

## **THE STYLE FORMS OF PUBLIC UTILITY BUILDINGS IN THE FIRST HALF OF 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY IN POLAND**

Zuzanna Borcz, Anna Borcz

Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences

**Abstract.** In the paper the variety of architectural styles in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is presented, showing examples of public utility buildings, erected in this time in Poland. An example of historical style is the National Savings Bank edifice in Cracow, erected in the years 1922–1924 according to the Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz design. Simultaneously a new style, referred to as Art Nouveau appeared. The competition for National Savings Bank in Rzeszów, announced in 1906 was taking into account the traits of Art Nouveau, and in the result the design different from historical styles, with an asymmetric elevation was selected for realization. On Podhale and gradually in other regions the Zakopane style became prevalent in those days; the kindergarten in Nałęczów, designed by Jan Witkiewicz-Koszczyk was built in this style. The next example is the Post Office edifice in Wrocław, designed by Lothar Neumann and erected in the years 1926–1929. In the final part of the paper the Post Office edifice in Ciechocinek, built in the modernism style in 1933 according to the design of Romuald Gutt and Józef Jankowski, is presented; this edifice even in our times attracts attention by its novatory form and a good realization.

**Key words:** public utility buildings, architecture, styles, early 20<sup>th</sup> century

### **INTRODUCTION**

The public utility buildings play an important role both in big and in small towns. They often transmit their style to neighboring edifices, in this way raising the significance of the region. The styles of public utility buildings find their reflection in contemporary architectural trends of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In that time the historical styles were applied, among them prevailed neo-Renaissance and neo-Baroque and generally the Eclecticism was dominating.

After the period of historical styles and even in a parallel course with them, begins a search for new, original forms in art. Architects tried to introduce new trends, basing

on modern materials and new technological methods. In this time appears Art Nouveau, followed by formism, then modernism, cubism and constructivism. This variety of tendencies is to be found in general, dwelling and even in industrial building, in public utility edifices being clearly visible [Pevsner 1976].

## HISTORICAL STYLES

Among edifices constructed in historical styles, an example is the National Savings Bank building in Cracow, erected in the neo-Classicism in Roman-Corinthian order (Fig. 1 and 2). The realization was preceded by an architectural competition, the selected project was designed by Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz. The building lot had a form of a triangle, the main entrance was at the corner. The building realized in the years 1922–1924 was mostly occupied by offices, at the first floor there was situated the round hall reaching to the fourth floor, covered by a dome.



Fig. 1. National Savings Bank building in Cracow, designed by A. Szyszko-Bohusz, the front elevation [Architekt 1925, 8, 13]

Rys. 1. Budynek Pocztovej Kasy Oszczędności w Krakowie, projekt: A. Szyszko-Bohusz, elewacja frontowa [Architekt 1925, 8, 13]



Fig. 2. National Savings Bank building in Cracow, the column capital of the front elevation (drawing by Z. Borcz)

Rys. 2. Budynek Pocztovej Kasy Oszczędności w Krakowie, kapitel kolumny frontowej elewacji (rys. Z. Borcz)

The functional differences of particular parts of the building are not enhanced on its outside. The whole frontage is encircled by monumental columns reaching the third storey, which are surmounted by a big attic. The contemporary editor of the journal “Architekt” wrote about this edifice: “One does not remember the real assignment of the building, it is like art for art’s sake” [Ekielski 1925].

## ART NOUVEAU – A NEW STYLE

In this time a new style, i.e. Art Nouveau appears, sometimes defined as the Vienna style (Latin ‘secession’ means ‘deviation’); this was a contrast to historical styles. One should point out that in Poland, and especially in Cracow the development of literary movement, painting and sculpture in Art Nouveau style was observed. Therefore it is characteristic that in the competition in 1912 for a project of National Savings Bank building in Sanok there was a comment: “It would be desirable that the building be erected using the outside forms of national character” [Architekt 1912, Borcz 1992].

In 1906 in Rzeszów the competition concerning the National Savings Bank building project was announced; the two first prizes were awarded to Cracow architects, and the third one to a Warsaw architect. The project awarded by the first prize was designed in Art Nouveau style, the shape of the building was rather simple, but diversified with bay-windows, breaks and an original attic.

The third prize was awarded to Henryk Stifelman and Stanisław Weiss (Fig. 3 and 4); here also the Art Nouveau influence appears – unquiet asymmetric shape with the complex system of gables and roofs; in frontage the large windows and balconies can be seen [Stifelman 1906].

