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MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE IN FILM

This text presents concepts of mapping Modernist Polish architecture presented in the feature films of 1960s. The feature film became an ideal medium in the 1960s for presenting modernity in Poland, as perceived through new buildings erected with the observance of modern trends. The feature films of those times constitute research material, letting us see and grasp the atmosphere of the times through the perspective of modernity recorded in the film shots. An important aspect of the research is the way in which the mapping of movements, modern architecture and feature films can be combined.

Keywords: Mapping, Modern architecture, Feature films

1. THE 20TH CENTURY: SOURCES AND ORIGINS

Modernist architecture in Poland dates back to the interwar period. From 1918 to 1939, modernism¹ in both Poland and elsewhere in Europe led to the development of architectural languages that broke entirely with past conventions. Many Polish architects travelled to Western Europe to gain experience in modern designing through working in important studios, including, among others, that of Le Corbusier (1887-1965). Architectural facilities erected in those times in Poland followed the artistic trends conceived and implemented in the leading European capitals of modernity, such as Berlin, Amsterdam, Prague.

Experience gained in the course of travelling and working in prominent architectural studios across Europe led to the propagation of the international style with-

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in the framework of Polish reality, with the incorporation of local traditions and culture added to a 'base model' or modifying a 'base model' to adjust it to local expectations and tastes. To some extent, shaping modern architecture in Poland always involved the use of regional motifs.

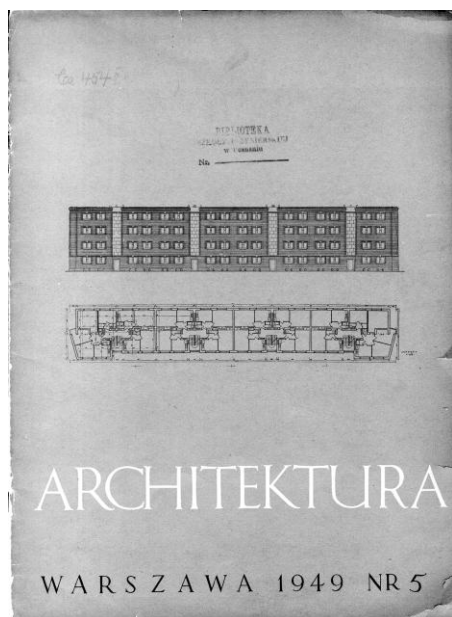


Fig. 1. Cover of the Polish magazine *Architektura* of 1949 with a simple magazine cover layout, characteristic of the period of social realism in Poland [Publication with the approval of the Main Library of Poznan University of Technology]

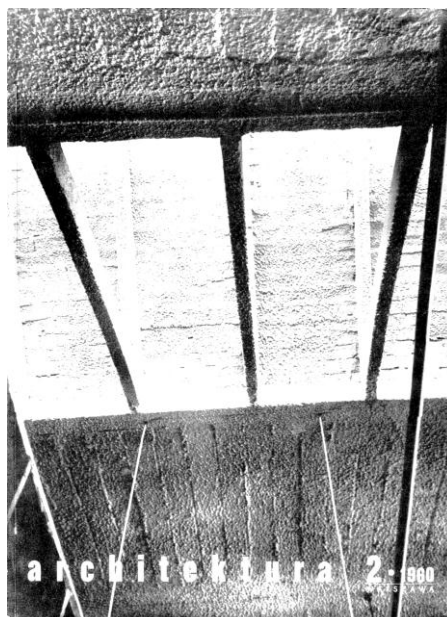


Fig. 2. Cover of the Polish magazine *Architektura* of 1960, manner of presenting architecture changed dramatically – an interesting photo composition, which encourages the viewer to further discover modern architecture [Publication with the approval of the Main Library of Poznan University of Technology]

The regionalisation of modern architecture was, in a way, a carrier of unique features of a given *genius loci*, which aspired to be continued by Polish architects in the post-war period. However, the political situation after 1945 largely contributed to the perception of modernism as a bourgeois style that the new socialist country (Poland) was supposed to condemn (see Fig. 1). Nevertheless, at the end of the 1950s, modernism was again favoured for urban space planning in many Polish towns (see Fig. 2).

