

MONIKA EWA ADAMSKA*

PLAY OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY.
THE INTERWAR COMPETITION FOR THE SEAT
OF THE AUTHORITIES OF THE REGENCY OF OPOLE

GRA W TRADYCJĘ I NOWOCZESNOŚĆ.
MIĘDZYWOJENNY KONKURS NA GMACH
SIEDZIBY WŁADZ REJENCJI W OPOLU

Abstract

In this paper the architectural competition for the seat of the authorities of the Regency of Opole of 1929 is presented, its formula, participants, the jury are indicated on the background of examples of German competitions of the interwar period. Analysis of the competition entries enabled definition of their style inspired by the ideas of interwar modernism and also architectural tradition. The jury declared decisively on the side of modern architecture, guaranteeing the new edifice the required representativeness and monumentalism.

Keywords: architectural competition, interwar modernism, public utility facilities, Opole, Regency of Opole, Silesia

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono zrealizowany w 1929 r. konkurs na nową siedzibę władz rejencji w Opolu, wskazując jego formułę, uczestników, skład sądu konkursowego na tle przykładów niemieckich konkursów okresu międzywojennego. Analiza prac konkursowych pozwoliła określić ich stylistykę inspirowaną ideami międzywojennego modernizmu jak i architektoniczną tradycją. Sąd konkursowy zadeklarował się zdecydowanie po stronie architektury nowoczesnej gwarantującej nowemu gmachowi wymaganą reprezentacyjność i monumentalizm.

Słowa kluczowe: konkurs architektoniczny, międzywojenny modernizm, obiekty użyteczności publicznej, Opole, rejencja opolska, Śląsk

* Ph.D. Arch. Monika Ewa Adamska, Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Opole University of Technology.

1. Introduction. Historical background

Opole is a town with a multicultural history dating back to the early Middle Ages. Until the 16th century, the town was ruled by the Piast Dynasty of Opole and then by the Hapsburg Dynasty, and in 1742 along with the whole of Silesia it was incorporated into Prussia. In 1945 Opole fell within the new borders of Poland. The history of Opole comprised periods of moderate development and deep stagnation. The decision that significantly changed the town's image and its status was its designation in 1816 as the capital of the Regency in the Silesia Province of Prussia¹. The new administrative function of the town required the construction of representative public utility facilities, especially the seat of the regency's authorities. The first building with this function was constructed in 1830–1833 within the old town walls, and the consultant on behalf of the Prussian government was Karl Friedrich Schinkel. The three-storey form of the office, monumental for the Opole of the time, was designed in the neoclassical style. The building, extended in the 19th century, did not survive the Second World War, and its remains were dismantled in the 1950s. [1, p. 10–11].

In the 1920's, the decision on the construction of a new seat for the Regency and Province of Upper Silesia was taken, resulting from the increasing needs of the Regency's administration. The northern part of Pasięka Island², called Ostrówek, was chosen for its location. This was a place of a special significance in Opole's history (Ill. 1). An early mediaeval wooden settlement functioned there from the 10th to the 13th century when, as a result of the town's foundation on the right bank of the Oder and the establishment of the Duchy of Opole, it gave its place to the duke's seat [3, p. 32–34]. In the 13th century, a stone castle with a cylindrical tower was erected, however, after the 16th century the building gradually fell into ruin. In the second half of the 19th century some of the rooms were adapted for the needs of the Regency of Opole and one of the building's wings was extended and in the area of the old town walls a scenic park was established. At the beginning of the 20th century the last modernisation in the history of the castle was conducted, extending it with a new wing in the neo-renaissance style. As a result of these activities the castle became a complex of buildings of different styles with a 13th-century cylindrical tower. In 1928–1931, as a consequence of the decision to locate the new seat of the Regency's authorities in Ostrówek, the castle was demolished leaving only the mediaeval tower. The importance and prestige of the new building was reflected by conducting careful studies on the possibility of forming a new complex³, and, later on in 1929, the conduct of an architectural competition [2, p. 123].

¹ There were four regencies in 1816: Dzierżoniów, Legnica, Opole, and Wrocław. In 1820, the Regency of Dzierżoniów was liquidated and its territory was divided between the Regencies of Wrocław and Legnica.

² The Pasięka Island of about 43 ha area is bordered by the Oder River and the canal of the Młynkówka River and is located near the Old Town.

