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***Contextualism as a contemporary
architectural design philosophy.
The issue of the role of the architect
based on examples of public buildings in Krakow***

Introduction

Architecture is the field of art that is most accessible to a wide audience and has a real impact on everyone's living space, while at the same time it is the most strongly connected with and dependent on external conditions. The object of architecture is never erected in a creative vacuum, but in a specific environment that affects it in various ways, both through the specifics of the order and natural, historical, sociological or legal conditions. Finally, the creation itself, the realization of an architectural work is not the result of the creative action of one person, but the cooperation of numerous specialists in various fields. Modern times, along with the rapid development of technology, have brought about a questioning of the role of the architect himself. The concept of "architecture without an architect" implies the use of artificial intelligence and 3D modeling techniques to create a structure perfectly inscribed in a specific spatial context, taking into account all definable conditions, such as terrain, climate, local law [1]. The creative process is reduced in this concept to an impersonal design of a building meeting external requirements based on optimizing algorithms. With the undoubted utilitarian appeal of such a solution, the question arises about the role of the architect himself. Is it a redundant profession in this day and age? In the computerized modern construction industry, will there no longer be a demand for the creative act itself? The architect is the only one capable of connecting the concept of

optimization (interpreted as the best possible integration of a new building with the environment) with the presence of an idea. With the idea, the architect can create an original modern form of high quality, and also give the building some symbolical meaning. The extreme oppositional concept of architecture as *ars pro arte*, programmatically disregarding the environment in order to create a work that is solely a manifestation of the creator's individual concept, often shocking in form and strongly dominating the place in which it is created, seems inapplicable in the spaces of historic cities, amidst a rich historic fabric and under the current conditions of developed legal protection of cultural landscapes. The creators of the latest works of public architecture in Krakow also face these questions and dilemmas. The purpose of this study is to show that the answer is the concept of contextualism, interpreted as a combination of respect for the historical environment with the presence of a creative idea, necessary to give the work an iconic value, at the same time sanctioning the sense of the architect's work. The intention of this article is also to formulate assessments and criteria for the analysis of contextual implementation on the example of selected case studies.

The author presents examples of public buildings built in Krakow in 2000 and 2016, which both won recognition in the architectural community and were socially accepted in the historic urban space. The common denominator of the described works is precisely the design philosophy based on contextualism, according to which the architect and his creative thought is a kind of medium between the historical heritage and modernity, he is the one who transforms the conditions, understood as limitations, into the material of inspiration, in order to create an object both

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perfectly inscribed in the surroundings, as well as distinctive and speaking the language of modernity.

The current state of research

There is extensive literature on the subject of contextualism in architecture itself, including in Poland. These include both studies of a general nature, focusing on the theory and philosophy of contextualism itself, and those devoted to specific projects. Among the former, we can mention the article *Architektura a kontekst miejsca* [Architecture versus a place context], whose authors – Jan Wrana, Agnieszka Fitta – note that the creation of concepts in architecture is to understand the context, and only objects whose creation was preceded by an analysis of the place have a chance to “live” in urban space [2]. In a collection of articles on the subject, *Eseje o tożsamości miejsca* [Essays on identity of place], Wrana writes about “place-directed” architecture [3] and the action of an architect who, after analyzing the existing conditions within the context of the place, decides to create a “new identity” through the creation of a new form [4]. In the study *O metaforze w architekturze współczesnej* [On metaphor in contemporary architecture], Marcin Charciarek defines context as an element that determines the meaning of an architectural statement and forms a cause-and-effect relationship with the form [5]. Marta Urbańska, in her work *Najnowsze realizacje polskie w kontekście historycznym – ochrona wartości przez architekturę decorum* [Recent Polish realisations in the historical context – protection of values through the architecture of decorum], gives some examples of contextual architecture of iconic nature created in Poland after 2000 [6]. Examples of contextualism in Polish public architecture are also mentioned in the study *Myśli – Marzenia – Miejsca. Architektura polska w innowacyjnej współczesności* [Thoughts – Dreams – Places. Polish architecture in innovative modernity] by Nina Juzwa and Jakub Świerzawski [7]. In the doctoral thesis by Małgorzata Wijas *Kontekst w polskiej architekturze XXI wieku. Wybrane przykłady* [Context in Polish architecture of the 21st century. Selected examples], the author puts forward the thesis that the consideration of context is one of the elements that affect the high quality of contemporary architectural and urban creations [8]. A reference to protecting the spiritual value of a place can be found in the 2008 *Declaration on the preservation of the spirit of place* [9], while a reference to the harmonious integration of the past with the present in the 2011 UNESCO document *The Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* [10]. Among the studies devoted to specific structures, we can mention Krzysztof Ingarden’s articles in which he analyzes his own contextual creative philosophy, including *Contextual architecture: between mimesis and abstraction – project of Małopolska Garden of Art* [11] and *Poszukiwanie metody – eksperymenty z kontekstem i materiałem na przykładzie wybranych projektów własnych* [In search of the method – experiments with the context and materials in selected own projects] [12].