Over the last several decades, Polish modern architecture of the second half of the 20th century has been the focus of extensive scientific research. Referring to architecture of that period, we are talking about architectural and urban planning

facilities conceived after 1956. The 1960s were years of rigorous formal and conceptual discuses for the right solutions and intensive development of architectural facilities and spatial complexes in compliance thereof [Nadolny, 2019].



Fig. 3. A view of the 10th-Anniversary Stadium, an icon of Polish post-war modernism, pulled down at the beginning of the 21st century. The database of the National Digital Archives in Warsaw, photograph no. 51-446 [Publication consent of the National Digital Archives in Warsaw]



Fig. 4. The interior of Supersam, a department store in Warsaw, in the second half of the 1960s, pulled down at the end of the 20th century. The database of the National Digital Archives in Warsaw, photograph no. 51-254 [Publication consent of the National Digital Archives in Warsaw]

In many cases the buildings constructed in those times showed a number of features typical of modernism. Geometrical building blocks undoubtedly became visible and tangible signs of the comeback of modernism in Poland. Among the examples of well-designed facilities that were compliant with the *genius loci* atmosphere are the no longer existing 10th-Anniversary Stadium in Warsaw (see Fig. 3) and the building of the self-service store Supersam (see Fig. 4) in Warsaw.

Both of the aforementioned buildings were later pulled down and replaced with new developments at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. The old stadium was replaced with a new one, presently named the National Stadium, whereas in the place of the previous Supersam store there is a new office tower. We shall not forget the ideological issues that, with the passing of time, ceased to play any role in the Polish modernism of the 1960s. We can be fascinated with Polish post-war modernism and attempt to work out the scientific grounds for the examination of this style with the use of new, history-diagnosing tools such as feature and documentary films today.

Modern digital tools allow us to add film frames to the list of materials that supplement the history of relevant buildings, public space facilities or spatial assumptions, and that can be used to create virtual journeys along the city maps as a result of mapping urban space.

The mapping process can now be perceived as an invaluable contribution to the historical record as well as the idea of heritage protection in its contemporary meaning. In my mind, the application of the mapping process will allow us to create a website where data and source materials can be exchanged, and it will, furthermore, contribute to a wider dissemination of important information regarding heritage protection within a given country, region or town among young generations.

2. FILM IMAGE USED AS AN ELEMENT OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE HERITAGE PROTECTION

The film as formally defined as part of heritage in 1980 in a UNESCO document entitled 'Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images'. The document established clear cross-national bases for the exchange and archiving of data recorded on a variety of carriers, including films. The aforementioned document set forth numerous types of films that can be deemed as data carriers, such as feature films, documentary films and short films.

Regarding the issue of mapping space, UNESCO's recommendation is a breakthrough document that views digital data sources as an element of heritage protection. Nevertheless, the document views them as whole artistic pieces, e.g. all types of films, used for the purpose of recording facts or events of great importance for a given country or community. In my opinion, from the point of view of combining

the history of modern architecture and heritage protection, only selected frames or sequences are suitable for the purpose of the protection of the legacy of our past.

In the case of feature films of the 1960s, I focused on single sequences that naturally were not meant by the film director or camera operator to be factual recordings of the existing space of a modern town. These frames accompanied the film plot as unique background (natural decoration) for the story developing in front of the viewers' eyes. From the perspective of my research so far, I would focus on those sequences or frames that document spatial reality as part of daily life in the analysed period.

In reference to my research on Polish modern architecture of the 1960s, I would like to raise several issues. The first is the motion of film images. Similar to the case of the perception of an architectural piece, we aspire to ensure the perception of a facility in motion from a variety of perspectives, angles of view or lighting conditions, depending on the time of day or season. These components allow us to recreate the *genus loci* or to grasp the original conception underlying the design and its implementation, which was lost in the passing of time but recorded in the feature film images.

Another potential benefit is the possibility of seeing those fragments of a building or a spatial assumption that have never been archived by means of, for example, building photographs published in field-specific magazines. It turns out that because of films, we are able to discover those spaces that have been little known to us or ambiguous due to unclear plans, drawings or sketches that have been preserved. If we can use films for the aforementioned purpose, we can visualise and better understand the original concept underlying a given facility erected on the basis of an architectural design that over time may have lost its clarity.

