financed by private companies and investors to house offices, banks, shops, showrooms, hotels, bars and restaurants. Because

bank interest rates are high, the number of buildings under construction are few, which is one reason Poland managed to avoid the worst effects of the recent global recession. Warsaw is one exception, where construction levels resemble those in other Eastern European cities (Ill. 2).



Ill. 2. Warsaw office center (source: PAP)

The current level of privately financed construction took time to achieve, and is still changing. The Adam Mickiewicz Institute has identified three stages in the history of Polish architecture after 1989<sup>2</sup>. During the first period, designs from several years earlier—still using primitive technology—were completed. At the same time, the first imported designs were built, these being the works of second or third-ranked Western architects described as the “paratroopers”<sup>3</sup>. In those days, glass walling was popular to conceal the scarcity of more appropriate solutions. Hardly any public buildings were built, and the drive for quick profits and budgetary savings were more important than build quality.

Deficiencies aside, buildings erected during the first period were the first in decades that could be compared to Western standards of finish. They demonstrated a radical shift from the status quo of the previous 50 years.

During the second period, an increasing number of companies entering Poland began construction of elegant offices. Their aspirations gave rise to commissions for the most talented designers, and competitions for the best designs. Consequently, numerous design studios appeared, often employing young, vibrant architects ready to work in the market economy.

Since the late nineties, the third period has seen the appearance of large developers for whom success in the market was as important as the need for attractive environments

<sup>2</sup> See: J.S. Majewski in *Polish Architecture in the Nineties*, [In:] *Polish Culture*, No. 3190, published by: Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Warsaw 2010.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

and appropriate quality of architecture. These firms would often commission designs from the most famous architects in the world. Examples include the Opera House located on Saski Square (Plac Saski) in Warsaw, where large developers commissioned the project from Sir Norman Foster (Ill. 3); the Praski Port in Warsaw, led by Spanish architect Ricardo Bofill, and the construction of the acclaimed Warsaw Financial Center skyscraper, designed by the renowned New York-based firm Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates.



Ill. 3. Norman Foster, Metropolitan Building, Pilsudski Square, Warsaw, 1997–2003; a) View from Pilsudski Square, b) courtyard (photo by A. Szczebrzeszyński)

Unfortunately, the same commercial pressures that built the Warsaw Financial Center have had a disastrous effect on the architectural quality of other buildings, particularly in Warsaw. The capital has a chronic shortage of office space and remains one of the most expensive cities for renting space, ranking just behind Paris, London, Berlin, and Moscow. Due to the shortage, as well as on the incidence of speculative office developments, developers choose to maximize the amount of leasable floor area in their new buildings. This has resulted in tower blocks that are out of scale and context with the existing buildings, poorly built, and possessing unattractive façades.

Many of these buildings were designed by Western firms who lacked interest in Polish culture and values. Of those, the most energetic were Skanska of Sweden and ILBAU of Austria. They used in-house architects in development, financing, and construction. The results were not of the highest quality despite planning controls, building regulations, and recent requirements regarding foreign investors requiring them to have new buildings approved by a Polish architect. Vestiges of the old regime—widespread corruption and bribery—prevented decent buildings from being constructed. Some intolerable construction and safety failures have also come to light in some of the new tower blocks, including inadequate fire escapes, lifts, and proper floor space.

There are some exceptions. In Warsaw, Orco Property Group realized numerous developments in their prestigious Small Luxury Hotels of the World collection, and is now engaged in Polish-born Daniel Libeskind's first project in Poland. It is an incredible 192-meter (630 ft), 54-story, high-rise in the heart of Warsaw (Ill. 1–4). In addition to 251 luxury apartments, it accommodates a retail area, an amenity floor, and an attended car park. This building's unique form relates perfectly to the environment. Advanced

ecological solutions generate high levels of energy and water savings, and, as one would expect from a glass structure, provide an unlimited source of sunlight.



Ill. 4. Daniel Libeskind, Luxury High-rise Residential Building, Street Złota 44, Warsaw, 2005 – under construction (visualization Studio Libeskind – ORCO)

Buildings designed, built, and financed by ILBAU are also of a respectable commercial architecture. Most were designed by Miljenko Dumencic, a Croatian resident in Poland who was a co-designer of an office-hotel complex in Szczecin (Radisson Hotel and Pazim Office Building). Szczecin witnessed anti-communist revolts in 1970 and 1980, and, since 1999, has been the capital of West Pomerania. Given its current landmark status today, Szczecin needs more attractive architecture in its downtown area besides the Pazim skyscraper (Ill. 5).



Ill. 5. Miljenko Dumencic, Radisson Hotel and Pazim Office Building, Szczecin, 1989–1992 (photo by ILBAU)

Like architecture in Western countries such as the United States or Great Britain, the quality of new Polish architecture and interior design varies considerably. An unfortunate consequence for cultures that have transitioned quickly to free market economies is, with the exception of prominent buildings that the quality of much of the architecture is poor. This is due largely to incentives, developers have to reduce building costs and professional fees, and to the fact relatively unskilled technicians produce much of the work done usually by architects. There are numerous examples of interiors and new buildings that exhibit little skill or imagination. On the other hand, one can find some distinguished works in which, fortunately, an architect has had an enlightened patron or has striven to achieve the highest possible design standards.

It has taken a while for Poland's leading designers to emerge, but the better design studios are now starting to be recognized within the profession, the media, and other circles.

To discover the best new architecture and designers in Poland, one must peruse architectural journals and examine the work on display in the major architectural exhibitions. Since 1989, three excellent, professional journals have appeared: *Archivolta Quarterly* and *Architektura i Biznes (Architecture and Business)* from Krakow, and *Architektura Murator*, published in Warsaw. The latter two publish the cream of Polish architecture, while *Archivolta Quarterly* mainly examines current architectural trends, theories and practices worldwide. Additionally, two major architectural exhibitions have recently taken place: *Plac Budowy: Polska (Building Site: Poland)*, held by the Academy of Arts in Berlin, and *Quo Vadis Architectura*, held at the Architecture Museum in Wroclaw.

The journals and exhibitions convey the pluralism of contemporary Polish architectural design, resembling that in other Western countries.

### 3. Present trends

There are four distinct architectural tendencies at work today in Poland. Three have great affinity with the same movements in Western Europe: neo-rationalism, deconstructivism, and late-modernism. The fourth, regionalism, necessarily differs from styles elsewhere.

