
**THE QUESTION OF DESIGNING MODERN
ARCHITECTURE IN CONSERVATION AREAS:
A CASE STUDY OF KORTOWO, THE CAMPUS
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WARMIA AND MAZURY
IN OLSZTYN**

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Key words: architecture, urbanism, spatial composition, campus, Kortowo.

A b s t r a c t

This paper is a presentation of the problems which appear when shaping space in architectural and urbanistic areas of special historic interest, with the campus of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn taken as a case study. Each new construction project in a conservation area must comply with a number of restricting conditions, whose aim is to adjust new buildings to the existing environment. Unfortunately, good exposition of the existing architectural composition not an easy task, and on many occasions construction projects carried out in historical sites introduce an element of chaos to space.

By analyzing how the university campus in Kortowo has been developed, we have arrived at the conclusion that the future spatial development of this area should focus on revalorization of the existing buildings – that is the overriding objective should be to bring order to the functions, forms and surroundings of the buildings on the campus grounds. This is a reflection of the complex nature of problems encountered when shaping a spatial composition in a conservation area. Eliminating ‘foreign’ shapes as well as creating new architecture that will blend well with the historical buildings would enhance the spatial values of the old part of Kortowo, which in turn could emphasize the prestige of the campus.

**PROBLEMATYKA PROJEKTOWANIA WSPÓŁCZESNYCH OBIEKTÓW ARCHITEKTURY
W STREFACH OCHRONY KONSERWATORSKIEJ NA PRZYKŁADZIE KAMPUSU
UNIwersYTETU WARMIŃSKO-MAZURSKIEGO W OLSZTYNIE**

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S ł o w a k l u c z o w e: architektura, urbanistyka, kompozycja przestrzenna, strefa ochrony konserwatorskiej, miasteczko akademickie, Kortowo.

Abstrakt

W artykule przedstawiono problemy kształtowania przestrzeni w historycznych założeniach architektoniczno-urbanistycznych na przykładzie miasteczka akademickiego Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego w Olsztynie. Każda inwestycja powstająca na terenach objętych ochroną konserwatorską podlega wielu rygorom, które mają zapewnić dostosowanie nowo powstających obiektów do istniejącego otoczenia. Niestety ekspozycja kompozycji istniejących form nie jest zagadnieniem łatwym i niejednokrotnie w miejscach o historycznym rodowodzie można zaobserwować działania wprowadzające chaos w przestrzeni.

Analizując sposób i intensywność zagospodarowania kampusu uniwersyteckiego, należy stwierdzić, że dalszy rozwój przestrzenny powinien skupiać się wokół działań rewaloryzacyjnych istniejących obiektów – uporządkowania ich funkcji, formy i otoczenia. Działania te odzwierciedlają złożoność problemów w kształtowaniu przestrzeni w strefach ochrony konserwatorskiej. Eliminowanie „wyobcowanych” form kubaturowych oraz tworzenie i powiązanie nowej architektury z historyczną wpłynęłoby na podniesienie przestrzennych walorów tej części Kortowa, co dodatkowo podkreślałoby jego prestiż.

Introduction

Designing modern architectural forms in a historical setting usually creates a series of problems, which must be solved in order to pay respect to the cultural heritage of a given area. This is unquestionably a necessary condition, which governs all actions conducted in conservations areas, both urbanistic and architectural ones. Unfortunately, good exposition of the composition of existing elements is not an easy task and therefore in many historical areas we can observe actions which introduce spatial chaos. The oldest part of the university campus in Olsztyn can serve as a good example of the above problems, which are the subject of the present article.

Kortowo¹, an area in the south-western part of Olsztyn, preserves the remains of a psychiatric hospital compound, built at the end of the 19th century. Today, it is the seat of the University of Warmia and Mazury.

As an urbanistic and architectural complex, the historical part of Kortowo is rich in the material culture elements, which can be put into mutually interacting groups of values, such as:

- archaeological – archeological sites,
- urbanistic – the composition plan, interiors, compositional axes,
- architectural – single architectural objects as well as their groups,
- natural – natural monuments, landscaped green spaces.

¹ This part of the campus which contains the oldest architecture is known as Kortowo I. It belongs to the university and is delineated by Warszawska Avenue to the east, a military zone to the north, Kortowskie Lake to the west and the Kortówka River to the south.

Spatial management elements

The spatial composition of historical Kortowo has maintained, to some extent, the original plan (Fig. 1) although the urbanistic setting – regular, symmetrical and developed along an axis running from the north-east to the south-west – has been largely obscured. However, the central part of the compound, around the Rector's Office and Cieszyński Square, has been preserved rather clearly.