In my view, a film image can be perceived as an invaluable element that can breathe new life into a unique colour scheme applied in the building, its details or the greenery around it, and thus it can modify our perception of the entire conception. I am aware of the fact that with the passing of time, that colours in the film become altered, nevertheless I am convinced that, having worked our unambiguous criteria of assessment and uniform standards of application, we can use film as a tool of heritage protection. From the viewpoint of the history of architecture, film can provide us with a new, innovative and pioneering perspective on the perceptions of modernism, different from the methods we have been using so far.

It is however vital, that the application of a new tool shall require cooperation between the architecture historians, archivists, architectural conservators and filmmakers. Joint efforts propagating the use of film images as a new tool in the area of heritage protection are, in my view, fully grounded and worth further pursuit.

3. THEORETICAL TOOLS SUPPORTING THE USE OF FILM IMAGES AS AN ELEMENT OF THE STRATEGY FOR PROTECTING MODERNIST HERITAGE

When carrying out research in the area of the history of architecture, we often refer to such tools as plans, drawings and maps; all of the named components contribute to a story about a building and can be viewed as relevant pieces of an entire puzzle, i.e. the structure of an entire historical or contemporary urban layout. The process of learning about facilities that from today's perspective have reached the status of an icon is a continuous process, with mapping being of key importance therein. The process aims at widening the range of cognitive values of architectural facilities that, in the opinion of the professionals in the field and of town inhabitants, have played a significant role in history.

As already mentioned, films may become a source of missing information or a source of supplementary documentation for the purpose of the protection of modernist heritage in Poland, as well as in Europe and elsewhere. Such a tendency in heritage protection cannot develop without theoretical foundations. For the purpose thereof, in this particular case we shall make our best efforts to combine the already existing theories developed in the areas of architecture, building conservation and protection with those developed in the area of film images interpretation. The history of architecture in the second half of the 20th century accumulated a wide range of examples of interpretative considerations in reference to architectural pieces, e.g. by Bruno Zevi (1918-2000), Manfredo Tafuri (1935-1994) and others. Each of these theories includes references to film images perceived as a specific type of medium by theoreticians. They, however, paid more attention to descriptions, photographs or drawings.

The book Bruno Zevi published, *Architecture as Space: How to Look at Architecture*, presents a legible and unambiguous message through which the author suggests that a film image shall gain importance in the process of teaching the history of architecture even though at the time of the release of the first Italian version of the book few could imagine a film image as an educative tool. As proof, I would like to quote one of the more interesting fragments of the book: 'Motion pictures are consequently taking their proper place in education and it seems likely that in teaching the history of architecture, the use of films, rather than of books, will greatly advance general spatial education' [Zevi 1974: 59].

Knowledge gained from the key concepts of heritage protection and documents drawn by UNESCO, among others, shall constitute an invaluable contribution to history. Many of these documents have become sources of references to the concept of heritage protection, The feeling of insufficiency still lingers, as can be seen in the present trends of combining a variety of disciplines, concepts or discourses.

My stance here is that it is important to introduce film images as a fixed part of discussions concerning the notion of heritage protection.

Theoretical discussions should, however, be of an inclusive nature and should aspire to have their postulates incorporated into modern achievements in the area of engineering and digital technologies. The application of virtual reality at different levels of heritage protection shall include an additional factor -namely motion picture technology – to supplement modern technologies with film images made in a given epoch or presenting a particular architectural piece.

In the modern world, where media publicity and opportunities for data utilisation in mobile applications can be extensively used, the innovative usage of film images can make an invaluable contribution to the process. Such a novel way could be treated as a marketing strategy promoting feature films as a new tool in the area of protecting the heritage of 20th century architecture and urban planning.

Referring back to my earlier considerations, I am in favour of developing standards for when a researcher can or cannot make use of the feature films from a given analysed period as a research tool, depending on the geographical location of facilities or spatial systems or depending on the period with regard to which a motion picture can be used as a reliable source of information, e.g. the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s or more recent contemporary periods. We could consider working out a concept for using films as an additional tool in the process of developing a concept for the protection of modern architecture heritage, urban design and modern urban landscapes created in the second half of the 20th century.

