

## Non-compulsory practical education programme for modernist heritage

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**ABSTRACT:** A non-compulsory programme for students of architecture that contains more specialised topics beyond the basic subjects is an important educational tool. The advantages include classes in smaller groups, the possibility of practical exercises in real field conditions and the benefits of meeting professional practitioners. This type of programme is particularly useful for teaching architectural heritage of the 20th Century, its protection and conservation; this knowledge is not widespread. The topic is current and there have been numerous developments over the years. The aims outlined in this article are to present the scope of this non-compulsory programme, including the interactive field classes, workshops and summer school. The benefits of this practically oriented programme are confirmed by the results achieved.

### INTRODUCTION

Achievements of previous generations are worth preserving and were recognised in ancient times. In the national interest, there is a concern to preserve monuments. Conservation buildings preserve historical *memory* and are important in shaping individual and collective identities. Concern for the preservation of valuable architectural objects for posterity has to address the need for the technical protection of buildings, so that they could last much longer than their normal lifespan [1].

Remarkable examples of 20th Century heritage have been destroyed as evidenced by the demolition of such *icons* of modernist architecture as the building of the Warsaw *Supersam* or the PKP railway station in Katowice.

The *Supersam* was the first self-service large-format store in post-war Poland and one of the most outstanding achievements of modernism in Poland (architects: Jerzy Hryniewiecki, Maciej Krasiński, Ewa Krasińska; constructions: Waław Zalewski, Stanisław Kusia and Andrzej Żurawski). After it was demolished in 2006, the Plac Unii office and commercial complex was erected in its place between 2010 and 2013.

The train station in Katowice was considered the best example of a trend in architecture called brutalism in Poland. The architects (Waław Kłyszewski, Jerzy Mokrzyński and Eugeniusz Wierzbicki) used impressive forms of large concrete goblets supporting the ceiling of the upper hall. The station building was demolished between 2010 and 2011; in its place a new station complex integrated with Galeria Katowicka opened in 2013.

In an article entitled, *Underestimated heritage of modernism in Białystok*, Krasińska wrote ...*The protection of centuries-old monuments is obvious to most people, however, the need to preserve the objects of modernist architecture created in the previous century raises a lot of controversies, also among conservators. The situation is not facilitated by negative connotations of modernism in politics, especially in post-communist countries. Nor with the negative sensational aesthetics associated with the colour grey and the monotony of housing estates of prefabricated buildings, the so-called large concrete slabs. The greatest responsibility of art historians and conservators is in selecting the most valuable objects, not only on a national scale but also within the region and popularisation of their cultural values. Lack of adequate protection significantly contributes to the impoverishment of this heritage (...)*, which the author presented in several examples of buildings from Białystok [2].

For this reason, the importance of education about the monuments of the modern era is raised for students of architecture and future design practitioners in an urban environment saturated with objects from the 20th Century. The purpose of this article is to present experience related to the introduction by the Faculty of Architecture at Gdańsk

University of Technology (FA-GUT) of educational programmes aimed at familiarisation with the issues and deepening specialist knowledge in the field of protection and conservation of the cultural heritage of modernism.

## PROTECTING THE LATEST ARCHITECTURE

Activities aimed at the protection and conservation of modernist monuments express a desire to consolidate for the next generations important phenomena from the 20th Century. This task is not obvious for many reasons. Among them, such architecture is not much studied by the specialists - art historians, conservators, architects and constructors. Also, the foundations of modern architecture, as well as economic considerations are barriers to the preservation of modernist monuments [3]. Assessing the value of 20th Century architecture began relatively recently; it was only in 2016 that monument protection was implemented in Poland [4]. Żychowska [5] and Schneider-Skalska [6] note that architecture of the 20th Century increasingly features in architectural education programmes.

However, there is a lack of public awareness of the importance of modernist architecture. This is apparent in the widespread divergence of form of the 20th Century architecture of blocks of housing in modern residential districts of large cities in Central and Eastern Europe; the monuments of modernist architecture constitute an unwanted heritage.

Conservation of monuments of modernism go beyond what is commonly understood by specialists, and dictate a different approach from that for the architecture of earlier periods. This architecture usually is characterised by different aesthetic, material and technical solutions, which has not been sufficiently recognised [3]; monuments of the modern era require a more personalised approach to protection and conservation. Thus, a new approach is required to the education of future architects, conservation practitioners and monument protection services, as well as conservation contractors.

Monuments of modernism are often treated, especially in smaller cities, as a necessary evil. It is not uncommon that investment decisions taken in such centres go against the preservation of important buildings although they are witnesses to historical and socio-cultural change. These phenomena are described in articles published by the historian, Sebastian Wicher, who posted on the blog Subjectively Białystok (Białystok is the largest city in northeastern Poland, tenth largest in Poland and the capital of the Podlaskie Province) [2].

