Between Critical Regionalism, Neo-vernacularism and Localised Modernism

Three projects of Ingarden & Ewy.

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In the 70s-80s Kenneth Frampton, defined the phenomenon of "critical regionalism" in contemporary architecture. He pointed out that the most interesting objects arise at the threshold between local and global architecture. These are objects that are open to modern technology in various fields of science, and at the same time remain rooted in the local tradition of building, thus to create a space that is approved and understood locally. The article presents two examples of buildings (the Małopolska Garden of Arts in Krakow and the Polish Pavilion EXPO 2005 Aichi in Japan, Europe - Far East Gallery in Krakow) that look for their individual contextual sources, turn to experiments with traditional materials, try to find lost threads of handicraft tradition, and at the same time reach for modern technologies with respect for the natural and cultural environment.

Keywords: wicker facade, building material experiments, experimental architecture, Polish architecture

MODERNITY AND CONTEXTUALITY OF THE MAŁOPOLSKA GARDEN OF ARTS IN KRAKOW

The Małopolska Garden of Arts was designed in the year 2005 as a competition entry, its implementation was started in 2010 and completed in 2012. The building is located at the Rajska Street, just opposite the building of the Provincial Library in Krakow. The departure point for the design concept of the project is the adaptation of the old XIX hall of the horse-riding arena, for a contemporary space of a multi functional theatrical-concert-conference hall. The complementary functions are: media library dedicated to art, conference rooms, a cinema and cafeteria. The main entrance to the theatre hall leads through the foyer located in the front of the former hall; this space is visually connected to the entrance and communication zone. This completely glazed zone was placed in front of the former hall façade. The decision about its glazing is dictated by the desire to display the historic façade, and to create a visual connection with the space of the “art garden” in front of the building. This part, roofed although the outer space, is an intermediate place between the street and the building. This borderland area is a place of possible artistic activities, from outdoor ex-
hibitions, to happenings and multimedia projections (Figure 1). The second part of the building - the mediatheque is a new building added from the side of the Szujskiego street. It houses multimedia collections on three floors, thematically related to art - music collections, art works and literature. Both parts are connected in one functional arrangement through the space of a café located at the lowest level (Orzechowski, 2013).

**Design method**
The main intention of the designers was to develop a design method allowing to create a free and innovative form so autonomous that it could be considered a form with an individual and contemporary expression, that would at the same time not disturb the character of the place. Moreover - it is the result of the undertaken analysis of forms and their geometry of neighbouring buildings coming mainly from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In order to define the characteristics of neighbouring buildings, two analyses were carried out - the geometry of roofs and angles found in the buildings of the entire urban quarter, as well as the analysis of characteristic facade materials. The neighbourhood is composed mainly by buildings of a residential function, typical build-
ings from the 19th century, surrounding the historic centre of Krakow. Their height is from 2 to 5 storeys with pitched roofs with a slope of approx. 10 - 30 degrees. The elevations of most tenement houses are eclectic, with articulation of cornices and inter-storey divisions, building ridge parallel to the streets. Facade materials - plaster and brick.

An analysis of this system resulted in a specific catalogue of features of the local architectural code. This code was used when making basic design decisions - choosing ceramics as an elevation material, as well as in defining the building’s geometry. In the roofs adjacent to neighbouring buildings, an exact continuation of heights and falls was assumed. Elevation obtained divisions based on the previously developed catalogue of angles. The form of the historical horse riding school has been almost entirely preserved, but in the new building it is only a part of the whole composition. The edifice has a variable height, which, however, does not go beyond the scale of the neighbours. The collapse of the cornice line results from a formal reference to the scale and angles of the declines of the surrounding roofs. Facade divisions of the new building also refer to the divisions of neighbouring buildings (cornices), despite the fact that the form of the facade abstracts from classicizing context and has the character of a continuous and open band composition made of glass and a vertical layout of elements of the ceramic façade, in a range of colours of traditional brick (Figure 2). The design method adopted in the development of the Małopolska Garden of Arts is based on two opposing principles of the neighbourhood interpretation - on the one hand respectful of morphological continuity - by using the geometric code, and the scale of the neighbourhood. On the other hand, it is allows the formal abstraction and interpretation of the existing system of historical forms. Façades with irregular composition of custom

