

JEREMI T. KRÓLIKOWSKI*

GAMES AND PLAYS
OF POLISH ARCHITECTSGRY I ZABAWY
POLSKICH ARCHITEKTÓW

Abstract

For some people a game may be a way of life while others may take life seriously – seeking the meaning of life. For some people life is a phenomenon and a secret whereas for others it is a game that is won by those who guess its rules. Architects in Poland play different games, not only games with architecture but also around it. There are games such as conference games, competition games, media games, games for points, for titles, historical games, serious games, and also possible is to be beyond games.

Keywords: architect, architecture, game, spatial values, metaphysical space

Streszczenie

Dla niektórych ludzi gra może być sposobem życia, inni na serio szukają sensu. Czasem jedni widzą fenomen i tajemnicę, drudzy grę która wygrywa ten kto zgadnie jej reguły. Architekci w Polsce grają różne gry nie tylko z architekturą ale także wokół niej. Są gry konferencyjne, gry konkursowe, gry medialne, gry o punkty, o tytuły, gry historyczne, są gry brane na serio. Można też być poza grą.

Słowa kluczowe: architekt, architektura, gra, wartości przestrzenne, przestrzeń metafizyczna

* Assoc. Prof. Ph.D. D.Sc. Arch. Jeremi T. Królikowski, Chair of Landscape Art, Warsaw University of Life Sciences.

1. Conference games are played under different slogans. The conference under the slogan of defining the architectural space has been held repeatedly. Seeking the answer to the question of the essence of the architectural space in various scientific papers is pointless. The same pertains to other conferences. The problem of identity has for years been the subject matter of many conferences. Looking at the changing architectural landscape in Poland, it is hard to spot forms and values determining its character. This is not the case of difficulty in translating conference statements into action since it is impossible to find in them an equally accurate opinion as the one expressed by Ewa Łuskina over a hundred years ago. Conference games are most of all social games, the possibility to meet others and exchange opinions concerning all possible matters that do not pertain to the principal subject of the conference. Statements are longer or shorter, read out or produced, shortened by the person leading the session or elongated excessively. However, substantive discussion hardly ever takes place. Publication and the number of points awarded in this respect are the most important issue. Conference games are not played only within the field of architecture. They are the result of the sick organisation of science in Poland, which is reflected in the fact that the outcomes of a conference cannot be presented in compliance with its course but need to be published in the form of a monograph or in a magazine. An idea, a thought, creativity, innovativeness or tradition are not essential – the only thing that matters is the result of the relay race organised by public officials. This does not mean that there are no conferences whose results are substantive conclusions or declarations. However, experience shows that such conferences need to be planned in advance and prepared together with their outcomes. In most cases, all that is not necessary. The game is played purely for the sake of playing.

2. Competition games are played in all seriousness as well as with full confidence that this is the best way to achieve the best design. However, it is often a lottery. In most cases, the final result is achieved by means of voting that is not the outcome of attempts at persuading one another but the result of predetermined beliefs. The course of this game discloses groups of participants competing against one another and the purpose of the game is to win over the juror to their side. This does not mean that each competition is a game. There are competitions in which a discussion is continued after their completion, often within post-competition games. A famous example of such competitions is the competition for the design of the Temple of God's Providence in Warsaw. A competition transforms into a game when there are no common assessment criteria. In such case, the only thing that counts is which person likes it and which is not in favour. At this point, team games involving supporters and opponents are played.

3. Media games with architecture in the publicly accessible space are played when there is breaking news, preferably something that may be referred to as a yell in space. Of course, there is no place for values or arguments here. Objects of admiration are selected in rankings that resemble beauty contests with one difference: the beauty is known to the initiated solely and the role of the public is to admire it. At this point, the specialist press becomes extremely useful since it provides role models. The most active magazine with respect to the number of published rankings is "architektura-murator" in which there is no place for the criteria of values. On the contrary, it is dominated by presentations and the expression of "modernity" that comes down to fashion and elimination of any deep thoughts. There is no place for discussion or concepts here. Gossip magazines discussing the social lives of celebrities serve as

a model, but in this case the celebrities are famous architects appearing as stars of advertising campaigns of construction materials. Thanks to that, it is easy to understand that the aim of architecture magazines in which architectural objects are presented is to indicate the way in which the products advertised in them can be used. Scientific production of numerous conferences, sessions, seminars or lectures does not allow you to guess what the opinions and thoughts of lecturers of Polish universities of architecture are. None of their books has caused a real sensation due to the fact that journalists and architects writing magazine articles do not bother to check the intellectual work of others.