The following study focuses on objects of cultural character built in the historic urban space of Krakow, where the main challenge for architects was the context of the historic heritage and the limitations of its legal protection. Under these conditions, it is particularly evident how contextualism allows to combine *genius loci* with modernity, and in the hands of a talented creator, respect for tradition proves to be an excellent starting point and stimulation for innovation.

Analysis of selected projects

Małopolska Garden of Art

The design of the Małopolska Garden of Art (MOS) by Ingarden & Ewý Architekci was selected through a competition in 2005 and implemented in 2010–2012 [13]. The building at 12 Rajska Street was erected on the site of a 19th-century riding school, used as storage and workshop facilities of the J. Słowacki Theater, opposite the building of the Regional Public Library. The immediate vicinity of the building is made up of residential buildings from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, typical of the buildings surrounding the historic center. The goal of designer Krzysztof Ingarden was to create a modern cultural center open to a wide audience, while respecting the statutory provision on the need to “continue the functions, parameters, features and indicators” of the historic neighborhood buildings¹. The architect’s answer to such a task became precisely the contextual method, thanks to which it was possible, within the framework of the existing conditions, to develop an innovative form with a highly individual and contemporary expression. The contextualism of the Małopolska Garden of Art is expressed through a multifaceted implementation of the principle of continuity. The first idea is the continuation of functions – the new building accommodated a theater stage (referring to the previous use of the hall) and a multimedia mediatheque, which is a branch of the neighboring library on Rajska Street. The theater space (which is in fact a multi-purpose performance, concert and conference hall) has been inscribed into the dimensions of the former riding hall. The entrance to it leads through a glass foyer, which simultaneously exposes the historic façade of the hall and creates a visual opening and connection with the garden in front of the building (Fig. 1). The second part of the building – the mediatheque – is a new building added perpendicularly from Szujskiego Street and houses multimedia collections thematically related to art (Fig. 2). Another way to set the edifice in context is to continue the architectural form and the parameters and features of the existing building. Thus, the design of the Ingarden & Ewý studio retains the height and divisions corresponding to the buildings it faces: both the ridges and cornices are extensions of the neighboring ones. The form of the dressage hall and its skylight have

¹ This is a provision of 27 March 2003 *Ustawa o planowaniu i zagospodarowaniu przestrzennym* [Law on planning and spatial development] [14].



Fig. 1. Małopolska Garden of Art, view from Rajska Street
(photo by J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

Il. 1. Małopolski Ogród Sztuki, widok od ul. Rajskiej
(fot. J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

also been preserved, while the staircase reproduces the pattern of polychrome, a fragment of which was discovered on the walls of the hall. The idea of material continuity is realized by the use of ceramic bricks. The front wall of the riding hall was also restored, using demolition brick. As Ingarden himself writes, the design method of the Małopolska Garden of Art is based on a combination of two opposing principles of interpreting the neighborhood – on the one hand, respecting morphological continuity and operating with a scale comparable to the existing structures, and on the other, abstracting and interpreting. Thus, the façade divisions of the new building relate directly to the neighboring tenements, but the form of the façade itself has a thoroughly modern character of an open band composition, made of glass and an obscuring vertical arrangement of ceramic elements. The historic forms and material have been transformed to create a building with an original and modern character. The architect describes this as a “method of reinterpreted local code”. “The local code” is elements taken from the environment, subjected to creative interpretation combined with abstraction understood as creating a modern and individual form.

Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka

The building housing the headquarters of the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor was designed by Piotr Nawara along with Agnieszka Szultk (nsMoonStudio) and Stanisław Deńko (Biuro Architektoniczne Wizja) in 2006 and erected in 2010–2014 [15]. The building was constructed in a special place, on the site of the historic Podgórska Power Plant on the banks of the Vistula River. In his statements, Cricoteka designer Piotr Nawara places special emphasis on the concept itself, as the main sense of a contemporary architect’s work [16]. It is the presence of a creative idea that, in his opinion, distinguishes construction aiming at utilitarian optimization from architecture “with the potential of an icon”, which has the chance with its form and message to “set



Fig. 2. Małopolska Garden of Art, view from J. Szujkiego Street
(photo by J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

Il. 2. Małopolski Ogród Sztuki, widok od ul. J. Szujkiego
(fot. J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

the framework for the changing reality”². The Cricoteka building has been firmly embedded in the context of the site. The historic power plant buildings have been carefully restored and given a new function – they house the archive, a multipurpose room, as well as administration and research department rooms (Fig. 3). Above them, a modern block has been erected in the form of two “legs” – reinforced concrete communication shafts – between which, like a bridge, a wing containing exhibition spaces has been spanned (Fig. 4). The façades of the block are finished with openwork panels made of weathering sheet, referring to the post-industrial character of the place, and its mirror-like underside reflects the historic buildings and the Vistula River. In Cricoteka’s design we are dealing with simultaneous contrasting and merging of “new” and “old”. The atectonic structure rises above the carefully restored historic buildings of the power plant, seemingly not integrating with its surroundings, which, however, are reflected in its mirrored surface. In this way,

² Noticeable are those buildings that have iconic potential. With the current overproduction of absolutely everything, only those things and objects that definitely rise above the average, are memorable. An architect will be a potential creator of unremarkable places and spaces. [...] Engineering will be taken over by specialized construction companies, while questions of aesthetics, ideas, crossing certain boundaries, juxtaposing materials, functions and needs will belong to the architect [16, pp. 152, 153].

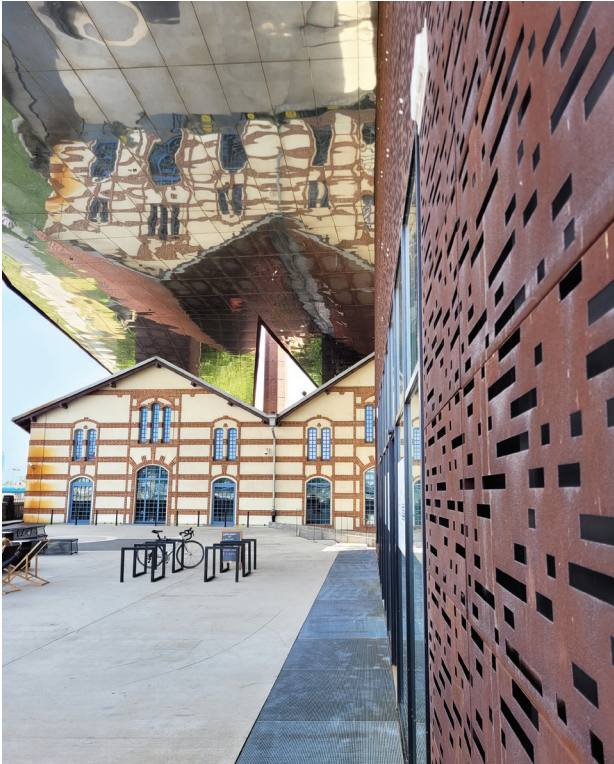


Fig. 3. Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka on Nadwiślańska Street. View of the restored buildings of the former Podgórska Power Plant housing, among other things, a multi-purpose room (photo by J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

Il. 3. Ośrodek Dokumentacji Sztuki Tadeusza Kantora Cricoteka przy ul. Nadwiślańskiej. Widok na odrestaurowane budynki dawnej Elektrowni Podgórskiej mieszczące m.in. salę wielofunkcyjną (fot. J. Białkiewicz, 2022)



Fig. 4. Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka on Nadwiślańska Street (photo by J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

Il. 4. Ośrodek Dokumentacji Sztuki Tadeusza Kantora Cricoteka przy ul. Nadwiślańskiej (fot. J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

the place and gives it a completely new, so desired by the architect, “iconic” quality (Fig. 5).

Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow

modernity becomes both a reflection of the site’s history and its contemporary dynamic life. Standing out in the landscape of the Vistula boulevards, the Cricoteka building draws attention with its design boldness and huge metaphorical charge, with numerous references to Kantor’s creative postulates. The historic buildings, together with the bridge of modern form thrown over them, form a whole that simultaneously grows out of the context of

The design of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow (MOCAK), by Italian architect Claudio Nardi (Claudio Nardi Architette, Leonardo Maria Proli), was selected through a competition in 2007, and realized in 2009–2010 [17]. The idea behind the building was to introduce a new contemporary quality to the former industrial district,



Fig. 5. Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka on Nadwiślańska Street, shot from the Father Bernatek footbridge on the Vistula River (photo by J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

Il. 5. Ośrodek Dokumentacji Sztuki Tadeusza Kantora Cricoteka przy ul. Nadwiślańskiej ujęcie z kładki Ojca Bernatka na Wiśle (fot. J. Białkiewicz, 2022)



Fig. 6. MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art on Lipowa Street, concrete "south wall" displaying the MOCAK name (photo by J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

Il. 6. Muzeum Sztuki Współczesnej MOCAK przy ul. Lipowej, betonowy „mur południowy” eksponujący nazwę MOCAK (fot. J. Białkiewicz, 2022)



Fig. 7. MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art on Lipowa Street with its distinctive shed roof (photo by J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

Il. 7. Muzeum Sztuki Współczesnej MOCAK przy ul. Lipowej z charakterystycznym dachem szedowym (fot. J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

while respecting the history and identity of this unique place. As in the case of Cricoteka, the site of the former power plant was revitalized, here the edifice of the new museum was inscribed in the neglected buildings of Krakow's Schindler's Factory at 4 Lipowa St. Nardi's project involved the adaptation of six existing buildings and the erection of one new. The result was a non-monolithic, dispersed complex of buildings with different functions and dimensions, connected by a paved promenade also used for outdoor projects. Building A is the main spectator service area, housing the exhibition space, main lobby, bookstore and café. Its right side adapts factory buildings, while the left side is an entirely new structure. The new museum building is partially hidden underground, so it does not dominate its surroundings either. Building B, which combines exhibition, workshop, office and social functions, makes full use of former industrial halls, one of which has been opened up to form a patio used for demonstrations and screenings. Most of the building structure is new, although some original walls have been preserved. It is architecture strongly marked by modern technologies. The main façade of Building A on the south side catches the eye with its glass surface. The concrete "south wall" displaying the MOCAK name visually balances the presence of the pre-existing Oskar Schindler's Enamel Factory (Fig. 6). The architect's main idea of linking the building to the site's context became the motif of the shed roof, typical of preserved factory halls, which was also extended to the structure of the new edifice. It became the leading visual element of the whole, defining not only the form of the building, but also creating its easily remembered logo. In the MOCAK building, the shed roof both metaphorically and quite literally connects the past with the present, as well as industrial tradition with modern culture (Fig. 7). Continuity and memory are the dominant motifs here that define the contextual character of the building. As Claudio Nardi himself said, the dominant "culture of absolute conservatism" in the spaces of historic cities these days can be for an architect not a constraint,

but a passionate challenge, defining the essential meaning of his work [18]. According to the Italian architect, respect for "roots" and the ability to transform tradition gives new objects a fantastic depth of meaning³.

