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Individualism and background architecture. Education dilemmas in the days of breakthrough

Faculty of Architecture at Warsaw University was founded in 1915 as one of the four units of the newly established university. The Organisation Committee's task was to outline the rules of functioning, including the principles of University educational program. The Committee members were architects and engineers who graduated from different European schools, universities of technology and academies and had various scientific and esthetical experiences.

Nowadays, we aim at organising a new university which is supposed to centre and shape our efforts; we aim at connecting creative activity at the deepest sources – architectural, painting and sculpture art; our goal is to revive old traditions, to maintain and develop the artistic tradition on the Polish land in order to compete with the Western Europe art with dignity like in the previous centuries.

The purpose of the program, which we present here, is to educate architects at the highest level and range – wide artistic culture and serious professional knowledge constitute guiding principles in form of a general study schedule as well as particular subjects¹.

Faculty of Architecture schedule was formed on the basis of the assumption that the architect's profession is characterised by the need to associate and use the knowledge which comprises many different disciplines understood as fields of study. A lot of attention was paid to the connections existing between architecture and painting, sculpture and pattern-designing. In the group of scientific subjects which included, among other things, mathematics, mechanics, building trade, constructions, installations and cost estimates, technical basics of designing were also taught. The schedule was complemented by practical information as regards architect's profession-

al duties. Plenty of time was also devoted to the issues of history of art and history of architecture as well as teaching urban planning in the historical and contemporary context² [19].

The first plan of studies comprised 4 140 hours of didactic classes carried out within four years. Over 35% (1 500 hours) constituted design classes. Historical subjects comprised nearly 20% of time (810 hours), while scientific subjects like building and construction – over 25% (1 080 hours). Almost 15% (600 hours) constituted drawing, graphics and sculpture classes³.

For comparison purposes, in the study schedule for the academic year 2008/2009 (for master's and engineer's degree inclusively) realised for six years (4 + 2 years respectively), the number of hours is 3 905. Design subjects comprise nearly 39% of time (1 520 hours), historical – circa 11% (450 hours), scientific building and construction – almost 17% (665 hours), drawing – less than 5% (180 hours).

The schedule outlined in 1915 was finally shaped till the academic year 1920/1921 without any bigger changes⁴ [15]. Within this time, all planned didactic units started to function:

– Departments: Urban Designing, Monumental Designing, Village Designing, Ancient Architecture, History of Architecture, History of Art, Polish Architecture, Town Building, Building Industry, Freehand Drawing;

² 'Wydział Architektury na Politechnice w Warszawie. Program, Warszawa 1915.

³ The analyses of study schedules at Faculty of Architecture of Warsaw University of Technology made on the basis of the information contained in the university documents were worked out by the author and used in the doctoral thesis: 'The Method of Recording and Accessing Historical Knowledge on the Example of Faculty of Architecture of Warsaw University of Technology', Warsaw 2010, pp. 255–270.

⁴ 'Program Politechniki Warszawskiej na rok naukowy 1920/21, Warszawa 1920, pp. 85–86.

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¹ A fragment of the first schedule preamble of Warsaw University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture, Warszawa 1915.

– Institutes: Polish Architecture, History of Ancient Architecture, Renaissance Architecture.

Program sources of Faculty of Architecture of Warsaw University of Technology can be found in Polish and foreign schools educating future professors of architecture – these schools functioned in Europe in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century.

The beginnings of architectural education in Poland go back to the 17th century. At that time the first Polish Department of Geodesy at Cracow Academy was opened⁵ [15], which – according to the foundation act – was supposed to teach, among other things, military construction. In 1632 at the same Academy, Department of Geometry and Fortification was opened, the schedule of which included the studies on Vitruvius ‘Architecture’⁶ [20]. In the 18th century, some elements of architectural education can be found in Engineering and Military schools schedules. However, graduating from those schools did not mean the right to practise the profession.

More or less until the middle of the 19th century, the majority of architects in Europe studied in the master systems and did not study at universities. A fundamental way to gain experience and fluency in the profession was practice. At the end of the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th century, non-compulsory professional examinations were introduced in many countries, which were mainly taken by persons who applied for clerk posts.

In the same period, first universities with technological sections were opened. In 1794 École Polytechnique was endowed – a Parisian elite technical school. The method of education in this type of schools was initially based on a free choice from the courses comprising issues from different branches of technology. Around the middle of the 19th century, faculties with specific profiles and examinations during the course of studies were introduced in the organisational structure of the university as well as the obligation to present a master thesis⁷ [2].

