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## Polish and German concepts in architecture and town-planning in Upper Silesia between World War I and World War II

It has often been pointed out in studies of western architecture of the twentieth century that neither of the two world wars has been of particular importance for the development of architectural form or town-planning. However, in the case of the Upper Silesian Industrial Region (Polish: GOP) the two world wars have been set as legitimate time limits.<sup>1</sup> The material preserved from that period allows us to state that the artistic aspects of the region had entered a new way of development. The political partition of Upper Silesia resulted in serious conflicts that led to a sense of competition in virtually all spheres of life. Cultural phenomena were more politicised in the region than elsewhere. The frontier became a separating cordon; cultural initiatives or achievements were defined as either purely German or purely Polish. Art, and architecture too, found themselves drawn into the whirl of propaganda. One should therefore ponder how the political divisions and partitions influenced the shape and development of town-planning and architecture.

The part of Upper Silesia that was allocated to Poland consciously separated itself from the legacy of German art. One has to bear in mind, however, that there was no decisively Polish tradition in that respect in the early 1920s, one that one could refer to the new political reality and conditions. There was,

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<sup>1</sup> On 10 October 1921 the countries represented by the Council of Ambassadors finally approved the new frontier, a bigger part of the Upper Silesian Industrial Region fell into Polish hands. Still, the compromise which brought about the division of Upper Silesia satisfied none of the parties concerned – ed. J. Szafarski, *Katowice 1865-1945. Zarys historii miasta*, Katowice 1978, 148.

nevertheless, a general matrix of ideas which treated architecture as a component of Polish culture. It was that matrix which, until 1928, made the architecture in Polish Upper Silesia reach for the repertoire of traditional forms, commonly applied in Polish art of that time.<sup>2</sup>

The most spectacular example of implementing such an approach has been the building of the Provincial Office and Silesian Sejm (Parliament), built between 1922 and 1929.<sup>3</sup> In line with the intentions of authorities, this immense, monumental building, with strongly accentuated features of representation, combined the elements of academic classicism filtered through the experiences of modernism, particularly the Cracow modernism of the early twentieth century. The interior design and decorations, in turn, belonged to the Polish art deco trend, a style that became representative for the official Polish art after the Paris Exhibition of 1925.

The trend that borrowed from Polish traditions, be it of Polish classicism in its different varieties, or modernism originating from the Cracow school, was the leading one in the architecture of Katowice in the 1920s. One can find its exemplification in monumental buildings, the representative character of which resulted from their functioning as seats of spiritual, political, or economic authorities. The building of the Polish Iron Syndicate (1930), designed by Tadeusz Michejda, situated near the Provincial Office, draws upon the simplified version of 'modern classicism', while the never-finished cathedral (1927-1956), designed by Zygmunt Gawlik and Franciszek Mączyński, brings to Katowice the classical forms in an academic frame. The National Economy Bank (1928-1930), designed by Stefan Tabeński, most effectively combines the 'crystal-like' decoration of art deco and classicism.<sup>4</sup>