Figure 2
MGA - custom designed ceramic facade continues and re-interprets the tradition of XIX/XX cent. brick facades of the urban block.
design ceramic claddings were adopted. It is an attempt to create contemporary architecture resulting from the analysis of the place and the desire to form a harmonious relationship between traditional and contemporary architectural languages. The method applied in the project can be defined as the method interpreting the typological and stylistic features of the neighbourhood. In terms of the design attitude, it is characterized by: a creative attempt to interpret the source, as well as radical abstraction in the field of internal composition and new forms applied to the traditional materials used (e.g., brick). It can be described as a method of creative, abstractive contextualism, located at the same time close to the architectural current widely defined by Kenneth Frampton as critical regionalism (Ingarden, 2017, p.76).

**POLISH PAVILION EXPO 2005 AICHI, JAPAN - WICKER ELEVATION EXPERIMENT**

The Japanese edition of the exhibition EXPO in Nagoya in 2005 was carried out under the leading statement “Wisdom of Nature”. This term is close to the idea of “sustainable development” understood as a balanced development of human civilization and the environment in which it functions - taking into consideration nature, economy, and culture. In the Polish Pavilion’s project, the main topic is interpreted in close connection with the supplementary theme of “The Wisdom of Nature”. The Polish Chamber of Commerce, the organizer of the Polish pavilion, defined the thematic scope of the presentation based on the symbols such as Chopin’s music and a unique tourist attraction - the historical salt mine in Wieliczka. The selection of these topics was preceded by marketing research on their recognition in Japanese society. The architectural concept of the pavilion was intended to illustrate this subject (Ingarden, 2013, p.56-60).

The designer’s assumption was to select an unconventional architectural material that allows to build metaphors of the immateriality and transience of music, and of the physicality of the underground salt chamber, and at the same time. The basic design decision concerned the problem of defining the form of the facade. The façade was an important distinguishing feature of the pavilion seen from afar, from the cable car transporting viewers to the “Common 4” area - a group of northern European pavilions in which the Polish pavilion was located. It was intended to refer to the Polish Mazovian landscape in order to be associated with Chopin’s music. The key reference to this idea and solution has become the statue of Frederic Chopin in the Łazienki Park in Warsaw, where Chopin is portrayed under a willow tree. This image gave impetus to the search for a method of using willow withes to form the facade of the building. Wicker (Salix Sp.), being a kind of willow, turned out to be an ideal material for this purpose (Figure 3). It is a material which in the form of a braid is susceptible to spatial formation, is light and inexpensive,

![Figure 3](image_url)

*Wicker (Salix Sp.), being a kind of willow, turned out to be an ideal material for the elevation*
and at the same time Poland has several traditional centres of artistic handicrafts in Poland, for decades specializing in the production of wicker braids. As a material, wicker itself carries a message to be a symbolic link between Chopin's music, Mazovian landscape and a modern pavilion (Figure 4).

**A prototype wicker façade**
The Polish Pavilion was the first prototype building using the technology of facade made of hand-woven wicker netting on steel frames, designed and spatially formed using the latest computer technology 3-dimensional modelling. It is a peculiar combination of “high-tech” design methods with low-tech material and production technology. The individual frames, after precise formation, were transported to the Rudnik by San area, a traditional wickerwork centre with over 100 years of tradition. In a dozen villages, within 3 months, the best craftsmen managed to hand-produce wicker mesh on around 700 steel module frames. The specific weave pattern, its density, length and detail of the finishing was the subject of tests and detailed analyses preceding the implementation. Ready-made modules were transported from Rudnik in containers to Nagoya and assembled on site. The wicker façade played a multifaceted symbolic role in the project - by precisely referring its production process to the idea of sustainable development, it implemented the ideological line of the EXPO exhibition, and symbolically reconstructed the currently disturbed relationship between man, nature and architecture. In addition, what was perhaps the most important - referred to the world famous Polish composer and created a picture of contemporary Poland, as a country skilfully and harmoniously combining its tradition and artistic handicrafts with technological innovation (compare: Mimura, 2005).
The Pavilion’s neo-vernacularism

