

## Forgotten Modernism? The Influence of “Red Vienna” in Poznań in the 1920s

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Władysław Czarnecki, an architect from Poznań, described the construction of a housing estate for workmen in Wspólna - Rolna - Tokarska streets, which was designed in 1926. In his memoir he referred to “Red Vienna” as the model estate. He wrote: “I divided everything into 23 segments with staircases. There were entrances to four flats on each platform. Thus, I got 276 out of 250 that were required. There were an antechamber, a kitchen with a sink in a niche, a larder, a toilet and two rooms in each flat. In some flats there was also one small room more. There were plans to build a self-service mechanised laundry and bathrooms in the yard. This was the standard of workmen’s flats in Vienna at the time. I thought it would be something new and progressive in Poznań, too”<sup>1</sup>. Apart from the welfare facilities there were also other new solutions, such as entrances located in the yard. However, similarly to the common laundry facilities, the city council did not approve of them. On the other hand, the architectural forms did not cause any reservations. At first sight they do not seem to confirm the inspirations described by the architect, especially the example of Karl-Marx-Hof, the construction of which started one year later, i.e. in 1927. The author’s footnote about it was added ex post.

The comparison of innovative Viennese solutions and references to those solutions in Czarnecki’s designs make us ask the question what really inspired the architect from Poznań, what he considered to be innovative and simultaneously moderate enough to be applied in a conservative community. Czarnecki tried to follow the current architectural trends all his life, but at the time, soon after he had finished architectural studies at Lviv Polytechnic, he regarded the classical rules to be a universal language of architecture. Although he accepted the language of modernism, he also referred to those rules in his later output.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note that when Czarnecki started designing the estate in Poznań, he may have known Viennese models only from periodicals or from the accounts of other people’s trips. He arrived in Poznań in 1925, soon after he had received his diploma from Lviv Polytechnic in 1923<sup>3</sup>, where he had come back from Russian captivity in 1922. He must have known Viennese buildings from his friends’ stories, but it is also very likely that he knew them from official brochures issued by Viennese authorities after the construction of individual complexes. The brochures came to Lviv after World War I, when the architects who had left the city for Vienna while it was briefly occupied by the Russians in 1915, began

to come back. The architects formed a strong colony in Vienna, so when they arrived back in Lviv, the community of architects was familiar with the current architectural problems in Vienna<sup>4</sup>. The first more elaborate report from Vienna was published in Polish journals only in 1929<sup>5</sup>, after the complex in Dębiec had been finished<sup>6</sup>. The Viennese experiment was commonly referred to as a successful example of solving the problem of dramatic shortage of inexpensive lodgings. The problem was particularly noticeable all over Europe after World War I. For this reason housing development became an important, if not the main architectural problem at the time. Only the housing projects implemented in the Weimar Republic, with Ernst May’s most famous estates in Frankfurt, were comparable with Vienna.

The solutions applied in Vienna might have evoked admiration due to the impressive number of lodgings built. Between 1919 and 1934 there were 58,667 lodgings built in 384 estates and 5,257 single-family houses. It was possible due to the policy of social democratic authorities in Vienna, for whom the housing programme was a priority. The implementation of enormous development projects was possible due to the tax system. The authorities introduced a rent tax and a fixed building tax, which partly helped the city pay back the enormous loan incurred for that purpose. Additionally, the jobless were employed for building works, which enforced simplicity in planning and technical solutions.

In the beginning the Viennese authorities considered building a garden city, which was to be a satellite of the metropolis. However, the concept was abandoned due to the lack of funds and suitable area. It was cheaper to build estates of different sizes in the city areas which had already been fitted with the necessary installations. Additionally, there was a political aspect of this policy – the residents of superblocs for workmen guaranteed support for the SDAP in the next municipal elections.