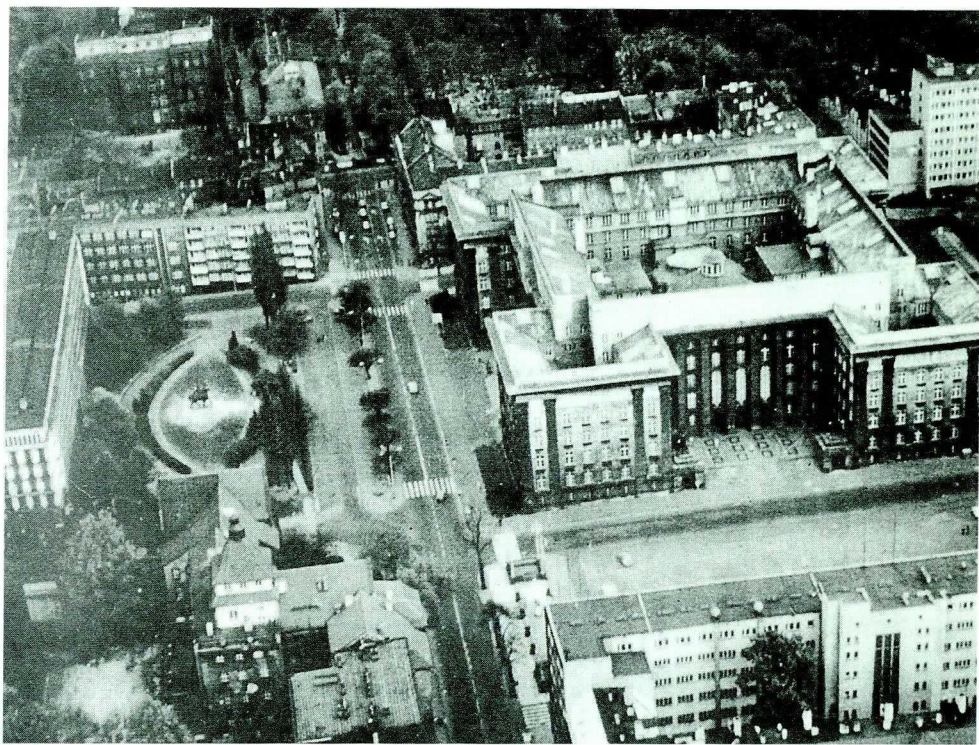
The building of Silesian Sejm (Parliament) was of particular importance as it became the first element of a newly-designed representative urban space: the urban forum with the aim of functioning as the new centre of Katowice, situated in the southern part of the town, ignoring completely the old post-German downtown area (1).<sup>5</sup> The forum was not homogeneous in style,

<sup>2</sup> A. K. Olszewski, *Nowa forma w architekturze polskiej 1900-1925. Teoria i praktyka*, Wrocław-Warsaw-Cracow 1967.

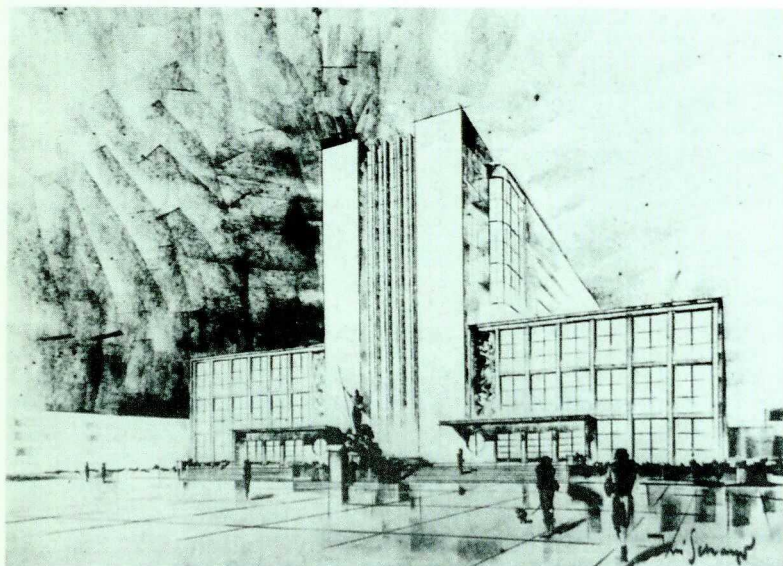
<sup>3</sup> The competition, whose results were announced on September 15, 1923, brought about the realisation of the project by the architects from Cracow: Kazimierz Wyczyński, Ludwik Wojtyczka, Stefan Zeleński, and Piotr Jurkiewicz; cf. H. Surowiak, 'Gmach Urzędu Wojewódzkiego i Sejmu Śląskiego w Katowicach oraz jego program ideowy', *Rocznik Katowicki*, 1983, 160-70; W. Odorowski, *Architektura Katowic w latach międzywojennych 1922-1939*, Katowice 1984, 52 and ff.

<sup>4</sup> Odorowski 1984, 45-110; B. Szczyпка-Gwiazda, 'Historia budowy Katedry w Katowicach', in ed. E. Chojecka, *O sztuce Górnego Śląska i Zagłębia Dąbrowskiego XV-XX w. Sztuka Śląska odkrywana na nowo*, Katowice 1989, 89-104.

