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Furniture-Making in Poznań 1945-1989. Education, Design, Production

The aim of my project is to deliver a comprehensive picture of furniture-making in Poznań from 1945 to 1989 in a monographic study. The capital of Greater Poland was a place where the main state institutions which supervised the development of the furniture industry were to be found, along with its educational base and exhibition facilities. The co-existence of specialized higher education, principal regulatory authorities, furniture factories and carpentry shops, as well as exhibition institutions with the Poznań International Fair at the forefront made Poznań a leading furniture-making centre with a nationwide impact, with no precedent or equivalent in the entire country. The situation, though present in the public awareness, has neither been extensively discussed so far, nor has it been really reflected in the studies on Polish or Poznań design. At the same time, the situation was characteristic of the former Eastern Bloc, where the design and production potential would be concentrated in one city or region. The functioning of the Poznań centre corresponds with the situation in Czechoslovakian Brno, where numerous institutions were in fact counterparts of those which resided in Poznań. Consequently, although the project will focus on Poznań as a furnitureremaking centre, it will take into account the kind of circumstances in which design and production functioned in Poland and the neighbouring communist states, including state supervision, centrally controlled economy, and rationed consumption.

This project remains within the current of research into design history while taking into account the practices, narratives, and mechanisms of generating cultural and social meanings of objects. The so-called Production-Consumption-Mediation Paradigm will provide one of the theoretical mainstays of the study of furniture-making in Poznań, as it encompasses the broadly understood sphere of consumption, mediation between the producer and the consumer, and the semantic role of the objects themselves. The project is also in line with the inquiry into the modes of inhabiting and arranging interiors as one of the elements of implementing social revolution and creating a living space for the "new human", an approach which is characteristic for the studies of design in the former Eastern Bloc.

In recent years, Polish furniture-making of the communist era has attracted considerable interest of collectors and interior design professionals. There is no shortage of popularscientific publications dedicated to the topic, and one observes a lively unofficial exchange of information concerning the creators, their designs, and production sites, but the credibility of that information is at times questionable. However, lack of a relatively comprehensive, scientific study which explores furniture-making in Poland translates into a major gap in reliable knowledge and continuing public demand. The project will add to the historicalartistic investigations concerned with the history of interiors, residential architecture as well as the relations of politics, power, propaganda and material culture in the strategies of societybuilding, by exploring how the entire framework functioned in the communist states.