In view of the political and economic aspects, the authorities thought that it was the best to build estates with multi-storey houses located “as close to the centre as possible and with all hygienic facilities which garden cities could have”<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the reference to the garden city was only ideological. It did not impose the manner of development of estates. However, it set the standard of city hygiene –

1. Czarnecki Władysław, *Wspomnienia architekta 1895-1930*, vol. 1, edited by H. Grzeszczuk-Brendel, Poznań 2005, p. 90.

2. Cf. Czarnecki Władysław, *Wspomnienia architekta*, vol. 1-3, edited by H. Grzeszczuk-Brendel, Grażyna Kodym-Kozaczko, Poznań 2005-2008.

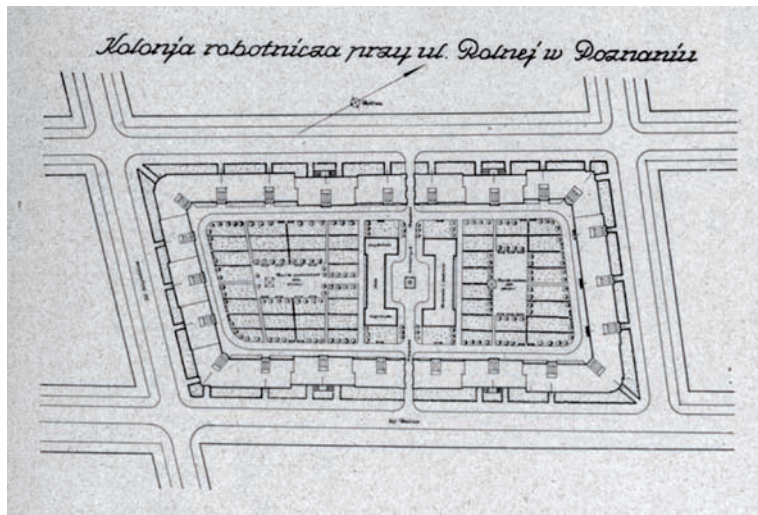
3. After the studies he worked for different private companies for two years, when he designed the barracks in Dęblin and Okęcie.

4. I wish to thank Professor Jakub Lewicki for the information about the Lviv colony in Vienna.

5. Marzyński Stanisław, *Działalność budowlana gminy miasta Wiednia*, [in:] *Architektura i Budownictwo* 9/1929.

6. I wish to thank Professor Jakub Lewicki for confirming my suppositions and showing the evidence.

7. Marzyński Stanisław, *Działalność budowlana gminy miasta Wiednia*, p. 337. Marzyński’s account is particularly credible because he received the information directly from the Building Office in Vienna (cf. p. 244).



1. Władysław Czarnecki, *Wspólna - Rolna - Tokarska housing estate in Poznań*, "Architektura i Budownictwo", 1929, No. 6, p. 220

free access to green space and air, appropriate lighting in lodgings and numerous common facilities. The standard was implemented in pre-war German cities, or to be more specific, in garden suburbs. The rules of combining the lodging with the surroundings, which derive from the reformatory assumptions made at the turn of the 19th century, became an architectural standard during the interwar period.

The maximum built-up area in a quarter could not exceed 50-70% and the free space was developed into common green yards with playgrounds. There could be up to four flats on each floor in one staircase. The area of the smallest flats was 21 m<sup>2</sup>. The flats consisted of a living room with a kitchen recess, a bedroom and a toilet. The biggest flats were 57 m<sup>2</sup> and there were three rooms, kitchen and toilet in them. The division of the residential kitchen into two rooms was treated as a symbol of social advancement and better standard. In view of the housing situation before and after World War I this attitude was fully justified.

In estates with more than 400 residents common laundries and baths were planned. Depending on the local needs there were also plans to build crèches, kindergartens, libraries, health centres, gymnasiums and cooperative shops. The estates were designed by different architects, who were employed by the city or who were commissioned to do specific tasks. As a result, there was considerable stylistic diversity, although most designs were made by the architects of the Viennese school. The aesthetic standards set by Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos or Joseph Hoffmann resulted in simplified architectural forms, where ornaments were abandoned in favour of careful workmanship and development of standardised details. The details were also

2. Władysław Czarnecki, *the yard in Wspólna - Rolna - Tokarska housing estate in Poznań*, "Architektura i Budownictwo", 1923, No. 1, p. 9



used as the elements identifying individual houses and providing employment to craftsmen.