An important event for the development of architectural education in Poland was foundation of Crown Engineers Corps School in Warsaw in 1789. At the same time, Lithuanian Engineers Corps School was open in Vilnius. Architectural education was introduced in both schools.

In 1826 the Preparation School to the Institute of Technology⁸ [1] was opened in Warsaw with the Department of Civil Engineering which, among other things, educated students in the scope of architecture and geodesy⁹ [12]. The school, which was supposed to be transformed into a university of technology, was closed after the outbreak

of the November Uprising. As a result of reprisals which took place after the uprising, Warsaw University and Faculty of Sciences and Fine Arts were closed in 1831. In 1844 School of Fine Arts continued teaching students in the range of artistic education¹⁰ [7]. After the school had been suspended (1863) and then closed (1866), education in the range of architecture on the level secondary school took place in Warsaw.

In 1898 Warsaw Tsar Nicholas Institute of Technology was created¹¹ [9]. Among three faculties of the newly opened university Faculty of Engineering and Construction started its activity, at which architecture constituted one of two specializations achieved on the level of a diploma. All the classes were run in the Russian language. After the University of Technology had been closed in 1905, in the years 1907–1910 The Society of Scientific Courses developed its activity in Warsaw, which organized, among other things, construction courses at the major of architecture.

In 1915, after tsar’s authorities had withdrawn from Poland and the Germans had entered Poland, The Society of Higher Scientific Courses and The Association of Technicians made attempts to open Polish University and University of Technology in Warsaw¹² [8]. Initially, the major of architecture was planned to be opened as part of Faculty of Engineering and Construction, however, due to the efforts made by Warsaw Architects Club a separate ‘Architectural Faculty’ was finally opened.

In the Organisation Commission there were the following persons: Mikołaj Tołwiński (the chairman), Rudolf Świerczyński (the secretary), Józef Dziekoński, Czesław Domaniewski, Jan Heurich, Karol Jankowski, Juliusz Kłos, Kazimierz Skórewicz, Tadeusz Tołwiński, and Jarosław Wojciechowski. The architects Zygmunt Kamiński and Apoloniusz Nieniewski as well as the engineers connected with other Faculties of University of Technology such as Henryk Czopowski, Waclaw Paszkowski and Ignacy Radziszewski also contributed to the preparation of schedules¹³ [14, 19].

We can assume that a diversity of experiences gathered by the members of the Commission significantly influenced the interdisciplinary and open character of the Faculty. Starting from education which they got in schools with technical profiles (Faculties of Architecture at Universities of Technology in Vienna, Karlsruhe and Darmstadt; Faculties of Construction of Higher Technical School in Dresden and University of Technology in Riga; Faculty of Engineering and Construction of Tsar Nicholas II Warsaw Institute of Technology; Institute of Civil Engineers in Petersburg; II Corps Cadets in Petersburg) as well as with artistic profiles (Tsar’s Academy of Fine Arts

⁵ Suchodolski B., *Historia nauki polskiej*, Wrocław 1974, Vol. 6, pp. 658–660.

⁶ Zarębska T., *Początki polskiego piśmiennictwa urbanistycznego*, Warszawa 1975, p. 404.

⁷ Anderson R.D., *European Universities from the Enlightenment to 1914*, Oxford 2004.

⁸ *150 lat Politechniki Warszawskiej: kalendarium*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 2–3.

⁹ *Ogólny programat kursów wykładac się mających w Szkole Przygotowawczej do Instytutu Politechnicznego w roku szkolnym 1830/1831*, Warszawa 1831.

¹⁰ Jakimowicz I., Ryszkiewicz A., *Szkola Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie 1844–1866*, [in:] *Rocznik Warszawski* 1963, Vol. IV.

¹¹ Kolbiński K., *Politechnika Warszawska 1915–1965*, Warszawa 1965, p. 22.

¹² Kazimierski J., *Nauka i szkolnictwo wyższe w Warszawie*, Warszawa 1987, pp. 401–409; *150 lat wyższego szkolnictwa technicznego w Warszawie 1826–1976*, Warszawa 1980.

¹³ *Wydział Architektury...*, op. cit.

in Petersburg; School of Fine Arts in Warsaw; School of Fine Arts in Cracow; Higher School of Painting, Sculpture and Construction in Moscow) through first design attempts to the development of one's own characteristic style.

