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Society, City, Future: Architecture and Spaces of Modernity in Kalisz at the Turn of the 20th Century

Kalisz, a town considered to be the oldest in Poland, acted in the years 1867-1914 as the capital of the westernmost governorate of the Russian Empire – Kalisz Province in the Polish Kingdom. At the turn of the 20th century it was a small city, with population reaching 20 000. After 1867, when it regained the governorate status (lost in 1844), its multiethnic society established an active network to support local administration initiatives. The city governed by Russian Governor Michał Daragan (1883-1902 in office) served as a place for negotiations between the representatives of the city and the imperial authorities. Urban space and public architectural projects played important role during those contacts and exchanges of power between Russian governor and multiethnic middle class of Kalisz. From the 1902 onwards, when railway connection between Kalisz and Warsaw was established, several speculative rushes transformed urban landscape of the town. Large suburbs, with spontaneously designated streets lined with overpopulated tenements have risen around the historical core. Urban expansion was the effect of the high population growth, connected with the developing industry (ca. 70 000 inhabitants in 1914). Dynamic and at the same time chaotic expansion of the new industrial city was welcomed by Polish middle-class with pessimistic attitudes towards emerging mass society, changing social structures and newcomers to populate recently developed districts.

Histories of urban development, changes in architecture and social usage/production of Kalisz urban spaces between 1870-1914 are focus of my research project. Its draft is divided chronologically into two parts (1870-1902; 1902-1914), covering among others: urban development, public architecture and its discourses, commercial and leisure spaces or housing investments. I would like to examine architecture as a not only “representation”, but also an active factor shaping social/class/political or gender relations in the century of industrialization and “modernity”. I believe that my approach will be guided by research questions posed in terms of the “spatial turn”, to quote John Archer: *How do buildings (and their designers) fashion the very terms in which society will negotiate its complex interests?*

*How does architecture engage (not merely "reflect") the conflicts and challenges of its time? How, why, and when does architecture transform the landscape of social relations, as through the introduction of new building types or modalities?*¹. Researching on Kalisz as a provincial governorate town in the former "Polish Kingdom" in Russian Empire I would like to pose some research questions. What was the role of architecture – especially public/government investments or unrealized projects – in the process of Imperial governance at the local, provincial level? How architecture and space took part in discourses of modernity for Kalisz – its industrialization, modernization and economic expansion? What urban space in its changing shape – either material or social – can "tell" historians about Kalisz society in its ethnic, class and political differentiation? Who acted in those changes, to mention complicated issues of municipal governance in the "Polish Kingdom" under the Russian rule only, where actors representing municipal, governorate or upper-state agendas or industrialists cooperated or conflicted? How architecture was used/politicized by social actors to "represent" national, state or class identities? Are we able to reconstruct social usages of urban spaces in Kalisz at the turn of the centuries in "micro-historical" terms? How urban development, connected with industrial boom, has been awaited in the public sphere – and how was it described during the rapid changes of 1900s? What kind of tactics of governance were employed in Kalisz to cope with the needs of the developing town – and with what results?

Proposed issues are to be discussed in my paper, based on general introduction, methods and some case studies. Talking about architecture and urbanism in those conditions was – and I believe is – explicitly political activity, revealing social, ethnic, economic tensions that shaped urban life in Russian Poland.

¹ J. Archer, *Social Theory of Space: Architecture and the Production of Self, Culture, Society*, "Journal Society of Architectural Historians", 64, no 4 (Dec., 2005), 432.