In order to avoid the monotony of larger complexes architects diversified the shape and elevations, accenting some axes, highlighting the ground floor and breaking the roof line. In spite of the simplicity of means it resulted in formal richness, especially in larger complexes, where the pursuit of some kind of monumentality was noticeable. The effect was intensified by the impression that the complexes were isolated by the limitation of entrances and the introduction of architectural sculptures, which often had allegorical character and expressed the power of the working class<sup>8</sup>.

The essence of "Red Vienna" housing estates was determined by the social programme which, contrary to the international avant-garde of the interwar period, was not connected with an arranged formal repertoire. It was also determined by the manner of development of the quarter and the scale of lodgings. Bearing those facts in mind, we can agree that there is certain relationship between the solutions applied by Czarnecki and some Arbeiterhofs. Undoubtedly, the most important element is the relation between the open space and built-up area in the plot and the attempts to introduce the welfare programme. In Poznań there were plans to build a common laundry with a bath, a reading room and nursery as well as playgrounds and lawns with trees in the yard surrounded by densely built houses and ventilated by gateways<sup>9</sup>. In the end only some trees were planted. This solution was regarded as progressive in Poznań. It is proved by the fact that although the welfare programme was reduced, for a long time the city authorities treated Czarnecki's estate as a model example how to solve the problem of housing for the poorest. The estate was registered at the congress of small lodgings in Prague in 1935 and it could be found in descriptions of Poznań buildings in *Architektura i Budownictwo*<sup>10</sup> and in *Księga pamiątkowa miasta Poznania*.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand the architect applied a modest-looking form and low-cost materials, but on the other hand, he also tried to achieve some conspicuousness, which could be seen in rounded corners with arcade loggias and in highlighted central axes. The architect fragmented relatively long elevations by applying shallow avant-corps and retracting some parts of the houses beyond the building line.

Czarnecki repeated a similar spatial development with houses around a large yard in Zawady in 1929. There were different architectural forms there. The architect fully accepted the language of modernism as he completely abandoned ornaments, used straight window bands and accented plinths, cornices and portals with brick cladding. The architect applied similar forms in a shelter for the homeless, which was also built in Zawady at the time. He planned that residents of the estate should also have access to the bath in the shelter. Czarnecki used characteristic argumentation – he wrote about low-cost lodgings "for common people" and emphasised the "aesthetic simplicity" of buildings.<sup>12</sup> Only architectural forms were modernised, but the earlier ideas were retained in the spatial layout of the estate. The welfare programme, which included a nursery, health centre and library with a reading room, also points to the fact that Czarnecki still thought that those solutions were up-to-date and modern enough. In the late 1920s and early 1930s common facilities located in estates for the residents of small lodgings were one of the standard postulates of the

8. Blau Eve, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919-1934*, Massachusetts 1999 - the publication is a monograph of Red Vienna.

9. The site plan can be found in *Księga pamiątkowa miasta Poznania. Dziesięć lat polskiego Zarządu Stołecznego Miasta Poznania*, Poznań 1929, p. 527.

10. Cf. *Architektura i Budownictwo* 1928, pp. 65 and 220-221, *Architektura i Budownictwo* 1932, p. 9, where Jerzy Tuszcowski's building for railwaymen was also shown.

11. *Księga pamiątkowa miasta Poznania. Dziesięć lat pracy polskiego Zarządu Stołecznego Miasta Poznania*, Poznań 1929, p. 527.

12. Technical description, Poznań State Archive, Records of the city of Poznań 4650.





3. The yard in Karl-Marx-Hof housing estate in Vienna. Photo by the author

avant-garde, which was realised, e.g. in housing estates in Warsaw. However, although the complex was planned and approved, it was never built, probably because of financial problems during the Great Depression. Between 1935 and 1939 gallery-access blocks of flats designed by Jerzy Tuszowski were built there. They followed the TOR (Workers' Estates Society) designs and were laid out according to the ruler system, indicating that the Viennese model of an inner yard with side buildings had been rejected.