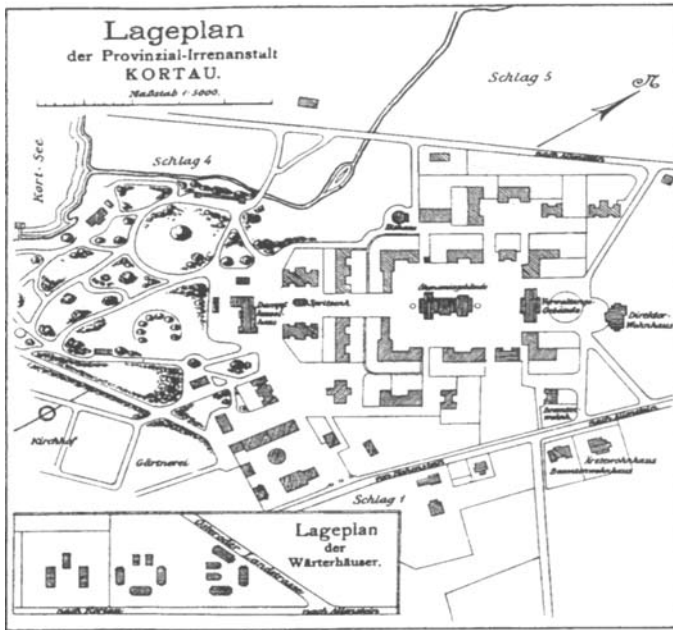


Fig. 1. Kortowo as a psychiatric hospital, plan of 1913

Source: PIECHOCKI (1993)

Changes in the urbanistic design of Kortowo are mainly due to the events that happened here at the end of World War Two, when many of the hospital buildings were damaged and devastated. The new buildings constructed shortly after the war were raised on the old foundations, with much care taken to maintaining their historical plan and shape. However, the architectural design of these buildings was an expression of the Social Realism style. Moreover, little attention was paid to the architectural detail and the buildings were often ineptly adapted to new functions. As a result, the spatial composition was degraded.

Although car transport has developed enormously over the last hundred years, the road pattern seen in today's Kortowo largely corresponds to the solution created at the end of the 19th century. Owing to many restrictions imposed on motor traffic on the campus, the original street plan of Kortowo, with the streets, squares and urbanistic interiors it included, has not been considerably modified. On the other hand, the fact that in the post-war years Kortowo began to serve educational purposes has made it necessary to design new routes for pedestrians and motorists as well as new car parks. This in turn has resulted in a number of uncontrolled solutions, divergent from the historical street plan, which should be now remodelled.

The construction investments completed in the post-war years have made diverse impact on the spatial structure of old Kortowo. The original axis of the whole composition has been severed in its southern section by a building (Fig. 2) completely different (foreign) in character from the existing edifices.



Fig. 2. A university building in Cieszyński Square, photo: M. ZAGROBA

Also the northern end of this axis has been cut off with a large, one-storey pavilion, which looks foreign to the surrounding environment. The cemetery, which was situated in the south-western part of the hospital compound, was transformed into a university park. Several other buildings,

larger and smaller ones, seem to have been constructed without any underlying complex analysis, which should be obligatory for any actions undertaken in a conservation area².

Architectural objects

Architecture has a profound effect on shaping the space in the old part of Kortowo, an area under protection of the Conservation Office. Most of the buildings reveal features typical of the architecture of Warmia and Mazury – they are built of red brick on rectangular, horseshoe or L-shaped plans (Fig. 3) and covered with ceramic tiled gable roofs. Their facades are divided with risalits and they possess many interesting architectural details, such as brick cornices and risalit tops or timber elements of the roofs (Fig. 4). The original setting and form of the buildings preserved until our days along with the materials used emphasize their historical value.



Fig. 3. A women's ward building of the psychiatric hospital – building no 31, photo: M. ZAGROBA

² The area of the former psychiatric hospital was converted into a conservation area and registered on 23rd April 1985 at number 3626 on the list of historical buildings as an architectural and urbanistic complex. Other protected elements comprise: the park, which lies on Kortowskie Lake, the grounds which contained the former Higher School of Agriculture and the complex of halls of residence as far as the Kortówka River. This protection zone 'B' also includes two buildings and the land plots on which they stand in Warszawska Street, opposite Kortowo.



Fig. 4. A women's ward building, typical architecture of the historical part of Kortowo, photo: M. ZAGROBA



Fig. 5. A hospital building, a historical building in Kortowo, raised in the early 20th century and 'modernized' in the 1970s, photo: M. ZAGROBA

Newer buildings, erected after World War Two, demonstrate a distinctly different type of architecture. With their shapes and form, construction solutions and design as well as the building materials used, they diverge from the harmonic, historical buildings, thus introducing some chaos to the well-designed compositional space. This is particularly true about the large buildings, which bear close semblance to the architecture of Social Realism (Fig. 2, 5). But many smaller, one-storey buildings covered with flat roofs are also in discord with the old architecture. This inconsiderate manner of adding new buildings greatly depreciates the value of the space, which is protected as a conservation area.