Józef Czapski Pavilion

The Józef Czapski Pavilion at 12 Piłsudskiego Street is part of the complex of the Emeryk Hutten-Czapski Museum – a branch of the National Museum in Krakow [19]. The tendered project by Danuta Fredowicz and Olga Fredowicz was created in 2011–2013, and was completed in 2016. The building is hidden in a garden, in an area bounded on two sides by historical walls, among outbuildings of tenement houses between Piłsudskiego and Smoleńsk streets, in the immediate vicinity of the Czapski Palace and buildings of the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts and AGH University of Science and Technology (Fig. 8). Designing a completely new building in such a compact area, between the historic walls and the gable wall of a historic tenement, was certainly the most important challenge for the architect. Initially, the originators of the idea of the Pavilion envisioned a one-story building with a historicizing style, but eventually a building three times larger (with three overground floors with a usable viewing terrace on the roof) and designed in modern forms was realized. Resembling a white box, the Pavilion retains the scale characteristic of the neighboring outbuildings, while at the same time its abstract cuboid form stands out from its surroundings like an autonomous work of art (Fig. 9). Inscribed perfectly between the neighboring buildings, in the plan lot Czapski Pavilion is composed of a rectangle on the south side, which connects to a trapezoid on the north side. The white façade made of corian with

³ *Conserving the roots while you transform them gives fantastic depth to the new organisms – that's what I was aiming for when I designed the MOCAK... [18].*



Fig. 8. Józef Czapski Pavilion in the garden of the Emeryk Hutten-Czapski Museum on J. Piłsudski Street (photo by J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

Il. 8. Pawilon Józefa Czapskiego w ogrodzie Muzeum im. Emeryka Hutten-Czapskiego przy ul. J. Piłsudskiego (fot. J. Białkiewicz, 2022)



Fig. 9. View from the terrace of the Józef Czapski Pavilion (fot. J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

Il. 9. Widok z tarasu pawilonu Józefa Czapskiego (fot. J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

a facsimile of Józef Czapski's signature brings to mind a blank painting canvas, ready to receive art⁴. In addition to exhibition spaces, the building houses a café, multimedia rooms and a reading room, while a garden has been arranged in front of the pavilion, partly using climbing plants and perennials from the old garden of the Czapski Palace. The link between the garden and the cubic body is a glazed veranda protruding at ground level. The café is reminiscent in style of the Parisian cafeterias of the early 20th century, which often appear in the artist's paintings. Despite its unmistakably modern character, the architecture of the building remains very ascetic, neutral and unobtrusive. Czapski Pavilion is a peculiar enclave of art, hidden in the space of urban gardens, usually closed

and inaccessible to visitors. Being hidden in the garden, the building is not directly adjacent to any historic façade, hence its modern form does not compete with the historic buildings, but only complements and enriches them. In this case, architectural minimalism served to set the building in the context of the place, where in the midst of eclectic historical buildings with a variety of functions and surrounded by nature appears a building so autonomously modern, and at the same time completely devoid of the will to dominate the surroundings, being a symbolic tribute to the devotees of art.

Polish Aviation Museum

The international competition for the new building of the Polish Aviation Museum was won by the German office Pysall.Ruge Architekten in cooperation with archi-

⁴ The façade of the building can be used as a screen for projections.

Fig. 10. Polish Aviation Museum at 39 Jana Pawła II Avenue (fot. J. Białkiewicz, 2022)

Il. 10. Muzeum Lotnictwa Polskiego przy al. Jana Pawła II 39 (fot. J. Białkiewicz, 2022)