In the 1920s Vienna was an important point of reference also for other Poznań architects, who attempted to develop a model of low-cost and modern housing complexes. In 1930 the seat of the Pension Fund for State Railway Workers was built at 50-52 Rolna Street according to Jerzy Tuszowski's design. Neither the welfare programme nor the character of the complex have much in common with the idea of "Red Vienna", unless there were plans to build more houses. However, there were no signs of such plans. The existent building designed on a C-shaped plan is surrounded by a large yard. The building is a stylistic reference to an office complex in Głogowska Street, which had also been designed by Jerzy Tuszowski and built a few years earlier, but it is characterised by more synthetic forms. The simple shape of the building with retracted corners, flat roof and no ornaments prove the acceptance of the language of modernism. The style may not have been adopted from Viennese sources, because German offers became more and more influential. The commemorative plaque, which followed the pattern of similar commemoration-and-information plaques placed at the entrances to housing estates in Vienna, was an important detail pointing to the architect's knowledge of Viennese estates. Apart from the designers' names, i.e. Jerzy Tuszowski and Stanisław Kirkin, the plaque also lists the names of current representatives of state and city authorities and the management of the housing cooperative.

The reference to Vienna and references to other models of modern architecture point to the fact that in the late 1920s and early 1930s the local community adapted new forms in a relatively free manner. The architects searched for inspirations from different sources and they did not hesitate to combine them regardless of programme discussions which were held at the centres of those movements. The information published in journals and the examples of modern architecture shown during the preparations for the Polish General Exhibition provided Poznań architects with models from Warsaw, Germany, the Netherlands, etc.

The residential complex for clerks, which was built at Głogowska Street in 1929, is an example combining different paradigms of modernity. The complex was built for wealthy Poznań inhabitants; the area of some flats was about 100-120 m<sup>2</sup> and there were even as many as 5 rooms



4. Sandleiten housing estate in Vienna, "Architektura i Budownictwo", 1929, No. 9, p. 341

in them. There were two tenement houses designed by Jerzy Tuszowski on a C-shaped plan. They were situated around green yards and separated by an inner alley enclosed with arcade connectors. Similarly to some Viennese models, this accented the consistency of the complex and its relative isolation from the surroundings. The architect also used modest-looking cornices on the lower and top storeys, highlighted the symmetry and some axes with rustication or pilasters, but he also introduced flat roofs, diverse shape of the building and flatness of the elevation. Those forms may have been inspired by the simplicity of Viennese complexes, although in view of the architect's further evolution those forms forerun a noticeable turn towards European modernism.

Tuszowski's other designs prove the "eclecticism" of sources. For Poznań architects they seemed to be a repertory of available forms of modern building, which was addressed not only to the poorest inhabitants.

