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Architecture and urban planning in Breslau (Wrocław) and Silesia in 1933-1945

My research project concerns the architecture and urban planning in Silesia in the time of the Third Reich. I would like to trace down the planning activities taking place in this region, which has been one of easternmost German territories until the outbreak of Second World War, and examine whether it has influenced the architecture.

One of the main issues to investigate, is the process of reshaping the public space in Breslau (Wrocław), the capital city of Gau (Nieder-)Schlesien and in other cities in the region. Since the architecture and spatial planning were assigned a key role in policy of the National Socialist state, the demand for new designs have caused an intensive movement in planning activity.

My research is mainly based on the archival sources and historical periodicals. I am trying to collect the missing pieces of the planning activity in Silesia during the Nazi period, in first step to analyze and systematize it. I would like to consider the relation between architecture the notion of modernity within eastern peripheral area of the Nazi state, and to pose further, more detailed research question.

For the purpose of the conference I would present a part of my project, which focuses on the redesign of the innercity area along Odra River banks. According to my research, the new architecture located around the river is to be interpret as a political and aesthetic manifesto of the new authorities.

The program of public buildings consisted of various tasks, like display of the new political force (administrative headquarters, in later projects replaced by Gauforum), the fight against unemployment (labor office), support for the science (university buildings, new library) and a special zone for youth (dormitories for students and place for gatherings located on islands).

The surrounding area has been already marked with significant edifices, among others the gothic Cathedral and the Baroque main building of the University. Argumentation provided by architects and press, as well as the projects themselves unveil the ambiguous attitude to the

monuments and historical context.

Overall vision for this area reveals the intentional process of reshaping the waterfront and the city skyline. The aim was to create a new silhouette of the city, or more precisely, two silhouettes on the both sides of the river. The river can therefore be regarded as another monumental avenue of the city.

It has been exposed especially in Werner March's planning for the redesign of Wrocław (1938-1939). The University campus was conceived as a complex of buildings located on the both riverbanks and islands, which altogether formed a circle. March also envisaged the government quarter on monumental scale on the riverbank, just in front of Cathedral Island, the oldest part of the city and a mainstay of Catholicism. The ideological layer also deserves a special attention and will be analyzed.

Those total concepts praised by authorities on the state and local level, have met criticism among local architects. Although the market square with town hall remained a historical heart of the city, the new public area with a large square would have resulted in the marginalization of former city center.

In my paper, I will also try to outline the relation between water and architecture in the broader perspective, supplying the examples from other river cities, that were intended to be redesigned in the Third Reich (e.g. Hamburg, Cologne, Frankfurt /Oder).