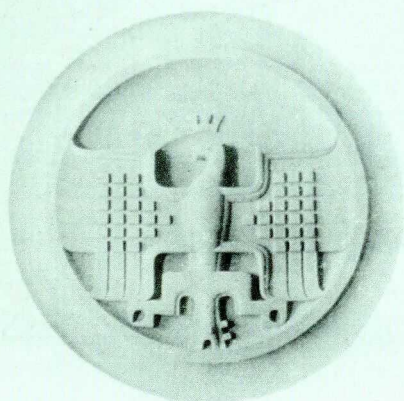
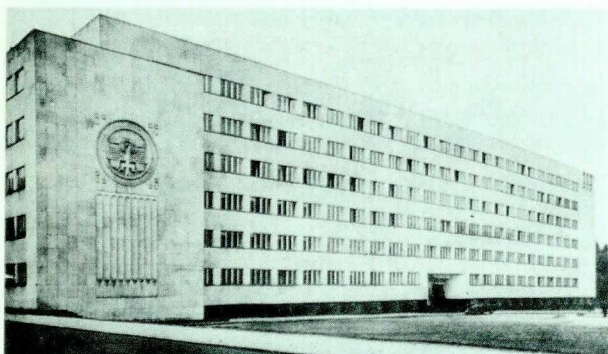
<sup>5</sup> B. Szczyпка-Gwiazda, 'Reprezentacyjne założenie placu-forum Katowic jako próba stworzenia "przestrzeni symbolicznej"' in ed. E. Chojecka, *Przestrzeń, architektura, malarstwo. Wybrane zagadnienia sztuki górnośląskiej*, Katowice 1995; Odorowski 1984, 49-62.



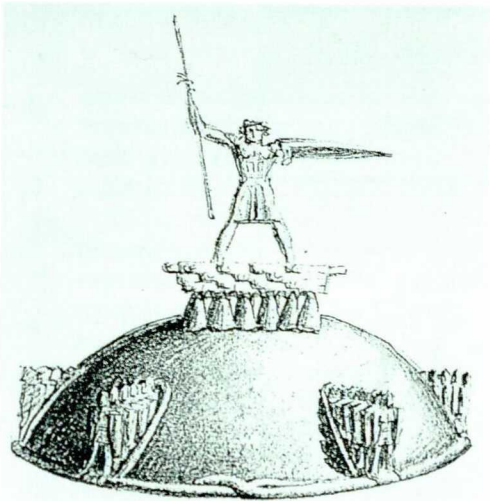
1. The Provincial Government and Silesian Sejm (Parliament). Spatial arrangement; as before 1939.



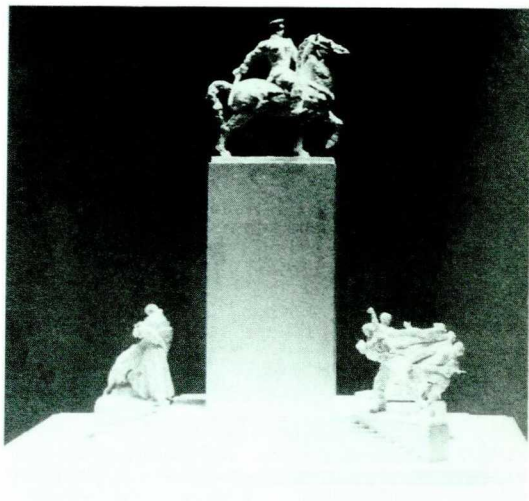
2 The Silesian Museum in Katowice, by Karol Schayer, 1934-36 (built 1934-1939). Photograph, 1939. Silesian Museum, Katowice.