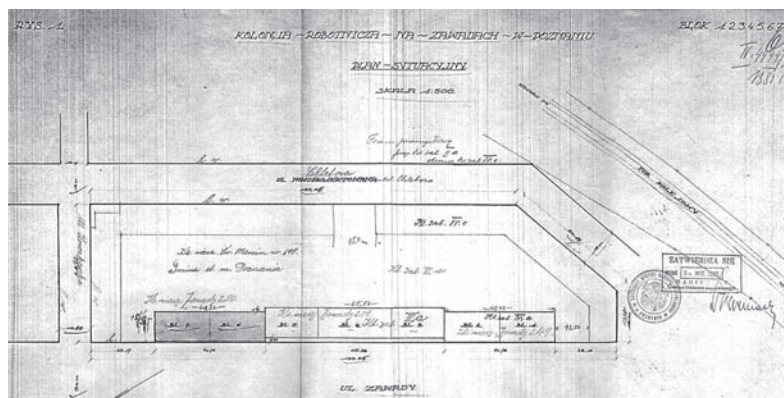
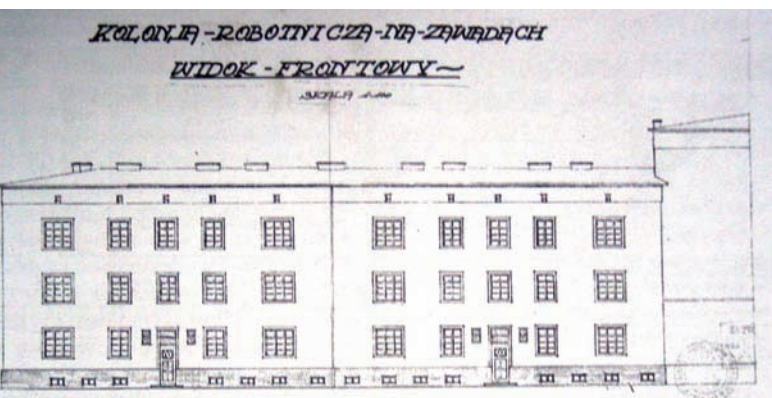
In 1929 Tuszowski designed a community estate with foregardens in Powstańcza and Wierzbicice streets. He designed a deep outer courtyard, which was enclosed with arcades from the street-side. The interior of the quarter was dismembered by the broken line of the buildings surrounding the yards. As could be seen in the design, sloped roofs, highlighted axes and separated storeys point to the fact that the architect used traditional forms, but he simplified them considerably. The complex could be treated as a conglomerate of different inspirations. Apart from the Viennese models, which were particularly noticeable in the



5. Władysław Czarnecki, a mock-up of Wspólna - Rolna - Tokarska housing estate in Poznań, "Architektura i Budownictwo", 1929, No. 6, p. 221







6. Władysław Czarnecki, a design of the housing estate in Zawady, State Archive Poznań

isolation of the building from its surroundings, it is possible to notice a creative discussion with picturesque complexes designed by Joseph Weiss, a Poznań architect, before World War I. The design might even refer to the so-called roundabout in Asnyka Street in Lviv<sup>13</sup>, which Tuszowski knew from the time of his studies at Lviv Polytechnic.

However, the search for similarities, justifying Czarnecki and Tuszowski's references to Viennese models, should not overshadow the presence of substantial differences, which are much more inherent than the similarity of arrangements or more or less conservative stylistics. The comparison of Viennese Arbeiterhofs and European modernistic models with Poznań estates gives a possibility to draw conclusions going beyond the issue of formal inspirations. Above all, the Viennese model concentrated on the creation of legal and economic bases of low-cost, mass lodgings, hygienic standards, welfare programme and organisational framework rather than the building form. Only then it was possible to build so many lodgings. However, it was impossible to achieve it in Poznań without the councillors' acceptance.

13. Lewicki Jakub, *Między tradycją a nowoczesnością. Architektura Lwowa lat 1893-1918*, Warsaw 2005.

Thus, the fundamental difference consists in the political engagement in the development of a complete low-cost building programme. In Vienna and in avant-garde concepts it was one of the tools preparing the new form of society. Such intentions cannot be attributed either to the authorities in Poznań or the architects involved in the execution of those orders. The authors of the estates in Poznań had more humble objectives – to provide low-cost lodgings and improve living conditions according to the civilisations standards which were becoming more and more widespread in Europe at the time. Those standards involved not only the problems of hygiene but also welfare facilities.