³ In the archive of the Voivodeship Conservator of Monuments in Opole, pictures of several models of the proposition of the new seat of the Regency authorities dating at 1928 can be found.

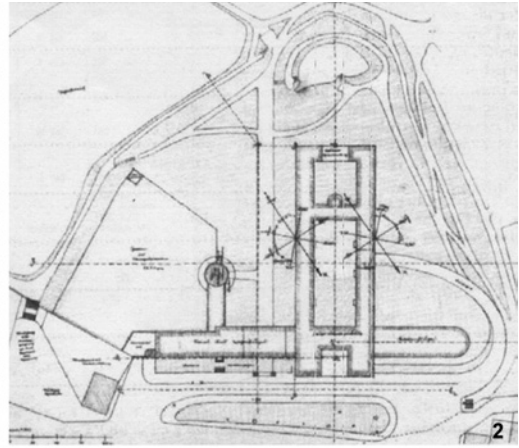
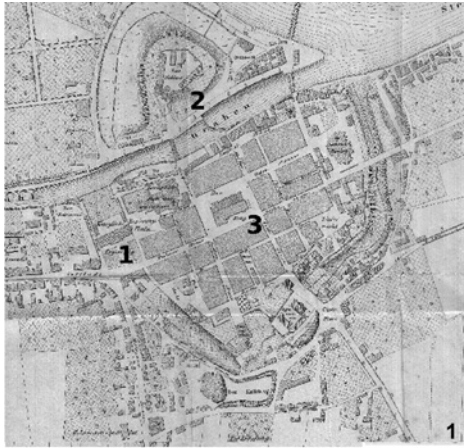
2. Competition for the Seat of the Authorities of the Regency of Opole. Formula, Participants, the Jury

The analysis of the information contained in “Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung”, a professional periodical related to architecture and civil engineering⁴, writing about architectural and urban competitions in Germany in the 1920s provides information on their scope and formula. To a lot of competitions, only architects born or living in the region of the project’s location were invited; however, sometimes this group was extended to other invited designers. This happened in the case of the competition for the typical small social rental apartments in Karlsruhe announced in August 1928. Beside local architects, Walter Gropius and J. J. p. Oud were also invited to participate in this competition. In the case of important facilities of national significance open competitions were announced. This situation took place in the competition for expanding the Reichstag that was conducted in 1928. Some competitions were closed, upon invitation only. The Opole competition was carried out in this way. Other closed competitions included the competition for the building of a bank in Berlin in 1929, limited to eight invited architects, including Hugo Höring and Max Taut. In the case of religious buildings, the conditions of the competition contained the provision to invite only Roman Catholic or Evangelical architects, respectively. Recognised architects and professors sat on the competition juries, including Paul Bonatz, Theodor Effenberger, and Adolf Rading. Also of interest are the data on the numbers of submitted designs. In the competition for expanding the Reichstag, 278 designs were submitted; for the indoor swimming pool in Munich – 203 designs; for the complex of the church and presbytery near Berlin – 104 designs. Most of the competitions conducted during the interwar period were competitions for realisation, few were studies. The deadlines for submitting the designs were from 1.5 to 3 months. The prices ranged on average from 1000 RM to 5000 RM⁵, also finance was budgeted for acquiring the copyrights to the submitted designs [9].

The competition for the new building of the Regency Office in Opole was closed. Upon the decision of the higher national construction administration, the following six construction counsellors of the Regency from the outside of Opole were invited to participate in the competition: Franz Kaßbaum (Hannover), Fritz Keibel (Berlin – Dahlem), Konrad Lehmann (Piła/Schneidemühl), Hans Malwitz (Berlin – Schmargendorf), Georg Petersen (Berlin), and Walter Wolff (Berlin). Moreover, it was decided to invite three representatives of Opole to participate in the competition: Anton Mokroß, construction counsellor; Gerhard Plagens, master builder; and Friedrich Volkholz, master builder. The competition jury included: Martin Kießling (Berlin), ministerial director; Eggeling (Aurich), higher construction counsellor of the Regency; Wilhelm Eggert (Berlin), secret ministerial construction counsellor; Karl Leyendecker (Wiesbaden), higher construction

⁴ “Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung” was a periodical published in 1881–1931, until 1920 by the Ministry of Public Works of Prussia, after 1920 by the Ministry of Finance of Prussia. At first, it was published irregularly, from 1898 twice a week, and from 1924 once a week. Its content comprised official announcements, presentations of new realisations financed from public finances, announcements on competitions and their results, information on exhibitions.

