

Marek Czapelski

INSTITUTE OF ART HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

Towards Socialist Architecture: Architectural Exhibitions at the Zachęta in the Years 1950–1955

The First National Exposition of Architectural Design (Pierwszy Ogólnopolski Pokaz Projektów Architektury, henceforward: OPA, 22 January – 28 February 1951) and the First General Exhibition of Architecture in the People's Republic of Poland (Pierwsza Powszechna Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej, henceforward: PWA, 8 March – 22 April 1953) are unquestionably worthy of attention as important elements of the process of implementing Stalinist principles of the organisation of architects' professional lives. The two exhibitions reveal important aspects of Socrealism in Poland: the practice of institutional coercion and arduous attempts at coordinating the postulated modernisation and economic rationalisation of Polish architecture with an ideologically correct image of its history.¹

In June 1949 the National Party Meeting of Architects (Krajowa Partyjna Narada Architektów) initiated the implementation of Socrealism in Poland. It issued a resolution which was soon to become an official document of the Association of Polish Architects (Stowarzyszenie Architektów Polskich, henceforward: SARP) and which announced the nearest future as a period of intensive "enhancement of the ideological level" of all architects, including "academic youth".² This obligatory education was to be accompanied by rigorous promotion of the methods of collective labour. Based on competition and productivity leadership, the collective labour system had recently been introduced among architects and was being implemented at the state design bureaus that had been established in late 1948. Controlling

1 This essay was written in the framework of the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities as instituted by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, entitled "The History of Exhibitions at Zachęta, the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, in the Period 1949–1970", no. 0086/NPRH3/H11/82/2014.

2 On the sessions, see W. Baraniewski, "Ideologia w architekturze Warszawy realizmu socjalistycznego" [Ideology in the architecture of Warsaw in the period of Socialist Realism], *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, 1996, vol. 22, pp. 236–238.

and assessing the current output in architectural design, as well as introducing a re-interpretation of Poland's entire architectural heritage which would conform with Soviet models, were to be important elements of this new professional reality.³

The resolution postulated the "enhancement of cooperation [...] through the designers' participation in production meetings at construction sites". This formula is noteworthy, because it signified the mandatory introduction of a strictly production-oriented approach to architecture, thus transplanting to Poland methods of worker management of production units which had been introduced in the Soviet Union in the mid-1920s. Organisational innovations introduced in the course of the following months made the programme more specific.⁴

One of these innovations was the establishment, in the early 1950, of the Committee for the Coordination of Warsaw Design Bureaus (Komitet Koordynacyjny Biur Projektowych Warszawy) – a body that was external to and independent from the existing institutions. Headed by Bohdan Garliński, the Committee essentially took over the initiative concerning the "periodical showing of design projects with their subjection to public assessment in the form of a display".⁵ This meant "a display of ongoing projects not subjected to any quality selection, [...] material taken directly from the architectural drawing boards, but [viewed as] the subject matter for a production meeting".⁶ The term "exhibition" was consistently avoided, because it was reserved for displays which had a full ideological message.

The new organisational model was launched by the Display of the Works of Warsaw Design Bureaus (Pokaz Prac Biur Projektowych Warszawy, 14 May – 1 June 1950, curated by Zenon Buczkowski).⁷ It included a lecture session with programmatic papers and a debate during which, according to a critical opinion issued soon after, "the participants avoided opportunities for self-criticism".⁸ Yet this was only the beginning of the struggle for "Polish Socrealist architecture". This was symbolically underscored by the venue of the show, i.e. the Warsaw University of Technology. On the one hand, this location

3 The text of the resolution: *O polską architekturę socjalistyczną. Materiały z Krajowej Partyjnej Narady Architektów odbytej w dniu 20–21 czerwca 1949 roku w Warszawie* [For Polish Socialist architecture. Materials from the National Party Meeting of Architects on 20–21 June 1949 in Warsaw], Warsaw, 1950, pp. 215–216.

4 *Proizvodstvennye sovesaniâ*, in: *Bol'shaâ sovetskaâ ênciklopediâ*, vol. 34, Moscow, 1955, pp. 637–638; W. Zagorulkin, P. Mieńko, D. Perepelkin, *Stalê narady wytwórcze* [Regular production meetings], Warsaw, 1961, pp. 7–8.

5 B. Garliński, *Architektura polska 1950–1951* [Polish architecture 1950–1951], Warsaw, 1953, p. 205.

6 "Pierwszy Ogólnopolski Pokaz Projektów Architektonicznych w Zachęcie" [The First National Exposition of Architectural Design in Zachęta], *Stolica*, 1951, no. 2, p. 8.

7 B. Garliński, op. cit.

8 B. Garliński, *Kolektywna ocena projektów...* [Collective assessment of the designs], p. 3.

assured that students would attend, on the other, it underlined the status of the new architecture as art *in statu nascendi*, i.e. still awaiting the point when its creators would mature and achieve true mastery.⁹

The First National Exposition of Architectural Design (OPA, 1951)

Locating the OPA, the next all-inclusive event, in the Zachęta building was thus a very significant gesture. The grand edifice, completed in 1900, was home to one of Poland's oldest institutions concerned with the organisation of exhibitions; hence it constituted a perfect place for propagandists to accentuate the postulated alliance of architecture and the visual arts. The fact that this exhibition space, unquestionably prestigious and available to a broader audience, had been selected signalled that, in spite of all the reservations, the Coordination Committee was satisfied with the course of the transformations taking place in architecture and that it considered them worthy of being presented to outsiders.

The curator of the show, the outstanding architect Jerzy Hryniewiecki, had undeniable experience in organising exhibitions (he had been, among others, the Chief Architect at the Recovered Territories Exhibition in Wrocław in 1948) and was familiar with matters of construction materials and prefabrication. He could, therefore, be considered a guarantor of the show's attractiveness, as well as an expert in the area of its theoretical leitmotifs; the artistic issues no less than the technological advances and economic concerns regarding architecture and the construction industry.

Hryniewiecki's intent was that the arrangement of the exhibition's interiors convey the atmosphere of a working meeting in an architectural design bureau. The setting included a drawing board on which there stood a model of Warsaw's leading Socrealist enterprise – the residential estate called Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa (MDM). Most of the design drawings were densely, slightly chaotically positioned on walls and double-sided boards (Figs. 1–2). Numerous chairs placed in the middle of exhibition rooms brought to mind office meetings and thus alluded to the collective character of design assessment. This stylised atmosphere of mass production in an architectural office was interrupted by small tables (probably intended for the more important participants of those meetings) placed along the walls and the carefully positioned plaster models of sculptural decorations and pieces of ornamental mouldings, which were strongly reminiscent of still-life models and which created the

⁹ For reflections on the appraisal and evaluation of the exhibited designs, see W. Baraniewski, "Ideologia w architekturze Warszawy...", op. cit., pp. 243–244, 247.

Pojęcie efektywności

Powstaje problem wyboru kierunku działalności inwestycyjnej, powstaje problem, co budować, powstaje problem kryteriów dla oceny założeń projektowanych i projektów. Dawne kryteria rentowności, kryteria rentowności poszczególnego zakładu, czy całego przedsiębiorstwa — stały się nieistotne. W gospodarce socjalistycznej stale i niezmiennie, we wszystkich działaniach realizujemy założenia polityczne. Decydujący jest nie interes poszczególnej inwestycji, poszczególnej dziedziny produkcji, czy zespołu zakładów produkcyjnych, ale interes całego społeczeństwa, interes oceniany z punktu widzenia realizacji socjalizmu. „Problemy budownictwa były u nas zawsze nie tylko problemami gospodarczymi — mówi Mołotow — ale i problemami polityki. I to jest zrozumiałe. Jutrzejszy dzień socjalizmu zależy przede wszystkim od osiągnięć budownictwa, które prowadzimy dzisiaj”¹⁾

Z punktu widzenia ekonomiki nie wystarczy kryterium rentowności; zastępujemy je przez pojęcie efektywności. Powstaje pytanie, co rozumiemy przez efektywność inwestycji. Dlatego podaję próbę definicji: przez efektywność inwestycji rozumiem ich przydatność z punktu widzenia realizacji założeń planu produkcji, usług i poprawy bytu mas pracujących. I dlatego winniśmy ustalić, jakie kryteria charakteryzować będą przydatność inwestycji. Czy kryteria prawidłowo sformułowane mogą być właściwą dla ostatecznego rozstrzygnięcia? Tak, ale tylko z punktu widzenia techniczno-ekonomicznego. Natomiast ostateczne rozstrzygnięcie musi być skontrolowane pod politycznym kątem widzenia.

Czy ekonomia ustaliła definitywnie metodę efektywności inwestycji? Niestety, jeszcze nie. Dyskusja na te tematy toczy się w fachowej prasie radzieckiej, w radzieckich instytucjach naukowych. Zabierają głos najwybitniejsi specjaliści, wypowiada się Akademia Nauk. Dyskusję tę podjęli również ekonomiści polscy. Między innymi, na grudniowym zjeździe ub. r. prof. Bronisław Minc podsumował wyniki dyskusji i wysunął postulat opracowania dla każdej inwestycji 14-tu kryteriów charakteryzujących jej efektywność. Na ich podstawie można scharakteryzować i ocenić poszczególne warianty projektowe.

