

Architecture of the 1960s in Katowice. Examples, Creators, State of Preservation

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The Katowice Downtown of the 1960s is - ranking behind Warsaw - one of the most interesting urban and architectural complexes in Poland of those times. It is admitted by the author of the book *Nowa architektura polska*, Przemysław Szafer, who wrote in 1972: "Katowice, apart from Warsaw, seems to be of most interest for urban planners"¹. At the end of the 1950s, the Downtown became a *tabula rasa* ready to be filled by urban planners and architects. Many factors contributed to such a situation: chaotic urban planning related with industrial nature of the city, war destructions in the Centre and relation between new authorities and the past. The 19th century "post-German" buildings did not correlate with paradigms – of eternal Polishness of the area and modernity. According to state authorities' declarations of that time, the nature of the entire zone changed from bourgeois to the working one. The new Downtown was supposed to serve the working class in the first place. Just like in 1922, Katowice became the capital of a big and rich voivodeship.

In the 1950s, the city Downtown was designed at a spectacular, social realism-specific scale. The main communication artery – Armii Czerwonej (currently W. Korfańtego Street) was to be developed with the most important public utility buildings, such as the Theatre Opera and Ballet. Such a vision of the town corresponded with its new name which was given in 1953, right after Josef Stalin's death. At that moment, Katowice became Stalinogród². It seems that at that exact time, new concept was born and started to be followed, the concept which defined the urban situation of Downtown in the 1960s and formed a starting point for the architecture of the period which is of our interest. It was decided to extend the Market Square two times, to demolish its northern frontage and to open fully the square at Armii Czerwonej Street. The main city north-south axis was converted into a wider, six-lane road with a median strip and tram tracks.

Followed in the 1960s, the Downtown design was accepted in 1962. It had been created owing to a merge of concepts of two architectural teams: Wiktor Lipczowan, Ernest Szary, Adam Woźniak as well as Zygmunt Majerski and Julian Duchowicz. It was completed in the Katowice Municipality Urban Planning Office and accepted for further implementation in 1962. The transformations were

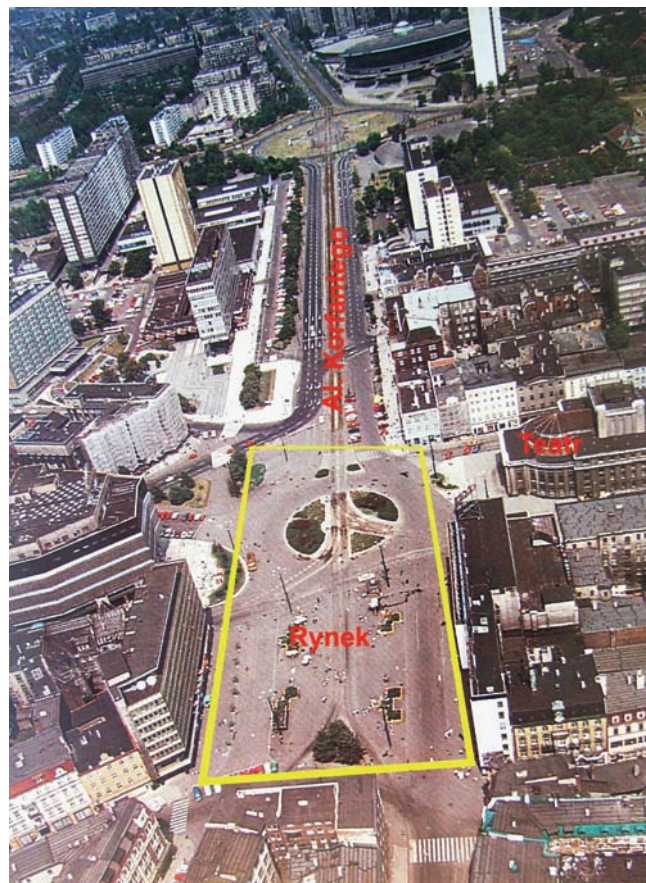
1. T. P. Szafer, *Nowa architektura polska. Diariusz lat 1966–1970*, Warszawa 1972, p. 198.

2. A. Borowik, *Socrealizm w śródmieściu Katowic. Wokół konkursu z 1947 r. oraz koncepcje lat pięćdziesiątych XX w.* [in:] *Von Moskau lernen? Architektur und Stadtebau des Sozialistischen Realismus (Uczyć się od Moskwy? Architektura i urbanistyka socrealizmu)*, Berlin 2012, pp. 188–196; eadem, *Pamięć miejsca. Niezrealizowane projekty Tadeusza Łobosa na przebudowanie rynku w Katowicach* [in:] *Katowice w kulturze pamięci*, scientific ed. A. Barciak, Katowice 2011, pp. 45–54.

undertaken under the auspices of the voivodeship authorities led by Jerzy Ziętek, the President of Voivodeship National Council Board.