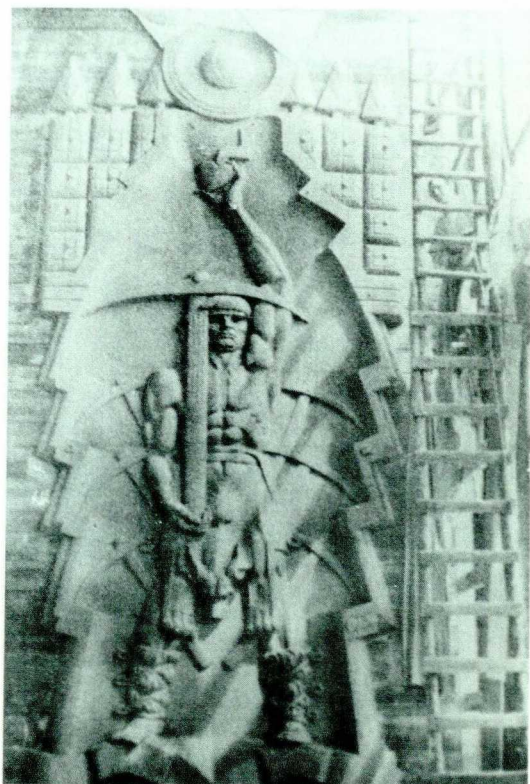
3. The Independent Offices with the bas-relief carved by Stanisław Szukalski, 1936. Photograph before 1939. Photograph before 1939.



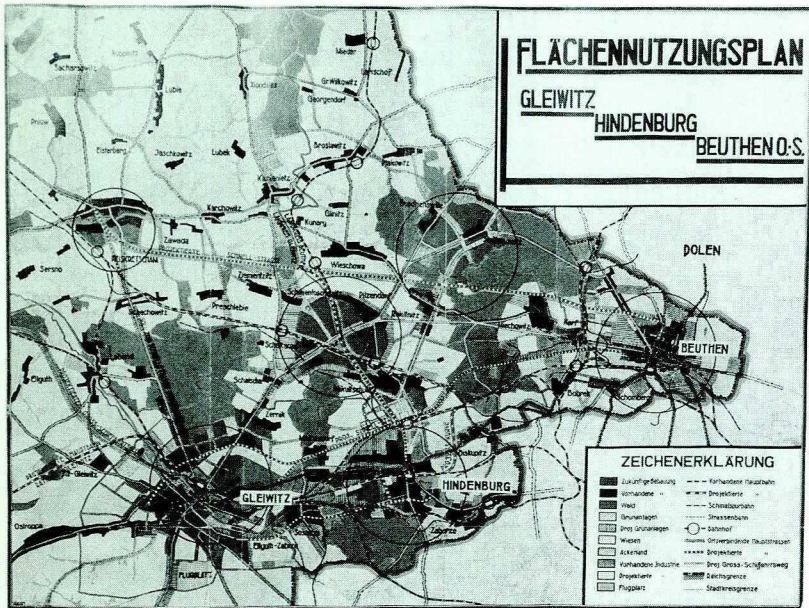
4. Design for the statue of king Boleslaw Chrobry, by Stanisław Szukalski, 1938.  
After *Szukalski Troughful of Pearls*, 1982.



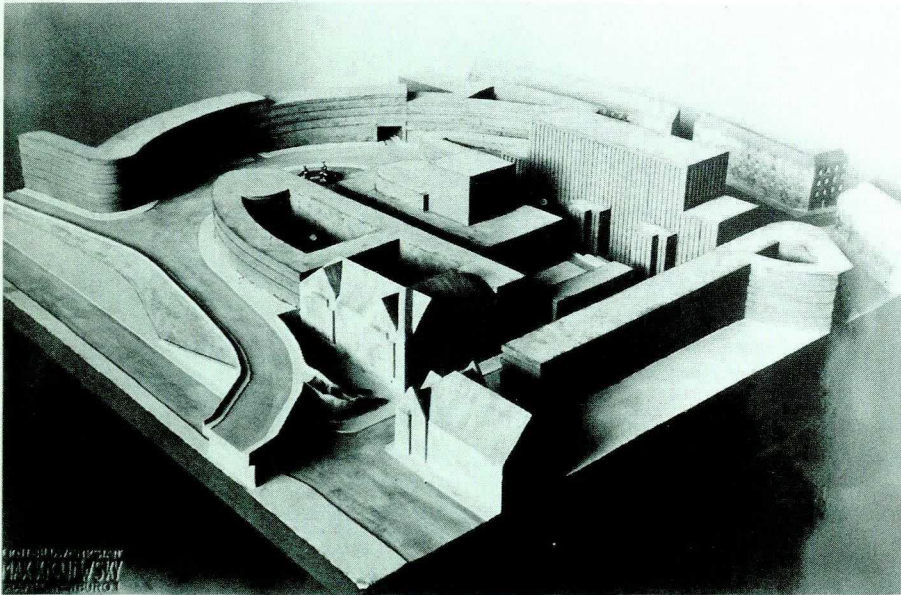
5. Design for the statue of Marshal Józef Piłsudski and the monument to Silesian Insurgents, by A. Augustyncic, 1937. After Photograph, 1939. Silesian Museum, Katowice.