The formula of education, which was accepted at the moment of creation of the School and developed during the first years of its activity, defined a specific profile of Warsaw Faculty determined by consistent coexistence of technical, artistic and historical disciplines. The plan of the program enabled the student to choose to some extent an individual way of education often based on cooperation with a chosen professor.

A boom in philosophical thought and new tendencies in art preceded by a rapid development of industry constituted the background for architectural activity at the beginning of the 20th century. The more and more common usage of new construction materials as well as the arising need for functional architecture resulted in changes in understanding the essence of building creative activity and the role of the architect.

A desire to leave the 19th-century historicism appeared in architecture. The last decade of the 19th century brought the origin of a new expressive style – secession. Modernity in architecture was represented at that time by realisations of Chicago School in the United States and designs by Perret and Garnier in Europe.

In 1907 in Berlin, Deutscher Werkbund was created – the association organised by a group of artists and industrialists, which aimed at creating conditions for the development of industrial production of high quality based on valuable craftsmanship¹⁴ [11]. The architectural creative activity was characterised by purity of functional solutions and simplicity of the form. The first exhibition, which presented realisations corresponding to the accepted assumptions, was opened in Cologne in 1914.

In general, the character of European architecture around the year 1915 was featured by fondness for historicism, in particular, in the scope of average creative activity. Representatives of the younger and progressive generation of designers tried to leave traditional thinking about art by heading towards rationalism.

Enlivening of artistic and intellectual activity, which was restrained by the events of World War I, came back after 1918 and was intensified by the development of industry and technological progress generated by military needs. Rational thinking about architecture, whose sources were already embedded in the creative activity of the 19th century, was developed in the atmosphere conducive to logical understanding and effective working. Dynamic development of industry and building industry was accompanied by initiatives from the borderline of art and technology.

In 1919 in Weimar, Staatliche Bauhaus was opened – the school whose profile was determined by the respect for craftsmanship, the awareness of unity of architecture,

sculpture and painting as well as the conviction that the best source of creative imagination is perfection of the technique¹⁵ [5, 6].

In 1917 T. van Doesburg established De Stijl group which played a significant role in the development of the modern architectural thought¹⁶ [13]. In this group there were painters, sculptors and architects who created according to neo-plasticism principles (geometric abstraction). This group introduced functional and constructivist tendencies into architecture. It also contributed to the development of the rational thought, the example of which constitute Kiefhoek residential complexes in Amsterdam (J. J. P. Oud) or cheap districts in Hilversum (W. M. Dudok)¹⁷ [18]. The year 1914 brought five principles of modern architecture formulated by Le Corbusier: detached supports, free plan, walls independent on the construction, facades with wide (streaked) windows, and flat roofs with gardens. The innovative concept of understanding architecture introduced new methods of building the form which made the architectural composition independent of the construction¹⁸ [10].

In 1926 'Praesens' group was established in Poland. It was created by, among other, artists connected with Faculty of Architecture of Warsaw University of Technology: Helena and Szymon Syrkus, Bohdan Lachert and Józef Szanajca. The program of the group referred to functionalism and constructivism and assumed synthetic unity of all fine arts. Members of the group realized many designs in which specific colours and forms were subject to functional purposes. They actively took part in the works of the International Congress of Modern Architecture¹⁹ [3, 4].

In this atmosphere, architectural creative activity developed in Warsaw, which comprised both completions of the existing city buildings and designs of new housing development. By using new areas, among other things, on the right side of the Vistula River or in Żoliborz it was possible to build urban complexes, which are nowadays commonly perceived as unique. While walking down the streets of this district we have the impression that this architecture – although often quite different as regards style, form and scale – perfectly blends in with the existing structure and gives the space an unexpectedly uniform character.

Building a new bridge on the extension of Aleje Jerolimskie in the years 1905–1913²⁰ contributed to the opening of the new investment areas on the right side of the Vistula.

¹⁵ Gropius W., *Scope of total architecture*, Ann Arbor 1962; Walter Gropius *The new architecture and the Bauhaus*, Boston 1965.

¹⁶ Padovan R., *Towards universality: Le Corbusier, Mies and De Stijl*, New York 2002.

¹⁷ White M., *De Stijl and Dutch modernism*, Manchester 2003.

¹⁸ Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture*, Los Angeles 2007.

¹⁹ Baranowicz Z., *Polska awangarda artystyczna 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1979.