Each of the above referenced examples of activities promoting the application of film images for the purpose of heritage protection is fully grounded and recommendable. Mapping may prove an inseparable part thereof. The identification of spaces that are culturally and architecturally important for a given community has always been an invaluable and beneficial process. Mapping the space of a town or a district can contribute to the discovery of new components of the cultural environment that might affect the perception of the architecture of the second half of the 20th century, which in turn may become significant for activities such as increasing tourist traffic or developing local business activities.

4. MAPPING THE ARCHITECTURAL SPACE OF POLISH POST-WAR MODERNISM WITH THE USE OF FILM IMAGES

Research material for the needs of my project carried out at Poznan University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture, was downloaded from the database of Polish film website www.Filmpolski.pl, which has a collection of Polish films made, among others, in the years under the research, that is from 1960 to 1970. In

view of the specific nature of the research, I have assumed the following criteria to be met by my research material. The first phase of selection:

- Full-length Polish cinema feature films made in the aforementioned period in Poland by a Polish director, with Polish being the language of the plot.
- The database also includes films that are otherwise connected with the Polish film industry, e.g. films involving a Polish director, Polish actors, Polish landscapes or frames. These films, because of the assumed research criteria, have been excluded from the research for formal reasons.
- The database of Polish films from 1960 – 1970 also includes collections of other types of films, such as: short feature films, television films, television plays, documentaries, cartoons and students' first short films. Because of the criteria adopted by the author for the purpose of the research, I have exclusively analysed full-length cinema feature films.

The preliminary research intended for the selection of the films collected in the database has shown that the number of Polish films made in the relevant years is very high. Another stage in the collecting of the research material was the selection of cinema feature films meeting the adopted criteria from the list of films included in the database of feature films. As I have already mentioned, only Polish films made in Poland and presented in the Polish language were taken into account within the process of detailed selection. It must be stated that from the point of view of the analysed period, in our further research I shall exclusively focus on films with plots featuring contemporary times, which include the time period under my analysis. The film director operating within the Polish cultural zone shall make up another decisive factor.

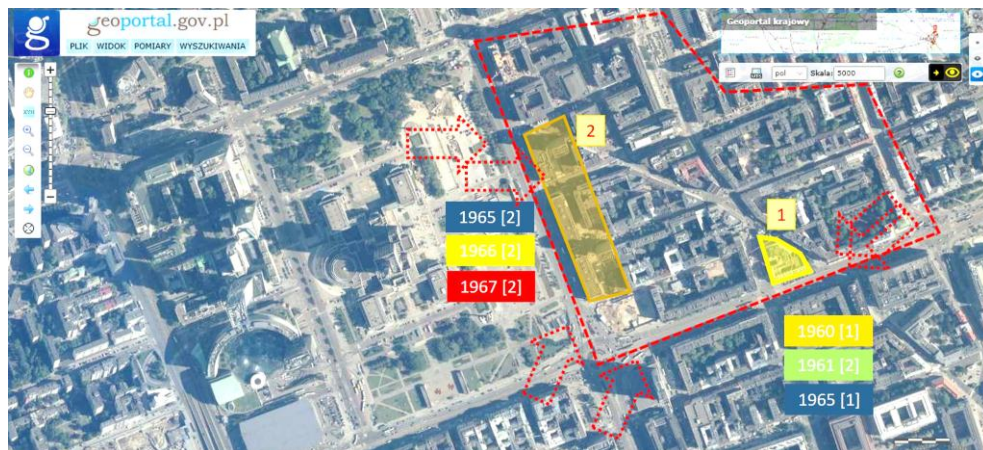


Fig. 5. A study showing the process of mapping modernist buildings in Polish films from 1960-1970, on the example of the Central Department Store and Eastern Wall buildings in Warsaw [Author elaboration]



Fig. 6. A study showing the process of mapping modernist buildings in Polish films from 1960-1970, the example of the Sady Żoliborskie housing estate in Warsaw [Author elaboration]

The research completed in the area of mapping has allowed us to draw up a catalogue of buildings that most often appeared in the Polish feature films of the 1960s in a variety of roles (see Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). The mapping has evidenced that Warsaw was the city filmed most often. The collected research material has allowed us to show which parts of urban space were deemed most important in view of portraying modern spatial reality and what sort of image was coined in the films of the epoch. As could have been easily predicted, the city centre was the focus of attention of numerous filmmakers.