⁵ Reichsmark (RM) was the German monetary unit implemented as a result of the change of currency in 1924.



- III. 1. F. Eitner's plan of Opole, 1863. 1. Neoclassical edifice of the seat of the authorities of the Regency of Opole (1830–1833), 2. Former Piast castle on Pasieka island, 3. Medieval location town. Source: [1, p. 11]
- III. 2. Location plan of the project for the seat of the authorities of the Regency of Opole by Konrad Lehmann (1st prize). Source: [6, p. 478]
- III. 3. A perspective sketch of the project for the seat of the authorities of the Regency of Opole by Konrad Lehmann (1st prize). Source: [8, p. 4]
- III. 4. Modern edifice of the seat of the authorities of the Regency of Opole (1930–1933). View in 1935. Source: author's archive

counsellor of the Regency; Kurt Wittler (Opole), higher construction counsellor of the Regency; and Dr. Hans Lukaschek, the president of the Regency of Upper Silesia etc. [7, p. 475]. In the competition's conditions, the main issues to be solved were as follows: the necessity for proper incorporation of the complex of new buildings into the urban landscape of Opole and the area of the old castle park, and an appropriate design for the residential part for the Regency's President, along with a suitable functional connection between the office and the ceremonial rooms. In addition, the mediaeval tower and the remaining part of the duke's castle were to be incorporated into the layout of the new administrative buildings, and finally designing the entry zone from Piastowska Street (Hafen Straße) was an issue to be solved.

3. Submitted Designs

Full information on the results of the competition⁶ were published on 24 July 1929 [6, p. 477–484]. The jury awarded four of the nine submitted designs⁷ in the following order:

- I award: Konrad Lehmann (Piła), in cooperation with Kirstein,
- II award: Franz Kaßbaum (Hannover),
- III award: Walter Wolff (Berlin),
- IV award: Gerhard Plagens (Opole).

I award: Konrad Lehmann (Piła), in cooperation with Kirstein (Opole and Piła), master builder

Konrad Lehmann, from 1925, performed the function of construction counsellor in Piła that was at that time the capital of the new Regency of Prussia. Kirstein from Opole, who cooperated with him, was also professionally connected with Piła. Their project, rated highest in the competition, was a geometric composition of cuboid forms (Ill. 2, 3). Two high buildings of 7–8 storeys, situated in parallel with each other and perpendicularly to Piastowska Street, connected through two connectors, comprised a distinctive and strong dominant within the complex. The arrangement was completed by two low, longitudinal buildings situated perpendicularly to the higher part, on both sides. The cylinder of the mediaeval tower, the only part of the dismantled duke's castle, was a free-standing element of the composition, and this solution was judged positively by the jury. In the opinion of the jury, Lehmann's work combined the modern form of the administrative buildings with the monumental look of the seat of the Regency's authorities. The jury also indicated the weak points of the project; however, it assessed the solutions as practical and brilliant, and unanimously decided to continue work on this design. Flat roofs, a vast glazing at the top of the higher part, and the rounded corners clearly indicated the style of German modernism and rational functionalism [4, p. 101].

II award: Franz Kaßbaum (Hannover)

Franz Kaßbaum, invited to the competition, was an architect born in 1885 and linked with Hannover, where he designed a number of constructed facilities for higher education institutions in the styles of cubism and expressionism. The architect participated in the competition a year before his early death in a car accident, in 1930 [5, p. 194]. Franz Kaßbaum's project was a consequent and clear composition of cuboid forms with flat roofs, mostly of one height. The architect proposed a strongly formalised comb layout comprising four regularly repeated buildings connected with a longitudinal, perpendicular element situated in parallel with Piastowska Street. In this combination, the author achieved an effect of a monumental front facade with a square facing Piastowska Street and an intimate

⁶ With the introduction written by the Ministry Director Martin Kießling, the jury's opinions, and drawings and photos of the models of all nine designs.

⁷ All of the submitted designs comprised of drawings, description, and a model.

layout for the interior connected to the park area on the Oder River side. The jury assessed Kaßbaum's design as modern, indicated that the connection of the facilities with the public green areas was appropriate; however, partly building in the tower was considered a disadvantage.