²⁰ The bridge was opened to public in January 1914. In August 1915 it was blown up by Russians like other Warsaw crossings. It was burnt after several months since its emergency repair. Reconstruction started in 1921 and lasted till 1927; in the meantime one road was opened (1925).

¹⁴ Maciuika J.V., *Before the Bauhaus: architecture, politics, and the German state 1890–1920*, Vol. 2, Cambridge 2005.

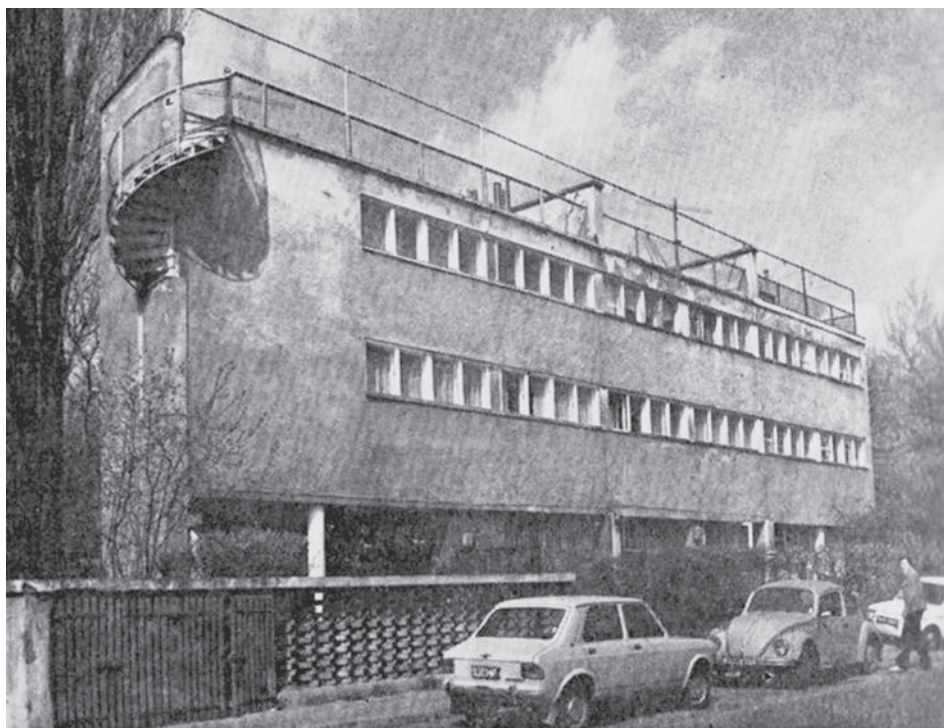


Fig. 1. Bohdan Lachert, Józef Szanajca, The Building at Katowicka Street in Warsaw

The first development plans of *Saska Kępa* appeared already in about 1900. After the building works of the bridge started, architects came back to the concept of district plotting and in 1911 the municipal council published the sketch of the regulatory scheme in which the realization of villa housing development was planned and the location of Skaryszewski Park was indicated. According to earlier assumptions, the arrangement of streets was shaped in the radiant system with the central square situated at the exit of the bridge. These plans were carried out almost 20 years later. Numerous reasons and conditions influenced the spatial arrangement and character of *Saska Kępa*. A particular climate of the place, which is today more appreciated than ever before, was shaped, among other things, by architecture reflecting wide creative possibilities of architects working in this area.

Walking along *Saska Kępa*, we can see not only examples of historicizing buildings but also buildings designed in the spirit of functionalism up to elegant, classicising modernism²¹.

The first significant investment in this area was the so called *Kolonia Łaskiego* which was located in the region of the following streets: Katowicka, *Obrońców* and *Dąbrowiecka*. The development complex was built in the historicizing stylistics although with the usage of a modern gravel-concrete technology. Many structures, which were built in the 1920s and 1930s, referred to traditional forms and details. This also refers to the building at *Obrońców Street 33*, the project of which is attributed to Józef Vogtman – a graduate from Faculty of Architecture

of Warsaw University of Technology in 1933²² [17]. This structure was built quite late, i.e. in about 1936 and its realization at that time shows the architects' everlasting devotion to historical inspirations.

