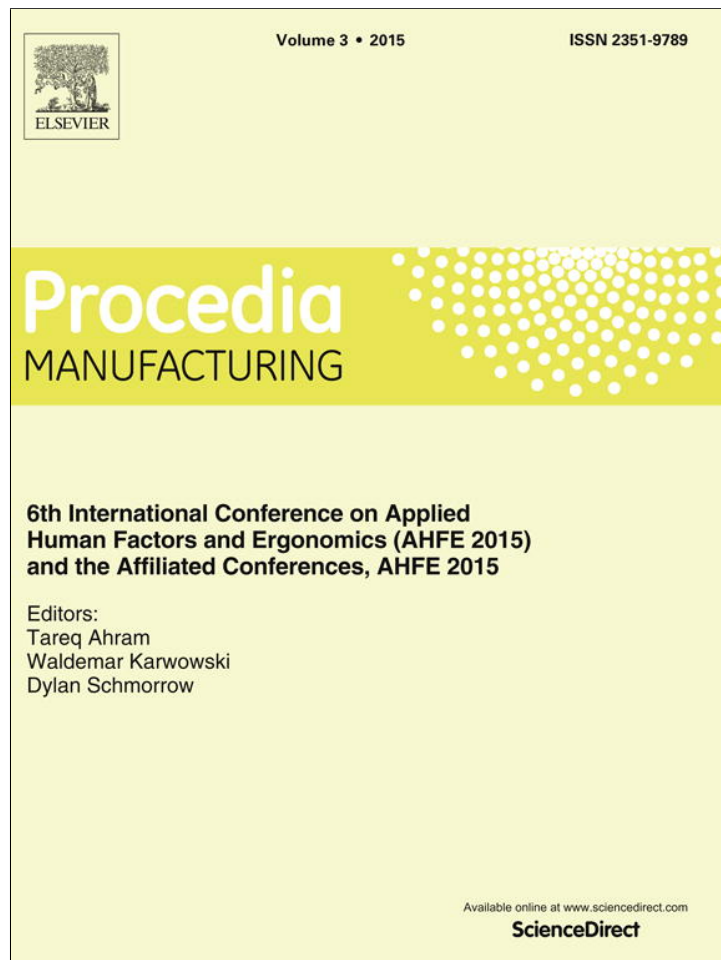


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Almost human architecture. Examples of Polish architecture where the human factor co-creates the concept of the buildings

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Abstract

The article presents authors reflections on objects co-creating the new image of the cities and encouraging creating an interactive, multicultural space. The presented problems discuss architecture in the context of transferring information and activation of public places in the city. They are an element of research concerning the role of functions dominating the composition of a city that is being conducted by the team of researchers from the Silesian University of Technology and the Lodz University of Technology. The text discusses two groups of problems: 1) the question of the selected objects belonging to a predetermined to significant group; 2) an attempt to analyse the factors creating the human context in architecture.

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1. Introduction

The direct stimulus for the title of this work was a TV series about the friendship of two policemen one of whom has an artificial leg and the other is a cyborg with a sensitive soul. Their differences, as well as the “imperfections” of human nature, did not interfere with their male friendship in solidarity. Also, they did not constitute obstacles in carrying out their job above the average.

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Something very similar seems to be happening in architecture: each year many new objects are created which organize the urban space. They are correct in their functionality and spatial solutions, they do not cause objections, nor emotions – and this is all that can be said about them. Next to them, other objects are created, albeit rarely, objects that do for the urban space a bit more – they can move us or our mind, they make us positively reflect on human needs and possibilities. Each cultural period introduces its most characteristic feature, an idea that is followed by architectural works. The Vitruvian principle (1st century B.C.) of durability, functionality and beauty of buildings, for which humans developed a construction logic, is the reason why we consider Greek temples or Gothic architectural works as impressive or why we are still moved by the rationalism of the modernists.

The dynamically changing reality introduces the need for change in the surrounding world – a need for cognitive fluidity of impressions stemming from a variety of aesthetic experiences. We are moved by the combination of influences originating in film, music, fine arts as well as from a variety of areas of architectural interaction: identity, familiarity, prestige.

The world seen from the perspective created in a constant interaction with a city does not surprise us by a lack of unity, a tendency to cumulate contradictions. The reality appears as a multitude of maximally differentiated needs of the society striving for variability, which has a changing dimension. Also the spatial record seeks to freely interpret the activity that is expressed by the variety of architectural concepts. A concept in architecture is closely related to the overriding idea located at the peak of the design process. It is this architectural idea that creates the cohesion of the concept of a building [1]. It is the concept, not the form, which differentiates architecture from plain building.

