

Objectives of the project and main expected results

The aim of this project is to **deliver a comprehensive picture of furniture-making in Poznań from 1945 to 1989** in a monographic study. The capital of Greater Poland was a place where the main state institutions which supervised the development of the furniture industry were to be found, along with its educational base and exhibition facilities. The co-existence of specialized higher education, principal regulatory authorities, furniture factories and carpentry shops, as well as exhibition institutions with the Poznań International Fair at the forefront made Poznań a leading furniture-making centre with a nationwide impact, with no precedent or equivalent in the entire country. The situation, though present in the public awareness, has neither been extensively discussed so far, nor has it been really reflected in the studies on Polish or Poznań design. At the same time, the situation was characteristic of the former Eastern Bloc, where the design and production potential would be concentrated in one city or region. The functioning of the Poznań centre corresponds with the situation in Czechoslovakian Brno, where numerous institutions were in fact counterparts of those which resided in Poznań. Consequently, although the project will focus on Poznań as a furniture-making centre, it will take into account the kind of circumstances in which design and production functioned in Poland and the neighbouring communist states, including state supervision, centrally controlled economy, and rationed consumption.

Description of research

The information necessary to carry out this project will be obtained through **archival research**, by means of **interviews** with former employees of furniture-related institutions, and **analysis of particular artefacts**. Analysis of data collected in the course of archival research will make it possible to reconstruct the operation of individual institutions and enterprises, and enable one to map their interactions and thus understand how Polish furniture industry functioned. The interviews are intended to yield information which for various reasons, including selective record of data in official documents, has not been preserved in the source material. The study of pieces of furniture, whether actual surviving items or their photographs, drawings, sketches and designs, will be a process consisting in formal analysis, whose aim is to demonstrate changes in the work of particular designers and, in a broader perspective, reveal trends in Polish furniture-making in the second half of the 20th century. The material used in production will be analyzed as well, in order to capture technological development in design and production. **Methodology.** This project remains within the current of research into design history while taking into account the practices, narratives, and mechanisms of generating cultural and social meanings of objects. The so-called Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm will provide one of the theoretical mainstays of the study of furniture-making in Poznań, as it encompasses the broadly understood sphere of consumption, mediation between the producer and the consumer, and the semantic role of the objects themselves. The project is also in line with the inquiry into the modes of inhabiting and arranging interiors as one of the elements of implementing social revolution and creating a living space for the “new human”, an approach which is characteristic for the studies of design in the former Eastern Bloc.

Rationale for research

In recent years, Polish furniture-making of the communist era has attracted considerable interest of collectors and interior design professionals. There is no shortage of popular-scientific publications dedicated to the topic, and one observes a lively unofficial exchange of information concerning the creators, their designs, and production sites, but the credibility of that information is at times questionable. However, lack of a relatively comprehensive, scientific study which explores furniture-making in Poland translates into a major gap in reliable knowledge and continuing public demand. The project should be carried out in Poznań in view of the availability of material and easier access to the persons involved (designers, teachers, manufacturers or their descendants). Simultaneously, the project will add to the historical-artistic investigations concerned with the history of interiors, residential architecture as well as the relations of politics, power, propaganda and material culture in the strategies of society-building, by exploring how the entire framework functioned in the communist states.