At the end of the 1920s, the first buildings representing architectural avant-garde were built on *Saska Kępa*. Among them, there is a building at Katowicka Street 9/11/11a, which was built as a three-family terraced house (it included the house and the study of Bohdan Lachert at number 9, the house of Z. Lechowska (No. 11) and the house of M. Ostrowska (No. 11a)). The project strictly referred to five principles of modern architecture of Le Corbusier. The architects Bohdan Lachert and Józef Szanajca were the authors. Both of them graduated from Faculty of Architecture at Warsaw University of Technology and they defended their diploma in 1926 and 1927 respectively. Bohdan Lachert worked as a didactic instructor; he was a deputy of the professor in the Department of Industrial and Economic Designing (1945–48); he obtained the title of associate professor in 1948.

At the same time, i.e. in the years 1928–1929, the architects realised – unfortunately not existing²³ any longer – the Villa of Antoni and Olimpia Szyller located at *Wał Miedzeszyński 756*. It was an outstanding example of extreme functionalism with the form consisting of rectangular elements of diverse heights.

In the 1930s the development of *Saska Kępa* was systematically extended by buildings which belonged to the modern architecture trend.

A good example can be the Villa of Andrzej Zaleski designed by Bohdan Pniewski in 1930. It is characterised

²¹ Classification introduced by K. Koszewski in the study: *Koncepcja architektoniczno-historycznej bazy wiedzy na przykładzie Saskiej Kępy w Warszawie*.

²² *Warszawska Szkoła Architektury 1915–1965*, Warszawa 1967, p. 295.

²³ Destroyed gradually since 1945 and pulled down in 2002.

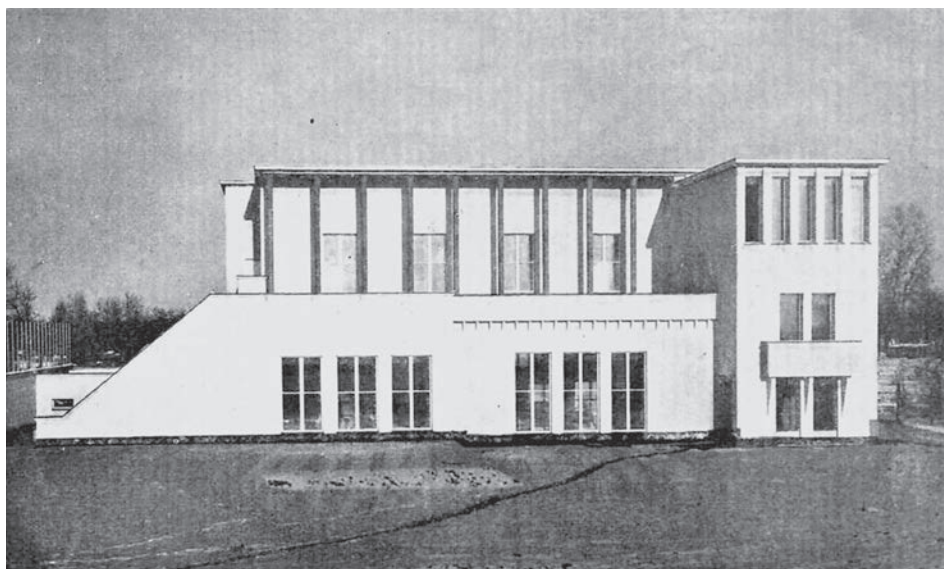


Fig. 2. Bohdan Pniewski,
The House at Miedzeszyński
Wał in Warsaw. Source:
Architecture and Construction,
No. 8/1932, p. 237



Fig. 3. Jadwiga Dobrzyńska,
Zygmunt Łoboda, The House
at Estońska Street in Warsaw.
Source: Architecture and
Construction, No. 4/1934, p. 114

by the structure consisting of simple forms of different heights and facades deprived of details and shaped by means of large planes of smooth walls. It is located in a way which makes it possible to observe the composition from the most convenient places and directions. According to the author's description: *'Forms of the building were designed in such a way that there were no short cuts from Miedzeszyński Wał'*²⁴ [21]. Bohdan Pniewski graduated from Faculty of Architecture at Warsaw University of Technology in 1922 and later he was connected with this Faculty due to his didactic activity. After the war he received the title of associate professor (1945) and then professor (1946). In different periods of his work at the Faculty, he managed the following departments: Department of Designing and Architectural Composition, Institute of Theory and Architectural

Criticism and Department of Public Utility Edifices Designing²⁵ [17].