¹⁾ „Woprosy Ekonomiki” Nr 10/1950, str. 18.

Od góry:

Ekspozycja gmachu biurowego przy ul. Marszałkowskiej. Autor arch. M. Leykam.

Ekspozycja Marszałkowskiej Dzielnicy Mieszkaniowej.

Fragment pokazu z modelem MDM na pierwszym planie.

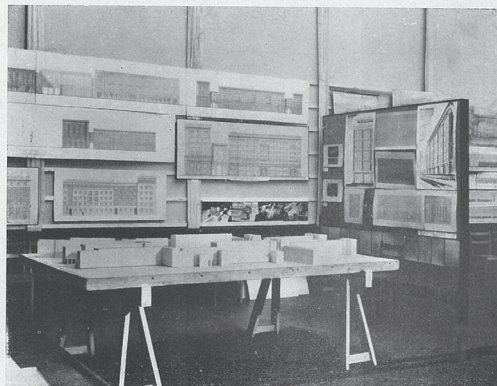
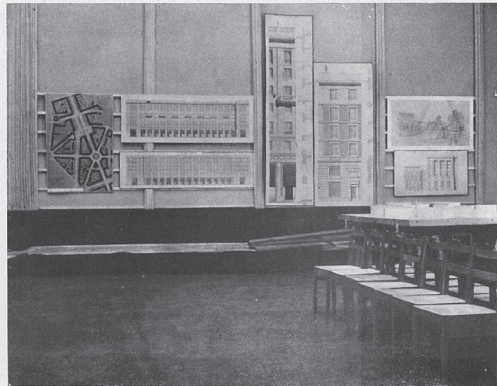
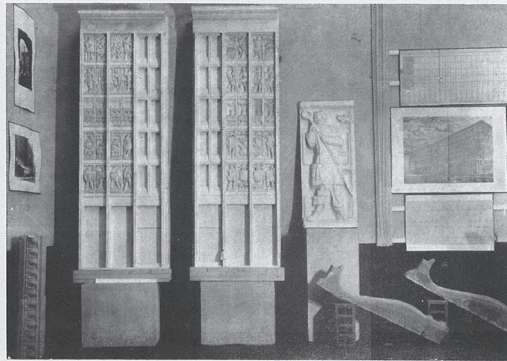
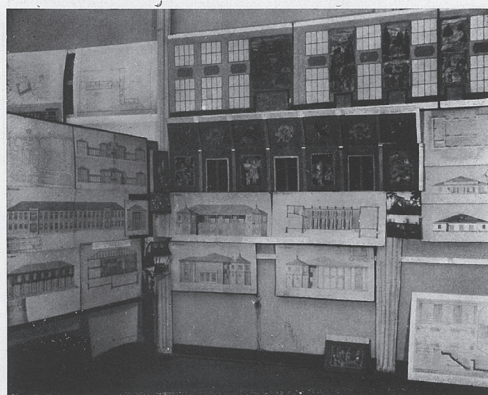
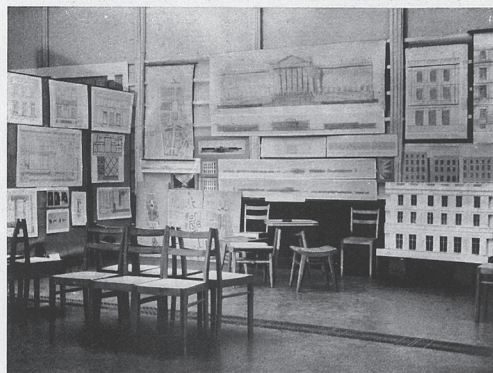


Fig. 1. Part of the display, OPA 1951, after *Architektura*, 1951, no. 5/6, p. 171



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Niestety, kryteria te są rozpracowane jedynie w stosunku do inwestycji produkcyjnych. W stosunku do interesującej nas dziedziny budownictwa ogólnej teorii nie wypracowała jeszcze systemu kryteriów. Ale nie jesteśmy zupełnie błądliwi w stosunku do tematu. Nasilenie budownictwa i różnorodność dyspozycji spowodowała konieczność opracowania szeregu norm programowych, a więc standardów osiedlowych, budynkowych i pomieszczeniowych, przestrzennych i wyposażeniowych. Ich uzupełnieniem są normatywy projektowe. I to są pierwsze stosowane kryteria dla oceny efektywności budowy, opracowane przez praktykę. W oparciu o ten dorobek proponuję wprowadzenie następujących 7 kryteriów dla oceny efektywności inwestycji nieprodukcyjnych.

Kryteria dla oceny programu.

Programy przestrzenne wyposażeniowe

Standardy przestrzenne i wyposażeniowe wyznaczają poziom zaspokojenia potrzeb jednostkowych. Celem przeanalizowania standardów wszelkiego rodzaju inwestycje budownictwa ogólnego rozbijamy na dwie grupy:

- a) sprzężone z inwestycjami produkcyjnymi,
- b) obsługujące bezpośrednio poprawę warunków bytu klasy pracującej.

Inwestycje sprzężone warunkują realizację planu produkcji. Muszą być zrealizowane. W związku z powyższym możemy powiedzieć, że górna granica standardu wyznacza stosunek globalnej sumy środków postawionych do dyspozycji przez plan na pokrycie danej potrzeby do zapotrzebowanej ilości jednostek w zakresie inwestycji sprzężonych. Powiększenie ilości jednostek użytkowych celem poprawy warunków bytowania klasy pracującej przy zmniejszeniu standardu jest celowe, o ile uzyskamy w ten sposób poprawę warunków bytowania mas pracujących i równocześnie uzyskamy wartości, które dłuższy czas mogą służyć ekonomice socjalistycznej.

Od góry:

Fragment pokazu rozbudowy
N. Świata.

Fragment pokazu Domu Wojska
Polskiego.

Fragment pokazu Ośrodka Szkoleniowego w Ursynowie.

Fig. 2. Part of the display, OPA 1951, after *Architektura*, 1951, no. 5/6, p. 172

relaxed aura of an artists' café.¹⁰ Owing to this combination of conventions, the exhibition's setting did not exude the gravity that was typical of Socrealism; in fact, it could be treated as an illustration to a contemporary description of Hryniewiecki's personality as provided by the writer Leopold Tyrmand: he was "a brilliant and witty intellectual", one of the "few wise procrastinators who cautiously and effectively resisted" the combination of "coercion and bribery" that was skilfully practised by the Communist authorities.¹¹

Yet, from the point of view of propaganda, the undeniable merits of the exhibition's visual arrangement were less important than the set of events that accompanied it, whose selected excerpts, as well as related reports, were published in the press.¹² In comparison with the earlier Display of the Works of Warsaw Design Bureaus, the programme of papers presented at the OPA was far larger. At the opening, Juliusz Żakowski, the Deputy Minister for Construction, delivered an ideological speech, in which he sketched out the postulated image of Socialist architecture: it was to make creative use of the heritage of Polish culture and, concurrently, to resist the cosmopolitan trends that had been cemented during the inter-war period. Żakowski's speech and the supplementary paper by Marcin Weinfeld clearly indicated the expectations of the authorities and the exhibition organisers as to the direction that the subsequent open debate was intended to take, namely, that it was to provide a comprehensive critique of the formal and ideological value of the exhibited designs.¹³ An archetype of this formal analysis was provided by the paper *Zagadnienia plastyczne architektury* [Visual issues in architecture] by Bohdan Urbanowicz.

The central topic of design assessment was accompanied by a set of papers relating to a side issue, that is to economic matters.¹⁴ The presentations by Michał Kaczorowski and Ludwik Tylbor indicated that, in the future, strong emphasis would be put on lowering the costs of construction in all areas – from

10 One of the pertinent reference points may be *Latona*, a café which operated during the German occupation in the courtyard of the house at Nowy Świat 35 in Warsaw, furnished for Jerzy Blikle by the architects Maciej Nowicki and Bohdan Pniewski, the sculptor Józef Klukowski and the painter Jacek Żuławski. Cf. M. Czapelski, *Bohdan Pniewski – warszawski architekt XX wieku* [Bohdan Pniewski: the architect of 20th-century Warsaw], Warsaw, 2008, pp. 174–175.

11 L. Tyrmand, *Dziennik 1954. Wersja oryginalna* [A diary of 1954. The original version], Cracow, 2011, p. 280.

12 The largest set of materials was published in *Architektura*, 1951, no. 5/6, an issue devoted to the exhibition.

13 Unfortunately, Weinfeld's paper did not survive in the original version. The published version was edited *ex post*, with the addition of topics from the public debate. In his summing-up speech, Roman Piotrowski referred to the original version of the paper.