The Polish Pavilion at the EXPO 2005 was included in the current of neo-vernacularism by art historian, prof. Andrzej Szczerski. Examples of neo-vernacular architecture, mentioned by Szczerski (Szczerski 2015), also include the Polish Pavilion at the EXPO 2010 in Shanghai of the WWAA team (Wojciech Kakowski, Marcin Mostafa, and Natalia Paszkowska). Neo-vernacularism, according to Szczerski, is one of the methods (e.g. alongside the current of the so-called critical regionalism) searching for a way to return to local building traditions after the experience of modernism. It is a reaction to globalization, and at the same time is a part of it, as it is a global tendency, noticeable in art, industrial design and architecture regardless of geographical latitude, which is referred to in globalist terminology as a glocalization. It differs essentially from the vernacularism of the early 20th century, (of Stanislaw Witkiewicz or Jan Koszczyc Witkiewicz), since it is devoid of the goals of that period, in particular attempts to create a great synthesis of the national style. Andrzej Szczerski aptly notes that “the departure from national contexts and the desire to subscribe to the formula of global fashion for folk has found a characteristic expression in the concepts used to describe the new phenomenon, using the terms “folk” or “ethno” (Szczerski 2015). Neo-vernacular turns to folk and local, treating this action as a medicine for homogenization, macdonaldization, impersonality of contemporary global culture, reaches selected elements of the local tradition, interprets its fragments, formulas, characteristic material solutions to return to the sources of traditional experiences associated with sensual feeling of materials and the perception of forms, assuming at the same time that it creates new values based on the contemporary language of art (Ingarden, 2017).

EUROPE - FAR EAST GALLERY (ANNEX OF THE MANGGHA MUSEUM) - LOCALIZED MODERNISM

The main building of the Manggha Museum in Krakow, designed by Arata Isozaki (1994), is a finitely finished composition with a sophisticated and unique roof structure, characterized by a combination of several planes based on the geometry of the hyperbolic paraboloids. Any attempt to continuing geometry of this composition would carry the
danger of disturbing its undeniable harmony. New design should, therefore, respect and emphasize its uniqueness and create only a fairly neutral architectural background to complement the order the surroundings. Thus, the Manggha Museum building remains the dominant feature in terms of form and function and the new annex composition is subordinated to it. Its shape was moved as far as possible from the Manggha foreground and situated in such a way that it would not obstruct it from the side of Konopnicka Street. The height has been adapted to the scale of the undulated Manggha roof. The Gallery has a separate entrance zone, with its own stairs, a ramp for the disabled and a terrace, which can be used for exhibitions and artistic activities outside the building. The location of the terrace in this place enlarges the public space of the Manggha foreground and creates an additional urban interior limited by the facades of both buildings. There is a mechanical underground garage in the place under the terrace. The facades with simple planes of glass and gray sandstone, are composed in relation to analogous forms of the existing small architecture of the Manggha foreground - to ramps and stairs (Figure 5). The oblique upper part of the south facade is a reference to the slanting lines of the slipway ramps in the foreground of the Manggha Center. The calmness of the architectural form expression is a discreet background for the main museum building.

The finishing materials of the façade and interiors have been selected to create an atmosphere of neutral exhibition space, constituting a minimalist background for art exhibitions representing the Eastern and Western cultures. As the main material in the upper parts of the façade, the Italian sandstone “Pietra Serena” was used, the lower parts were made of black granite (Figure 6). The interiors of the exhibition halls are the “white cube” spaces. Neutrality
and synthesis of architectural forms are contrasted in the interiors by introducing wood in all the furniture equipment with which the viewer is in direct contact, they are: reception counter, cloakroom counter, sitting benches, base for dragon sculpture, stairs to the upper gallery, etc. Thanks to this treatment, the object is remembered by the sense of touch, as a warm and friendly object. The minimalism of the project is in this way softened to become a touch-friendly object, and the placement of the building and its subordination to the Manggha Museum makes it a statement of a “localized-modernistic” approach.

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