Bernard Tschumi [2] states that there is no architecture without a context. An architectural work always comes to existence in a given setting, in a geographical localization, or in the context defined historically, culturally or economically. This does not relate to the visual dimension of an object only. Many examples of modern architecture show that the concept of a building corresponds to its program content to a varying degree. Here it is worth to add, that methodology of qualitative research for the evaluation of objects is recognized in Klaudiusz Fross publications [3]. The architectural idea often precedes the introduction of the program contents however usually it is the program content that confirms the generally accepted weight of the object. For there is no architectural space without that “something” that happens inside it. Bernard Tschumi appreciating the weight of the context introduces into the discussion three strategies, three relationships possible to obtain between the architectural concept of an object and the context:

- Mutual indifference meaning the independence of the idea from its setting in any context. The object and its architectural idea coexist in the space independently, not interacting with one another.
- Mutual cohesion is seen when the architectural idea of the object and its setting in space are complementary, often so deeply that it seems that they smoothly unify.
- A conflict between the concept and the context sometimes results in the need to work out a consensus for this separation (*op. cit.*).

2. Presentation of the architectural objects which were built last time in Poland

Such assumptions influenced the authors in their choice of discussed objects. For presentation we chose three groups of objects located in Poland, which can be characterized as follows:

- A. Objects of seemingly neutral context and hidden contents: Museum of History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, the seat of the National Symphonic Orchestra of the Polish Radio in Katowice, the building of the Interactive Centre of History of Ostrów Tumski also called the Gate of Poznań;
- B. Objects having in common the context of the place: the branch of the BRE Bank in Bydgoszcz, the seat of the Philharmonic Orchestra in Szczecin and the Opera House in Białystok;
- C. Objects created in the context of architectural familiarity: the building of the Służew Culture House in Warsaw, the Chopin Museum in Żelazowa Wola, Malopolska Centre of Culture (Malopolska Garden of Arts) in Kraków.

The presented objects created in the recent years in Polish cities are largely effects of the support of the European Union. They are an excellent expression of the transformation of the city development strategy of an information society based on knowledge, for which main investments support a significant improvement of the city's perception. This new architecture of Polish cities lends support to the integration of their image in the process of creating new "narration" about culture, whose aim is to counteract the phenomenon of "blurring" the urban space.

Because of text length limitation space only two buildings of each group are discussed.

2.1. Objects with a neutral context and hidden content

2.1.1. Museum of the History of Polish Jews – POLINI in Warsaw, Authors: Lahdelma & Mahlamaki Architects, Finland, 2013

See Fig. 1. The museum of the History of Polish Jews – POLINI was erected in the Warsaw district Muranów – in the centre of the old Jewish ghetto, just near the monument commemorating its eradication by the Nazis in 1943. The object has two functions; one is to inform about the contribution of the Jewish nation to the history of Poland, and the other is to be a cultural-educational centre. The building is located in the context of a housing area. The Finnish team of architects, Ilmari Lahdelma and Rainer Mahlamaki, won the competition. Their object is an "architectural box" of a square plan. It is very simple in its form. It creates, especially inside, a sublime ambience that allows to reflect upon the transience of existence. The panels that create the casing contain glass panels with inscribed in them a graphics of Polish and Hebrew letters that create the word POLIN (Poland). When viewed from the outside the building resembles a large, glass cabinet containing the Books of Torah. Thanks to its geometry and height, it harmoniously blends with the environment, with the post-war housing. The building has 4 storeys above the ground and two underground. The crown of the interior constitutes a tall entrance hall shaping the architectural impact of the interior. The height of the hall allows to create an impression of a "tear" of the object at the height of the ceiling. This tear shows history in an allegoric manner. It can be interpreted in two ways, either as the Jews crossing the Red Sea or as an interruption of the history of Jews in Poland during the Holocaust. The object has hidden symbols in the details of the architectural concept, which is not aggressive towards the passer-by or the visitor. Nevertheless, the architecture of this object remains in memory.

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw won many prizes, among them the Chicago Athenaeum Institut Architecture Award, The Design of the Year funded by the Association of Polish Architects SARP in 2013, as well as the internet users poll in 2014.



Fig. 1. Museum of History of Polish Jews in Warsaw (source: The Museum of the History of Polish Jews).