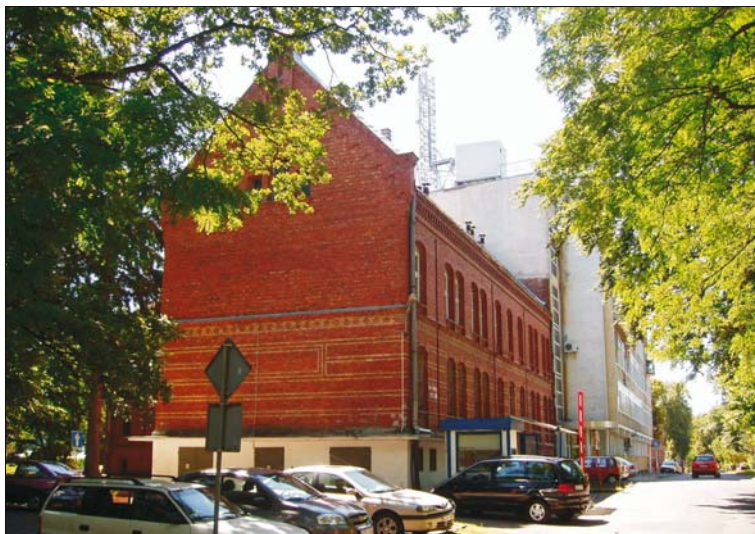


Fig. 6. University buildings in Prawocheńskiego Street, photo: M. ZAGROBA

Several observations can be made at this point. First of all, the new buildings are not examples of unpermitted construction work. Contrary to this, they all had building permits. The local development plan, however, is not short of explicit written rules regarding the adjustment of new construction investment projects (construction of a new building, extension, addition of floors, reconstruction as well as demolition of old buildings) to the forms, sizes and architecture of historical buildings.

In practice, it proves to be a challenging task to choose the right colours for a façade or to replace old windows, for example, when the role of an architect is often reduced to an ability of graphic presentation of design solutions rather

than making designs and choices. Doubtless, this characterizes the current state and problems of architecture in Poland.

All the elements of the present spatial management in the historical part of the campus – architectural, landscape and urbanistic ones – require revalorization, with an aim of preserving the culturally valuable complex of the buildings. Another reason why Kortowo is so valuable is its location (on a lake, next to a park), which is why it is considered to be one of the most picturesquely set university campuses in Poland.

Designing architectural objects

The oldest part of the university campus, today, set out as a conservation area owing to its spatial design, excludes construction of large objects in the available space. But this does not mean that the whole area is protected from any construction investment projects. The local development plan states it very clearly that the form of new buildings cannot be in discord with the existing design and their size must not be overwhelmingly large in the space which was defined in the past. Such recommendations should eliminate construction or reconstruction of the likes of Social Realism or erection of flat-roofed, one- or two-storey pavilions (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. A historical building of the post office, against the background of post-war buildings, in Heweliusza Street, photo: M. ZAGROBA



Fig. 8. A one-storey pavilion at 4 Heweliusza Street, photo: M. ZAGROBA

Having analyzed the manner and intensity of the development of this area, it needs to be suggested that any future spatial development should focus on revitalization of the existing buildings in a way that will bring order to their functions, forms and surrounding grounds (Fig. 8). Elimination of ‘foreign’ forms as well as creation of new architecture related to the historical buildings would improve the spatial values of this part of Kortowo, which in turn could add to its prestige. For such activities it is necessary to formulate certain recommendations, which reflect the complexity of spatial management in conservation areas. The recommendations can be summarized as follows:

- based on some analytical work – monitoring of modifications made to the urbanistic setting – streets, squares, building alignments, composition of interiors,

- elimination of ‘accidental’ objects, ‘accidental’ in terms of their form, scale, expression, spatial context, in short – buildings which disturb the uniform character of the whole complex of buildings,

- adjusting new construction projects to the historical forms by maintaining the same scale, architectural expression, materials and solutions. New architecture should not copy the historical forms but it needs to be suited to the developed space.

- when renovating the existing buildings, the applied design solutions should correspond to the historical forms of the buildings. The materials used ought to include traditionally used building materials (brick, timber, ceramic roof tiles).

Preservation of cultural values – urbanistic, architectural, archaeological and natural – should be combined with analyses of the impact produced by new

construction investment projects on the maintained historical spatial plan of the area. This means that both the architects and the conservation officers, who supervise the design and construction stages, are greatly responsible for the protection of the cultural heritage. Unfortunately, this shared responsibility for our common heritage does not always assume the form of partner cooperation. Thus, it is evident that the question of designing modern architecture in conservation areas is a multi-facet issue.

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