The leading movement in Poland at the moment is neo-rationalism. All its best followers are from Krakow, including Romuald Loegler, Wojciech Obtulowicz, and Dariusz Kozłowski. As well as projects in Krakow, Loegler has won international competitions in Berlin, and his works have been featured in European journals and books (Ill. 6). His most interesting works concern urban design projects, which build on Italian theories.

Quite different and inspired by Italian neo-rationalism is the work of Dariusz Kozłowski. Although neo-rationalism adopts elements from the vernacular, Kozłowski's Catholic seminary complex in Krakow (1997) still comes as a shock with its intense colors, broken façades, interrupted arcades, introverted plan, and generally complex form (Ill. 7). By contrast, the work of Wojciech Obtulowicz is far more restrained, more ordered in its planning, and contextual in its setting. There are other architects who design buildings in the neo-rationalist style, including Andrzej Duda, Henryk Zubel, Piotr Fischer and Henryk Nawratek, all of whom practice in Silesia.



Ill. 6. Romuald Loegler, extension of Krakow University of Economics, Krakow, 1992–1998 (photo by K. Januskiewicz)



Ill. 7. Dariusz Kozłowski, Catholic seminary – façade, Kracow, 1984–1997 (photo by D. Kozłowski)

The Warsaw University Library may be one of the most interesting and creative architectural achievements in Poland after 1989. In 1993, Marek Budzynski and Zbigniew Badowski won the competition for its design. Inspired by Italian neo-rationalism, it is a brilliant experience. A low, spacious concrete building is penetrated by the greenery of a botanical garden on the roof. The structure, like the temples of art of the last century, contains complex iconographic decorations. It possesses a green steel construction and cathedral-like proportions, and the façade depicts a series of open books (Ill. 8). Situated nearby the Cultural Palace and the Royal Castle, it presents a great view.



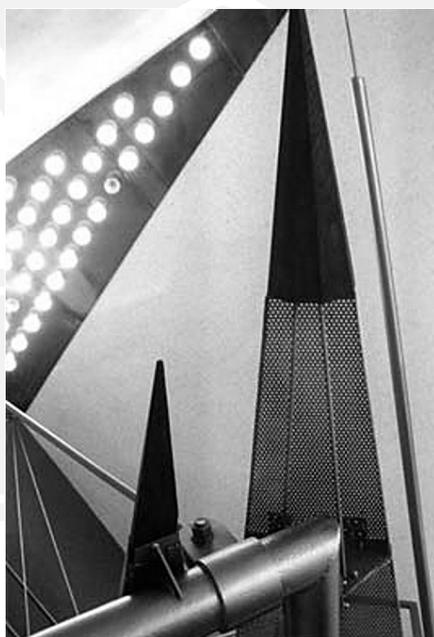
Ill. 8. Marek Budzyński, Zbigniew Badowski, Warsaw University Library; a) facade, b) vestibule, c) catalog room, Warsaw, 1993–1999 (photo by M. Budzynski)

Another movement in Poland is deconstructivism, practiced particularly well by two architectural studios. In Silesia, Mirosław Polak and Marek Skwara have executed a series of extraordinary interiors, which are distinguished in their exploration of steel, the indigenous material of the region. Each of their projects responds intuitively to the essence of their clientele and can vary from the highly sophisticated—with use of high quality materials and specially designed distinctive fittings such as at the Town Hall in Bytom – to the crude in the example of the rusting steel and suspended glass floor at the Bar Złom, also located in Bytom (Ill. 9).

Another interesting deconstructivist is Wojciech Jarzabek, who has completed new buildings, including a prominent department store, in his home city of Wrocław. Although his work is designed in his own quirky manner, his latest projects display an American influence, particularly by an early Frank Gehry and a little bit of Michael Graves.



Ill. 9. Atelier PS, Bar Zlom, Bytom, 1993 (photo by Marek Skwara)



Ill. 10. Marek Skwara, Mazda showroom, Katowice, 1992 – steel detail (photo by M. Skawara)

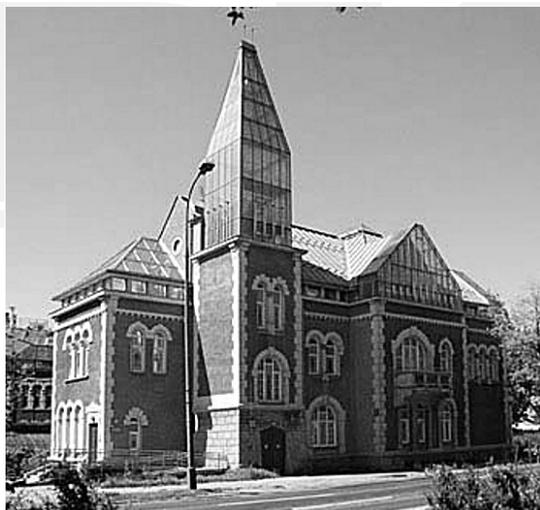
Quite different and inspired by Zaha Hadid's early works is the recent international competition-winning design for the Museum of the Second World War in Gdansk. The pavilion, together with the obelisk nearby, squeezes into the ground and strikes the visitor with light, creating a symbol of catastrophe and surviving hope. Like the phoenix, the building rises from Mother Earth, its ashes facing towards the sky (Ill. 11).



Ill. 11. Studio 'Kwadrat', Museum of the Second World in Gdansk – international competition winning design, 2010

Perhaps the most common design movement in contemporary Poland is late-modernism, which is represented in most of the new private banks, supermarkets, showrooms, offices, and housing estates. The New Airport Terminal at Warsaw Okecie, designed by a firm associated with a German construction concern, is an example of the mediocre design seen all too often.

There are, however, some notable exceptions. The airport terminals built in Krakow, Wroclaw, and Gdansk, whose designs were selected through a competition, reveal a much higher standard. The most interesting is the airport terminal at Krakow-Balice, designed by Stanislaw Denko, Janusz Dulinski, Dariusz Gruszka, and Piotr Wrobel. Another example is a mini-office block renovation belonging to the Warsaw University Foundation and known as Szara Willa (Ill. 12). The new tower has extensive glass roofing and walling through which its steel construction can be seen. The construction is notable for its designers' meticulous attention to detail and their application of new technical solutions heretofore absent in Poland.



Ill. 12. Grey Willa (1930) – after renovation by Marek Kiciński, Warsaw, 1997 (photo by M. Kiciński)

Possibly the best-known Polish architect today is Krzysztof Chwalibog, the former president of SARP, who, with his partner Ryszard Girtler, has designed some attractive private housing, notably at Gdynia Hill. Their Warsaw-based studio, JEMS Architects, designs in a pronounced late-1920s to early-1930s cool, white International Modernist style (Ill. 13).