14 Namely: Michał Kaczorowski's *Ekonomika projektowania architektonicznego* [The economics of architectural design], Ludwik Tylbor's *Ekonomia projektowania na odcinku konstrukcji* [The economics of construction design], Jerzy Hryniewiecki's *Materiały budowlane* [Construction materials].

the exploitation plan through the design solutions to the production costs. This decrease was to be achieved through the introduction of mandatory norms and standards as well as administrative instructions and, in the long run, by means of innovative construction methods and materials (e.g. pre-tensioned concrete). In view of the private sector, which had effectively been eliminated from all large construction endeavours in the People's Republic of Poland, the limitations enforced by the state authorities were of crucial importance to the designers. Only special, monument construction projects were to be exempt from the rigorous economic requirements; hence it was clear that the majority of designers taking part in the debate would come across this system in their everyday work. Jerzy Hryniewiecki's paper stood out among those dogmatic speeches. Instead of focusing on centralised management in the construction industry, Hryniewiecki stressed the necessity of adjusting the designers' way of thinking to new technologies. His approach can be seen as the heritage of the pre-war avant-garde, even though the latter was emphatically criticised during the debate, and his assertion that construction must be conducted "faster, cheaper and better"¹⁵ seems to harbinge one of the central slogans of the thaw that was to take place under Khrushchev. The OPA can thus be viewed as the point when the architectural community and the public were made aware that the construction industry in the People's Republic of Poland was to be ruled by the principles of technocratic economics.

The programmatic presentations were followed by a three-day debate.¹⁶ One day was reserved for a debate conducted by students matriculated at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Technology.¹⁷

During the debate several generalised assertions relating to topics of aesthetics and ideology, which referred to the introductory papers, were accompanied by numerous explications delivered by the authors of the exhibited designs. It is worth noting that comments concerning urban planning were usually formulated without referring to the Stalinist newspeak. Essentially, however, matters that did not involve the dominant issue, i.e. the ideology, were marginal in the debate.

Another remarkable point is that economic issues were also marginalised during the debate. Only Bohdan Pniewski reminded the audience that "the construction industry is limping"¹⁸ and criticised the government-imposed

15 J. Hryniewiecki, "Materiały budowlane" [Construction materials], *Architektura*, 1951, no. 5/6, pp. 184–185.

16 The course of this debate is known from the discussion in *Architektura* and from notes made by Józef Sigalin. See *Architektura*, *ibid.*, pp. 203–208; J. Sigalin, *Warszawa 1944–1980. Z archiwum architekta* [Warsaw 1944–1980. From an architect's archive], vol. 2, Warsaw, 1986, pp. 413–417.

17 "Dyskusja młodzieżowa na I Ogólnopolskim Pokazie Projektów Architektury" [Youth debate at the First National Exposition of Architectural Design], *Architektura*, *ibid.*, pp. 209–211.

18 B. Pniewski, a voice in the debate, *Architektura*, *ibid.*, p. 207.

obligation to economise on construction materials. It is possible that some inconvenient statements from the debaters were suppressed; neither can it be ruled out, however, that at this stage only a practitioner having a firmly established professional standing and currently involved in various construction projects, such as Pniewski (who, incidentally, was the target of slight but frequent barbs thrown by the debaters), was able to assess the scale of the problems which the bureaucratic limitations and supply restrictions would cause in the architects' everyday work.

In addition, the debate revealed an interesting – and unintended – result of the OPA. This nationwide event was certainly intended to facilitate a quick and effective introduction of the Socialist doctrine in the entire country; the architects working in the capital, being the most familiar with its principles, were to spearhead its implementation. However, it was the achievements of the Gdańsk circle of architects that gained considerable attention. Thus the OPA became one of the first post-war opportunities for comparing the work of various centres and thus made it possible to diverge from the strictly Warsaw-centred model of presenting architecture.

Finally, the event was closed by professional assessment of the exhibited designs as conducted by four Advisory Committees created by the SARP. This, of course, amounted to a modification of the practice of production meetings, whose participants were obliged to take part in the decision-making process regarding the subsequent course of work. The competencies of the Committees were delineated, not very systematically, following the criteria of technology/construction, function and aesthetics, which caused some chaos and resulted in the reports being repetitive.¹⁹ Incidentally, one has the distinct impression that many of the committee members were not unhappy with this, because this way they could avoid issuing blanket assessments of the exhibited works.

It is also remarkable that it was the committee headed by Józef Sigalin that issued the most detailed assessment of the architectural designs, with their systematic appraisal according to the criteria developed by its members, which also included strictly ideological matters.²⁰ Sigalin was a pre-war Communist who had stayed in the Soviet Union during the war and was thoroughly acquainted with the realities of an architect's work under the Stalinist system. At the time of the exhibition, he was energetically climbing the ladder of the professional hierarchy and was greatly interested in displaying his involvement at a prestigious meeting – and, indeed, six months later

19 The Advisory Committees were for the office buildings and high-rises (chaired by Marcin Weinfeld), frame construction buildings (chaired by Józef Łowiński), buildings of public use (chaired by Jan Koszczyc-Witkiewicz) and complexes of urban architecture (chaired by Józef Sigalin). B. Garliński, *Architektura polska 1950–1951*, op. cit., pp. 206–207.

20 J. Piłatowicz, *Józef Sigalin*, <http://www.ipsb.nina.gov.pl/index.php/a/jozef-sigalin> [accessed 15 December 2015].

he was nominated the chief architect of Warsaw. Assessments formulated by the remaining three committees were more concise.

This gesture of professional loyalty was contrary to the intentions of the exhibition's organisers and may have influenced the tone of dissatisfaction that was distinctly heard in the speech of Roman Piotrowski, the Minister for Construction, which summed up the meeting. He charged the majority of the programmatic presentations with not having appropriate persuasive power and the debates with having an insufficiently positive programme for the future. He explicitly stated that the members of the audience occasionally expressed "sentiments that were contrary [to the exhibition's ideological line – M. C.]."²¹ Thus, according to Piotrowski, they questioned the fundamental aim of the exhibition, the papers and the debates, i.e. the necessity of "breaking with certain architectural trends that [...] hinder progress in architecture, thereby making it more difficult for us to fulfil our tasks of fully aiding the society in its struggle to build Socialism in Poland" and "demonstrating the need to refer to the architectural past as the expression of the continuity of our national culture".²²

The exhibition's postulational character, as expected by Piotrowski, was better expressed by the peculiar restrictions imposed on the textual and visual information regarding the exhibited designs, which is evident in the source publications, than by the debate itself. Even the very fact that the "production meeting" status of the show lowered the rank of the exhibited works is symptomatic – the works thereby ceased to be exhibits, which may have made the idea of publishing their catalogue easier to abandon. A hundred and thirty-six designs were exhibited; only less than ninety can be identified on the basis of the available materials, and only half of those were presented on photographs published in the press.

Significantly, the ideological control imposed after the exhibition was not tantamount to the verbal *damnatio memoriae* of the particularly hotly criticised works; it was limited to the elimination of all relevant illustrative material. Thus, designs which had repeatedly been mentioned in the press lost their concreteness and became no more than ideological models of an error in the course of creative work.

What was sentenced to oblivion, however, were the names of the architects who had authored the criticised works: Stanisław Kolendo, Zbigniew Ihnatowicz and Jerzy Romański.²³ It seems to me that it is precisely these

21 "Przemówienie ministra budownictwa miast i osiedli inż. arch. Romana Piotrowskiego na I Ogólnopolskim Pokazie Projektów Architektury w Warszawie" [The speech of the Minister for City and Residential Estate Construction, Roman Piotrowski M. Eng. (Arch.), at the First National Exposition of Architectural Design], *Architektura*, op. cit., p. 167.

22 Ibid.

23 The author of one of the most often and most vehemently criticised designs, i.e. the Institute of Industrial Chemistry in Warsaw, was never mentioned (it was Stanisław Kolendo M. Arch.); the names of Zbigniew Ihnatowicz and Jerzy Romański, the authors

three architects, as the anonymous “pupils of Le Corbusier”, who became the true victims of the public debates which took place at the OPA. Marek Leykam, although criticised during the show, was treated far more leniently in comparison: his statements were published, one of his designs was reproduced (although one that was very conservative in its form). In his case this was more of a show-trial: a very public process of compelling a celebrated architect to reform and to correct his line.

The illustrative materials from the OPA published after the elimination of the “Corbusier leanings” constituted a handbook, so to speak, of architectural and town-planning solutions which were acceptable and permissible under Stalinism and which were intended to lay the foundations for future Socialist architecture in Poland. The presence of diverse variants of decorative architecture in the manner of Auguste Perret was tacitly accepted, despite the declared emphasis on the role of references to tradition and the more or less literal re-workings of various motifs, details and the entire compositional schemata evoking Classicist, Renaissance and Baroque styles. With regard to themes, in turn, illustrative materials published in the press highlighted the rich programme of endeavours undertaken by the People’s Republic of Poland in the areas of public buildings, with particular emphasis on the role of scientific, cultural and educational institutions in the architectural landscape of the newly established state. Interestingly, the OPA did not include any model design that would fully exemplify this message. Maybe that is why one of the articles referring to the OPA is illustrated with a reproduction of a not exhibited drawing by Jan Knothe showing the Central Cultural Centre (Centralny Dom Kultury) in Marszałkowska Street.²⁴

This sanitised yield of the OPA as the model “production meeting” that demonstrated the introduction of the Socrealist doctrine into Polish architecture was promoted nationwide via a cycle of Regional Architectural Shows (Regionalny Pokaz Architektury, RPA), which were initiated in 1951 as per the decision of Roman Piotrowski, the Minister for City and Residential Estate Construction.²⁵

Thirteen such shows took place over the spring and summer of 1951: in Białystok, Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Katowice, Kielce, Cracow, Lublin, Łódź, Olsztyn, Poznań, Rzeszów, Szczecin and Wrocław.²⁶ During each show, papers modelled

of the Central Department Store, which was equally criticised but much less frequently mentioned in the published summaries, were also overlooked.