## EDUCATION AND MODERNISM HERITAGE IN POLAND

Polish universities teach the history of architecture focusing on the protection of cultural heritage and the legacy of antiquity, the Middle Ages and modernity, i.e. architectural periods also commonly known as *great European styles* [7][8].

In Poland, there are 15 state colleges and eight private schools offering a diploma of architect engineer and Master of engineering architect. An examination of existing architecture educational programmes was undertaken to inform the introduction of a new non-obligatory programme. This showed that almost all educational institutions focus on contemporary architecture, with limited content on the history of 20th Century architecture. Exceptions to this rule were colleges specialising in 20th Century architectural heritage. None of the schools offered optional courses beyond theoretical classes in the history of architecture.

Similar conclusions were drawn for conservation, where there is not an extensive education programme specialising in the conservation of 20th Century monuments, in particular monuments of the modern era. None of the universities has classes involving non-university experts of monument conservation.

## SUMMER SCHOOL OF MODERNISM

The Faculty of Architecture at Gdańsk University of Technology (FA-GUT) offers a full range of study options for the profession of architect. The educational programme offered has been updated and improved noting that practical knowledge of buildings plays a key role in the training of architects. Trend changes are also taken into account, including additional ways of acquiring knowledge and future types of practical activities related to the profession. The experience of the staff at the Department of History, Theory of Architecture and Conservation of Monuments in the FA-GUT in the research and care of monuments of modernism has led to the creation of a non-compulsory educational programme going beyond the framework of academic education.

Experimentally implemented in 2019, the Summer School of Modernism programme, under the guiding slogan, *architecture - protection - popularisation*, has the aim of familiarising participants with the issues of research, conservation and protection, as well as the popularisation of modernist architecture (Figure 1). During its first edition three cities were used as examples: Gdynia, Gdańsk and Lviv (Ukraine). The programme was directed at various groups of recipients interested in learning about, or deepening specialist knowledge in, the field of protection and conservation of modernism monuments.

The school's participants already had practical experience of working in the profession with enthusiastic commitment and the approach of a *young* student. The first group of participants included:

- mature designers, contractors of the architectural and conservation industry operating in the area of monuments;
- architectural researchers and doctoral students;
- employees of conservation offices in municipal and provincial administrations;
- students of engineering and Master's studies in architecture, monument conservation and the protection of cultural goods.

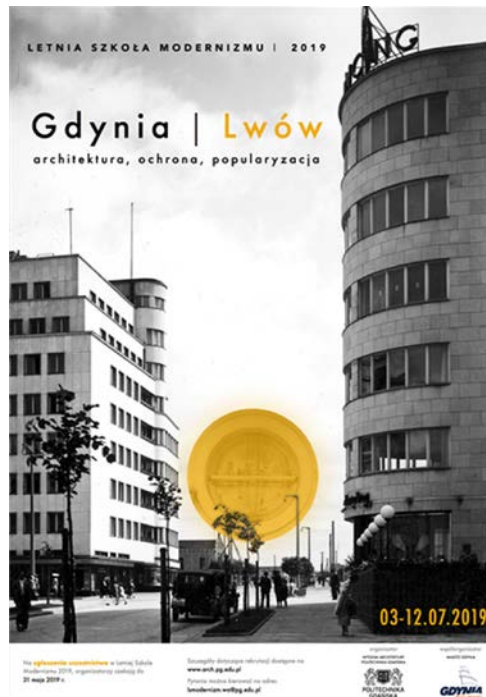


Figure 1: Poster for the Summer School of Modernism, 2019.

The first edition of the school focused on the building sites/centres of Gdynia, Gdańsk and Lviv. Lectures and workshops were conducted by research staff of the FA-GUT and the Faculty of Architecture of the Lviv Polytechnic National University. Specialists (architects, conservators, technologists and contractors) were invited to participate as experts. Summer school classes took the form of combined activities - lectures, workshops, exercises and field trips, at the FA-GUT and in the cities of Gdynia, Gdańsk and Lviv. The field work is particularly important in the education process [9].

Co-operation with local (municipal) authorities, research and culture institutes was also important. In Gdynia the Mayor of Gdynia supported the summer school, offering to promote events. Also supportive were the Museum of the City of Gdynia and the Museum of Emigration in Gdynia. In Gdańsk, the Association of Architects of the Polish Coast Branch and the Gdańsk branch of the National Heritage Institute were involved in the organisation of the school. A similar contribution was made by institutions on the Lviv side, including the Centre for Urban History of East Central Europe and the Association of Architects of Lviv, where public debates were organised on the condition of the monuments of modernism and the prospects for their preservation.