The earliest building based on the new style was the so-called *Zieleniak*, namely an office building in Rynek 13, erected according to the design by Julian Duchowicz and Zygmunt Majerski or Tadeusz Łobos in the spirit of post-war functionalism. In the 1960s and 1970s, three more monumental buildings were erected in the area near the market square: Marian Śramkiewicz's *Dom Prasy* (Press House), an administrative and service building, Mieczysław Król and Jurand Jarecki's *PSS Zenit*, the most modern co-operative commercial centre in Poland of that time and *Skarbek* commercial centre, designed independently by

1. Katowice Downtown. Source: J. Moskal, W. Janota, *Bogucice, Załęże et nova villa Katowice*, Katowice 1993, p. 161



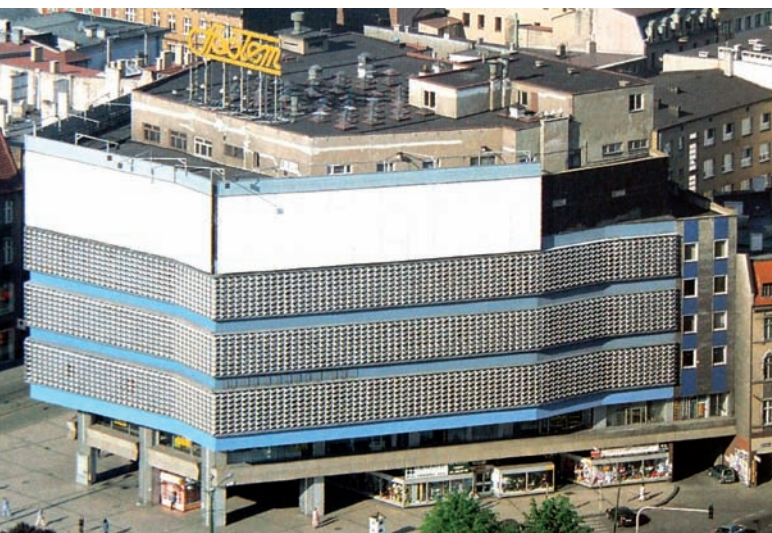


2. Zenit co-operative commercial centre, designed by Mieczysław Król and Jurand Jarecki, 1958, built in 1962. Archive photo from Jurand Jarecki's collection

Jarecki. *Dom Prasy* with a glass and aluminium curtain wall as well as *Zenit* with a similar commercial part, both with recessed ground floors symbolised the postulated modernity of the city and opening of the architecture towards the entire world. *Skarbek* represents a slightly different style; it is more sculptural owing to a complex plan and aluminium shells that face windowless elevations of higher floors. All the buildings, in particular commercial centres, follow a broad functional programme designated not only for the citizens of Katowice, but also for citizens of the entire Silesian agglomeration.

Since the 1960s, the west side of Armii Czerwonej Street was reorganized. It was the site of post-manor estates, such as the Thiele-Winckler palace with a park or Dwór Marii (the Court of Mary). Following the trend of eradicating traces of the German history of the city, these buildings were demolished. In their place, other buildings were erected: the modern Katowice Hotel designed by Tadeusz Łobos and Jan Gluch, *Delikatesy* housing and service building by Marian Skalkowski and Sports and Entertainment Area for 14,000 spectators, created by Maciej Gintowt and Maciej Krasiński, engineers, and by Włodarz, Żórawski and Zalewski, engineers. The last facility has become the symbol of the modern Polish architecture and has been appreciated internationally. Apart from the excellent structure and the shape of *Spodek* (Saucer), perfect proportions, body differentiation and multi-plan aspect of *Delikatesy* and the above-mentioned Katowice Hotel are worth noticing. Even today, one may be astonished by the expressive form of reinforced concrete roofing over the entrance to the grand self-service hall, the first centre of this kind in Silesia. The Silesian Insurgents Monument, the project of which was

3. Skarbek Commercial Centre, completed in 1970, designed by J. Jarecki. Source: J. Moskal, W. Janota, Bogucice, op. cit.



selected in the Polish-wide competition. The victorious project was the monumental concept of sculptor Gustaw Zemła and architect Wojciech Zabłocki.