24 (JKM), “Wizja Warszawy przyszłości. Pokaz budownictwa” [A vision of the future Warsaw. An architectural show], *Żołnierz Wolności*, 1951, no. 36, p. 4. Knothe’s drawing came from the album by Bolesław Bierut *Sześćioletni plan odbudowy Warszawy* [The six-year plan of the reconstruction of Warsaw], Warsaw, 1951.

25 B. Garliński, *Kolektywna ocena projektów...*, op. cit., p. 7.

26 This is the number given in Bohdan Garliński’s detailed report, including the list of shows (idem, *Architektura polska 1950–1951*, op. cit., pp. 208–209). Texts published later, during the exhibition, mention thirty-three regional shows in the years 1950–1952.

on those delivered at the OPA were given out and criteria for the assessment of the exhibited works were devised. In addition, a group of fifteen designs that had been favourably assessed at the OPA was exhibited at each of the shows, parallel with the same number of works by the local architects.²⁷ An additional goal of the Regional Architectural Shows was to select materials for an ensuing event which was to be crucial to “the raising of architectural output towards Socialist Realism”.²⁸ This event was the national conference of architects, accompanied by a comprehensive exhibition.

The First General Exhibition of Architecture in the People’s Republic of Poland (PWA, 1953)

Preparations for this event, which was initially planned for October 1951, began relatively late, i.e. in May of that year. The SARP was nominally the exhibition organiser, but the enterprise had certainly been arranged in answer to a command coming from the Party authorities, possibly inspired directly by the Soviet leaders. This is indicated by the fact that both the concept of the event and its date have obvious counterparts in other countries of the Eastern bloc.

In October 1951, a congress of the Association of Hungarian Architects took place at the National Museum in Budapest and was accompanied by an architectural exhibition. Two months later, in December of the same year, a German Congress of Architects took place in East Berlin, at a similarly prestigious venue, i.e. in the Parliament and the seat of the National Front of Democratic Germany – and it was also accompanied by an architectural exhibition. The events in Hungary and in East Germany were both international, with guests coming mainly from the Eastern bloc, but the latter event was also attended by West-German architects. In Czechoslovakia, in turn, in the palace U Hybernů in Prague, a large exhibition entitled *Architektura v českém a slovenském národním dědictví* (Architecture in the Czech and Slovak national heritage) was opened in 1951.²⁹

This is most probably an error, as a total of seventeen regional shows took place in this period, plus the two shows that are discussed above, i.e. the Display of the Works of Warsaw Design Bureaus in 1950 and the OPA.

27 B. Garliński, *Kolektywna ocena projektów...*, op. cit., p. 8; designs exhibited at the OPA enumerated in: idem, *Architektura polska 1950–1951*, op. cit., pp. 208–209.

28 Garliński’s phrase used in the description of the programme of the national exhibition. *Program Wystawy Architektury 1952* [Programme of the architectural exhibition 1952] dated 26 November 1951, documents pertaining to the Exhibition of Architecture in the People’s Republic of Poland, the SARP Archive.

29 *Fragen der deutschen Architektur und des Städtebaus. Referate gehalten anlässlich des ersten Deutschen Architektenkongresses in Berlin, Dezember 1951*, Berlin, 1952; W. Durth, J. Düwel,

The need to organise the Polish exhibition quickly and effectively was urgent, so it is not surprising that the position of the commissary was entrusted to Bohdan Garliński, who had already proved himself an able organiser and a man who understood the ideological obligations faced by the new architecture. In late May he presented the concept of an exhibition divided into three parts: the didactic (i.e. historical) section, which was to amount to ca. 30% of the programme, the contemporary section, which was to present around one hundred post-war designs and completed projects, and the youth section (10% of the programme).

The plan included placing greater emphasis on design selection and detailed delineation of themes (which were to be a synthesis of the past with the present and technological progress) than it had been done at the OPA. Marcin Weinfeld was appointed the supervisor of the contemporary section, Jan Zachwatowicz of the historical section, and Zbigniew Karpiński of the youth section.

The programme making the concept of the exhibition more specific was written by Garliński in the autumn of 1951. In this programme, he delineated a plan for arranging the contemporary section around the following issues: home, work, culture, science and education, health and hygiene, public use, sport, physical culture and relaxation, administration.³⁰

Thus the speed and efficiency of collecting materials for the most important part of the exhibition, i.e. the contemporary one, from various architectural centres was of key importance. The already mentioned Regional Architectural Shows, whose direct organiser had been Garliński, proved very helpful. Since he was very active as the commissary of the national exhibition, by the summer of 1951 it may have been expected that the set deadline would be met. However, unforeseen problems arose, one of them being the lack of a guaranteed budget; at one point Garliński considered putting a stop to the preparations altogether. Ultimately, towards the end of the year a more restricted programme was accepted and the date of the exhibition and the congress was set for the middle of 1952; but even this date was later postponed, more than once.

The question of the venue was crucial. The Zachęta building was considered from the very beginning, but the organisers wanted to acquire exhibition halls in the National Museum and, after this plan fell through, in the newly finished edifice of the Parliament. The Zachęta was finally settled on, and the

N. Gutschow, *Architektur und Städtebau der DDR. Die frühen Jahren*, Berlin, 2007, p. 250. E. Prakfalvi, *Magyar építészet 1945–1959. Periodizációs vázlat*, in: *Modern és szocreál. Építészet és tervezés Magyarországon 1945–1959*, ed. Z. Fehérvári, V. Hajdú, E. Prakfalvi, Magyar Építészeti Múzeum, Budapest, 2006, p. 14; E. Prakfalvi, P. Ritoók, "Socialist in content, national in form. Searching for national forms in the Hungarian architecture of the mid-1950s", *Autoportret*, 2010, no. 3, pp. 68–69; *Architektura v českém a slovenském národním dědictví*, Osvěta, Praha, 1952.

30 *Program Wystawy Architektury 1952*, op. cit.

exhibition designers appointed, only in May of 1952. The team: Kazimierz Muszyński, Mieczysław Piprek and Roman Dutkiewicz, was responsible for the exhibition itself, while Michał Kokozowow, Tadeusz Iskierka and Jerzy Wasilewski were entrusted with the preparation of the formal reception area: the main hall, the staircase and the environs of the building.³¹

The Chief Executive of SARP wished that both the exhibition and the planned National Council of Architects take place at the Zachęta, which caused further delays. A date that was feasible and, as it turned out, would be kept was established only in November of 1952. In addition, it proved impossible to hold both events in one place; the Council of Ministers Palace was selected as the venue for the meeting of the National Council of Architects.

The fact that the exhibition opened with a delay of a year and a half evidently resulted not only from financial difficulties, but also from the indifference, or perhaps even objections, with which both the Ministry of Culture and the Parliament Chancellery regarded the needs and ambitions of the architects' milieu. It seems that the architects lacked strong political support from the highest authorities, who may not have been entirely convinced that the milieu was sufficiently prepared for such a prestigious event; for instance, one gets the distinct impression that the success of ideological propaganda as exerted by the Regional Architectural Shows held in 1951 was viewed with some scepticism. The shows revealed the inadequacies of the provincial architectural centres; this triggered the reform of the Regional Show formula in 1952. Only four shows were held in that year, but they were much larger (389 designs in total). Also, they were located in the main architectural centres of the regions, i.e. in Gdańsk, Cracow, Poznań and Warsaw, which facilitated ideological supervision.³²

In fact, throughout the entire, long period of preparations the organisers of the shows were plagued by the fear of selecting wrong designs. Designs selected for a Regional Show or recommended by the architectural bureaus (the latter procedure concerned only pre-1952 designs) had to pass through several stages of the process of approval, the ultimate sanction being the decision of the Chief Executive of the SARP.³³

31 Originally, the design was to be prepared by Jerzy Staniszkis, but he was abroad at the time. A letter of the Exhibition Committee to the Parliament Chancellery dated 25 February 1952; a note from the Chief Executive of the SARP to the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party dated 29 August 1952, documents pertaining to the Exhibition of Architecture in the People's Republic of Poland, the SARP Archive.

32 B. Garliński, "Regionalne Pokazy Architektury 1952" [Regional Architectural Shows 1952], *Architektura*, 1953, no. 3, pp. 77–84.

33 B. Garliński, "Uwagi o Pierwszej Powszechnej Wystawie Architektury" [Notes on the First General Exhibition of Architecture], *Architektura*, 1953, no. 5, p. 140, third page of the cover.