Ill. 13. JEMS Architects, Spectra Office Building, Warsaw, 1995–1999 (photo by JAMS)

In Krakow, Marek Dunikowski, Krzysztof Kiendra, Piotr Labowicz, Witold Gilewicz and Andrzej Owczarek in Lodz have demonstrated how to design appropriate high-tech buildings of steel and glass. Gilewicz’s design for Kazimierz Shopping Center adopts references and elements abstracted from the local tradition. The shopping center is interpreted as a complex architectural organism, crossed by an intricate network of pathways that develop on two levels while remaining in constant correlation.

In Poznan, architects Pawel Handshuh, Piotr Chlebowski, Krzysztof Kochnowicz and Wojciech Kolesinski have beautifully restored and extended some historic houses for a bank. Finally, Ryszard Jurkowski and Tomasz Konior from Katowice have completed some excellent housing estates and public buildings in Silesia (Ill. 14).

Although it has never been practiced particularly well, post-modernism—a popular architectural movement that predominantly originated in the United States—also appears throughout Poland. Post-modernism was promoted zealously by the architectural critic Charles Jencks as the savior to the consequences of modernism. Amidst the dramatic political and economic changeover in 1989, it was clear Poland would try to purge itself of its incongruous socialist modernism past and adopt the symbol of multi-national capitalism post-modernism—in its new consumer architecture. Several years after the changeover, there are many postmodernist buildings and interiors, particularly in Warsaw.

In the West, however, post-modernism was to be short lived. It was, as Kenneth Frampton noted, “pure scenograph”, and as the critic E. M. Farrally said, “it was clear that Post-Modernism was not an independent freedom force at all, but a sort of mutant isotope of elemental Modernism; initially radiant, but highly derivative, insidious and programmed to decay”<sup>4</sup>. Although there are still buildings being erected in the post-modernist style in Poland, the same late-modernist takeover may yet happen.

<sup>4</sup> E.M. Farrally, *The New Spirit* [In:] *The Architectural Review*, August 1986, p. 9, also 7-12.



III. 14. Tomasz Konior, Musical Academy – extension, Katowice 2005–2007 (photo by Konior Studio)

While many will find the new pluralism of architectural ideas in Poland exciting, these styles are still based on Western practices. Naturally, some may feel that Poland’s soul has always been rooted in Western culture and that new architecture must demonstrate a clear break with the communist past. However, virtually all new Polish architecture follows what has become an international language, examples of which can be found as much in the Middle and Far East as in the West.

If Western architecture is now the global style, one question must be asked: how does this new architecture relate to the culture and traditions of Poland?

To begin to frame this question, we must create a suitable intellectual atmosphere to explore such concepts as the theory of culture and the theory of architectural design. This thought relates to the Kantian notion of autonomy. Kant explains that works of art challenge not only the actual world (the positive view) but also the very legitimacy of all the possible worldviews (the normative view). Lefaivre and Tzonis continue: “this occurs

when a building is self-reflective, self-referential, when it contains, in addition to explicit statements, implicit meta-statements that make the beholder aware of the artificiality of her or his way of looking at the world”<sup>5</sup>.

#### 4. Towards a critical regionalism

Over the course of the twentieth century, architecture in Poland—like most aspects of Western culture—has been characterized by increasing homogeneity beyond national lines. As Paul Ricoeur points out, the universalizing of culture is, in some ways, an advance for humanity, but it also constitutes “a sort of subtle destruction” in which local sources of stylistic innovation are repressed gradually as universal styles of architecture, art, and food take over. There is a tension between local culture and this universalizing trend that cannot be resolved fully in favor of one side or the other, and the tendency of styles and forms to spread quickly will only increase, causing regional culture to become “something which (must) be self-consciously cultivated”<sup>6</sup>.

In 1983, the distinguished architectural critic Kenneth Frampton published a notable paper entitled *Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance*, which expressed grave concern about the global adoption of Western architecture<sup>7</sup>. In responding to the question of why he argues for regionalism, Frampton said, “Perhaps it’s an over-reaction. But, at least in the North American situation, it became rather clear to me that there was this sort of very polarized discourse between high-tech on one side—although there is a very primitive school of high-tech in the United States compared to what is happening in England—and what I referred to, perhaps with somewhat unfair pejorative implications, as a kind of scenographic reduction of architecture to a scenography which makes a very gratuitous, or parodied, use of historicist motifs”<sup>8</sup>.

In his paper, Frampton advanced the case for a more responsive architecture that not only incorporates modern technologies, but also belongs to its region. The text begins with a long quotation from Paul Ricoeur, describing the current state of traditional culture and the effects of universalization, which, he argues, leads to mediocre civilization. Ricoeur questions “how to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization”<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Lefaivre and Tzonis, *Why Critical Regionalism Today?*, Quoted in Joan Ockman (ed.), *Architecture and Culture 1943–1968*, New York: Rizzoli, 1993, p. 109 (first published in *New Yorker*, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1947).

<sup>6</sup> P. Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965, p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> See: K. Frampton, *Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance* [In:] Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983, 16-30.

<sup>8</sup> K. Frampton, *Regionalism. A Discussion with Kenneth Frampton and Trevor Boddy*, The Fifth Column, 1983, Summer, 53.

<sup>9</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Universal Civilization and National Culture*, trans. Chas A. Kelbley, [In:] *History and Truth*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965, 276.

Ricoeur expresses concern with creeping modernization in undeveloped parts of the world:

“The phenomenon on universalization, while being an advancement of mankind, at the same time constitutes a sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional cultures ... but also ... the creative nucleus of great cultures... Thus we come to the crucial problem confronting nations just rising from underdevelopment. In order to get on the road towards modernization is it necessary to jettison the old cultural past which has been the raison “d’etre” of a nation...? Where the paradox: on the one hand, it has to root itself in the soil of its past, forge a national spirit and unfurl this spiritual and cultural revindication before the colonialist’s personality. But in order to take part in modern civilization, it is necessary at the same time to take part in scientific, technical, and political rationality, something which very often requires the pure and simple abandonment of a whole cultural past... There is a paradox: how to become modern and return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization”<sup>10</sup>.

Ricoeur states further that there often exists a pressure to abandon a whole cultural past in order to take part in modern civilization. Instead of wiping the slate clean, he advocates a model that incorporates historical themes as the basis for future development.