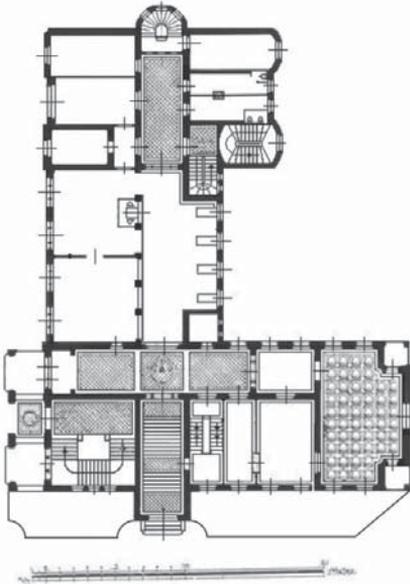


Fig. 3. Design of National Savings Bank building in Rzeszów by H. Stifelman and S. Weiss, the ground floor projection [Architekt 1906, 12]

Rys. 3. Projekt Kasy Oszczędności w Rzeszowie, projekt: H. Stifelman i S. Weiss, rzut parteru [Architekt 1906, 12]

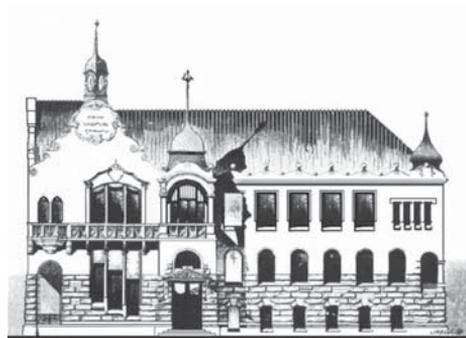


Fig. 4. Design of National Savings Bank building in Rzeszów by H. Stifelman and S. Weiss, the front elevation [Architekt 1906, 12]

Rys. 4. Projekt Kasy Oszczędności w Rzeszowie, projekt: H. Stifelman i S. Weiss, elewacja frontowa [Architekt 1906, 12]

## ZAKOPANE STYLE

Simultaneously to Art Nouveau, in Poland yet before the independence was regained the Zakopane style appeared [Tondos 2004]. This style has its origin in the trend for the folk art of Podhale, which was a nest of Polish national culture. In this time Zakopane assembled prominent persons – writers, painters, doctors; the most important creator of this trend was Stanisław Witkiewicz. In those days appeared villas, sanatoria's and pensions which had some characteristic features of Zakopane style. Those buildings of the segmented projections had brick wall bases and their first storeys were wooden, with the pointed shingle roofs. On the gable always the image of the rising sun was to be seen.

Zakopane style expanded beyond Podhale borders, in this style inns, schools and even brick houses were built. As an example may serve the activity of Jan Witkiewicz-Koszczyc [Tondos 2004] who to some extent was a continuator of Stanisław Witkiewicz, his uncle. In Nałęczów Jan Witkiewicz-Koszczyc designed a cottage for an atelier for Stefan Żeromski. One should mention that on the initiative and with financial support of Stefan Żeromski there was endowed a kindergarten for children of workers and artisans, erected also in Zakopane style (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. The kindergarten building in Nałęczów, designed by J. Witkiewicz-Koszczyc (photo by Z. Borcz)

Rys. 5. Budynek przedszkola w Nałęczowie, projekt: J. Witkiewicz-Koszczyc (fot. Z. Borcz)

The kindergarten building is situated on the square plan, with an asymmetric entrance directed toward the street. The first floor and the two-storey attic are covered with a gable roof. In the gable wall of the first storey the balcony window is situated. The veranda of the entrance frontage is supported by two columns with buttresses bound by a semicircular arcade. The frontage is made of the white stone and decorated with red bricks. In the roof the large windows are situated. Above the first floor the plaque with the date 1906 is placed. In 1920 S. Żeromski donated this building to Polish Government.

## FORMISM

The trend of art, known as formism, the kind of expressionism was related to Art Nouveau. It propagated innovative ideas and broke off with hitherto existing styles. Formism derived inspirations from original art forms – cubism, expressionism and futurism. Architects tried to introduce new trends basing on modern materials and new technologies. Formism was developing in 1920's in many European countries, even though in this time began to appear functionalism and constructivism which would predominate by many following years.

In ideas of formism the comeback to simple figures and patterns derived from them were to some extent an answer to existing round and fluctuant forms. The geometrical decorations used were a reflection of contemporary painting, likewise figural bas-reliefs representing stylized persons. In formism a great attention was paid to the wall texture, it was often a brick fa ure, applying special clinker profiles, sometimes of a triangular form. In spite of a developed ornamentation the building shapes were rather raw, of good proportions.