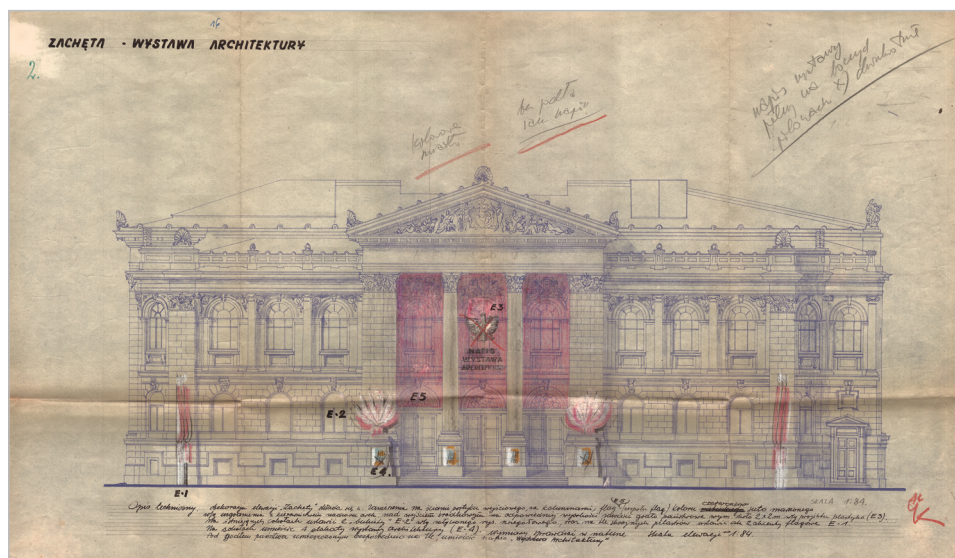


Fig. 3. Design for the decoration of the Zachęta for the PWA, 1953, photo: the SARP Archive, Warsaw

The ceremonial opening of the exhibition, held on 8 March, was fairly modest and the comments in the press were brief and rather reserved. This propagandist reticence was certainly caused by official mourning, as Stalin had died three days earlier (incidentally, the city of Katowice was renamed Stalinoogród a day before the exhibition's opening; it proved impossible to change the name in the already published catalogue).³⁴

The exhibition itself, however – despite the earlier financial difficulties – was prepared meticulously and with considerable flair, at least for the realities of the day. Zachęta's edifice was decorated on the outside and the exterior decoration also included an inscription made up of three-dimensional letters placed along Królewska Street from the Ogród Saski side; flower parterres were to be set up on the patch of greenery in front of the edifice (Figs. 3–5).³⁵

On their way to the main exhibition halls on the first floor, visitors symbolically retraced the path of the ideological education that Polish architecture had acquired in the preceding five years. Excerpts from fundamental documents of the era, namely from the Resolution of the National Party Meeting of Architects from 1949 and the new statute of the SARP from 1951, were displayed on the ground floor (Fig. 6). Quotations from Lenin, Bierut (Fig. 7)

³⁴ It is now impossible to find the names of the officials who attended the opening.

³⁵ A design for the arrangement of the square in front of the Zachęta, documents pertaining to the Exhibition of Architecture in the People's Republic of Poland, the SARP Archive.



Fig. 4. Decoration of Królewska Street for the PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

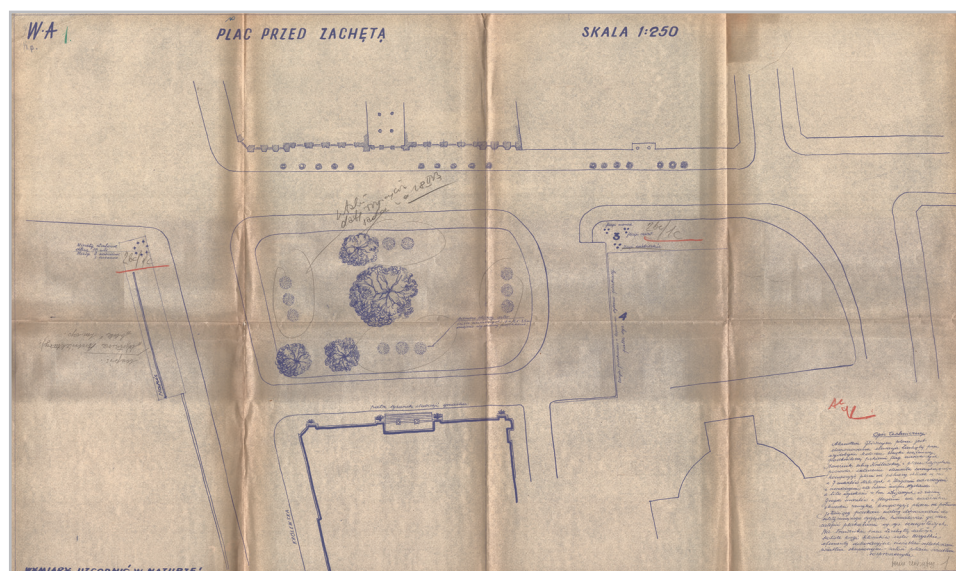


Fig. 5. Design for the decoration of Zachęta's front lawn for the PWA, 1953, photo: the SARP Archive, Warsaw

Fig. 6. Placard with a quotation from the SARP statute, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



and Stalin were to be seen on the mezzanine (no iconographic record of the last placard seems to have survived). This theme culminated with placards bearing the names of architects who had won national art awards, which were placed in the hall of the first floor.

The implemented plan of the main section of the PWA differed from the initial concept. The idea of arranging the contemporary section around current issues was abandoned; instead, each exhibition room focused on the architecture of some region of Poland (Fig. 8). The historical section was not set off spatially, as had been planned. Materials that had been collected for this section were also divided according to region and exhibited in rooms containing contemporary designs.

The main section of the PWA occupied seven exhibition rooms on the first floor. The largest one, namely the Matejko Hall, was devoted to Warsaw and the region of Mazovia. The neighbouring Narutowicz Hall was the Hall of Honour and focused on the Polish-Soviet friendship, but in fact it was also filled with designs from Warsaw. The third-largest room (Room No. X on plan) focused on Lesser Poland, and the much smaller room (No. IX on plan) on Greater Poland. Silesia, Pomerania and Podlachia, the last one including the Łódź area, occupied the three rooms of the front enfilade (Nos. VI, VII, VIII

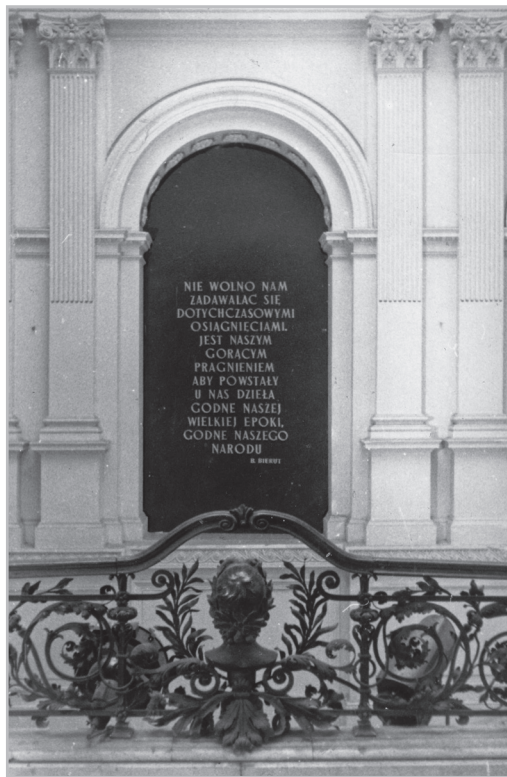


Fig. 7. Placard with a quotation from B. Bierut, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

on plan). The initial conception for the youth section was retained; it was located on the ground floor.³⁶

When explaining the change of conception, Garliński emphasised that the regional arrangement was more attractive to the general public and that it facilitated making comparisons among the achievements of various circles. He also admitted – with surprising frankness – that too few designs of residential and industrial buildings had passed all stages of the process of approval for separate sections to be formed.³⁷

Another reason that may be added here is the fundamental conflict between the initial conception and the Socrealist vision of architecture as great art, which was forcefully promoted at the exhibition. The proposed thematic

³⁶ Very little is known about the Youth Room; it was not included in the catalogue record. Only one review mentions, albeit very generally, the designs exhibited in this room: "This is where the best diploma designs by young architects have been grouped. The vast range of topics is noteworthy. There are designs for residential and industrial architecture in large cities and designs for tiny, delicate country houses at summer resorts". (Ant), "Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej" [The exhibition of architecture in the People's Republic of Poland], *Wola Ludu*, 1953, no. 69, p. 5.

³⁷ B. Garliński, "Uwagi o Pierwszej...", op. cit., third page of the cover.

