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THE TOWN HALL IN CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

Summary. One of the most important public administrative services is the Town Hall as the seat of the local authority in the city or community. In contemporary architecture Town Hall has to express the power of this local authority as well as its transparency. Evidences of this are Boston City Hall, Tokyo City Hall, Encamp Town Hall, New Murcia City Hall and London City Hall. The pioneering architects of these Town Halls - and many others around the world - were fully aware of the necessity of making these institutions of modern democratic society architecturally manifest, each in his own way in relation to the environment.

RATUSZ WE WSPÓŁCZESNEJ ARCHITEKTURZE

Streszczenie. Jednym z najważniejszych budynków usług administracji publicznej jest ratusz, który jest miejscem lokalnej władzy w mieście lub gminie. We współczesnej architekturze ratusz musi wyrażać potęgę lokalnych władz. Świadczą o tym Ratusz w Bostonie, Ratusz w Tokio, Ratusz w Encamp, Ratusz w New Murica City i Ratusz w Londynie. Architekci pionierzy tych Ratuszy – i wielu innych na świecie - byli w pełni świadomi potrzeby wybudowania tych instytucji dla nowoczesnego demokratycznego społeczeństwa, co było architektoniczną manifestacją. Każdy architekt miał własną koncepcję w stosunku do środowiska.

One of the most important public administrative services is the Town Hall as the seat of the local authority in the city or community. This is a forum where inhabitants of the city participate in managing the administrative affairs of their city through their representatives, who meet in the City Council.

In the historical development of city the Town Hall building was always recognisable on the city's horizon. In the Middle Ages the Town Hall, where the hall of the town council, a chapel, a prison and other rooms necessary for public services were situated, was defined and clearly identified both by its location, which was in the centre of the city (in or near the market place), and its shape, for example with a tower – symbol of a self-governing municipality. Throughout the evolution of the Town Hall during the Renaissance, Baroque and Classicist periods and until the nineteenth century its shape was always monumental and elegant, emphasising the optimum arrangement of the

surrounding space as well as the functions of the building. The history of architecture is studded with significant examples, such as Siena, Prague, and here in Poland Zamość, Gdańsk, Sandomierz, Poznań and others.

In contemporary architecture Town Hall still occupies a great role in city life, especially in countries in which much of government is devolved to the local level, and Town Hall has to express the power of this local authority. The point at which the population and its local authority meet is a very important public place in the town's space. Below are some examples from around the world of town halls of different sizes and types, presented according to the date of construction.

Boston City Hall

The design of the Boston City Hall was selected in a competition in 1962. "It was won by a firm of young architects – Kallmann, McKinnell & Knowles. But more important than the means



Fig.1. Overview across Boston City Hall plaza, photo by Howard Davis

were the results, which established a powerful, tantalizing direction for American architecture.”[5] Their winning design was executed in 1963- 68 (fig.1).

The architects of the city hall linked the plaza in front to the very heart of the building with a continuous carpet of red brick. “The red brick paving is a traditional Bostonian feature; it is used here not only for that reason but also as a means of uniting building and square and of symbolizing the breaking down of barriers between the people and their city government, which was the central philosophical aim of the architects. The council chamber, with a large window directly over the main entrance, is linked with the square by a stair tower faced with the same red brick.”[6] This connection of public space and Town Hall is the main interesting point of this design.¹

¹ Exhibition galleries and access to the mayor and the city council are reached by wide flights of stairs. The top four floors, which form a rectangle around a central light well, accommodate departmental offices. The dominating regularity of their fenestration, as opposed to the variation below, states cellular offices, rather than public areas. The

Tokyo City Hall

This building, designed by Kenzo Tange and constructed in 1986-1991, is one of the most important in Asian architecture. "The complex is located in Shinjuko, one of Tokyo's most important sub centres, and spreads over three contiguous city blocks. It is limited on the west by Shinjuko Park and on the other three sides by office buildings and a multi-level interchange. Most of the administrative offices are housed in two tall buildings on the park side, whereas another building directed more toward the public stands at the other end, around the public square." [4] (fig.2)



Fig. 2. Aerial view of Tokyo City Hall, photo by Osamu Murai. Shinkenchiku Shashinien [4]

Tower I, located between the square and the park, from the 33rd floor divides into twin towers, which reach a height of 243 m. The upper part of tower II, 163 m high, progressively decreases in size, in a stepped arrangement in relation to Tower I, to form a combined profile at the summit of the buildings [4]. The tops of these towers are rotated 45 degrees, lending the static bulk a twisting upwards motion, while the central lower section between is set slightly back.

Some say that it looks more like the home of a global corporate giant than the local city council. Whatever sentiments it arouses, this office complex reflects the modern Asian architectural sensibility.

Encamp Town Hall

Suso Vergara, Juan Garcia-Bores Espi and Jaime Viaplana Ferrer, with their design for the tax, registration, and licensing bureaus are located in a three-story semi separate brick wing whose daily contact with the public is acknowledged and expressed on the exterior. [5]

New Town Hall in Encamp entered in the international competition held in mid-1988, were determined to break traditional architectural moulds. With their daring, innovative ideas, they wished to break down these barriers and radically change the monotonous appearance of the architecture in their small country [3] (fig.3).

“The building is situated in the centre of the town of Encamp in the Principality of Andorra. The slight slope of the large site enhances its unique and personal character. The surrounding landscape is spectacularly rugged and mountainous, typical features of most parts of this small country. It was, in fact, the importance of the natural surroundings, which led the architects to establish a close link between the construction and its setting. The immediate result is that the new structure mimics the setting by mirroring the mountainous landscape surrounding it”[3]. “In its own way it is a celebration, rather than a rejection of the marvellous natural scenery of the region” [3].



Fig. 3. General view of Encamp Town Hall, photo by Francesco Tur [3]



Fig. 4. New Murcia City Hall, photo by DucciaMalagamba [7]

New Murcia City Hall

New Murcia City Hall, constructed in 1995-1998, is an important example of the expansion of the Town Hall towards the neighbouring buildings. In the early medieval city of Murcia, the New City Hall, designed by Rafael Moneo complements the premises of the nearby seat of the

local authorities. The building fills a gap in the Plaza Carden Belluga frontage, created after an eighteenth-century house had to be pulled down. The City Hall facade is fully autonomous but excellently harmonised with the character of the place [7] (fig.4).



Fig. 5. London City Hall and its surroundings, photo by Nigel Young [8]

London City Hall

In the More London Masterplan, Norman Foster's urban architecture project, the Greater London Authority (GLA) building covers an area that is at present the most interesting part of the city – on the south bank of the Thames near to the tourist attractions Tower Bridge and the Tower of London [8]. The main feature of the interior is a 730-meter long spiral ramp staircase curving through all ten above-ground storeys to the top of the building. This is open to the public, allowing citizens to view the GLA's activities [1]. The open, legible nature of democratic policy is symbolised by the transparent dividing structures (fig. 5).

The pioneering architects of these Town Halls - and many others around the world like Toronto, Saynatsalo, Kurashiki, and Ottawa - were fully aware of the necessity of making these institutions of modern democratic society architecturally manifest, each in his own way in relation to its environment.

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