This type of involvement by external institutions in the educational activities of the University is of mutual benefit. Students expand their knowledge about practical aspects of the architect's work and institutions raise their profile in the local community. This type of co-operative activity is practised by the FA-GUT in various educational programmes [10].

#### SUMMER SCHOOL OF MODERNISM: PROGRAMME

Photographs from Gdynia and Gdańsk are displayed in Figure 2. The programme content at the Summer School of Modernism included:

- The modernist concept of the city, represented by Gdynia, designed and implemented mainly in the 1920s and 1930s.
- Issues with Gdańsk modernism, including the state of its protection, evaluation and perspectives on preserving Gdańsk's modernist architecture.
- A session in the city of Gdańsk covered the criteria for evaluating architecture of the modern period and architectural heritage of the Second Polish Republic from smaller centres in Pomerania.
- Characteristic architectural elements and details of modernist buildings (plaster, woodwork, floors, finishing, equipment and more).
- Gdynia public architecture and the large-scale construction of the industrial port complex. Lecture sessions included complementary visits to view conservation activities and modern transformations (adaptations,



modernisations, extensions). This highlighted both the general framework for the development of revaluation projects, as well as details of investments related to modernist buildings.

- Practical classes on the conservation of monuments, elements of modernist buildings and practical experience of minor renovation works.
- After arrival at Lviv from Gdańsk, a presentation was held of architecture from the period of multiculturalism (Lviv is on the UNESCO list). Participants learned about modernism and of problems in protecting their cultural values.

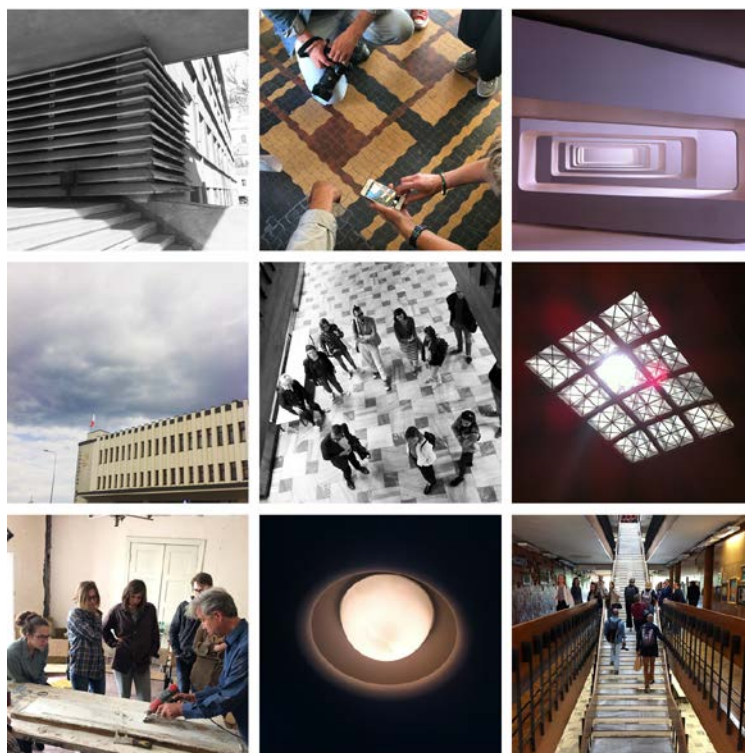


Figure 2: A compilation of photos taken in Gdynia and Gdańsk (Instagram: Summer School of Modernism, July 2019 [11]).

A range of the photographs taken during the session at Lviv, Western Ukraine is shown below in Figure 3.