Ten years into Poland’s free market era, architects began to again question their role in advancing Polish culture, and sought to use their art to assert Poland’s cultural uniqueness. The promotion of a regional architectural movement is not a recent phenomenon in Poland, as preserving native culture is something of a national pastime, Poland having been controlled throughout modern history by Russia, Germany, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. By borrowing popular motifs from traditional wooden buildings in places such as the Tatra Mountains, architects discovered a surreptitious way to preserve the national Polish character.

This process was never formalized until the end of the nineteenth century, when there appeared various attempts to develop a national style of architecture. Perhaps the earliest and most prominent example of this came from an artist and writer Stanislaw Witkiewicz (1851–1915) who, via the design of several villas, tried to promote the “Zakopane Style” for all buildings in Poland. While Witkiewicz’s work was no more than the revival of timber folk building of the rural region, his nephew Jan Koszczyc-Witkiewicz (1882–1958) was one of the most successful architects to produce original Polish regionalist architecture. Polish historians of architecture praise his work for being simultaneously both modern and national, and unparalleled by anything to be found abroad (Ill. 15, 16)<sup>11</sup>

Even during the communist period several exceptional works that clearly reflected the region were built in Zakopane. These included *Tourist House* designed by Tadeusz Brzoza and Zbigniew Kupiec in 1950s, and the church at Olcza, designed by Teresa and Tadeusz Gawlowski and completed in the 1980s (Ill. 17).

<sup>10</sup> *op. cit.*, 276-7.

<sup>11</sup> See: A Milobedzki, *The Architecture in Poland: A Chapter of the European Heritage*, International Cultural Center, Krakow 1994, 125.



III. 15. Stanisław Witkiewicz, Jaszczurowka Chapel, Zakopane, 1905–1907 (photo by M. Holcer)



III. 16. Stanisław Witkiewicz, House 'Willa pod Jedlami', Zakopane, 1897



III. 17. Teresa and Tadeusz Gawłowski, Church at Olcza, Zakopane, 1978–1988 (photo by T. Gawłowski)

With some exceptions, regionalism did not come into the architectural vocabulary again until the late 1950s. And it was not until 1981 when Alexander Tzonis and Leane Lefaivre introduced the term critical regionalism as an alternative to modernism and post-modernism.

In *The Grid and the Pathway* Tzonis and Lefaivre define critical regionalism:

“By way of a general definition we can say that it upholds the individual and local architectonic features as against more universal ones. Critical regionalism is a bridge over which any humanistic architecture of the future must pass”<sup>12</sup>.

From Lefaivre and Tzonis’s discussion about the idea of critical regionalism in 1981 and in the leading essay of their 2003 book, two changes are noteworthy<sup>13</sup>. In their recent book, the word “critical” is not used to denote an opposition or resistance to anything internal or external in architecture. They emphasize a particular region in terms of the value of an individual project within the physical, social, and cultural constraints of that region, aiming at sustaining diversity while benefiting from universality<sup>14</sup>. Tzonis’s rapprochement to critical regionalism intends to “design” an identity mapped within the prevailing order of globalization. The authors trace the genesis of critical regionalism to its ancient historical and political roots, and focus on its modern expression. They point to the increasing use of the theory in the recent works of a truly global selection of visionary architects, including Santiago Calatrava in Spain, Renzo Piano in the South Pacific, and Berger and Parkkinen in Germany. Discussions of Tropical Architecture and contemporary works in Asia round out this important contribution to a topical debate about the role of architecture in the world.

The architectural critic who has done more to raise and spread the issue of critical regionalism than anyone else is Kenneth Frampton. In his first essay (1983) on the subject, he explained the term clearly:

“The fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place. It is clear from the above that Critical Regionalism depends on maintaining a high level of critical self-consciousness. It may find its governing inspiration in such things as the range and quality of the local light, or in tectonic derived from a peculiar structural mode, or in the topography of a given site”<sup>15</sup>.

Frampton expounded even further on the subject in 1992 with his revised and enlarged seminal book, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* in which he devotes a whole chapter to *Critical Regionalism: modern architecture and cultural identity*. In this chapter he defined the movement further:

<sup>12</sup> A. Tzonis and L. Lefaivre, *The grid and the pathway. An introduction to the work of Dimitris and Suzana Antonakakis* [In:] *Architecture in Greece*, No. 15, Athens 1981, 178.

<sup>13</sup> See: A. Tzonis and L. Lefaivre, *Critical Regionalism: Architecture and Identity in a Globalized World*, publisher Prestel, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> A. Tzonis and L. Lefaivre, 2003, *op. cit.*, p.122.

<sup>15</sup> K. Framton [In:] Hal Foster, ed., *op. cit.*, 21.

“The term ‘Critical Regionalism’ is not intended to denote the vernacular, as this was once spontaneously produced by the combined interaction of climate, culture, myth and craft, but rather to identify those recent regional ‘schools’, whose primary aim has been to reflect and serve the limited constituencies in which they are grounded. Among other factors contributing to the emergence of a regionalism of this order is not only a certain prosperity, but also some kind of anti-centrist consensus – an aspiration at least to some form of cultural, economic and political independence”<sup>16</sup>.

Frampton created a list of seven essential characteristics that constitute critical regionalism. First, he recognizes that critical regionalism is only ever likely to be a “marginal practice,” and that it favors small-scale developments rather than grand plans. He also suggests that although it may be critical of modernization, it should never ignore the liberating features of the modern movement.

Second, Frampton highlights one of critical regionalism’s most distinctive features, which he calls the “place-form”, and in which he sees the designs of buildings grounded inextricably to their territory and site rather than being seen as alien objects.

Third, he suggests an emphasis on the “tectonic” qualities of architecture rather than reducing it to scenography. In Frampton’s earlier essay, he quotes Stanford Anderson’s definition that, “Tectonic referred not just to the activity of making the materially requisite construction ... but rather to the activity that raises this construction to an art form”<sup>17</sup>.

As the fourth feature, Frampton emphasizes a response to essentially local characteristics such as the topography of the site, the play of light, and climatic conditions. There is an emphasis on harmonious openings to the outside and a rejection of a universal adoption of air conditioning.

The fifth feature is an emphasis on unique tactile features, which are equally as important as a building’s visual qualities.

The sixth characteristic is that, while critical regionalism opposes replication of vernacular buildings, it may permit a reinterpretation of vernacular elements if they help to place a building within its region.

Finally, Frampton observes that critical regionalism is only likely to be successful in those cultures that are able to escape the pressure of the universal civilization.