As examples of formism the building of the Police Station and the building of the Post Office can serve, both in Wro aw. The Post Office edifice was erected in the years 1926–1929 according to the design of Lothar Neumann, the post architect [Borc 1992b]. The five-storey building, 20 m high, with a tower 43 m high was made of brick and the whole tower part of the reinforced concrete; the tower has a square projection (Fig. 6 and 7). The frontage, although rather raw, was decorated by breaks and pilasters on the whole height. In particular parts of walls one can see fa ures resulting from different brick arrangements. The edifice is crowned by original attics 2 m high, divided by pilasters; the repeating motif of the attics is the composition of two isosceles triangles (Fig. 8 and 9).

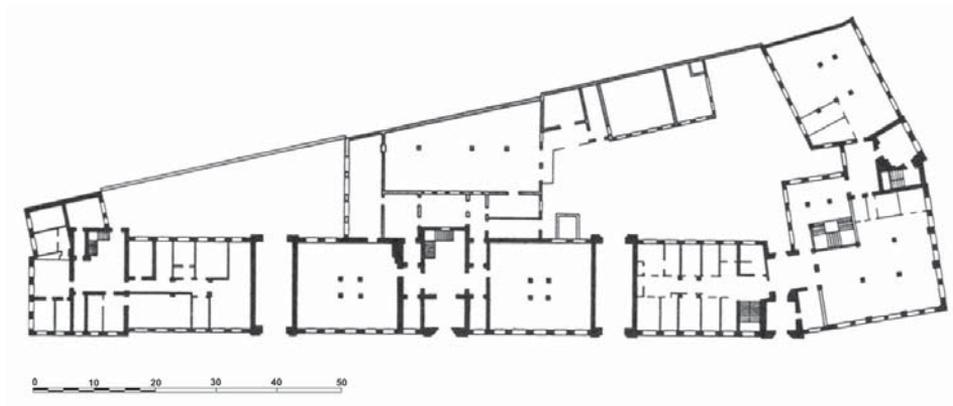


Fig. 6. The Post Office building in Wro aw, designed by L. Neumann, the ground floor projection [Borc 1992b]

Rys. 6. Budynek Poczty G ownej we Wro awiu, projekt: L. Neumann, rzut parteru [Borc 1992b]



Fig. 7. The Post Office building in Wrocław, a general view (photo by Z. Borcz)

Rys. 7. Budynek Poczty Głównej we Wrocławiu, widok ogólny (fot. Z. Borcz)

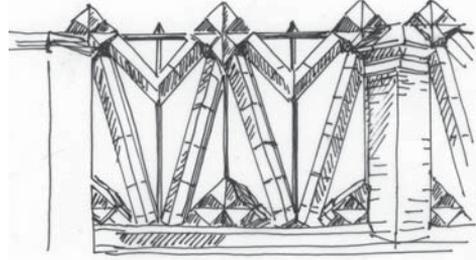


Fig. 8. The Post Office building in Wrocław, detail of the attic (drawing by Z. Borcz)

Rys. 8. Budynek Poczty Głównej we Wrocławiu, detal attyki (rys. Z. Borcz)



Fig. 9. The Post Office building in Wrocław, the elevation fragment (photo by Z. Borcz)

Rys. 9. Budynek Poczty Głównej we Wrocławiu, fragment elewacji (fot. Z. Borcz)

The decoration of the building are abstract geometrical forms in portals as well as the medallions connected thematically with post and with professions of citizens (Fig. 9). The bas-reliefs were designed by the Berlin sculptor Felix Kupsch, they were made in Ullersdorf (now Oldrzychowice).

## MODERNISM

A guiding idea of modernism was to provide for citizens good, healthy flats with the use of urban planning, architecture and industry achievements. These elements had to be coherent and as a result the modern building forms should be created. About 1925 many public utility buildings were erected, such as cinemas, department stores, offices, banks etc. The modern forms had to perform the function of a given edifice and to be connected

with its construction and technology. In this time steel and concrete started their domination, the symmetry was avoided, the buildings had a light shape and the flat roofs; the windows were not protruding from frontages.

The Post Office edifice in Ciechocinek was erected in 1933 in the modernism style according to the project of Romuald Gutt and Józef Jankowski [1937] (Fig. 10). It is an example of a free composition of building shapes in park environment. The well worked out architectonic detail deserves an attention; the windows with straight lines and the entrance side walls are a decorative element. The entrance is covered by a large roof supported on one asymmetrically situated pole (Fig. 11 and 12).