6. The bas-relief of a miner, by Stanisław Szukalski.



7. Plan for the Three Cities of Beuthen-Hindenburg-Gleiwitz (Bytom-Zabrze-Gliwice). After Schabik, Stütz, Wolf 1929.



8. Layout Plan for the City of Hindenburg (Zabrze), by Hans Poelzig, 1927. Technische Universität Berlin, Plansammlung.

however, not being built all at the same time. It comprised architecture of various artistic forms, its spatial arrangement was that of a centrifugal layout with representative features. That assumption allowed the creation of a distinctly defined space, where ideas and artistic values came together.

The other buildings located in that square, constructed after 1934, belonged to a modernistic avant-garde. The new forms in architecture became a way to express the program of the provincial authorities. The 'modernity-oriented' approach manifested the progress in the domains of civilization and culture, made by Silesia under Polish government, showing the distinct character of the province at the same time. In social consciousness, the slogan 'Katowice skyscrapers' was meant to be associated with economic growth and well being, achieved in the 'American way'.<sup>6</sup>

The Katowice urban forum has got two main buildings which, as new constructions, jointly create its space. North of the Sejm, the Provincial Government, the building of the Muzeum Śląskie (Silesian Museum) was constructed between 1934 and 1939, following a design by Karol Schayer (2).<sup>7</sup> The modern body of the building, with elevated middle break, evoking the image of a spire symbolizing sovereign power, was a new development in Polish art. Giving up the classical forms, supposedly appropriate for the 'temple of art', through its modern body the Museum expressed such values as culture and progress. The building, together with that of the Provincial Government, constituted the axis of town-planning composition, forming at the same time a sharp contrast to the huge body of the latter, which clearly evoked associations with might and duration, thus with power. After 1935 the representative city centre gained a new element of composition, from the western side, the ascetic building of the Independent Offices, designed by Witold Kłębowski. Here the simple and clear body of the building, ideal in proportion, was contrasted with the richly ornamented building of the Provincial Government (3).

The ideological programme contained in the above arrangement was further stressed by the sculptures, bas-reliefs, and architectonic decorations. The main features were two statues which linked ideologically the two parts of the forum: the statue of king Bolesław Chrobry, carved by Stanisław Szukalski (4), and

<sup>6</sup> W. Odorowski, 'Wieżowce Katowic i ich treści ideowo-propagandowe', in ed. E. Chojecka, *O sztuce Górnego Śląska i przyległych ziem matopolskich*, Katowice 1993, 267-68; the first 'skyscrapers' were built in Katowice in the years 1929-1934, designed by Eustachy Chmielewski and Tadeusz Kozłowski.

<sup>7</sup> D. Głazek, 'Budynek Muzeum Śląskiego w Katowicach w dwudziestolecu międzywojennym', in ed. E. Chojecka, *Z dziejów sztuki Górnego Śląska i Zagłębia Dąbrowskiego*, Katowice 1982, 17 and ff; E. Chojecka, 'Treści ideowe Muzeum Śląskiego w Katowicach', in ed. L. Szaraniec, *Ziemia Śląska*, I, Katowice 1988, 33-47. The building of Silesian Museum, completely ready for use, was demolished in the autumn of 1939, after Germans took over Katowice when World War II broke out. After the war ended in 1945, the authorities then in power, prejudiced towards the inter-war period did not allow rebuilding the museum.

the statue of marshal Józef Piłsudski on horseback, carved by Antun Augustincic (5). The supplementing elements consisted of bas-reliefs of a miner (6) and a Silesian woman on the front of the Silesian Museum, and the bas-relief of an eagle (Polish national emblem) on the façade of the Independent Offices, all three carved by Stanisław Szukalski.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the Katowice Forum Square expressed ideas of history; by reaching back to the testimony of the past, the idealised crown of which was to be carried over into the present. It is almost symbolic that the town-planning solution found provided a link between traditional and avant-garde buildings, thus uniting history and present into one whole.