To illustrate his argument, Frampton selected regionalist buildings created by modernist architects, including Alvar Aalto’s Saynatsalo Town Hall, Jorn Utzon’s Bagsvaad Church near Copenhagen, and Tadao Ando’s Church at Hokkaido. There are, of course, many outstanding contemporary regionalist architects practicing in their own locally inflected manners, such as Imre Makovecz in Hungary, Glenn Murcott in Australia Geoffrey Bawa in Sri Lanka, Lucien Kroll in Belgium, and EI-Wakil in Egypt to name but a few.

Although they are less well known outside the country, Poland has a small number of regionalist architects, the most notable of whom are Andrzej Skoczek, Adam M. Szymski, Stanislaw Niemczyk, and Szczepan Baum. Interestingly, their approaches to architecture

<sup>16</sup> K. Frampton, 1983, *op. cit.*, 31.

<sup>17</sup> S. Anderson, *Modern Architecture and Industry: Peter Behrens, the AGD and Industrial Design*, Opposition 21, Summer 1980, 83.

did not arrive with the adoption of capitalism in Poland. Rather, their architecture developed in reaction to the universal language of socialist modernism imposed during the communist era.



Ill. 18. Andrzej Skoczek, Piotr Labowicz, Krystyna Januszkiewicz, Olympic Multipurpose Sport Hall, Zakopane, 1997–1998 project (visualization)

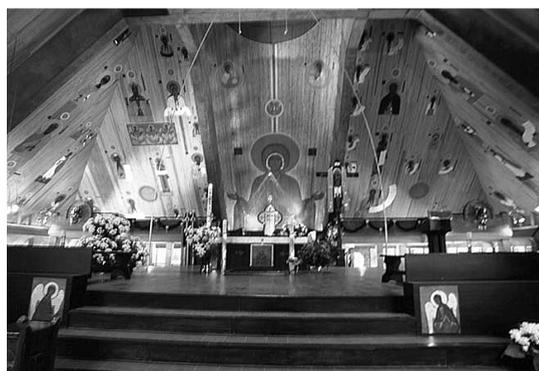
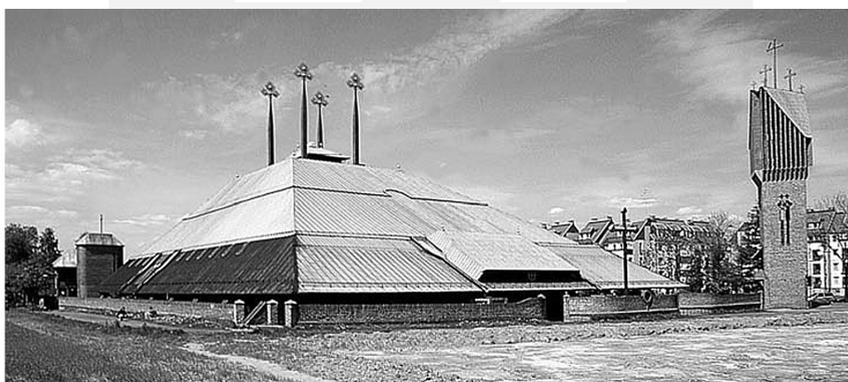


Ill. 19. Adam M. Szymiski, Marek Rozwarski, Catholic Chapel – Virgin Mary of Fatima, Szczecin, 1986–1989 (photo by A.M. Szymiski)

Their buildings reflect the regions of Poland within which they practice. Niemczyk's and Skoczek's works (Ill. 18) clearly belong to the Silesian and Cracovian south, while Baum's buildings are indigenous to the Baltic north, and Szymiski's works belong to West Pomerania (Ill. 19). These works are idiosyncratic and adopt all those qualities that Frampton attaches to the best critical regionalism, such as the place-form, the tectonic, and the tactile.

Of all the architects practicing in Poland today, the one whose work reflects Frampton's definition of critical regionalism best is Stanislaw Niemczyk. Based in Tychy in Silesia, Niemczyk first came to prominence with the design for an extraordinary church—the Church of The Holy Spirit (Kosciol Swietego Ducha) at Tychy Zwalcowe—which was built between 1979 and 1983 and won the 1983 SARP award for architecture. It stands out as uniquely modern, yet quintessentially Polish in character, and was featured in the American architectural journal *Progressive Architecture* in 1989<sup>18</sup>.

Niemczyk's Church of the Holy Spirit positions the congregation as close to the altar as possible, with most people in front of the altar, a smaller number at the sides, and even fewer behind. An emphasis on the tactile is evident in the choice of materials: all the walls are of brickwork, and exposed timber is used for all the windows and doors. Natural timber is also used to line the inside of the great roof, resembling the traditional timber churches of the region. Simple, geometric motifs—notably arches and crosses—break up monotonous surfaces on the main doors, windows, brick walls, and even on the roof.



III. 20. Stanislaw Niemczyk, Church of The Holy Spirit (Kościół Świętego Ducha), Tychy Zwalcowe, 1972–1989 (photo by K. Januszkiewicz)

<sup>18</sup> See: N. Moffett and M. Pidgeon, *Perestroika in Poland*, *Progressive Architecture*, February 1989, 33-38.

Lastly, a particularly striking feature of the interior is the paintings on the sloping timber ceilings around the sanctuary, a traditional feature found in old wooden churches of the region. These impressive paintings by Jerzy Nowosielski are not only derived from folk art, but are also painted like the icons that adorned eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Eastern Orthodox churches (Ill. 20).

Niemczyk's Church of the Holy Spirit is undoubtedly one of the finest contemporary buildings in Poland to evoke the spirit of critical regionalism. It is described as a "very individual object", and praised for "escaping from modernism, as well as escaping from over- decorative post-modernism"<sup>19</sup>. Adam Milobedzki goes even further when he observes that it "incorporates the cultural syncretism lying at the roots of Central European tradition in a hermetic stylistics, which might be paralleled, perhaps uniquely, by analogies in contemporary Hungarian Expressionism, with its equally deep-rooted ethnic and national symbolism"<sup>20</sup>.

Niemczyk's individual style can be seen on more utilitarian buildings in Silesia, such as his terraced housing at Tychy-Glinka and his housing at Mikolow. The housing estate at Mikolow is on the outskirts of a small industrial town, adjacent to some busy roads. It was designed and built during the latter stages of the communist era (1983–1989), when most new Polish housing was based on the heavy concrete, system-built, high-rise model used in most communist countries at that time (Ill. 21).