In research, we must still refer to the social and historical contexts of the times. The 1960s in Poland were the years when social norms were being formed according to the communist system in the country, and when the perception of urbanity, leisure time activities and social contacts in restaurants or cafés changed. There was more freedom and openness in comparison to the previous norms that governed social behaviour or subdivisions. (see Fig. 7)

One factor we should not forget when analysing feature films of the time is the socialist ideology that was imposed from the top down. Achievements in the area of modern residential development and public utility buildings were model examples intended to prove the superiority of a centrally planned economy over a free-market economy. Moreover, the image of modernism as recorded in films showed modernity with no technical or technological flaws, free of any aura of supply deficiencies or social or political limitations.

Today, we no longer adhere to the socialist ideology. What has remained is an image recorded in films of pieces that reflect good architectural practice. In reference to my earlier considerations concerning the inclusion of film in the tools used for heritage protection, the visual aspect of films shall be appreciated. It blends well with our daily reality, where the digitalisation of everyday life in Poland and other European countries is omnipresent.



Fig 7. Centre of Warsaw – buildings of the so-called Eastern Wall, making up the background of the film „Człowiek z M3” of 1968 [The photograph published under the permission of the National Film Archives in Warsaw, photo no 1-F-205-120]

5. CONCLUSION

Defining modern architecture as part of our legacy, I have been attempting to reveal the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon, encompassing the issue of space mapping, which turned out to be a very complex aspect, as well as encompassing the incorporation of a film image as a new tool into the concept of heritage protection. I am fully aware of the fact that my research pursues new directions, making

me more fascinated with the topic, which can be freely subdivided into or merged with a great number of layers.

I am attempting to define feature films, constituents of the mapping process, as research material from the point of view of an architect but not a filmmaker. I know that some aspects herein have been discussed only briefly by the author. Nevertheless, I have been thoroughly studying the topic that has fascinated me for years. I am aware of the imperfections of my research tools, deriving from the fact that I am constantly looking for solutions to all the problematic issues related to the topics of my studies. I have been attempting to put together film, architecture and heritage protection in a manner that goes beyond the presently accepted definitions and criteria.

As I have already mentioned herein, I would like to develop relevant guidelines for the use of film as a source of recorded images and also as a means of contributing to a new perception of the concept of heritage protection. Mapping has without a doubt contributed to the creation of the database of modern facilities documented in Polish feature films of the 1960s. At the same time, the topics I have been researching will widen the scope for the mapping of a number of aspects inherent in Polish modern architecture. In the near future, I would like to focus on urban landscapes as presented in the Polish films of the 20th century. I hope to be able to form a research team that will work with me on the issue of audio in feature films, which nicely supplements the creation of soundscape space.

I understand the readers may approach my research material (documentary films, film chronicles and other forms of records on a film tape) from a different viewpoint. Nevertheless, I maintain my stance that the topics I have raised can and should be further discussed.

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ARCHITEKTURA MODERNISTYCZNA W OBRAZIE FILMOWYM

Streszczenie

Niniejszy tekst przedstawia koncepcję mapowania polskiej architektury modernistycznej przedstawionej w filmach fabularnych z lat 60. XX wieku. Film fabularny stał się w latach 60. XX w. idealnym medium do prezentacji nowoczesności w Polsce, widzianej przez budynki wznoszone z uwzględnieniem ówczesnie panujących trendów. Filmy fabularne z tamtych czasów stanowią materiał badawczy, pozwalający zobaczyć i uchwycić atmosferę przeszłości przez pryzmat nowoczesności zapisanej w kadrach filmowych. Ważnym aspektem badań jest sposób, w jaki można połączyć mapowanie, nowoczesną architekturę i filmy fabularne.

Słowa kluczowe: mapowanie, architektura modernistyczna, film