The reconstruction entered the next phase, following the Urban Planning concept of Downtown housing estate located in the territory which primarily had belonged to *Marta* steel plant, to the west from Armii Czerwonej Street. The housing estate was called *Śródmieście-Zachód*, and its creator, Mieczysław Król, was selected on the basis of a competition in 1963. Specific buildings under the defined Urban Planning layout were designed by different architects, which became the hallmark of the team. The main project aims were to meet the Atena Charter pre-war postulate: "Sun, space, green" for all human beings. Another determinant was the necessity of tall buildings, forced by the economics. The choice of Downtown housing estate concept with the main building, the so-called *Superjednostka*, i.e. home for 3,000 people, was the result of urban planning norms and regulations of 1964, which was the tallest building in Europe of that time.

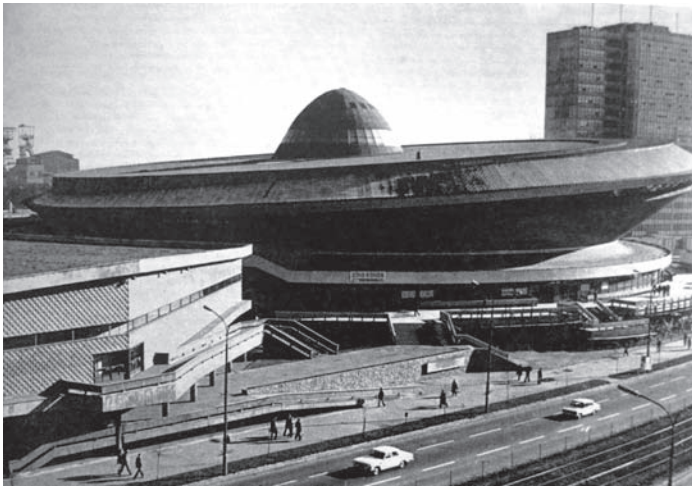
In terms of *Śródmieście-Zachód*, the following facilities were built: Aggregate Housing Unit, Marriage Registry, *Centrum* commercial and catering centre, *Junior* commercial centre – all created by Mieczysław Król, the so-called *Ślizgowiec S-20* housing and service building and Artistic Exhibition Centre designed by Stanisław Kwaśniewicz, 24-K housing and service building by Jurand Jarecki and Marian Skalkowski, four-unit kindergarten by Olga Ziętkiewicz and pavilion school with a swimming pool by Tadeusz Sadowski. In the neighbourhood there were: *Separator*, former administrative and service building of Coal Industry Design Office by Stanisław Kwaśniewicz and Orbis Hotel, nowadays Silesia Hotel by Tadeusz Łobos.

The downtown housing estate is a clever and perfectly designed arrangement. The housing function is predominant, by three tall buildings: *Superjednostka*, *Ślizgowiec* and 24-storey steel tower block. They are preceded by commercial centres which constitute a kind of foreground, isolating the area from inconvenience caused by heavy traffic. They were a multifunctional complexes following a service programme for the housing estate and, in part, for the entire region. Their creator – Mieczysław Król – defined them as "neutral", because while designing them, he was driven by the principle of "neutrality of dimensional and plastic forming of a building in order to achieve a background for elements that grow around"³.

3. M. Król, *Problemy urbanistyczno-architektoniczne przebudowy centrum Katowic w latach 1954-1980 (Wybrane zagadnienia projektowo-realizacyjne)* [in:] *Z dziejów sztuki Górnośląska i Zagłębia Dąbrowskiego*, ed. E. Chojecka, Katowice 1982, p. 63.

4. Katowice Hotel, designed by Tadeusz Łobos in cooperation with Jan Gluch, 1961, built in 1962–1965. *Delikatesy* residential and service building, designed by Marian Skalkowski, 1959–1960, built in 1960–1962. Archive photo from Jurand Jarecki's collection





5. Spodek Arena, the so-called Saucer, designed by Maciej Gintowt, Maciej Krasiński, constructed by Andrzej Żórawski, Aleksander Włodarz and Waclaw Zalewski, 1964. Source: Katowice, editor J. Gliszczynski, Katowice 1972

The main aim of Śródmieście-Zachód was its pedestrian-friendly nature. An urban planner and architects designed an excellent pedestrian commercial passage with intimate yards divided by arcades. The second idea, unfortunately not performed, was to create a median strip parallel to the former F. Dzierżyńskiego Street, currently Chorzowska.