Ill. 21. Stanislaw Niemczyk, Terraced housing, Tychy-Glinka, 1983–1989 (photo by K. Januszkiewicz)

<sup>19</sup> K. Kucz-Kuczyński, *Church*, No. 18, Tychy, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Milobedzki, *op. cit.*, 127.

By the 1980s, strong reactions to this form of housing appeared, and attempts to “humanize” it were being made by newly established private architects, particularly in Silesia and West Pomerania. Modifications to the heavy concrete model included reducing the height of buildings to a maximum of five floors, applying stucco or brickwork to the façades, the frequent addition of pitched roofs and projecting balconies, and, in some cases, arranging the building blocks in a terraced form. Most of the housing schemes incorporating these modifications have an international flavor, just like some contemporary housing in Western Europe.

A more recent example of Niemczyk’s work is his primary school at Katowice-Giszowiec, the first stage of which was designed and built between 1991 and 1995 (Ill. 22). Giszowiec is a unique industrial village built for coal miners and their families between 1908 and 1911. It was planned on English garden suburb lines with winding tree-lined streets and semi-detached two-story cottages and gardens. The center of the village contained all the necessary social and commercial facilities. This idyllic settlement remained unchanged until the 1970s when one of the communist state offices started to demolish some of the existing houses. Fortunately, by the mid-1980s, this destruction was finally brought to an end, and the only new building to have been completed since then is the school.



Ill. 22. Stanislaw Niemczyk, Primary school, Katowice–Giszowiec, 1991–1995 (photo by K. Januszkiewicz)

In designing this new complex, Niemczyk sought to provide modern functional spaces adapted to the needs of primary school children while also responding to the context of this historical garden suburb. The layout, form, and architecture of this school demonstrates the architect’s extraordinary sensitivity to the configuration of the existing buildings and the landscape-dominated environment. It is a masterpiece in the art of contextualism.

The school site is at an awkward juncture, surrounded on three sides by the detached and semi-detached homes of the village and concrete slab blocks facing its fourth side. The architects responded by arranging a series of small, detached blocks for classrooms and other facilities. These blocks run parallel to the surrounding streets, are one- or two-

-stories high, and have tiled roofs, just like the surrounding cottages. Bulkier and taller elements of the school are contained in a block located along the fourth side of the site, directly opposite to and aligned with a concrete slab block of flats. Some of the blocks out of the site are detached from the main school buildings, effectuating a series of linked spaces that resemble a small town.

A predominant material used for the external walling is brick, done in Niemczyk's unique way. Niemczyk uses bricks of different colors in a quirky mélange—horizontal and vertical bands (or soldier courses), specially shaped bricks, arches and circles—together with panels of rendered walling. Each building block in complex is different; the architecture changes constantly, yet clearly comes from the same hand.

The character of the exterior is also reflected inside. Around the staircases and recreation hall, Niemczyk uses brightly colored tubular steel balustrades and screens. In the larger spaces—such as the main vestibule and the cafeterias—he uses framed structures of in-situ, reinforced concrete. The vestibule outside the cafeteria has a grid of columns and shallow arches supporting an external wall at the mid-point in the span of the arches. Dormer windows, roof lights, and lanterns are used extensively to provide bright and cheerful spaces. Artificial lighting is integrated into the interior design using modernist spherical or continuous tubular fluorescent light fittings. A variety of new public and semi-public spaces are generated by the new interiors, corresponding perfectly with the modern concept of the school as a place where a young person is initiated into the social world. It becomes a collection of interesting outside and inside spaces, an introduction to the complex social world of adults<sup>21</sup>.

Another notable critical regionalist architect whose work evokes the spirit of northern Poland is Szczepan Baum. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Baum, like most architects of the era, was an international modernist. He differed from most, however, in that his work was more sensitive and had more affinity to contemporary Scandinavian modernism than any other style. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, Baum's approach to architectural design began to evolve organically as can be gleaned from his writings at the time:

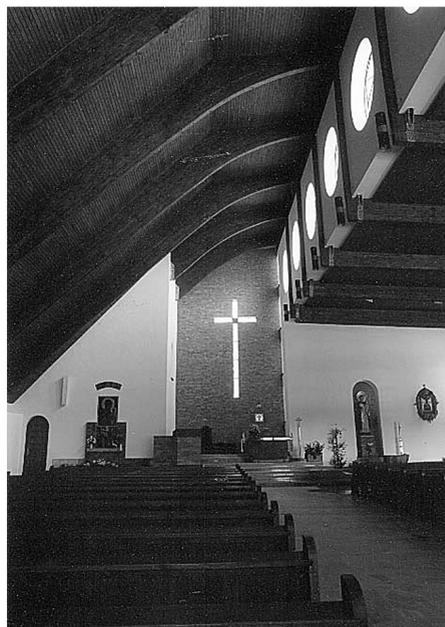
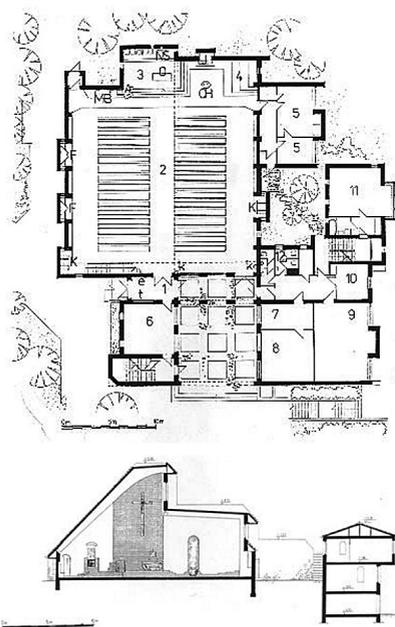
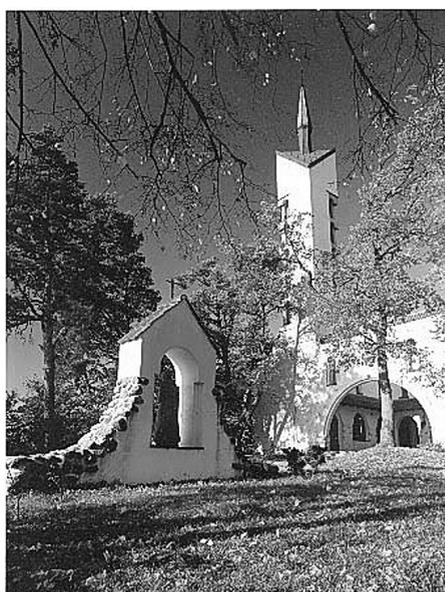
“Good architecture, like a tree to the birds – provides comfortable shelter, a sense of security and freedom to man. It has grown from this earth of ours, it is the co-creator of the world's landscapes and climates which are full of harmony and opulent in form and natural expression just as the old trees are”.