2.1.2. Building of Seat of the National Symphonic Orchestra of the Polish Radio in Katowice, Author: KONIOR STUDIO, 2014

The city of Katowice is the capital of the largest in Poland industrial region, Upper Silesia which is currently undergoing transformation. The seat of The National Symphonic Orchestra of the Polish Radio is an element of the change of the image of this area and is a part of the zone of culture that is being created in Katowice. The architectural competition for this building announced in 2008 was won by the Konior Studio.

The Orchestra is a building on the rectangular plan, of a simple geometry, of a form without a clearly highlighted front elevation and a lack of a visible entrance. The architecture of the building does not make any classic references. The outdoor elevations are created by tall, irregularly spaced glass clearances, limited by vertical walls of a reddish, brick texture. The box of the concert hall is only slightly visible from the outside, however it gently suggests that it hides in its interior a concert hall (for 1800 people), whose image can be compared to a *pearl in a crown*. The centripetal concept of the plan is accentuated by rooms of accompanying functions spaced along the exterior walls. In addition, this string contains a chamber music hall for 300 people. The entrance hall, of a clearly modernist character, reveals the main entrance to the object. The contrast of the smooth, white walls of the hall and a stark décor seems to be one of the elements of beauty of this object.

Soon after opening, the object was awarded the 1st prize in a competition organised in Poland and the main Prize, the Five Star Award of the European Commercial Property Awards in the category Public Service.

2.2. The Context of the place

2.2.1. The Branch of the BRE BANK in Bydgoszcz, Authors: Andrzej Bulanda and Włodzimierz Mucha, 1996

See Fig. 2. The branch of the BRE Bank in Bydgoszcz is one of the icons of Polish architecture from the end of the 20th century. This is a modern building designed with a great respect for the past and relating to the character of the place in which it is located. It is a building referring to the typology of granaries but built for modern times, realizing a new function – the function of a bank, a modern version of a granary, a storehouse of money. The branch of the BRE bank is a landmark of a modern city in Poland. Bydgoszcz is also the first Polish city that started the revitalization of riverbank areas locating where seats of cultural institutions and preparing attractive recreation space for its citizens take place.



Fig. 2. BRE Bank in Bydgoszcz (source: N.Juzwa).

The idea of this undertaking originated from the desire to respect and stress the climate of the place – the port and the riverbank as well as the closeness of the granaries. The authors said about their activity and their design “We are an original studio designing modern architecture strongly connected to the place. Our aspiration is to work out a recognizable style whose most important feature is an individual reading of a place... The project originated from the need to respect the unique climate of the urban bank of the river Brda and its role in Bydgoszcz... We wanted to highlight the climate of the place, the specific *genius loci* of the riverbank and the nearby port” [...] (interview with the authors of the building – Sto Journal, 1/2007). For the interior finish, similarly as in the construction of the external terraces, wood was utilized which lended the building warmth and elegance.

2.2.2. *Karłowicz Philharmonic Orchestra in Szczecin, Author: Estudio Barozzi Veiga, 2014*

The design is a result of an international architectural competition which was won by the Spanish design bureau Barozzi Veiga. The winning team proved that interesting effects could be achieved by uniting contradictions. The building of the philharmonic, equally when its urban setting is concerned, as well as its interiors, draws on many ideas, concepts and aesthetics, uniting them into a surprising work. The object is a “symbol” of a quarter reduced to an arrangement of boxes and pyramids lacking characteristic architectural elements – storeys, doors, windows and detail. This object is located in the historic part of the city Szczecin. The consistent material contrast (even the roofs are white) and the synthetic shape single out the object from its context yet at the same time it fits surprisingly well into the historical environment.

This ability to unify contradictions is also visible inside the object. It is not uniform – it rather tells small scale or monumental stories drawing upon a variety of places, times and ideas. The object houses two concert halls – a large and a small one, as well as the main hall of a height of over 10 m. In addition, there are office spaces and facilities invisible to the spectators. A good example of a mosaic of ideas is the main hall – following the full of historical references silhouette of the building, it constitutes a total surprise as it refers to the modernist idea of “arrangement of solids in light”, asymmetry and simplicity. The main concert hall – “The Solar Hall” – is for a change a story drawing upon the wealth of baroque – the spectator is surrounded by a golden cage (all walls and the ceiling are covered by a golden schlagmetal) made up from the surfaces of walls and ceiling. Another story is told by the chamber hall – “The Lunar Hall” – which through its black, wooden decoration and subtle detail brings to mind Finnish or Japanese architecture.