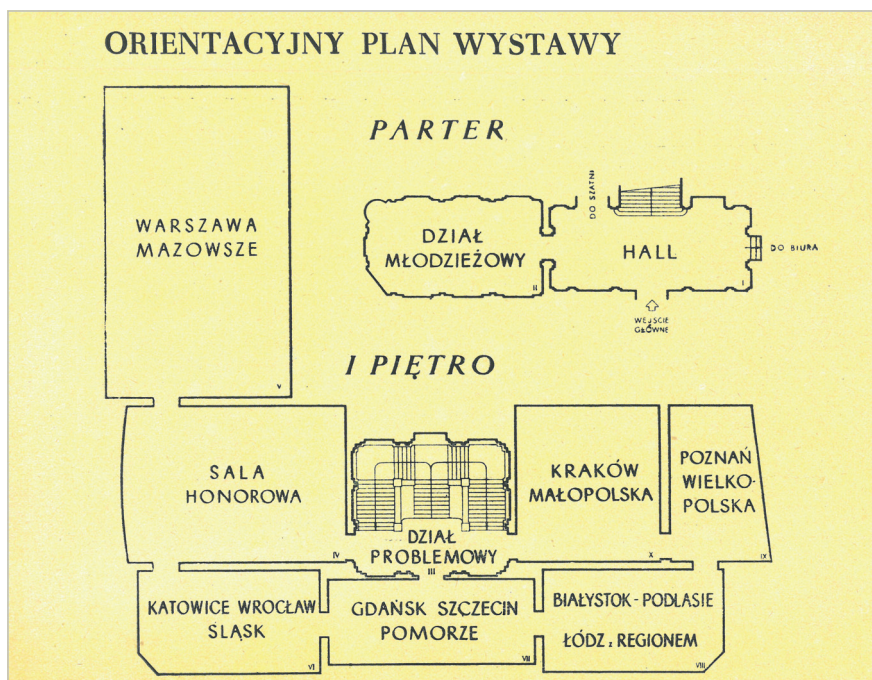


Fig. 8. Ground plan, PWA, 1953 (after *Pierwsza Powszechna Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej* [The first general exhibition of architecture in the People's Republic of Poland], exhibition catalogue, Zachęta, Warsaw, 1953)

arrangement resembled the manner of ordering the material at industrial exhibitions or fairs. In addition, creating the arrangement according to current issues could provoke undesirable associations with the scientific aims of the architects of the Modern Movement who were ritually condemned as “Formalists and Constructivists” and who emphasised the analytic, all-inclusive and technical nature of the work of an architect and town planner. The “CIAM grille”, a systematising method of presenting the issues under discussion which had been introduced in 1949 at the 7th International Congresses of Modern Architecture in Bergamo, is worth mentioning in this context.

The aim of the PWA, however, was to present architecture not as a field of expert knowledge, but as an expression of the culture of a society engaged in building Socialism. To achieve this aim, it was necessary for architecture to be “endorsed by the working masses, by all the nation”.³⁸ Roman Piotrowski pointed out in his suggestive statement that in order for the exhibition to

38 The introduction by the Minister for City and Residential Estate Construction, Roman Piotrowski, in: *Pierwsza Powszechna Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej* [The First General Exhibition of Architecture in the People's Republic of Poland], exhibition catalogue, Zachęta, Stowarzyszenie Architektów Polskich, Warsaw, 1953, pp. 7–8.



Fig. 9. The Matejko Hall, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

overcome the difficulty posed by the “attachment of the works of architecture to the ground” – a feature that limited their influence, thus making it less than general – it was necessary to “present the exhibits realistically” and to offer a selection of the most characteristic contemporary and historical works.

In order to fulfil this postulate, numerous models of both old and recently designed construction projects were turned into one of the key elements of the exhibition.³⁹ Contemporary and historical edifices and urban complexes, set side by side on nearly identical plinths and visually similar to one another because of their structure, were intended to impinge on the visitors’ awareness as carriers of the regions’ architectural identity made cohesive by the continu-

³⁹ Models of the following new construction projects can be recognised at the exhibition: Warsaw – the Palace of Culture and Science, the Marszałkowska Residential Estate (MDM), the Praga II estate, the Parliament building, the Grand Theatre, the National Bank of Poland, the Central Station; Gliwice – the Biprohut office block; Kalisz – the nursing academy; Katowice – Inland Revenue building; Cracow – the centre of Nowa Huta (two models); Łódź – the University Library, the National Theatre; Rzeszów – the Tourist’s House; Zakopane – the Tourist’s House; Moscow – the Polish pavilion at the All-Soviet Agricultural Exhibition. Models of historical edifices that can be recognised: a plaster cast of the column from Strzelno; Gdańsk – the Town Hall tower; Poznań – market square with the Town Hall; Szydłów – the town plan model.

ity of historical tradition. This all-encompassing, suggestive image of the past as integrated into the present culminated in a placard located in the Matejko Hall (Fig. 9). In the centrepiece was a photograph of Józef Sigalin presenting “construction plans for Socialist Warsaw” to Bolesław Bierut, members of the government and members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party. It was surrounded by photographs of historical buildings (on the left-hand side) and new construction projects (on the right-hand side); this was to suggest an ideological connection between the Łazienki Palace, the castle in Baranów Sandomierski, Poznań’s Town Hall, the Wawel Castle or the Collegium Maius and such architectural projects as the Parliament building, the Marszałkowska Residential Estate, the East–West Freeway (Trasa W–Z), the industrial complex of the Passenger Automobile Factory (FSO) in Żerań, or the Party House complexes in Warsaw or Kielce. Taken all together, these projects were an apotheosis of the causative power of Bolesław Bierut, “the first architect of the country” and – considering that the entire PWA was arranged by region – the projects underscored the countrywide supremacy of the mission of building (or rebuilding) Warsaw.

The same theme was underlined by the Hall of Honour. It focused on the aspirations of the new authorities to legitimate power, alluded to by the wall decoration with the bust of Bierut seen against the background of a draped white-and-red flag and an excerpt from the Party’s ideological statement: “People’s democracy must acknowledge the vast heritage of progressive creators in all areas of Polish culture; it must refer to the progressive, humanistic and democratic tradition present in our culture” (Fig. 10). The most prestigious components of the new city centre were proposed as an architectural embodiment of this thought: the Palace of Culture and Science (designs and photographs), the Marszałkowska Residential Estate (placards and a model), the Party House (a photograph) and designs awarded in the contest for the Central Square of Warsaw (Fig. 11). It was precisely during the spring of 1953 – while the PWA was in progress – that the steel skeleton of the Palace of Culture and Science was being raised and the growing structure appeared against the city’s skyline for the first time. It constituted a peculiar, dynamic illustration to the causative power of the new authorities as declared at the exhibition – an illustration which, being anchored in the space of a city ruled by these authorities, lent them credibility. Today it is difficult to say whether this was intentional; after all, the exhibition’s opening date was postponed several times.

In keeping with the Socrealist principle of an unbreakable connection between architecture and the visual arts, the exhibition included contemporary figural sculptures with an iconography typical of the era, photographs of decorations from the already completed projects (e.g. the MDM estate) and copies of elements and architectural details from historical monuments, the most striking of which was the plaster cast of a Romanesque column discovered in 1946 in Strzelno (Fig. 12).



Fig. 10. The Hall of Honour, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



Fig. 11. The Hall of Honour, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



Fig. 12. Plaster cast of the column from Strzelno, the Greater Poland Room, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

A large-scale photograph of the Renaissance gate of Brzeg Castle, which was located in the Silesia Room, constituted an important element of the exhibition's programme. As the gate was decorated with sculpted portraits of Polish kings and the Piast rulers of Silesia, it evidently contributed to confirming the Polish presence in Lower Silesia from the perspective of art history (Fig. 13).

It is symptomatic that, apart from this one example, the programme did not include ancient monumental figural sculptures. The preferred variety were old edifices devoid of a message and ornamental motifs, as well as the works of artisans, such as the wooden chest in the Greater Poland Room. The intention was probably to avoid an undesirable and potentially problematic iconography, e.g. Christian motifs. The already mentioned column from Strzelno was one of the very few religious elements in the otherwise almost entirely secular vision of Poland's past, as proposed by Jan Zachwatowicz. Churches were avoided, also on photographs of historical monuments – the First Republic was represented mainly by residences and royal foundations and by urban architecture. Special attention was paid to Classicism in the Warsaw milieu, including the era of the Congress Kingdom, which made it possible to accentuate the programme of constructing monumental public buildings (Fig. 14).



Fig. 13. The Matejko Hall, in the background a photograph of Brzeg Castle in the Silesia Room, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

The historical narrative ended on edifices constructed in the 1830s. This was probably caused by the dialectic approach to history and art according to which the formation of modern-day capitalism had begun in that period.⁴⁰ Also, it would be wrong to overlook a phenomenon which went beyond Stalinism, i.e. the profound dislike for historicist styles that had been current in the latter half of the 19th century, which was then prevalent in architects' milieus. Even Henryk Marconi or Franciszek Maria Lanci, architects whose high standing was never questioned in the period of Socrealism, were in dis-favour at the exhibition.⁴¹

40 During the National Party Meeting of Architects in 1949, Jan Minorski said: "The collapse of the Empire style and the coming of eclecticism are inseparably linked with the emergence and development of a contemporary capitalist society". J. Minorski, *Oblicze współczesnej polskiej twórczości architektonicznej* [The face of contemporary Polish architectural output], in: *O polską architekturę socjalistyczną...*, op. cit., p. 66.

41 Their status is additionally confirmed by the fact that the edifices they had designed in Warsaw were rebuilt after the war damage; also, the series "Mistrzowie Architektury Polskiej" [The masters of Polish architecture] published by the Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning included a monograph on Lanci.



Fig. 14. The Matejko Hall, part of the historical display, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

In fact, more architects were conspicuously absent. Garliński's initial plan, conceived in 1951, included the legacy of the inter-war period and the first years of post-war reconstruction. Ultimately, however, the oldest 20th-century building to be exhibited at the PWA was most probably the Party House in Warsaw, designed in 1947. In this way such architects as Jan Heurich Jr. and Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz disappeared from the programme.

