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Contemporary Religious Architecture in Polish Public Discourse 1945-1989

Polish post-war religious architecture is a vast but still barely studied research field. Since we lack not only case studies but above all general summaries concerning churches build between 1945 and 1989 in Poland, it occurs to me that rather than try to fill in those blanks by writing another monograph (ex. on post-war churches in Warsaw), it would be more interesting and valuable to focus on a broader problematic. My chosen area of research is public discourse on the contemporary religious architecture in Poland during the communist period. I believe that without understanding ideas of social actors and issues at stake one cannot fully comprehend the origins of religious architecture and the choices made by designers and decision-makers in power on that time.

My aim is to identify social actors taking part in the development of church architecture (architects, artists, members of the clergy, experts, faithful), and to describe their contribution. To do this, I will conduct a survey of their published statements on the subject - mainly in catholic press, architectural revues and other professional publications. During all the investigated period number of articles, essays, interviews and books on this particular topic was strictly limited, Catholic Church officially being denied an active role in the society by authorities (relations between the Communist Party and the Church were in permanent crisis). Despite the proliferation of churches observed in Poland especially from the late 1970s, there is virtually no professional critic discourse on projects or possibility of discussion on contemporary religious architecture (at least not in professional press or publications). However the few publications that exist, mainly of either emotional or purely technical character, give an important insight to the milieu of architects, investors and experts that shaped Polish churches in the second half of the 20th century.

I would like to know what the social actors were thinking about contemporary churches and how they have seen the future of religious architecture in Poland. Why did they advocate for a particular architectural style, its symbolic meaning, did they prioritize the congregation as a whole or rather its individual members? Examination of the texts allows seizing different

visions of the Church and – which follows – different understandings of the role of religious architecture.

This problematic necessitates a multidimensional approach. Survey and analysis of opinion on contemporary religious architecture and urbanism will allow to join political, artistic (especially issue of modern vs. postmodern language), religious (ex. changes in liturgy, impact of the Second Vatican Council) and social (importance of the 'sacred' in public space, role of the Church in the society) approaches. Adopting strictly artistic perspective would be misleading, as have been proven in previous publications by architecture and art historians. The choice of giving space to various social actors will provide presence of both micro- and macroscale in my research. Firstly, I will try to reconstruct main axes of the public discourse. Secondly, I hope to analyse and contextualise the arguments of social actors, understand their choices and the effect their ideas have had on their actions. I hope that my methodology will allow me to nuance the image of the architectural landscape of this epoch still often simplified in Poland.