2.3. *The Context of Familiarity*

2.2.3. *The Służew Culture House in Warsaw, Authors: WWAA and 137 kilo (collaboration Michał Nocuń), 2013*

The Służew Culture House is a surrounded by a fence country village with wooden houses, bridge, a place for a vegetable patch and a run for animals. It seems to be a mix of urban and country feelings, progress and traditionalism, inscribed in to local contexts. For the 20 thousand housing estate “Służew nad Dolinką” (eng. Służew at a Little Valley) is a space in which the members of the local community experience their participation in culture in a way they dreamed of. They can view exhibitions by known Warsaw painters who are also their neighbours and who they meet in the local shops; they can converse with poets and listen to musicians whom they once encountered when bringing children to the local schools and kindergartens.

The functional program of the object was divided in a way to create two separate buildings that could also function separately. The main part and the entrance are located on level -1 that can be accessed by an amphitheatrical staircase descending from the entrance square. This sunken space plays the role of a stage during open-air performances. Its warm, wooden floor encourages playing games and relaxing in breaks between activities.

The fully glassed walls directed on one side towards the park and on the other towards the back street allows people walking around the Culture House to observe activities taking place inside as well as the green areas of the Służew Stream. Such formation of the building allowed to maximally bind its inside with the surroundings. Thanks to that the space around the object becomes, as it were, a public space of the city, it allows to expand its activity outside the boundaries of the building.



Fig. 3. Malopolska Centre of Culture (Malopolska Garden of Arts) in Kraków (source: Malopolska Centre of Culture K.Ingarden).

2.2.4. Malopolska Cultural Centre (Garden of Arts) in Krakow, Authors: Ingarden & Ewy Architects, 2012

See Fig. 3. The Malopolska Cultural Centre (MOS) is one of the projects co-financed by the European Union. The design had to take into account the location of the new object in the historical building style of the centre of Kraków. The building was erected among old tenement houses and the architects decided to respect this context. The recipient during their first contact can have the impression of crossing the borders of a garden, in which culture is being cultivated on evenly spaced beds, just like plants. In some circles of the Krakow bohemians the MOS is seen as the Krakow Pompidou Centre.

The programming of the MOS is directed towards the promotion of modern art in a variety of cultural fields. Apart from the culture creating aspect the main focus of the Centre is education through art, and in the case of disabled persons – therapy through art as well as integrating activity in art.

In the building there is a multifunctional hall (theatre performances, concerts, conferences) which was located in the old hall of a horse stable from the 19th century. The other interesting area is the garden, which is an open space for outdoor expositions, happenings and other cultural activity. At the disposal of the guests there is also a smaller audience for multimedia screenings, a café and rooms in which educational activities connected to art can take place. It is interesting and very human that in the roof a hole has been left though which a maple tree will be able to grow.

3. Survey investigations among students of architecture

The authors of the presented paper are experienced architects and teachers. We have a clear opinion about beauty, aesthetics of about qualifying objects into a given meaning category. It seemed interesting to investigate the opinions of students to determine whether their point of view is consistent with that presented in the first part of this paper.

The research was conducted in March 2015. The survey was conducted among the students of Architecture at the Silesian University of Technology, who will take their Master's exam in a year's time. The survey in the form of an unstructured interview was completed by 62 persons. It should be emphasized that these studies were exploratory in nature. The gender or age of the participants were not taken into account.

The students were shown a multimedia presentation describing all nine objects (their photographs and basic characteristics) and subsequently they were asked to fill out questionnaires with three tasks to complete:

1. Form the nine objects the participants had to name one that they would like to have in their neighbourhood;
2. Each object had to be classified in one of the groups defined in the present paper, i.e. group A – objects neutral to their environment; group B – object well fitting in the context of their surroundings (historically or formally); group C – objects architecturally familiar.
3. To justify their choices in a few sentences.

A synthetic summary of the results of the survey is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Synthetic summary of the results of the survey.