Critics of those times evaluated Katowice Downtown facilities positively in comparison with other projects. After all these years, the author of Śródmieście-Zachód, Mieczysław Król, summarised his concept of that time. He wrote: "The rule of open, spacious centre was to be a contrast to dense, functionally and spaciouly mixed facilities of the neighbourhoods, like in the majority of Silesian cities. To this end, simple, uniform, clearly defined shapes of buildings forming the centre were used. That was the origin of the trend to integrate cubature which often performed different functions. This was an opportunity to release the surrounding the area from dense development, to open and "ventilate" urban planning interiors in a long-term perspective. These features were to be characteristic, highlighting it among the GOP (*Upper Silesia Industrial Region*) urban chaos.⁴ The project, notwithstanding its smaller scale, shows similarities to the east frontage of Marszałkowska Street in Warsaw, the so-called Eastern Wall, elaborated by a team of designers under the supervision of Zbigniew Karpiński.

To conclude, it is worth enumerating some of essential features of the 1960s architecture.

Firstly, it is impossible to separate it from the urban planning. Jerzy Hryniewiecki noted such a regularity, introducing a division, supplemented by Przemysław Szafer⁵.

Secondly, the architects of the 1960s were generally driven by two priorities: human and economy. That caused the primacy of function over the form, as well as diligence in terms of housing estate functional programme and of the adjoining buildings.

Thirdly, the 1960s architecture followed the 19th century idea of arts synthesis – Gesamtkunstwerk. It manifested either on the outside (mosaics, polychrome staining, sculpture, bas-relief) as well as interiors (well-planned interior arrangement).

In the 1960s, expressive colour value, which was to highlight the structure or well-thought façade rhythm, was appreciated. The colour was rediscovered at that time and it became an extremely important element of architecture; colourless architecture virtually did not exist or hardly existed. Artistic compositions were supposed to soften the harshness of functional forms, individualise internationality

4. M. Król, op. cit., p. 60.

5. T. P. Szafer, *Nowa architektura polska. Diariusz lat 1966–1970*, Warszawa 1972, p. 7.



6. Roofing over the entrance to the Delikatesy supermarket. Archive photo from Jurand Jarecki's collection

and classification, adding romantic spirit to automation and modernity.

Along with colours, technology, constructive and finishing materials were also important. The latter were frequently plain and "poor", e.g. *iryski*, namely broken glass cladding or prefabricated ceramics. On the other hand, also other deficit materials were used, like light and solid aluminium.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the innovativeness of the 1960s urban planning and architecture in Katowice. It was the place where prototypical projects at the scale of the country, but lagging behind in comparison to the west, were created: tower blocks at Osiedle Marchlewskiego designed by Mieczysław Król dating back to 1956, Aggregate Housing Unit, Marriage Registry, S-20 building erected using the slipform technology or a 24-storey steel house designed by Jarecki and Skalkowski.

If the Katowice's architecture of the 1960s aroused your interest and now you would like to visit my city, I must tell you – it is not worth it. The authorities do not utilise the potential which is present in the heritage of the 1960s. Kłyszewski, Mokrzyński and Wierzbicki's railway station, part of the Śródmieście-Zachód complex has been demolished. *Dom Prasy* has changed into a modern office building. Lack of knowledge and willingness has caused a significant loss of artistic assets of the majority of facilities mentioned here, as well as of those which the author did not managed to describe for the lack of time. Actually, it does not matter, because most of them serve as carriers for

7. *Superjednostka residential building*, designed by Mieczysław Król, 1965. Photo by A. Borowik

8. *24-K residential and service building in Sokolska Street*, designed by Jurand Jarecki and Marian Skalkowski, 1965-66. Photo from Jurand Jarecki's collection



7.



8.



9. Downtown residential area in Katowice. Postcard from Marian Lubina's collection

large size advertisements. Despite the existence of official institutions, numerous foundations, there is not a concept for developing and utilising this potential, and the main slogans of transformations are thoughtless modernisation of elimination. Again, Katowice proves the thesis of Prof. Ewa Chojecka, a local researcher – that in order to create something in this city, it is necessary to deny the past, and then eliminate it in part or as a whole. It is particularly painful, when one sees how pointlessly social modernism is substituted with contemporary forms of neomodernism. The word does not change almost at all, but scale and technology (the latter in a positive way, though) do change. In this process, there is less care of urban planning, which in the 1960s was imminently related with architecture as well as less care concerning the human, who instead of being a citizen, becomes solely a service recipient and a consumer.



10. School in M. Grażyńskiego Street in Katowice-Koszutka, designed by Stanisław Kwaśniewicz, 1958-59, built in 1960-62. Photo from Jurand Jarecki's collection