4. The game for points is the primary game of those who decide to deal with the field of architecture. The publishing cycle is now shorter than in the period of PRL but sufficient funds need to be collected before an article can be published. Receiving grants depends on whether a person has already received them. The more grants a researcher has been awarded, the greater the chances for receiving other funds are. Moreover, one cannot be too original since there is a risk that the reviewer will not understand such originality because he has not heard of it before. Scientific development needs to be gradual, performed step by step. Going too far is unacceptable. The holder of a doctoral degree should not deal with the field researched by the professor unless he receives his consent since there is a risk that he will not be awarded any points. It is not worth discussing topics whose results cannot be published quickly. At some universities, assessment takes place every two years but there are ideas to perform such evaluations every term. Twice as many points can be received when articles are published in any language other than Polish, e.g. in English, French, Russian, German, or Italian. This is the way in which degrees and academic titles can be obtained.

5. The game for titles was perfectly depicted by Wojciech Kosiński in his preface to Sławomir Gzell's book concerning architecture. This outstanding panegyric favourably emphasises the role of the author of the book in awarding academic titles. Reaching this point is not an easy task since placing architecture in the field of the technical sciences enables discrediting those theses that seek a synthesis between art and culture, which also comprises technology and nature. Therefore, there are cases when insignificant achievements allow a person to reach much higher than persistent research work at the meeting point of various fields. But that is alright.

6. Historical games. History becomes a playing field when it avoids the truth and pretends that nothing has happened. A specific example of such a game is the game for Joseph Stalin's Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw. The fiftieth anniversary of putting this building into service is celebrated this year. Therefore, articles and books are being published on this occasion. However, no publication mentions the fact that this building killed Warsaw for the second time since 5000 people were relocated from the quarter where the Palace was to be built and the houses rebuilt among the ruins were demolished. The ruined houses created a tissue that was connected by means of the existing underground infrastructure.

The game for Piłsudki Square together with the attempt at reconstruction of the Saski Palace located there until the year 1944 is seemingly an investment game but with symbolic content. The current form of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is the only sign of city's destruction. Erecting a mock-up building of yet unknown designation is both a degradation of

the national symbol and sending a message that the war did not affect Warsaw at all. As a result of location games, the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising and the Polish History Museum were placed on the outskirts of the city centre. These games are possible since they are based on the fact that in the period from 1939 to 1989 the system of values and its hierarchy were effectively demolished. The notion of spatial values that was introduced by Florian Znaniecki in the year 1938 has not taken root among architects. Novelty at all cost has become the principal value.

7. Serious games occur infrequently; however, they are extremely interesting. Architecture treated as a game appeared in the post-modernist period. The message “form follows fiction” enabled the creation of complex narrations constituting the architects’ game with investors and users. For architects this may not have been just a game but intentions can never be proved and once they are declared they may be subject to change. A game becomes reality when the user develops an interpretation of the form, thereby making it his own interpretation. And this is what happened in the case of the complex of buildings of the Fathers of the Resurrection in Cracow (designed by Dariusz Kozłowski and Waław Stefański). Father Dariusz Tabor developed his own narration of architecture, built its theological interpretation, thus giving the architectural space a dimension of metaphysical reality [2]. Metaphysical reality exists beyond architecture; however, it can be reached under the guidance of sacred signs and symbols. When architecture is treated as a game and when the main thing that one may look for in architecture is novelty, then sacred values are changed into a museum exhibit. This is what happened not so long ago in Kazimierz Dolny, where in the rainbow-like arch of the monumental parish church a glass cross (designed by Konrad Kucza-Kuczyński) with a wooden figure of Jesus Christ was placed. The game of new meanings destroys deep historical symbols that are connected with the Tree of the Cross (as it is said in an old song - *Faithful Cross, above all other, one and only noble Tree! There is none of such a tree. One, upon which our God was nailed. Sweet is the tree and sweet are the nails which bore that sweet fruit.*¹ also referred to as the Tree of Life as well as its fundamental meaning. In this case, the brave act of the architect has shown that the game of forms and meanings is risky and hazardous not only with respect to the perception of the metaphysical dimension and sacral values of the architectural space, but it may also disturb the deepest longings of human hearts. The game cannot fill the reality of human feelings, not in this case nor in many other cases people are waiting for. Architecture treated as a game leads to the fact that space becomes funny for a moment but it is hard to identify with such a space and, what is even worse, it is sometimes revolting and aggressive just like the new facade of the tenement house at Chmielna St. 25 in Warsaw (designed by Bulanda Mucha Architekci). The wavy stripes of colourful glass have been interpreted by Marta Leśniakowska as an architectural expression of the ideology of gender.² In this case, similarly to many other cases, verbal games are supposed to hide the failed architectural solution that is shockingly different from the