Baum's work is conscious of the intrinsic character of northern Poland and reveals a deep appreciation for the regional building style, place-form, and quality of light. Baum's development can be traced through three church projects designed between 1977 and 1983 at Zdunska Wola, Lodz, and Straszyn. Showing a progression to his style, the last church at Straszyn, executed between 1985 and 1988, is far more regionalist in its approach.

The church at Straszyn is set in beautiful countryside in a coastal area near Gdansk (Ill. 23). The plans of the church buildings follow the Early Christian or Basilican model

<sup>21</sup> More on the Critical Regionalism and Stanislaw Niemczyk's works, see: P.G. Fauset, *Krytyczny regionalizm – Stanislaw Niemczyk (Stanislaw Niemczyk's Critical regionalism)*, Archivolta Quarterly, No. 3, 1999, 16-20; G. Stiasny, *Primary School*, Katowice–Giszowiec, Architektura Murator, No. 9, 1995, 15.

from the fourth century. Passing through the archway brings visitors into a wonderfully intimate forecourt, which, with its arcades and semi-circular arches, derives from the atriums of the Roman churches.



Ill. 23. Szczepan Baum, Catholic church, Straszyn, 1985–1988 (photo by S. Baum)

It is undoubtedly one of the most enchanting compositions to have been built in Poland in the last twenty years. It was achieved due to its unique blend of the historical and familiar, along with a functional simplicity of the present age. Baum uses a simple palette of tactile materials, composing the finish to all the pitched roofs—differing from the metal sheet roof of the bell-tower and the copings of the walls—in traditional orange clay tiles. Apart from random stones used in the external walling, all the materials in the church building are plainly finished, and fortunately, relieved of applied decoration.

The design is organic and timeless. Its synthesis of Early Christian church layouts, quintessential northern Polish character and materials, together with its contemporary structure, lighting, and details make it an exceptional complex. As a work of critical regionalism, it is incredibly successful as there is no doubt about to which region it belongs. For all who go there to worship, preach, and visit, the church at Straszyn is an incredible inspiration.

A more recent development by Baum is his contribution to the reconstruction of Elblag city center. Situated close to the Baltic Sea east of Gdansk, Elblag dates to the thirteenth century. The city was almost completely devastated during the Second World War, and, in the post-war years, most of the redevelopment of the town was done outside the former city center. During that time, most of the land, and even foundations of the original buildings in the city center laid undisturbed. It was perhaps uniquely fortuitous that the urban core of Elblag had not been redeveloped in the incongruous modernist manner that has wreaked havoc on so many Western town and city centers since the war.

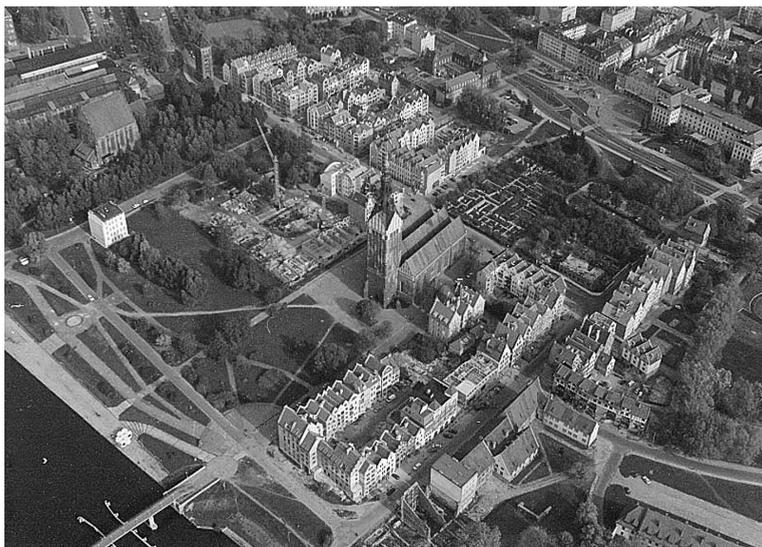
By the time Elblag's reconstruction had been considered in the early 1980s, public opinion about modern architecture and planning forced local authorities to rethink their approach to the design of city centers. This sometimes resulted in an overreaction towards conservation, which often led to the preservation of any old buildings regardless of their condition and architectural quality. It also often led to the unimaginative construction of new buildings that deliberately replicated older or former buildings nearby. Fortunately, the local authority at Elblag had the foresight to appoint a distinguished team of urban designers to make proposals for the reconstruction. The team included professors Wieslaw Anders from the Technical University of Gdansk and Ryszard Semka from the Gdansk School of Visual Arts, as well as Szczepan Baum.

The team devised a master plan that established a set of urban design principles to be applied to the entire redevelopment area. The goal was not only for the reconstruction to have some reference to the past, but also to allow for flexibility throughout the reconstruction process (Ill. 24).

The first principle was the retention of the existing street grid pattern and the possible pedestrianization of some of the main streets. This provided a series of reasonably sized, mainly rectangular building sites for redevelopment. It was suggested that new buildings should be built exclusively around the perimeter of each site, leaving a courtyard in the center available for parking, servicing, and landscaping. An urban street architecture was considered essential, and it was proposed that new buildings should be constructed along the same building lines that had existed prior to the Second World War, using the remaining front elevations and wall foundations wherever possible.