tect Bartłomiej Kisielewski. The project was designed in 2005–2007 and completed in 2010 [20]. In addition to Cricoteka and MOCAK, it is another modern museum facility realized in a complex of historical buildings. The Aviation Museum complex had been operating since 1963 on the site of the historic Rakowice-Czyżyny military airport dating back to 1912. And in this case, reference to the context of the site was the main architectural idea, determining the shape of the new facility. Eight preserved hangars were adapted for exhibition purposes, while the newly erected main building draws attention with its modern form and richness of symbolism at the same time. The height and modular scale of the new edifice were determined by the surrounding historic hangars. The building's composition was based on a square outline, the size of which corresponds to the dimensions of the plan of the historic hangar from 1929 located in the central part of the museum complex. On a square concrete platform with a side length of 65 m, the architects designed an edifice with a highly original shape, bringing to mind a windmill or an airplane propeller. The interior of the three wings accommodates exhibition and educational spaces, a cinema, library, conference rooms, bistro and offices. The atectonic, disjointed body of the new edifice does not dominate the historic buildings, but interacts with them. Three basic materials were used to finish the building: architectural concrete, aluminum and glass. Huge glazings not only add visual lightness to the building, but also “open” the building to the park environment, blurring the division between the indoor and outdoor parts of the exhibition (Fig. 10). Thanks to the contextual approach, the designers of the Polish Aviation Museum have inscribed a strongly modern, dynamic in character and austere at the same time block in the historical buildings, creating an edifice with great potential for content and symbolism. In the words of Kisielewski: *We wanted the project to clearly relate to the context of the city [...]. The priority was [...] to create a modern form that could become a symbol of the Aviation Museum on the contemporary cultural scene of Krakow. The new building [...] combines almost all the typological and ideological features of the place, i.e. the very essence of flying, the atmosphere and structure of the airport and the fascination with the history of technology. The building has been logically and naturally integrated into the existing complex of hangars and museum buildings* [21].

Study results

The sketchy analysis of the selected objects of the latest public architecture in Krakow presented above, makes it possible to point out some common features, resulting from the adoption of the same philosophy at the basis of the creative process. The presented realizations were created at a similar time and all of them are related to the sphere of culture, but they have a strongly individual formal character. Despite this striking dissimilarity and despite the fact that they are works by different designers, from diverse backgrounds, both Polish and foreign, they share a common architectural idea of contextualism. At the core of the creative method here is the need to refer to the environment. The buildings described were built in various locations in Krakow: in the surroundings of the historic center, in the immediate vicinity of the Vistula boulevards, on post-factory grounds, and on the grounds of the historic airport. All these locations are united by their historical significance and the need to respect and relate to the existing architecture, which is under strictly formulated legal protection. Designing in such specific conditions, in the immediate vicinity of the historic tissue and strict rules for its protection, can be seen as a significant constraint on creative invention. At the same time, in the case of public architecture, so clearly marking its presence in the city space, the desired result is a building with iconic potential, and therefore noticeable, architecturally attractive, carrying a message of modernity. The need to reconcile these two phenomena – dependence on the environment and the ambition to create a highly original work – is the first creative idea common to all the described objects.

Reference to the context is implemented by architects in several ways. The first, and most direct, is the preservation of the existing buildings (as a whole or their elements) and the adaptation of historic buildings for new purposes, combined with their restoration and modernization. In all of the presented realizations, we are dealing with the combination of elements of the preserved historic architecture and the new edifice into one complex. The second way of relating to the context of the place, less literal, is to adapt the new buildings to the scale of the surrounding buildings. This is accomplished by harmonizing their heights, divisions, or using design modules derived from historic buildings. In addition to references of scale and divisions,

architects also use material references (brick in the MOS project). Moving on to increasingly metaphorical references, another method of establishing a connection with the environment is to take a particular motif from the existing architecture, which is creatively introduced into the new building. An example is the shed roof in the MOCÁK project. All of the aforementioned projects are also linked by the use of glass as a means of linking new buildings to the context of the site. Glazing not only adds visual lightness to the buildings, but above all acts as a kind of connector with what is outside, fostering the blurring of boundaries between the new edifices and their surroundings. To some extent, contemporary buildings become “transparent” both literally and metaphorically. Architects symbolically allow history to be reflected in the glass panes of modernity, proving that a modern block does not have to alienate itself, but can blend harmoniously with its surroundings. The most non-literal and “abstract”, and at the same time the most advanced reference to the context is the symbolic charge of the form of the new objects. At this stage, the creative process has already gone far beyond simply adapting to the site as it is seen in the concept of optimization. In order to encode symbolic content in architecture, an idea in the designer’s mind is necessary. At the same time, this metaphorical charge enhances the quality, and thus the iconic potential, of the work. Symbolic references can be made on various levels. In the case of Cricoteka, we are dealing, among other things, with the form of the building evoking associations with the works of Kantor and with a reference to the idea of ambalage (the new edifice “wraps”, as it were, the historic buildings of the Podgórze power plant). In the Czapski Pavilion, the white façade-screen can be interpreted as a blank canvas, symbolically open to any kind of art, transferred to it by means of modern technologies. The Aviation Museum contains references to the idea of flying in its body. What is appropriate for symbols, all these references are ambiguous and open to interpretation, leaving the viewer a great deal of freedom in their individual search and reading.