The exhibition included only one of those luminaries of Polish architecture of the first half of the 20th century who were acknowledged in the period of Socrealism, namely Stanisław Noakowski. His sketches were displayed among the students' drawings in the youth section and his drawings of imaginary buildings in the style of the Polish Renaissance adorned the exhibition's catalogue. Noakowski, who had presented a suggestive vision of the national past and fulfilled the role of a mentor of future creators, perfectly matched the Socrealist idea of education in the field of architecture (as long as the churches, which he had often drawn, were ignored).

The contemporary section of the PWA was, of course, intended to create new leading lights. The main focus was on Bohdan Pniewski, the only architect to be honoured by having three models of his designs displayed, namely the Parliament building, the Grand Theatre and the National Bank of Poland. The others were Wacław Rembiszewski (six designs that he had authored or co-authored

were on display), Jan Bogusławski (six designs), Zygmunt Stępiński (six designs) and the team of the “Tigers”, i.e. Waław Kłyszewski, Jerzy Mokrzyński and Eugeniusz Wierzbicki, who was, incidentally, the then-chairman of the SARP (five designs).⁴² All of these architects, with the single exception of Rembiszewski, came from the Warsaw milieu; it is, therefore, quite obvious that the identity of the new Polish architecture was still determined in the capital.

The absence of designs by Marek Leykam, whose output had been hotly debated at the OPA two years earlier, is noteworthy. It may be treated as a symbolic failure, although of a very peculiar kind: the architect did not become a model object of ideological re-education – a process that was greatly favoured in the Stalinist system.

Even more interesting, perhaps, is the general question: Regardless of the stability of the fundamental ideological programme and formal solutions, to what extent did the PWA change the vision of Polish Socialist architecture as endorsed at the OPA?⁴³ One new element was certainly the more emphatically marked historical legitimisation, indicated by the effort to present this architecture as a dialectically correct continuation of progressive traditions. It brought about further effects: in his statement published in *Stolica*, Jan Zachwatowicz underlined that “referring to the progressive traditions of bygone days [...] contemporary architecture also evinces tendencies towards regional variations”.⁴⁴

Zachwatowicz’s works should, of course, be understood not as a statement of fact, but as a postulate, and, worse still, not an easy one to realise, because it was contrary to the logic of the organisational transformations that were then being implemented in architecture. The rich traditions of some regions were often not reflected in the contemporary achievements of the local milieus. Zachwatowicz himself was circumspect in talking about the difficulties caused by the fact that the areas covered by particular design bureaus were inconsistent with Poland’s historical geography. Garliński openly complained that he had an insufficient amount of material to arrange some regional rooms, whereas the part devoted to Warsaw and Mazovia was outsized. The exhibition’s programme tried to cover up these inequalities by combining the achievements of fairly distant regions in one room; for instance, the justification for putting Podlachia and the Łódź area together was that their capital cities, both being “neglected working-class centres”, were deemed similar.⁴⁵

42 When it comes to the number of exhibited placards, the record was set by Sigalin’s team, which had designed the East–West Freeway and the Marszałkowska Residential Estate.

43 It must be noted that at the PWA, similarly to the OPA, only some 30–40% of the exhibited designs were published.

44 “Regionalizm w architekturze. Rozmowa z patronem działu historycznego prof. J. Zachwatowiczem” [Regionalism in architecture: interview with the supervisor of the historical section Prof. J. Zachwatowicz], interview by M. S., *Stolica*, 1953, no. 13, p. 8.

45 S. Gawłowski, “Wystawa architektury w ‘Zachęcie’” [The exhibition of architecture at the “Zachęta”], *Słowo Powszechne*, 1953, no. 63, p. 4.



Fig. 15. The Pomerania Room, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

As far as can be judged on the basis of the surviving iconographic materials, the local character was more strongly marked in the northern-Renaissance motifs evident in the designs proposed for Gdańsk and its environs (Fig. 15) and in the architecture of the Podhale region.

The postulated regional character of architecture was in clear opposition to its typicality, which was strongly promoted at the PWA. The exhibition included several designs on widely differing themes: from an office building through a school and residential blocks to a summer pasture cowshed and a building for storing beehives over winter. These had mostly been produced in design offices that were active in Warsaw, so they were placed in the Warsaw and Mazovia Room. This reflected the existing centralisation of the system of producing and distributing technical documentation. The local context was impossible to consider in these circumstances; typical designs intended for mass implementation were described as “universal”, meant to introduce a “distinctively national harmony”.⁴⁶

This grandiose language is not surprising; typicality was one of the determining categories of the aesthetic of Socrealism. In his report at the 19th Con-

46 A. Ciborowski, “Co to jest projekt typowy” [What a typical design is], *Architektura*, 1953, no. 2, p. 55.

gress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in 1952, Georgy Malenkov rather curiously explained typicality as “the sharpening of the image of reality”.⁴⁷ Yet at the same time this language inadvertently revealed that the regionalism of architecture in the Stalinist period was superficial. Implementing typical designs had a practical aspect; it was one of the ways of alleviating the results of structural flaws in the construction industry.⁴⁸ In the realities of Poland in the year 1953, typicality may be considered an attempt – if a very ineffective one – to achieve an “escape forward”, i.e. to lower costs and to lessen the input of construction materials into consumption enterprises (which included the construction of non-productive buildings). One of the pertinent methods was the implementation of construction norms in typical projects, and these norms were being energetically worked out at the time. Besides, the design for a residential building made of hardboard, which was exhibited at the PWA, is a testimony to the cutback programme of construction from locally sourced or waste materials as undertaken in 1953. This indicates that the importance of economic matters, which were present at the OPA only as a series of papers, had considerably increased in the meantime.⁴⁹

It is obvious that the PWA revealed some tensions between components which together constituted the offered vision of the future Socialist architecture. The arrangement of material according to regions in a way confirmed the prestige and professional standing of the conservators who, having deftly adjusted themselves to the current rhetoric, cemented the status of historical heritage as an element that symbolically subjugated the future.⁵⁰ This,

47 W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska w latach 1950–1954* [Socrealism. Polish art in the years 1950–1954], Cracow, 1991, p. 18; B. Groys, *Stalin jako totalne dzieło sztuki* [Stalin as a total work of art], translated by P. Kozak, Warsaw, 2010, p. 76; T. Gryglewicz, *Komunizm w sztuce polskiej* [Communism in Polish art], <http://www.omp.org.pl/artukul.php?artykul=162> [accessed 20 May 2016].

48 The so-called typical sections of residential buildings appeared in the Soviet architecture in the 1930s. They were not only a manifestation of the search for optimal planning solutions, but also an attempt to effectively distribute the relatively small cadre of architects and to lighten their workload, especially since architects were then especially needed for the by then already ongoing programme of industrial enterprises. See L. Tomaszewski, “Budownictwo i urbanistyka w ZSRR” [Construction and urban planning in the Soviet Union], *Architektura i Budownictwo*, 1931, no. 7, pp. 259–260.

49 This seems to echo the approach of Milyutin, who recommended mass construction from cheap materials (N. Milûtin, *Socgorod* [The Socialist City], Moscow, 1930, p. 61). His proposal was not followed, however, at least not at the level of official statements, and Milyutin himself lost his position and influence in the 1930s, D. S. Hmel’nickij, «*Socgorod*» Nikolaâ Milûtina v kontekste soverskoi istorii [Milyutin’s “Socialist City” in the context of Soviet history], http://archi.ru/lib/e_publication_for_print.html?id=1850569826 [accessed 10 May 2016].

50 The process of the conservators’ milieu’s adjustment to slogans proffered during the ideological offensive of Socrealism is described by Piotr Majewski in *Ideologia i konserwacja. Architektura zabytkowa w Polsce w czasach socrealizmu* [Ideology and conservation. Historical architecture in Poland in the period of Socrealism], Warsaw, 2009, esp. pp. 149–152.

however, made it more difficult to present those components of the exhibition which, from the ideological point of view, were its key part, i.e. the new designs. In accordance with the Modernist myth of regeneration, the new designs were supposed to always occupy a privileged position in relation to the monuments of the past.⁵¹ Also, at the PWA the public and official image of Stalinist architecture as mainly a fine art began to be questioned for the first time. The harbingers of the unconcealed technocracy that was to dominate the official discourse of the Polish construction industry in the following decade appeared at the PWA.

The exhibition at the Zachęta was very popular with the public, which is only in part explained as resulting from the efforts of propaganda since it was seen by fifty thousand visitors, of which only four thousand took part in the guided tours.⁵² This interest seems understandable, considering that the visitors were members of the post-war world – still only a few years old – in which new ideas in architecture and urban planning seemed to have a great power to cause change. Efforts to respond to this interest are evident on both sides of the Iron Curtain (see the *Festival of Britain* in 1951).⁵³

In the reality of a totalitarian Communist country it was impossible to count on a public debate regarding the proposed vision of architecture in the newly constructed Poland that would be ideologically unconstrained and free from ritualised formulas; this had already been proved by the OPA. Reports from the exhibition and the accompanying reviews in the daily press were mostly conventionalised – and surprisingly few in number.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, it would be difficult to overlook the fact that Stalin's death managed to cause, if only to a limited extent, a change in the tone of some statements concerning the PWA. This is evident already in the appraisal of the exhibition as delivered by the team comprising Zdzisław Mąceński, Tadeusz Zieliński and Adam Kotarbiński during the First National Council of Architects, which finally took place on 12–15 April.⁵⁵ The questions posed in the appraisal, namely: "Which designs are good? Which designs suit the requirements of Socialist Realism?", were typical of the architects' production meetings in recent years; but the answers to these questions deviated from the

51 P. Juskiewicz, *Cień modernizmu* [The shadow of modernism], Poznań, 2013, pp. 66–67.

52 "Odpowiadamy na pytania w sprawie Powszechnej Wystawy Architektury" [Answers to questions concerning the General Exhibition of Architecture], *Stolica*, 1953, no. 21, p. 10.