¹ The oldest Polish record (1550–1555) of this ancient song constituting a fragment of the hymn by Venantius Fortunatus, a bishop of Poitiers who died in the year 601, who wrote it in order to give praise to the part of the Holy Cross that was a present from the Byzantine Emperor Justin II to the Princess Radegund in the year 569, is part of the hymnal stored in the library in Kórnik [3].

² “The facade of the building by Bulanda and Mucha analysed from the point of view of the gender ideology is both masculine in its strength and dominance and feminine in its softness, provocation, seduction and eroticism. This is a model representation of the psychoanalytic nature of each process

19th- and 20th-century tenement houses situated in Chmielna St. What are architectural games supposed to hide? One of the hidden aspects of the architectural reality consists in absolute exploitation of young architects, which is observed both in the case of well-known architectural studios as well as in those offices which are not as famous. It is even harder to understand that this exploitation is very often accompanied by underestimation and a paternal attitude towards junior employees. The answer to such allegations is the excuse that this is what is happening all over the world, that there is a shortage of commissions and free market, but architects' organisations are not taking any action to develop this market.

8. Beyond the game. The answer to the question of how to live in Poland, how to live in Warsaw, is not easy, especially for young people who perceive the situation they find themselves in as housing exclusion. As a result of the current political system, residential premises are expensive and less available. What is more, the number of premises built is not sufficient to satisfy the real demand. Poland is one of the two European countries where adult children live with their parents for the longest period of time.

A report from the monitoring activities conducted by Warsaw Tenants' Organisations shows that the actual demand for residential premises in Warsaw exceeds the estimate number of one hundred premises and is subject to constant increase with the ageing of buildings and the growing number of small households. The commercial market does not offer residential premises to those people who do not have high income or do not work permanently on the basis of an employment contract (or do not possess creditworthiness for other reasons such as age or unfavourable credit history). Although Warsaw is the city where the level of remuneration is the highest, the differences in the amounts of the income received are equally high, thus making social stratification significant.

A housing policy based on various forms of investment, including authentic housing cooperativeness, may constitute a solution to this problem. Drawing the attention of the Union of Polish Architects (SARP) and the National Chamber of Polish Architects (IARP) to this issue is of utmost importance both for historical reasons and for the sake of the future. The importance of the architect's profession observed in the interwar period was the result not only of a high level of creative output but also of architects' involvement in solving social problems, especially their participation in housing cooperativeness. Today, the creation of a large design market not only on a Warsaw scale but also nationwide may provide future inhabitants as well as young architects with new opportunities. Development in the construction market may be a consequence of this movement.

However, this is not the end of the case. Such residential premises cannot be built in any way and in any place. A new urban vision is indispensable. However, this vision is hard to find at conferences, in dedicated trade magazines or in colourful magazines dealing with the field of architecture.

According to CBOS data from studies conducted in September 2013, 52.8% of respondents mentioned the lack of housing perspectives as one of the three main problems of families in Poland whereas 72.7% of respondents confirmed that housing problems constitute

of creation whose essence consists in the seduction strategy of almost sexual nature that is aimed at enchanting the viewer, thereby "possessing" him." [1]

the main reason for the increasing demographic crisis. In the ranking concerning housing conditions prepared by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, which brings together 34 member states, Poland took the penultimate place among the 34 countries assessed in the ranking (May 2013). It is estimated that there is a shortage of at least 1.5 million residential premises in the entire country; however, there are calculations that indicate that this number is higher, exceeding two million. This shows that better understanding of residential construction, urbanism as well as of the settlement network in Poland and its landscape is indispensable. According to the Chamber of Construction Designing, "Politicians are not interested in these problems since in their opinion the residential crisis does not have a direct impact on their political careers or voting results and their housing conditions are usually very good" [4]. Politicians are not bothered about this; they cannot deal with this issue. Therefore, this problem needs to be solved by the society as well as by architects in cooperation with the society. This is a fundamental issue of our existence. You can enjoy successive awards and competitions, you can come into agreement with the new authorities that may finally understand it. You can still play this game.