As Ingarden writes, contextualism is neither a design method nor an architectural style, it is a definition of the relationship between the designed structure and its local background [11, p. 320]. The aim of contextual architecture in urban space is to inscribe itself in the continuity of its history. The new building must “speak” in the language of forms and meanings understood locally, as the architect of the Małopolska Garden of Art emphasizes, the task is to avoid semantic chaos and maintain the cultural continuity of the place by adding and marking the presence of contemporary forms. Ingarden refers to this as “abstract contextualism” and links it to Kenneth Frampton’s “critical regionalism”⁵. Adopting such a design philosophy makes it possible to create objects that are globally modern in ex-

pression and at the same time rooted in local tradition, and thus acceptable in historical space. Urbańska uses the term “*site-specific* architecture” [22] or “the architecture of dialogue” [23] to describe the same phenomenon. Regardless of the nomenclature adopted, the key is the attitude to the context of the place, which is neither a passive imitation nor an arrogant rejection of the surroundings. Contextual architecture in the case of the above-mentioned buildings is the architecture of interpretation, combining respect for the *genius loci* and the ambition to create a valuable contemporary form on this basis.

Contextual philosophy – conclusions

The contextual creative philosophy in the case of the listed public buildings is based on combining the idea of revitalizing a place with giving the new building its iconic potential. Revitalization takes place both literally by modernizing the historic building and by giving the place a new meaningful content and quality. The context of the place and the associated conditions for the architect are both the framework and the matter of the creative process. The goal is to combine the concepts of continuation and modification so that a completely new quality is created. The essence of the creative method here is to treat the site context and its accompanying formal constraints in terms of inspiration for the liberation of an original idea. In a context treated with respect, the architects introduce modern forms, technologies and materials, giving the whole a highly original character. In all the projects described, the past and the present interact, with the past becoming inspiration and material, and modernity giving history a new life and meaning. Despite being firmly rooted in the historical context, all the projects mentioned are characterized by originality and modernity of form. It manifests itself in the atypical shape and layout of the mass (especially Cricoteka, MOCÁK, Aviation Museum), the use of modern materials and technologies, or the original treatment of traditional materials (MOS elevations). Each time we are dealing with a modern architectural form, which does not compete and does not dominate the historical buildings, but fits harmoniously into it, creating a distinctive whole. It is this combination, which is both coherent and creates a new quality, and therefore incorporates both the concept of optimization and the idea of iconic architecture, that should be considered the main achievement of the designers of the listed edifices. Contextualism in this sense becomes an answer to the question of the meaning of the architect’s work in modern times, in a situation of intensive development of technology and artificial intelligence, as well as his role in the complex system of architectural conditions, which consists of legal, financial, environmental or social considerations. The architectural profession is evolving away from engineering and towards concept creation. This is particularly noticeable in the case of public buildings, which are required to be noticeable and present a high quality of form. At the same time, the form in this case cannot be freely generated by the imagination of the designer, but must take into account a whole range of conditions. Thus, the first task

⁵ The definition of “critical regionalism” was developed by K. Frampton in the 1970s–1980s. According to Frampton, the most interesting buildings are created at the intersection of local and global architecture, so they are open to technological advances and at the same time rooted in local traditions, creating a space that is understood and approved by local communities.

of the building designer is a multifaceted analysis of the context of the place, followed by creating an idea on this basis, which, carried through the concept to realization, will give the new building iconic potential. The idea is that which goes beyond notions of optimization and utility, giving the form a symbolic charge. What is particularly important, all of the described objects have been very well received, both in the public and in the architectural community, as evidenced by the numerous awards given to their creators in Poland and abroad, as well as the plebiscites won⁶. The Małopolska Garden of Art, Cricoteka

and the Czapski Pavilion were winners of the plebiscite Krakow – My Home in 2013, 2015 and 2016, respectively, which testifies to the recognition of a wide audience. All the buildings, with the exception of the Czapski Pavilion, were also nominated for the prestigious European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture – Mies van der Rohe Award (in 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015).