New buildings were to be between four and six stories in height to provide an appropriate scale and compatibility with a few remaining buildings in the area. Although each street

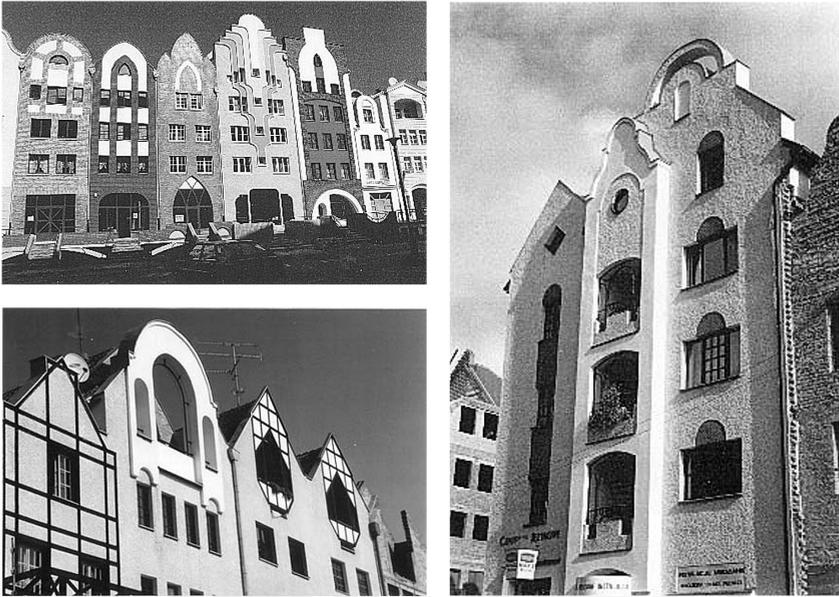
was to be comprehensively rebuilt, it was vital that each terrace was composed of a series of separately identifiable buildings, complete with their own unique gables facing the street, this being an individual architectural style found in the traditional street architecture of the region. Furthermore, the width of each building was to be adjusted, wherever possible, to the width established by the existing foundations on the sites. Some flexibility was required here and some accommodation had to be made for larger stores or offices that might occupy the width of two or more buildings. Window and door openings would follow, as far as practicable, the vernacular pattern of the region. Lastly, it was recommended that traditional building materials would be used.



Ill. 24. Elbląg – city fabric reconstruction – aerial view (photo by S. Baum)

In view of the size, complexity, and funding situation of the reconstruction of Elbląg, the redevelopment area was broken into four stages, and the design of each stage was allocated to separate teams of architects, including local practices. The earlier stages, built prior to 1989, were designed to accommodate housing co-operatives. Since 1989, however, the redevelopment has been funded by a group of private partnerships and individual investors, which has produced an effect on the architecture. In the earlier stages, the positioning of flats on the ground floor resulted in small window openings on the facades, whereas, in the later stages, the ground floors have been used to accommodate public and commercial facilities, resulting in larger window openings (Ill. 25).

The fourth stage of Elbląg's reconstruction stands out as the most interesting and comes from the hands of the ingenious Baum. The site for this stage is one half of a long rectangular block bounded by three streets, the shortest of which is Ulica Stary Rynek (The Old Market Square). It is the main street to which all the stages are related. Although Baum faithfully followed the same urban design principles as the other architects who have contributed, he introduced other characteristics that have resulted in a more exuberant architecture.



III. 25. Wieslaw Anders, Ryszard Semka, Szczepan Baum, Reconstruction of the central area of Elblag, 1985–2000 (photo by S. Baum)

Although the development site was flat, Baum varied the internal ground floor levels in adjoining units and adjusted the levels of the first floors to provide differently sized spaces. A variety and mixture of window openings appear both at the ground floor level, as well as in tiled façades above. Finally, the scheme has some sophisticated detailing and makes use of an interesting variety of indigenous tactile building materials.

Baum's buildings have a variety of roof spaces. Along with the conventional dual-pitch roof, there are mansards, mono-pitches, and curved roof forms. Each gable end is totally different from any other in this or other stages in the reconstruction, and includes some lively Art Deco or Art Nouveau inspired flourishes<sup>22</sup>.

## 5. Conclusions

The Elblag project reveals the central predicament of architecture as a collaborative art. Today's Polish architecture is a hybrid not only of current global trends, but also of the groundwork laid previously. The ideas that identify a region's architectural character may either be long-standing or evolutions of notions imported when foreign ideas were deemed superior to native ones. Those values are not necessarily unique to a place, but come to be considered so after a short time.

<sup>22</sup> More on the Critical Regionalism and Szczepan Baum's works, see: P.G Fauset, *Krytyczny regionalizm Szczepana Bauma* (Szczepan Baum's Critical regionalism), *Archivolta Quarterly*, No. 2, 1999, 17-20.

Architecture, like language or mysticism, is both universal and unique. Architects participate actively in the development, dissemination, and redevelopment of ideas. This is why the opening of the Polish economy was so crucial to progress, and why Polish architects today have the liberty to put their own spin on the architectural world around them.

Poland has a rich and varied architectural legacy. It can be observed not only in the buildings constructed by the aristocracy and the church, but also in its humble vernacular buildings. In its architectural development, Poland has experienced many of the same influences and styles as in Western Europe. One or two forms of architecture are, however, peculiar to Poland, such as the traditional wooden churches in the south and the domestic architecture in the Tatra Mountains. Poland also has some wonderful towns and cities, characterized by their narrow urban streets, central hard-paved squares, and stucco architecture.

Although the changeover to a market economy was a necessary reform and was appropriate for the culture of Poland, an architectural predicament emerged. International consumerist architecture swept through the country, resulting in the construction of inappropriate buildings, particularly in Warsaw. If this form of building is allowed to develop unchallenged, the cumulative effect may become as equally inappropriate as socialist modernism.

There is uncertainty about the direction that Polish architecture should take in this new free enterprise culture. Since the country now leans heavily towards the West, it was inevitable that the West's architectural pluralism would be adopted. Although Poland has some distinguished architects, nearly all of their works follow Western abstract modes, which are unrelated to Polish culture and values.

It is well known that the Poles are proud and patriotic people with a great regard for their culture and traditions. An essential part of this culture is in its architecture, and if Poland wishes to retain its identity as a country, it must limit the construction of additional placeless buildings. Works by architects such as Stanislaw Niemczyk and Szczepan Baum demonstrate an appropriate Polish way forward, and exemplify the critical regionalism the nation needs to preserve and evolve its unique architectural identity.

Poland and Eastern Europe need to examine traditional architecture and urbanism. The study should contain methods of typological and morphological analysis according to the comparative criteria, such as by Banister Fletcher at Oxford University and Saverio Muratori at the University La Sapienza in Rome or Adam M. Szymiski at the West Pomerania Technological University in Szczecin. This would allow the establishment of an organic link between the internal characteristics of the architectural organism—such as the structures of load bearing walls and columns, façades, roofs, together with distributional schemes—and the external conditions of the studied edifice as part of a particular urban environment. The experience should be developed by research groups in collaboration with other research teams in Europe and the US, leading to the publication of a series of books related to the analysis of Regional Architecture and Traditional Urban Fabric. It is expected that at the end of the research program, the scientific unit will produce a systematic classification of the fundamental features of regional buildings and urban spaces, together with the clear understanding of their crucial role in the process of construction of Polish and European cities.