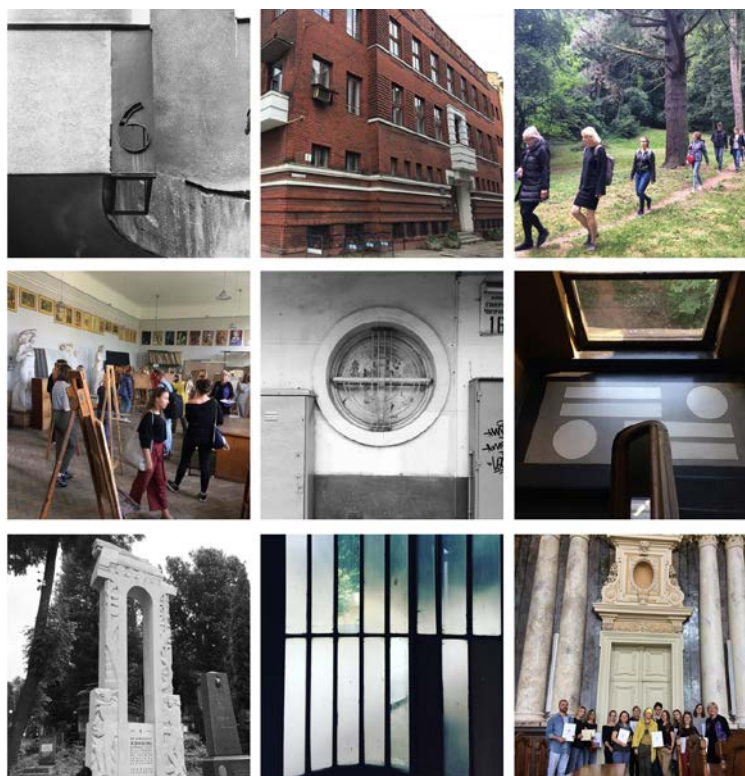


Figure 3: Compilation of photos taken during the session block in Lviv, Western Ukraine (Instagram: Summer School of Modernism, July 2019 [11]).



## SUMMARY OF THE FIRST EDITION OF THE FA-GUT SUMMER SCHOOL

A necessary element of learning is through experience. This is apparent by the impact on recipients of non-standard methods of transferring knowledge and experience. An extensive programme of intensive classes in the field and workshops supported by theory during seminar classes proved successful. A combined group of participants consisting of practitioners and students of architecture, as well as representatives of the monument protection services allowed for the exchange of the experiences and insights of the participants.

Some of the motivating factors for participation in the summer school in 2019, as stated by participants, were:

- getting acquainted with the modernist heritage of the cities: Gdynia, Gdańsk and Lviv;
- familiarisation with modernism through popular promotional events (trips via modernist routes, city architectural festivals, the cultural programme of cultural centres and others), and the desire to broaden knowledge on this subject;
- interest in modernism during the first years of studies and a desire to deepen this in second-cycle studies;
- searching for inspiration and specialist knowledge, focused on modernism to develop a thesis;
- deepen specialist knowledge about modernism to use in scientific work (e.g. writing a doctoral dissertation);
- deepen knowledge about monuments and learning about practical ways to protect them; deepen knowledge about possibilities of preserving historic values with the example of modernist buildings;
- a way to meet people who work protecting cultural heritage or conservation design, which can lead to an interesting exchange of thoughts and professional experiences.

As a summary of the experience and results of the Summer School of Modernism, it is worth quoting school participants after its completion:

*In the future, I would like to have an impact on the historic buildings that surround me, which is why I am glad I have broadened my knowledge in this field (Master's student at the FA-GUT).*

*The circle of my interests includes history of architecture and the conservation of monuments - it is in this area that I would like to study the next levels, which is why I think the Summer School of Modernism gave me a great opportunity to gain practical knowledge and encouraged me to deepen it (Student of engineering studies at the FA-GUT).*

*Due to the combination of my historical and architectural passions, Lviv is close to my heart. Participation in the Summer School of Modernism has contributed to the broadening of my horizons and acquiring knowledge in architectural studies (Master's student at the FA-GUT).*

*The opportunity to learn about the modernist architecture of Gdynia and Lviv, accompanied by professional commentaries of specialists was a valuable experience, the knowledge I acquired will be useful in my professional work (Employee of the office of the City Heritage Conservator of the Rzeszów City Hall).*

*Expanding my knowledge on solutions used in modernist architecture will be valuable to me both for analysing documentation submitted to the office, as well as preparing my own historical and conservation documentation (Senior specialist for immovable monuments, Provincial Office for the Protection of Monuments in Olsztyn).*

There needs to be an awareness of the didactic and presentational significance of Polish architecture. Particular emphasis should be placed on the most progressive avant-garde trends of the interwar period. There is a need to pay attention to examples of protected cultural objects and to display them properly. Doing this, especially for smaller building sites or centres will secure them as examples of good architecture.

An awareness campaign should promote understanding of historical monuments and the need to protect any listed objects. It is necessary to oppose superficial judgments with authoritative assessments. It is not easy to explain to the resident of a now shabby tenement house from before World War I that *this is a historic building*.

## CONCLUSIONS

The architectural heritage of modernism, as an important component of Europe's cultural heritage, has been increasingly recognised since the beginning of the 21st Century by specialists and latterly by the public [2].

Actions aimed at the protection and conservation of modernist monuments aim to preserve an important aspect of the history of the 20th Century. The success of this first edition of the Summer School of Modernism will allow this programme to continue in coming years.

The next editions will focus on other European cities abounding in modernist monuments. The continuing programme will incorporate the experience of other researchers and practitioners from local research universities in their respective cities.

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