The buildings in the German part of the Upper Silesian Industrial Region already constituted, in the early 1920s, a substantial amount, yet the bulk was not reflected in richness of architectural forms. The majority of buildings served residential purposes, housing facilities being much in demand in the strongly developing and socially minded Weimar Republic.<sup>9</sup>

Among the relatively early achievements of modern architecture was the Seidenhaus Weichman in Gleiwitz/Gliwice, designed by Erich Mendelsohn (1921-22), with a dynamically shaped body and rhythm of form that are considered forerunners of the expressionist architecture.<sup>10</sup> That, however, found no continuation in the region. The architecture there mainly followed a rather traditional line of development, often linked with the so-called *Heimatstil*. Some expressionistic elements often appeared in social-oriented constructions; when added to the traditional body of the building they resulted in a specific, dynamic artistic expression.<sup>11</sup> A modest example of *Neues Bauen* was the DEWOG cooperative housing estate in Zabrze (then Hindenburg), built in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

The plan of creating the aggregate of three neighbouring towns of Bytom-Zabrze-Gliwice (then Beuthen-Hindenburg-Gleiwitz), established around 1926, fitted the idealistic town-planning concepts of the Weimar

<sup>8</sup> E. Chojecka, 'Niedoszły pomnik Marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego i Powstańca Śląskiego w Katowicach', in Chojecka 1993, 313-36; Szczypka-Gwiazda 1995; B. Szczypka-Gwiazda, *Nieznane oblicze sztuki polskiej. W kręgu sztuki województwa śląskiego w dobie II Rzeczypospolitej*, Katowice 1996, 37-52.

<sup>9</sup> F. Gabrysch, *Die räumliche Entwicklung der Städte Beuthen, Hindenburg und Gleiwitz*, Berlin 1937, 62. The new constitution of the Weimar Republic stressed the role of government control over land management, which guaranteed housing facilities for all inhabitants. The housing reform became effective after 1923, as economic conditions stabilised. W. J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, London 1996, 249.

<sup>10</sup> R. Stephan, *Studien zu Waren- und Geschäftshäusern Erich Mendelsohns in Deutschland*, Munich 1992, 53-62; L. Jodliński, *Dom tekstylny Weichmanna w Gliwicach - nieznane dzieło Ericha Mendelsohna*, Gliwice 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Expressionistic accents dominate especially in social buildings of the early 1920s, e.g. the Eichendorf Schule in Gliwice, the Städtische Blücherschule in Zabrze, or in Aula der Mittelschule in Zabrze.



Republic architects (7). The idea of aggregating those towns arose within the framework of the national economic reform.<sup>12</sup> The final version of the plan was developed by the team of municipal architects of the Construction Departments of the towns of Gleiwitz (now Gliwice), Hindenburg (now Zabrze), and Beuthen (now Bytom), headed by the *Stadtbauräten* M. (?) Wolf, Albert Stütz, and Carl Schabik.<sup>13</sup> The main reason for developing the idea was the necessity to revive and improve the economy in the eastern part of Germany, yet propagandistic aims also were present, as Max Berg wrote: 'Towns situated near the border should gain a notable economic and cultural status, in order that they may emanate their German power onto areas along both sides of the frontier'.<sup>14</sup>

The general concept regarding the development of the Three Towns aimed to solve town-planning problems in relation to the region. Spatial planning was made dependent upon economic development; a common form of urban development (*Gesamtstadtform*) was to take into consideration the distribution of extractive industry plants. The idea of decentralising was the core of town development, assuming the introduction of green belts between estates and plants, polycentric distribution of new districts, taking into consideration the existing borders. Thus, development was possible mainly in the north-west direction. New housing estates were located far from historically developed towns. The new residential areas (*Trabantenvororte*), rich in greenery, were also meant for recreation and rest.