In all the works described, the reinterpretation of heritage provides the foundation for the creation of valuable modern forms. Thus, realized according to a contextual philosophy, architecture seems to be the best that modern times can introduce into the space of historical urban organisms with a rich historic tissue, such as Krakow. This paper presents just a selection of a few cultural buildings, and can certainly serve as a contribution to a comprehensive study of the issue of contemporary public buildings in Krakow as contextual architecture.

Translated by
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⁶ The Małopolska Garden of Art has won more than a dozen awards, including international ones, including ArchDaily Building of the Year 2021, Iconic Award 2013, Platinum A' Design Award 2014, S.ARCH 2016 International Project Award grand prize. Cricoteka was recognized, among others, as the best public building 2013–2014 in the Life in Architecture competition. MOCAK won, among others, the Philippe Rotthier European Prize of Architecture for the renovation and transformation of a historic factory. The Polish Aviation Museum in 2012 was recognized as the world's best public building made of architectural concrete (Cemex Building Awards).

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Abstract

Contextualism as a contemporary architectural design philosophy. The issue of the role of the architect based on examples of public buildings in Krakow

The paper presents the selected examples of public buildings in Krakow, constructed between 2000–2016, which gained recognition from both local community and the architectural society. These are cultural facilities: Małopolska Garden of Arts, Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka, MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art, Józef Czapski Pavilion, and Polish Aviation Museum. The common feature for all the described buildings is the contextual philosophy of designing. According to this philosophy, the context of place and the conditions deriving from it (including legal protection of historic buildings and areas) are perceived not as limitations but the source of inspiration for an architectural idea. The new building can be context-dependent on many levels, from the most literal to the metaphorical ones, both within the area of architectural form and the symbolic meanings. Thanks to the use of contextual architectural philosophy, the new buildings are raised both valuable as a contemporary contribution to the urban space and also respecting its historical character and *genius loci*. Contextual architecture is thus the best solution for urban spaces nowadays, especially within the historic cities with numbers of monuments protected by law, such as Krakow.

Key words: contextualism, recent architecture of Krakow, design philosophy

Streszczenie

Kontekstualizm jako współczesna filozofia projektowania. Zagadnienie roli architekta na przykładzie obiektów użyteczności publicznej w Krakowie

W artykule przedstawiono wybrane przykłady powstałych w latach 2000–2016 krakowskich budynków użyteczności publicznej, które zyskały uznanie wśród społeczności i w środowisku architektów. Są to ośrodki kulturalne: Małopolski Ogród Sztuki, Ośrodek Dokumentacji Sztuki T. Kantora Cricoteka, Muzeum Sztuki Współczesnej MOCAK, Pawilon Józefa Czapskiego, Muzeum Lotnictwa Polskiego. Cechą łączącą wszystkie opisane budynki jest kontekstualna filozofia projektowania, która zakłada potraktowanie uwarunkowań wynikających z kontekstu miejsca (m.in. ochrona prawna zabudowań zabytkowych i terenów historycznych) w kategorii nie ograniczeń, lecz inspiracji dla architektonicznej idei. Nawiązanie do kontekstu miejsca odbywa się na wielu płaszczyznach, od najbardziej dosłownych do metaforycznych, zarówno w sferze formy, jak i przekazu symbolicznego. Dzięki zastosowaniu filozofii kontekstualnej powstają obiekty wartościowe jako współczesny wkład w przestrzeń miasta i respektujące jej historyczny charakter oraz *genius loci*. Tego rodzaju architektura jest w obecnych czasach najlepszym rozwiązaniem dla organizmów miejskich o szczególnie bogatej tkance zabytkowej, takich jak Kraków.

Słowa kluczowe: kontekstualizm, najnowsza architektura Krakowa, filozofia projektowania