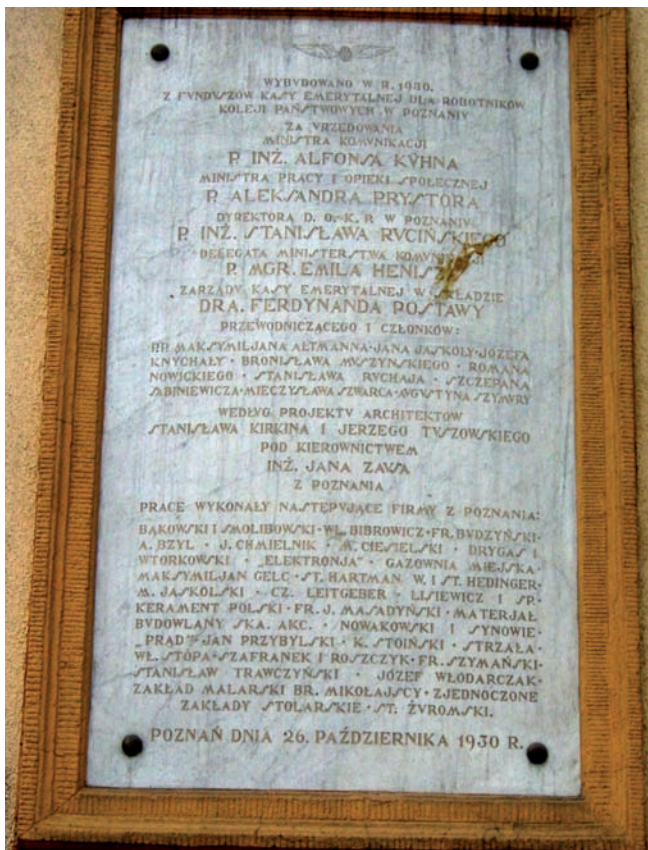
The non-revolutionary strategy of Austrian Marxism, whose aim was to "win heads in democratic elections rather than cut them"<sup>14</sup>, was too radical for Polish society. All the more it was unacceptable for people in Poznań, where social democrats were not strong enough. In view of this attitude, apart from the narrow group of Polish avant-garde followers at the time architects paid attention to formal and functional solutions rather than the intrinsic ideas of socio-political reconstruction.

14. Bauer Otto "Nicht die Köpfe einschlagen, die Köpfe gewinnen!"

7. Jerzy Tuszowski, the block of the Pension Fund for State Railway Workers, 50-52 Rolna Street, Poznań. Photo by the author







8a. The commemorative plaque in 50-52 Rolna Street, Poznań. Photo by the author

The reception of Viennese models was facilitated by the unorthodox formal character of those estates, the pursuit of stylistic modernity without the need to radically abandon tradition. This attitude is mostly the legacy of theoretical considerations made by such architects as Otto Wagner. Adolf Loos rejected ornament because it grew mentally old the soonest.<sup>15</sup> His attitude stopped shocking people in the 1920s and it was related with "ethical economy" – labour and energy saving when constructing buildings. Modernity consisted in rational acceptance of technological, hygienic and aesthetic progress.

Since the beginning of the 20th century there had been the growing belief that new times required a new style corresponding to the living conditions that were changing. This conviction made even less radical architects change their technique, reduce and simplify architectural forms. Poznań architects made references to the Viennese school because the architects from Vienna did not want to abandon tradition completely and for example, they accepted classical rules as the fundamentals of architectural works. Czarnecki's output was characterised by the same belief that classical rules were permanent and universal. He liked to use them in his designs and gradually abandoned linking them with the use of historical forms. The change of the contracting party, which the working class had become indirectly, caused the need to select simple means for modest-looking buildings. In fact, this rule was in agreement with the classical principle of decorum. Low-cost building for "common people" forced architects to simplify or abandon details, make use of solid shapes, diversify materials, allow for the reformatory rules of city hygiene and gradually teach the new, sparing formal language. The maintenance of specific hygienic and functional standards, which was achieved by combining buildings with their surroundings, became a chief determinant of modernity. However, above all, innovativeness was related with the introduction of common facilities for dwellers. This compensated the small area of lodgings and it was also perceived and regarded as the progress of civilisation.

15. Cf. comments: Achleitner Friedrich, *Architektur zwischen typologischem Fatalismus und semantischem Schlammasel*, Wien 1996, p. 56.