53 B. Conekin, *"The Autobiography of a Nation": The 1951 Festival of Britain*, Manchester, 2003.

54 Of all the popular, non-specialist press, *Stolica* published the most varied material, which included interviews with the section supervisors and with Bohdan Pniewski.

55 Known from the summary published in: "Krajowa Narada Architektów. Referat o wystawie" [The National Council of Architects. Paper on the Exhibition], *Architektura*, 1953, no. 7, pp. 172–174. Bohdan Pniewski, who also participated in the team's work, was not mentioned. M. Czapelski, *Bohdan Pniewski...*, op. cit., p. 333.

patterns of criticism which by then had already been entrenched. The review was not dominated by a vision of architecture that was typical of Stalinism; a subjectivist approach to both the architect as a person and to the works of architecture is evident instead. Policies already implemented in the construction industry were censured in the conclusion. Also noteworthy is the condemnation – based on the legacy of Functionalism and out of necessity delivered in a rather veiled fashion – of the superficiality and inconsistency of the Socrealist design practice.

According to the published materials, the attitudes expressed in this review did not prevail at the Council. The debaters generally toed the line of Stalinist ideology; visitors from countries of the “people’s democracy” were especially compliant. Yet it is worth stressing that critical remarks were expressed by some Poles, e.g. by Stanisław Juchnowicz, who pointed out that the façades of new buildings in Nowa Huta were being left unfinished.⁵⁶

Even the resolution of the National Council of Architects, although filled with ideological formulas, contains passages referring to the organisational problems that plagued the architectural milieus in Poland (e.g. bureaucracy and the weakness of these milieus in smaller centres) and also to the unsatisfactory quality of the architects’ work (e.g. the failure to use new materials and construction methods, the insufficient quality of typical designs). Considering the acute problems faced by the milieu, the call for “architectural excellence” as found in the resolution sounds like a plea for supernatural aid and is a testimony to the Stalinists’ desperate powerlessness and their attempts to rally in the face of the growing difficulties.⁵⁷

The most telling indication of the coming re-evaluation of the architectural discourse is an essay that appraised the residential architecture designs exhibited at the PWA.⁵⁸ It contained a fundamental critique of the manner of presenting the designs at the exhibition. The charges concerned the superficiality of these presentations and their focus on empty visual effects with a concurrent disregard for the arrangement of interiors. Thus the accusations were directed against the organisers, who preferred typically Socrealist idealised and suggestive sketches, and the authors of the designs, who were accused of belonging to the “achievement-oriented elite” of architects (Zygmunt Stepiński and members of the “Tiger” team were mentioned by name).⁵⁹ In addition,

56 “Krajowa Narada Architektów. Zagadnienia regionów” [The National Council of Architects: the issue of the regions], *Architektura*, *ibid.*, p. 183.

57 “Rezolucja Pierwszej Krajowej Narady Architektów” [The resolution of the First National Council of Architects], *Architektura*, 1953, no. 5, pp. 113–114.

58 Z. Malicki, A. Uniejewski, “O projektach mieszkaniowych na I Powszechnej Wystawie Architektury Polski Ludowej” [On the residential architecture designs at the First General Exhibition of Architecture in the People’s Republic of Poland], *Miasto*, 1953, no. 5, pp. 16–19.

59 On the particular nature of Socrealist architectural drawing, see W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska...*, *op. cit.*, the chapter entitled “Mistycyzm architektury” [The mysticism of architecture], pp. 42–58.

the authors of the essay, Zaslław Malicki and Andrzej Uniejewski, criticised the flawed conception of monumentalism, which they called the “trombone style”. They did not dare to issue a fundamental critique of the Marszałkowska Residential Estate (MDM); instead, they levelled the accusation of “a boundless surfeit of detail coupled with some clumsiness in its application” against the new design of the Młynów estate in Warsaw. In fact, their general criticism of the way of making allusions to tradition by “attaching a piece almost exactly copied from the Wawel Castle, from Krasiczyn or from the faraway Florence to the wall of a residential block” referred to the basic way of designing architecture in the period of Socrealism.

This essay put the manner of presenting designs at the exhibition and the quality of the functional solutions applied therein in the centre of attention, and in this way it denounced the constituting components of the vision of Polish Socialist architecture. Thus it anticipated the argumentation which would be typical of the “thaw” criticism. It did not use the language of production meetings; it opened the path towards a debate that would culminate during the National Council of Architects in March of 1956.⁶⁰

Hence, from the point of view of the organisers, the exhibitions of architecture hosted by the Zachęta, as well as the vision of the future Poland which they were intended to create, suffered a total defeat. It cannot be ignored, however, that many of their key elements played an important role in the subsequent decades. The ideas of typicality and standardisation which had been brought to the fore at the PWA would return, reformulated, after a few years’ break to become an important component of the policy implemented in the construction industry from 1959 until the collapse of Wiesław Gomułka’s administration.⁶¹ The Regional Architectural Shows, in turn, lost their ideological function and subservience to the central event and underwent a telling correction of their name; as Regional Architectural Reviews, they became an important recurring event at many centres; at some of them they are held to this day.

Regardless of its considerable ideological load, the PWA certainly played a positive role in popularising historical architecture. It was noted during the exhibition that visitors were very interested in display cases containing various pertinent books (which, incidentally, were not on sale).⁶² It has been reported – although this may be a slightly exaggerated account – that the publishing

60 On the “thaw” discussions in the architectural milieu, see W. Baraniewski, *Odwilżowe dylematy polskich architektów* [The thaw dilemmas of Polish architects], in: *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 r.* [Thaw: art ca. 1956], ed. P. Piotrowski, exhibition catalogue, National Museum in Poznań, Poznań, 1996, pp. 129–132.

61 Uchwała nr 285 Rady Ministrów z dnia 2 lipca 1959 r. w sprawie przyjęcia tez dotyczących typizacji w budownictwie [Act no. 285 of the Council of Ministers dated 2 July 1959 on the acceptance of theses regarding typicality in the construction industry], *Monitor Polski*, 1959, no. 70, item 365.

62 “Odpowiadamy na pytania...”, op. cit., p. 10.

programme triggered by the PWA resulted in the publication of many valuable volumes. The monumental *Architektura polska do połowy XIX wieku* [Polish architecture until the middle of the 19th century] by Jan Zachwatowicz may be considered one of these.⁶³ The series “Mistrzowie Architektury Polskiej” [The masters of Polish architecture] began to be published in 1952 and, over the following four years, developed into a set of monographs which at the time constituted a vast achievement on behalf of the scholarly milieu.

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

Abstract

Exhibitions of contemporary designs accompanied by their public criticism and assessment by a commission were meant to be a tool in implementing Socrealism in Polish architecture – a process which had been announced in 1949. The First National Exposition of Architectural Design (OPA, 22 January – 28 February 1951), housed in the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art building in Warsaw, was one of the most widely advertised events of this kind. Its discussion exposes the peculiar atmosphere of these events, the strategies of persuasion and instruction as employed by the organisers in relation to ideological and aesthetic issues, and the reactions of the architects participating in the debates, who generally tried to avoid the aggressive tone of the polemic. In addition, the primacy of technocratic economics, which was later to become one of the key elements of policies concerning the construction industry in the People’s Republic of Poland, was first revealed at the OPA, if only still in the background.

The exhibition at the Zachęta, treated as a production meeting in progress, was to be a preparatory stage for a sweeping exhibition that would present an all-inclusive vision of both historical and contemporary Polish architecture. Such an event accorded with the universal schemata of rituals of social life structured in keeping in line with Stalinism, but the path to the First General Exhibition of Architecture in the People’s Republic of Poland (PWA, 8 March – 22 April 1953) turned out not to be easy. Problems concerning its financing and venue, as well as the lack of political support, resulted in its opening, in the Zachęta building, soon after Stalin’s death. In general, the exhibition’s arrangement followed regional divisions, i.e. both the historical and contemporary material were arranged according to region. An analysis of this plan reveals that it was profoundly ill-suited to the realities of producing architecture in the state-owned design offices when the emphasis on typicality was increasing.

The initial stage of the critique of Socrealism is also inseparably linked with the PWA; the essay appraising the exhibited designs as delivered at the First National Council of Architects in April 1953 must be considered the first text of this kind.

Both the OPA and the PWA are, above all, reminders of the practice of institutional coercion and of the ideological approach to history that were typical of Stalinism. At the same time, however, it should not be forgotten that the exhibition of 1953 resulted in the publication of a series of valuable publications concerning history and art, while the Regional Architectural Shows, instituted in order to select designs to be exhibited at the PWA, evolved into recurring events which in some centres are still organised today.

63 J. Zachwatowicz, *Architektura polska do połowy XIX wieku* [Polish architecture until the middle of the 19th century], Warsaw, 1952.