9. Game and culture. The city landscape as a game field is the result of adopting the dogma of inevitable spatial development in accordance with free market rules. The outcome of such a game consists in an aleatoric game in which the opinions of Polish architects become a series of monologues that nobody listens to. This causes total chaos which is the exact opposite of architectural culture.

The culture of architecture constitutes a part of the culture of space perceived and created by people. The common criticism of the quality of space in Poland focuses on selected areas solely and does not touch upon the fundamental issues of the Polish contemporary architecture. During a discussion that was held in the Museum of Modern Art (in October 2014), Jerzy Szczepanik-Dzikowski pointed out that the mock-ups displayed in the Museum confirmed the fact that the architecture in Poland speaks many languages. Each and every designer wishes to create a unique work that does not relate to other works. However, this issue was not continued. Moreover, this also shows that the statements produced within performances and discussions are a series of monologues.

Whereas culture is a dialogue among contemporary people, a dialogue with the past and the future. This dialogue requires knowledge of a language, establishing values sought to be attained as well as referring to role models.

The greatest discrepancy between the society and the environment consists in different attitudes towards role models, which leads to the fact that contemporary architecture does not create social community.

Archetypes of the most important types of buildings, such as the house and temple, which are embedded in the social tradition, are not subject to creative interpretation but are ridiculed by critics deeming them as unfashionable and out-of-date. This pertains to the house in the form of a manor house or the temple whose symbol is the basilica in Licheń.

The measure of the architectonic culture is the order represented by its work and introduced into the surroundings and the landscape, and most of all into human life.

In his concept of the study of culture, Florian Znaniecki treated the notion of order as the key category of culture that links it with nature. He claimed that order is a prerequisite for successful activity and the world of culture is the world of values that is embedded in human experience, and which cannot be based on the categories of nature.

The new architectural form solves the current problems in conformity with the cultural canons, or modifies those canons, or poses questions concerning its sense. By breaking with the existing models of place, it introduces new models or simply builds a form that has never been seen before, or because the investor or designer wishes so. The culture, including the culture of architecture, is a living organism that is subject to changes and remains culture unless its continuity is ruptured.

The continuity of culture is significant both in the case of an open landscape and urban landscape of a square or street. No deep discussion on the form and structure was initiated when the office building designed by Norman Foster was constructed on Piłsudski Square in Warsaw. Moreover, the condition of periodicals in Poland is not in favour of exchanging ideas, even in the form which, despite censorship, could be observed in the monthly magazine “Architektura” in the first half of the 1980s. When Metropolitan was being created, the monthly magazine “architektura-murator” was consistently turning into a colourful magazine that did not deal with any important issues.

The distinction between architecture being the result of its creators’ egoism and architecture resulting from the love for the neighbour proposed by Mieczysław Twarowski constitutes the fundamental problem of architectural culture. This radical attitude seems to exclude any game. However, there are love games and, what is more, you may say that there are also brutal and cultural games in which you may want to destroy the opponent or treat him in a friendly manner.

Also the words in this article may be understood as a game. But sometimes somebody may say – “I am checking”. Then it may turn out that not only is the king naked but also the queen – architecture. And this was not the case in the fairytale.

References

- [1] Leśniakowska M., *The effect of reflection. Bulanda & Mucha at Chmielna*, [in:] ARCH 1/2014.
- [2] Tabor D., *A seminar: From the place to values. Critical and Aesthetic Reflections* [Od miejsca do wartości. Refleksje krytyczno-estetyczne], [in:] “Ressurrectio et vita, Scripture Polish Province of the Resurrection”, no. 1–2, 1994.
- [3] <http://dziedzictwo.ekai.pl/text.show?id=3581>.
- [4] <http://www.ipb.org.pl/?p=516,31.05.2015>.