III award: Walter Wolff (Berlin)

Walter Wolff was an architect and an officer of the construction administration of Berlin. In 1928–1932 he cooperated with Martin Kießling on designing and constructing the university hospital in Berlin [10]. His design, awarded third place in the competition, was based on rectangular quadrilaterals of four storeys and flat roofs with an internal courtyard. One of the short sides of the rectangle was elongated and connected to the V-shape lower wing containing the President's apartment. Wolff incorporated the mediaeval tower, which functioned as the staircase into this part. The jury complimented the solution of the main form and internal courtyard; however, they criticised the idea of using the tower as the staircase and expressed doubts about the functional layout of the facility. Moreover, they negatively assessed moving the complex far away from Piastowska Street and the decomposition of the old castle park. The architect used horizontal stripes of windows of horizontal proportion, a solution similar to the one used in the designs awarded 1st and 2nd places. The mediaeval tower, similarly to Kaßbaum's work, was the dominant height of the composition.

IV award: Gerhard Plagens (Opole)

There is little known about Plagens – he was not the architect of any significant facility constructed in Opole during the interwar period. The design submitted by Plagens was the only one among the winning ones with traditional high roofs. The layout plan was based on a composition of two quadrilaterals of different heights connected to each other with internal courtyards. The tower, although partly built-in into the smaller quadrilateral, remained the dominant height of the composition. In the jury's opinion the Plagens' proposition, although rewarded, lacked the charm as well as the qualities of modern administration facilities. Its advantage was the interesting incorporation of the tower into the zone of the main entrance, while the disadvantage was moving away the buildings far from Piastowska Street and taking a substantial part of the green areas.

Other Designs

The solutions contained in the winning designs were based on right angles and straight lines, and arches were used in the layout plans of four other designs. The design of Friedrich Volkholz from Opole, previously engaged in the pre-competition study analyses, was based on a semi-circular layout, and the forms were covered with high roofs. The form of a triangle with arched sides was chosen by Georg Petersen from Berlin, using, similarly to Volkholz, high roofs. In both designs, the cylindrical tower was incorporated in the internal courtyards. Hans Malwitz, an architect and construction officer from Berlin, and the architect of interwar

higher education facilities in Berlin and Królewiec, after that engaged into the post-war restoration of Münster, also based on a triangular form with one arched side. In the design of Fritz Keibel, also from Berlin, the cylindrical tower became the middle of a radial composition of three buildings connected with arched wings and covered with high roofs. Among the works which were not rewarded, only the design of Anton Mokroß, architect and construction officer from Opole, Katowice, Rybnik and Wrocław, engaged in the post-war restoration of Würzburg, had solutions similar to those of the three awarded works: a layout based on a quadrilateral with an additional wing creating the entrance square, buildings with flat roofs, and corners interestingly accented by moved-back staircases.

4. Summary

The nine designs submitted in the competition for the seat of the authorities of the Regency of Opole presented different formal and stylistic solutions. The layout plans of the five designs were based purely on right angles and straight lines, while in four others arches were introduced: segmental or semi-circular. In all designs, except for the proposition of Franz Kaßmaum, an internal courtyard appeared in the shape of a square, rectangle, semi-circle or complex. The style of the solutions varied from simple geometric compositions of blocks with flat roofs referring to the idea of interwar modernism and functionalism to solutions with complex forms and high roofs characteristic of tradition. In the majority of works, the mediaeval cylindrical tower, the remains of the duke's castle, was the dominant height in the composition. Fritz Keibel referred to tradition in the fullest way, also giving the tower the role of compositional dominant in a complex of forms with high roofs. In contrast to the rest of the designs, the winning design by Konrad Lehmann included a high building entering into a dialogue with the tower. The jury, through its decisions, strongly declared its support for the modern architecture, which in the jury's opinion met the representative and monumental needs for the façade the new seat of the Regency to the fullest extent. The new building of the seat of authorities of the Regency in Opole constructed in 1931–1933, a great example of interwar modernism and functionalism, significantly differed, however, from the design submitted for the competition (Ill. 4). One of the reasons for introducing changes was the discovery of adverse ground conditions on part of the area and discovering remnants of settlement from before the foundation of the town.

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