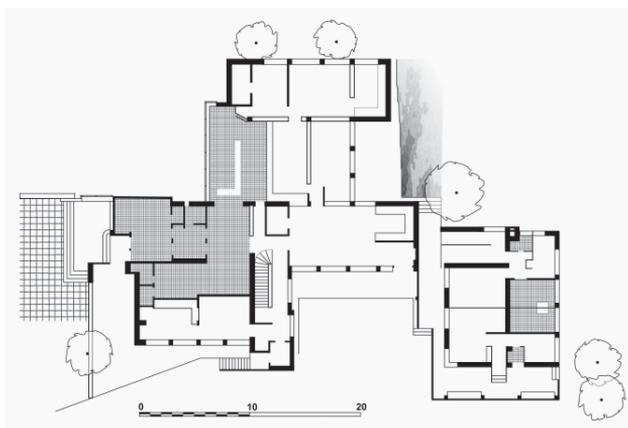


Fig. 10. The Post Office building in Ciechocinek, designed by R. Gutt and J. Jankowski, the ground floor projection [Architektura i Budownictwo 1937, 3, 70–73]

Rys. 10. Urząd pocztowy w Ciechocinku, projekt: R. Gutt i J. Jankowski, rzut parteru [Architektura i Budownictwo 1937, 3, 70–73]



Fig. 11. The Post Office building in Ciechocinek, the side elevation [Architektura i Budownictwo 1937, 3, 70–73]

Rys. 11. Urząd pocztowy w Ciechocinku, elewacja boczna [Architektura i Budownictwo 1937, 3, 70–73]



Fig. 12. The Post Office building in Ciechocinek, the front elevation (photo by Z. Borcz)

Rys. 12. Urząd pocztowy w Ciechocinku, elewacja frontowa (fot. Z. Borcz)

## CONCLUSION

In a summary one should point out that the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a conglomeration of many architectural styles; afterwards they gradually consolidated. It is noteworthy that these various styles did not develop chronologically, some architects designed innovatory projects, others however were conservative and traditional. The given examples of public utility buildings illustrate these tendencies.

In Cracow the National Savings Bank was erected in the historical style in the years 1922–1924, while the rules of competition for design of National Savings Bank in Rzeszów, announced in 1906 already introduced some features of Art Nouveau style. Another style, dominating for a long time because to the half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, and propagated by Jan Witkiewicz-Koszczyk, was the Zakopane style; an example is the kindergarten in Nałęczów built in 1906.

The building of the Post Office in Wrocław was erected in the years 1926–1929 according to design of Lothar Neumann in the quite different style, i.e. formism. As a final style of the 20<sup>th</sup> century one can consider the modernism, an example is the Post Office edifice in Ciechocinek, built in 1933 according to the design of Romuald Gutt and Józef Jankowski.

## REFERENCES

- Borcz Z., 1992a. Polskie poczty. Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków. Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław.
- Borcz Z., 1992b. Architektura budynku poczty we Wrocławiu, siedziby Muzeum Poczty i Telekomunikacji. Rocznik Muzealny 7, 13–23.
- Ekielski W., 1925. Gmach Pocztovej Kasy Oszczędności w Krakowie. Architekt 8.
- Gutt R., Jankowski J. 1937. Architektura i Budownictwo 3: 70–73.
- Pevsner N., 1976. Historia architektury europejskiej. Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa.
- Stifelman H., Weiss S., 1906. Architekt 12.
- Tondos B., 2004. Styl zakopiański i zakopiańszczyzna. Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków.

## FORMY STYLISTYCZNE BUDYNKÓW UŻYTECZNOŚCI PUBLICZNEJ W PIERWSZEJ POŁOWIE XX WIEKU W POLSCE

**Streszczenie.** W artykule przedstawiono różnorodność stylów architektonicznych w początkach XX wieku, podając przykłady budynków użyteczności publicznej, wznoszonych w Polsce w tym czasie. Przykładem stylu historycznego jest budynek Pocztovej Kasy Oszczędności w Krakowie, wzniesiony w latach 1922–1924 według projektu Szyszko-Bohusza. Równoległe pojawił się nowy styl, zwany secesją. W tym duchu w 1906 roku rozpisano konkurs architektoniczny na budynek Kasy Oszczędności w Rzeszowie i w rezultacie wybrano projekt odmienny od historycznych stylów, z elewacją asymetryczną. Na Podhalu, a stopniowo w innych regionach, rozpowszechnił się styl zakopiański. W tym stylu Witkiewicz-Koszczyk zaprojektował przedszkole w Nałęczowie, zbudowane w 1906 roku. Następnie przedstawiono budynek Poczty Głównej we Wrocławiu, zaprojektowany

w stylu formizmu przez Neumanna i wzniesiony w latach 1926–1929. Artykuł kończy opis modernistycznego budynku poczty w Ciechocinku, autorstwa Gutta i Jankowskiego, wzniesionego w 1933 roku. Budynek ten do dzisiaj zwraca uwagę nowoczesną formą i dobrym wykonaniem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** budynki użyteczności publicznej, architektura, style, początek XX w.

Accepted for print – Zaakceptowano do druku: 20.09.2011