The purpose of creating an integral plan for the Three Towns was not merely utilitarian but also related to prestige. The new architecture and expression was meant to enhance the status of Gleiwitz (Gliwice), Hindenburg (Zabrze), and Beuthen (Bytom) and make them a major industrial centre. It is worth noting is that fact that also at the German side of the frontier the new architecture became a vehicle for expressing the ideological platform of local authorities. The central urban zone was located along the frontier line, and was linked with the historic town structures. Yet, the towns of Gleiwitz (Gliwice) and Beuthen (Bytom) had some 700 years of history behind them, while Hindenburg (Zabrze) received municipal rights only in 1922.<sup>15</sup> In the early twentieth century the latter town was even nicknamed the biggest village in Europe, and its chaotic layout lacked a centre. Thus the creation of a centre for that town became one of the major tasks for town-planners. The renowned German architects: Max Berg, Paul Bonatz, Hans Poelzig, Dominicus Boehm

<sup>12</sup> (?) Gerlach, *Vorschlag zur endgültigen Lösung des obereschl. Eingemeindungsproblems unter Berücksichtigung der Städte Beuthen, Hindenburg und Gleiwitz*, Berlin 1926.

<sup>13</sup> Eds Schabik, Stütz, Wolf, *Dreistädteinheit Beuthen Gleiwitz Hindenburg, Landkreis Beuthen*, Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna 1929.

<sup>14</sup> M. Berg, *Erläuterungsbericht zu dem Entwurf für die Bebauung des Stadtkerns in Hindenburg O/S*, typescript in the Archives of the Deutsches Museum, Munich.

<sup>15</sup> J. Pollok, *Hindenburg O/S. Stadt der Gurben und Hütten*, Essen o.J. 1979, 149.

were invited to design the city of Zabrze, located north of the town's railway station (1927).<sup>16</sup>

All those architects proposed a dense set of buildings within the City, to serve the purposes of culture, entertainment, commerce, administration, and local self-government. Max Berg developed an axial layout in his project, which consisted of organically linked units. The architect proposed linking together bodies of buildings according to the principle of height gradation, which he often applied. The architecture proposed by Berg could be traced back to his proposal for the spatial development of Lessingplatz in Breslau (Wrocław).

The design suggested by Paul Bonatz was the most traditionally oriented. His solution, through the proposed regularity and strong classical accents in the space arrangement was perceived as a relict of early 1920s. Hans Poelzig put forward a project consisting of three independent elements situated around the square in front of the railway station. The independent units formed a set of dynamic, expressive blocks that constituted a unity, with free transition from one spatial arrangement to another (8). The project of Poelzig manifested most conspicuously the differences in treating architecture and space on both sides of the frontier. Poelzig shapes space of theatrical character, dynamic and fluid. The urban forum in Katowice was built by adding to the traditional body of the Provincial Government of cubic, 'hard' rectangular blocks, which co-created a static space, clearly of nineteenth century origin. Despite the fact that on both sides of the frontier the architects reached for modernistic forms, their understanding of modernism and modernity appears to differ substantially.

The above remarks appear to be confirmed in one of the best urban development projects, though never fully implemented, in the town of Hindenburg (now Zabrze): that of the Kamillian Square, designed by Dominicus Boehm in 1928-1929. The terraced arrangement of space, together with inherently dynamic bodies of buildings, results in a truly expressive whole. Similar designs and projects, expressionistic in character, may be found also in the towns of Gliwice and Bytom, e.g. the Town Hall of Gliwice, designed by Carl Schabik, the St Joseph Church in Zabrze, designed by Dominicus Boehm, or the plans for reconstructing the Town Theatre in Bytom (Beuthen) by Hans Poelzig.

The ambitious projects and designs for the Three Towns have never been fully implemented. Comparing the construction activity on both sides of the frontier, it has to be stated that the development designs for Katowice were implemented to a larger extent. On the basis of existing examples one can state that the conflicts between nationalities resulted in their taking different routes to modernity in both parts (Polish and German) of the Upper Silesia. Despite the slight influence of German avant-garde upon the architecture of Katowice, one can legitimately state that, during the twenty years between two world wars, the Polish and German schools did not create a uniform image in the territory of Upper Silesia.

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<sup>16</sup> Schabik, Stütz, Wolf 1929, XXV.