

The case of a city „in between”: architecture and urban planning of Opole in the years 1945-1989

The objective of the research project is to present a cohesive narrative concerning the architectural and urban development of Opole between 1945 (the end of the Second World War) and 1989 (the end of the Polish People's Republic and the beginning of capitalism). The structure of the research project presents the history of Opole's post-war architecture and urban planning in chronological order, starting with the first five post-war years (1945-1950) and moving on to the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s. The research project will present examples of architecture and urban planning, as well as its creators – architects, planners and other actors.

Another aim of the research project is to include Opole's post-war architecture and urban planning into the general discourse surrounding post-war architecture and urban development in Poland. Currently, the discourse surrounding it is overwhelmingly shaped by the examples of bigger cities. Including a case study of a smaller city, such as Opole, has a potential to nuance and enrich the discourse, while presenting new ways of researching and examining post-war architecture and urban planning.

The third objective is to propose a new research optic, which aims to examine Opole as a city located “in-between” in regards to various values, aspects and contexts, both material and immaterial, which determined Opole's architectural and spatial development in the examined period between 1945 and 1989. Among them we can mention: Katowice and Wrocław, Upper and Lower Silesia, big and small city, Polishness and Germanness, disruption and continuity, negation and acceptance, expectations and reality, uniqueness and commonness. Thus, the research project's potential lies in the possibilities of nuancing and enriching the discourse surrounding architectural, urban and spatial development of Polish cities after 1945 by presenting that topic in the context of Opole as a smaller city, with its own distinctive issues, themes, events and discourses.

The project aims to answer two essential research questions. The first one concerns how this particular status of Opole as a city “in between” dictated and impacted its architectural and urban development during the post-war period. The second one aims to answer how architecture and urban planning in Opole have been intertwined with politics, ideology, identity and discourses surrounding modernity and heritage. The main hypothesis of the research project is that the status of Opole as a city situated “in between” different factors, values, aspects and contexts had a direct impact on the city's architectural and urban development.

This research project, as a first ever monographical entry on post-war architecture and urban planning in Opole, is a pioneering work within the field of architectural and urban history of Polish cities. Its content and proposed narrative is based mainly on research, analysis and examination of previously unpublished archival and source materials. Due to the fact that the topic of the project has not yet been a subject of an independent research, the significant bulk of the work is comprised of basic research: identification of certain buildings, their designs, time of their conception or important actors that had an impact on the processes presented in the research project. Archival queries, conducted in Opole, Warsaw and Katowice, will help in establishing the most crucial topics, issues, events and actors.

In order to create a comprehensive and multifaceted narrative surrounding architectural and urban development of post-war Opole, the results of the basic research will be analyzed by the use of various theories and methodological approaches that shape the current discourse surrounding architecture, urban planning and space. Showing the research themes in the context of politics, identity, ideology and society aims to present architecture and urban planning as inseparably bonded with those wider sociological and cultural issues, transcending the rudimentary issues of purely material or aesthetic values. Used methodological approaches include social theory of space, postcolonial theory, dissonant heritage and spatial turn.

The effects of the research project include preparing new chapters of doctoral dissertation, writing two research articles with intention of publishing them in international journals and creating a website popularizing themes and topics included in the research project.