The house of Jadwiga Dobrzyńska and Zygmunt Łoboda located at Estońska Street 6, which was designed and realised in the years 1932–1933, is considered to be an outstanding example of rational architecture. The form of the building defined by the uncomplicated rectangular mass referred to Le Corbusier creative activity following his principles: a free plan, terrace on the roof, free façade, streaked windows and a building on pillars. Jadwiga Dobrzyńska graduated from Faculty of Architecture in 1922, while Zygmunt Łoboda in 1927²⁶ [17].

The villa at Obrońców Street 10, which was designed by the architects Piotr Kwiek and Lucjan Korngold in the years about 1934–1936, constitutes an example of luxuri-

²⁴ Architektura i Budownictwo, No. 8/1932, p. 240.

²⁵ *Warszawska Szkoła Architektury...*, op. cit., pp. 248–249.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 274, 284.

ous functionalism. It was the building with diverse facades arranged according to the principles of geometric abstraction. Lucjan Korngold graduated from Faculty of Architecture in 1921 and Piotr Kwiek in 1927²⁷. These several examples of prominent architectural works designed by the graduates of Faculty of Architecture in the area of Saska Kępa can constitute the proof that strongly individualised architecture can successfully intermingle with neutral urban context and in this way enrich the space with characteristic elements and jointly create genius loci [17].

It is worth emphasising the fact that the above mentioned architects studied at Faculty of Architecture at Warsaw University of Technology shortly after the University was set up. Many students started their education before the year 1920. However, it seems impossible to determine a simple rule which would show the relation between the date of submitting the diploma and the nature of further creative activity. It also seems interesting that a probable author of the presented most conservative works is the last graduate of the School (Józef Vogtman, diploma in 1933).

Nowadays, if we look around Warsaw in search for a contemporary equivalent of the housing estate of Saska

Kępa quality, it is difficult to find examples of organised plotting on this scale at all. Perhaps, modern norms of the investment market are not favourable for a reasonable planning policy.

Against this background, the Town Wilanów seems to be a particular example whose realisation has lasted for several years on the so called territories of Pola Wilanowskie in the south of Warsaw. The housing estate is designed on the basis of the local plans worked out by the authors selected through urban competitions, which is something really unique. Of course, the range and character of the design significantly differs from the above mentioned pre-war realisations. It refers to the scale and to the intensity of the development as well as to the planned functional structure which – apart from multi-family residential buildings – includes trade, service and office zones. The central element of the arrangement plan is Świątynia Opatrzności Bożej (National Temple of Divine Providence) – currently under construction.

It seems that in the perspective of several years, we will have an opportunity to see whether the ambitious plans of a private investor turn out to be effective. Will we be able to sum up a walk around the Town Wilanów as satisfying not only because of the quality of the public spaces but also due to the character of the local architecture?

²⁷ Ibidem, pp. 281–282.

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Indywidualizm i architektura tła. Dylematy edukacji w dobie przelomu

Współczesna kultura zbudowała przekonanie o konieczności ponadnormatywnej ekspresji.

Wyścig ikon generuje krótkotrwałe zainteresowanie i różnorodne skutki w czasie. Teledyskowa lista przebojów znika w cotygodniowej reinkarnacji. Miasto krzyczących fasad trwa.

Kiedy w roku 1915 członkowie Komisji Organizacyjnej tworzyli podstawy programowe Wydziału Architektury Politechniki Warszawskiej kontekst działań architektów odzwierciedlał ponad stuletnią destrukcję państwowości.

Różnorodność upodobań i rodowodów upoważniała do przewidywania niespójnych, kompilacyjnych efektów. Spotkali się m.in.: Józef

Pius Dziekoński, Rudolf Świerczyński, Karol Jankowski wywodzący się z różnych europejskich szkół, politechnik i akademii sztuk pięknych.

Mimo to warszawska spuścizna dwudziestolecia tworzy spójny obraz o ponadprzeciętnej jakości. Szkoła wykształciła „architektów klasy średniej”, którzy tworzyli znakomitą architekturę tła: gmachy publiczne, budynki socjalne, mieszkalne. O czym przekonuje spacer po warszawskiej Saskiej Kępie, czy Żoliborzu.

Jakiej chcemy dziś architektury? Czy przez absorpcję ikonicznych modeli zdołamy uporządkować krajobraz miast zniszczony przez półwieczne niedoinwestowanie i totalitaryzm? A może znów, bardziej niż wirtuozów potrzeba nam mistrzów drugiego planu?

Key words: background architecture, individualism, education

Słowa kluczowe: architektura tła, indywidualizm, edukacja