No	Name of the building	Assigned group (score 0-2-4)	Test 1 Resp. %	Test 2 Resp. %		
				A	B	C
1	Interactive Centre of History of Ostrów Tumski	A	2	55	42	3
2	Malopolska Centre of Culture (Malopolska Garden of Arts) in Kraków	C	1	1	84	15
3	Śłużew Culture House in Warsaw	C	1	1	14	85
4	Museum of History of Polish Jews in Warsaw	A	3	84	15	1
5	National Symphonic Orchestra of the Polish Radio in Katowice	A	2	45	40	15
6	Philharmonic Orchestra in Szczecin	B	2	31	59	10
7	Opera House in Białystok	B	3	15	45	40
8	Chopin Museum in Żelazowa Wola	C	1	10	30	60
9	BRE Bank in Bydgoszcz	B	0	98	1	1

The investigations have shown that generally young adepts of the Faculty of Architecture of the Silesian University of Technology in Gliwice have strongly defined preferences as far as their environment in concerned – they want a familiar architecture, and what is very important – friendly to people (1st place in Test 1 column). It does not mean that sometimes they do not appreciate object that are stark or mysterious. Maybe this is connected to the methodology of teaching at this faculty. Still very much alive is the tradition of the so-called “Silesian School of Architecture”, preferring the identity of the place and *genius loci*.

Another noticeable aspect of the research is the question of the lack of agreement of the students with the assignment of objects to groups A, B or C. This concerns in particular:

- The Malopolska Centre of Culture (Malopolska Garden of Arts) in Kraków (No. 2) – assigned to group C, chosen by students to belong to group B
- BRE Bank in Bydgoszcz (No. 9) – assigned to group B, chosen by students to belong to group A.

The Centre of Culture in Krakow was not seen as familiar, however well fitting in the context – this thinking is correct as long as we think of a building as one that supplements the city centre buildings. The context of this building is much more complex – the existing 19th century buildings have a different characteristics – the shape of the Centre differs from the context of the surroundings as much as any other avant-garde object (although not in a controversial manner in terms of Polish conditions).

In the case of the Bydgoszcz object, above all, the main reason for the lack of agreement is little understanding of the difference between an object neutral to its surroundings and one that is inscribed in its context – for the students a lack of other buildings in the immediate surroundings and the lack of historical knowledge means for them architectural “neutrality” (i.e. the given object could be erected anywhere). In the case of the branch of the BRE

Bank in Bydgoszcz the basic meaning of the symbolic character of the building lays in the region's history, and at the same time in its architecture.

4. Summary

The initial assumptions, i.e. the grouping of objects according to their context in the their surroundings allow to organise the conclusions:

1. Objects that are connected by the context of place (B) have a common characteristics – their architecture makes a connection with the past, the history of the place. The internal cohesion between the architecture and its context is expressed by the authors in various ways: the BRE Bank reminds of the ancient wealth of the soil, accumulated in the riverbanks granaries; the Szczecin Philharmonic refers to the silhouette of a proud Hanseatic city; the Podlasie Opera expresses the junction of eastern and western Europe. The recall of the historic memory in modern architecture is achieved “not by means of artificial recreation or imagination of styles, but an smart application of natural materials that are created by humans”[5]. As stated by E.Rewers, the turn in architecture towards philosophy that becomes cognizant of its cultural base was necessary at the time of the appearance of a “stranger” from a different culture: urban, medial or architectural one [6].
2. Objects created in the context of familiarity (C) are a modern manifestation of vernacular tendencies. In Polish architecture it is a record readily used. It is expressed by formal preferences as seen in the Malopolska Garden of Arts and the Chopin Museum and in the choice of materials, which is even more visible in the Służew Culture House. These tendencies are most clearly visible in detached housing architecture deeply rooted in historic, folk and regional tradition. This is also connected to the slow movement that is developing in urbanism and architecture that stands against the speed of development only due to engineering and technological conditions.
3. The objects in the third group of a neutral context and hidden content (A) seem to be no less important for the subject. Despite the seeming lack of connection with the surroundings, their architecture creates an impulse for a new shaping of the urban space. Their content, hidden under their architecturally laconic casing, brings about a feeling of emotional and intellectual comfort. With this comfort, beauty is connected.

Beauty in architecture originates from many conditions, but it is undoubtedly connected to human needs. From the oldest times (ancient Greeks) it has been associated with the good and truth. Modernist times reduced beauty in architecture to a matter out of place, shameful as Sullivan stated “form follow function”. Today, beauty returns to the consciousness of those evaluating the quality of architecture and urban space.

Increasingly frequently, not only architects see harmony and beauty in architecture as important human factors. Opinions in this regard are voiced by philosophers or ethicists, e.g. Hans Georg Gadamer. According to him, the criterion of beauty has an universal, timeless meaning. It allows making assessments that extend beyond the generally accepted standards like size, age, functionality or the object's technical condition.

When assessing the beauty of an object or city, apart from the physical dimension, the geometry of solutions we can also assess the non-material dimension – the influence of the quality of solutions in the cultural, human or social sense. The beauty created by the architect contains the essence of the human factor.

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