8b. The commemorative plaques in Vienna. Photo by the author



Viennese architects treated low-cost housing development as a new architectural task. It involved the development of such formal values which could be achieved in combination with reduced costs. The functional and social programme was implemented with low-cost and simplified materials. However, it also involved carefully considered aesthetic forms and it allowed the diversity of artistic creation. The new issues became ennobled by highlighting the monumentality of the complex, which is best noticeable in Karl-Marx-Hof. This large estate with 1,382 flats became famous, because those low-cost lodgings had conspicuous forms despite their simplicity. The effect of monumentality and representativeness was enhanced by sculptural decoration in the central part of the estate, building the sense of dignity in the dwellers. In spite of all the differences it is not difficult to place those estates in the tradition of the Viennese architecture of the ring era. The architects of the estates which were called working class palaces were aware of this fact.

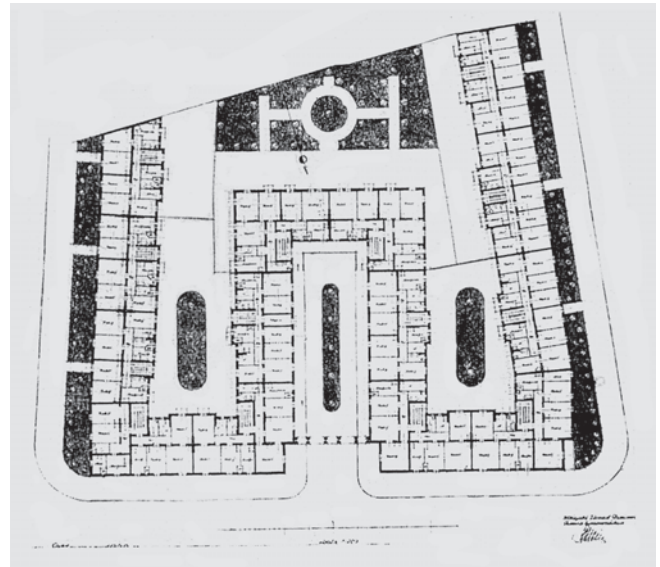


9. Jerzy Tuszowski, a housing complex for clerks, Głogowska Street. Photo by the author'

Simplicity resulting from economy and identified with modernity was a rational possibility for Viennese projects. Similarly to the effects of monumentality, it continued the assumptions of Viennese architecture at the turn of the 19th century. The designers of working class estates matched them with low-cost building development without the creation of new ideas. As Friedrich Achleitner writes, after 1918 Viennese architecture processed, reproduced and saw itself.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the output of Viennese architects played an important role in the translation from the language of simplicity and functionality into the language of modernity.

The awareness of continuation of tradition differs the simplicity of "Red Vienna" from the avant-garde, for which the low cost and simplicity of the new type of architecture was a broader challenge. The diverse forms of mass building developments were more closely related with the social utopia, the development of new future society and/or modern man. For this reason simple forms became the ideological declaration and mandatory "costume" of the avant-garde. The word "new" was a key word. Architectural purism involved not only cost cutting but it also manifested a new lifestyle, which was not limited to poorer social classes. It was a declaration of progress or even revolution. The avant-garde ideologised

16. Achleitner Friedrich, *Architektur zwischen typologischem...*, Vienna 1996, p. 56.



10. Jerzy Tuszowski, a design of the housing complex in Powstańcza / Wierzbicę Streets, "Architektura i Budownictwo", 1929, No. 6, p. 222

the form and manifested their attitude, where simplicity was associated with progress rather than cheapness. This fact may somehow account for the expansion of the avant-garde and overshadowing other architectural trends of the interwar period, e.g. Viennese expressionism or Ernst May's experiments in Frankfurt.

However, in the 1920s the domination of avant-garde concepts was not certain yet. Low-cost housing drew the attention of different groups of architects and municipal authorities, forcing them to search for more economical materials, constructions and forms. This makes us aware how important low-cost housing development was for modernism as a school of new language. The concepts of low-cost housing had been developed since the turn of the 19th century and they were widely applied after World War I. However, it seems that only the possibility to adjust this language to more refined, elaborate and "rich" projects for higher classes consolidated this language of simplicity as new modernistic aesthetics even if it involved the abandonment of social utopia, which was retained only by the most radical representatives of the avant-garde.