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Poznań, 11 March 2025

Review of PhD dissertation of mgr inż. arch. Jakub Bródka titled “Late-modern architecture of single-family houses from 1945-1989 in Poland: research and perspectives for protection on the example of selected objects from the area of the Silesian Voivodship”

Basis of the review

Act of 20 July 2018 Law on higher education and science (Journal of Laws 2018 item 668)
Act of 14 March 2003 on scientific degrees and academic titles, and on degrees and titles in the field of arts (Journal of Laws 2017, item 1789)
Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 19 January 2018 on detailed procedure and conditions for conducting activities in doctoral dissertation proceedings, in habilitation proceedings and proceedings for the conferment of the title of professor (Journal of Laws 2017 item 271)
Order of the Chairperson of the Council for Architecture and Urban Planning at the Faculty of Architecture, Silesian University of Technology - dr hab. inż. arch. Alina Pancewicz associate professor, Silesian University of Technology dated 09.01.2025.
Doctoral dissertation: Jakub Bródka titled *Late-modern architecture of single-family houses from 1945-1989 in Poland: research and perspectives for protection on the example of selected objects from the area of the Silesian Voivodship*

Formal characteristics and layout of the dissertation

The doctoral dissertation titled *Late-modern architecture of single-family houses from 1945-1989 in Poland: research and perspectives for protection on the example of selected objects from the area of the Silesian Voivodship* was developed by mgr inż. arch. Jakub Bródka under two advisors: prof. dr hab. inż. arch. Magdalena Żmudzińska-Nowak of the Silesian University of Technology and prof. arch. Marco Giorgio Bevilacqua of the University of Pisa under a binational agreement between the Silesian University of Technology and the University of Pisa. The subject matter of the work falls within the subject of contemporary research on the problem of identifying and protecting the architectural heritage of the twentieth century. Such research is particularly valuable due to the existing vast legacy of residential architecture of the time, including basic studies on problems specified in the title of the work, which concern individual single-family houses. Chronologically, the work covers the period from the beginning of the twentieth century to its end, for which a detailed analysis of the studied phenomena was conducted. The architecture of modernist single-family houses built in Poland between 1945 and 1989 is an essentially unchartered topic. Research and prospects for preservation as exemplified by selected buildings from the Silesian Voivodeship is certainly a subject that fills a critical information gap and arouses interest in a number of environments.

The presented dissertation comprises one extensive volume of 257 pages, including text, figures, diagrams, charts, and tables. The classical structure of the dissertation consists of ten parts. The first presents an introduction to the research objectives. This includes a description and definition of the researched subject, an explanation of why it was chosen and its goals, as well as the scope of the study and a description of the author's

methodology. The main body of the work is divided into five extensive chapters arranged on a problem basis. The first contains a broad description of the state of research and, importantly, presents the definitions and abbreviations used in the dissertation. The second chapter is a general outline of the problem of housing after World War II. This is followed by a detailed study of single-family housing in the Silesian Voivodeship and a very important chapter devoted to the valuation of the studied buildings. The last part of the main body of the dissertation focuses on recommendations concerning the protection of architectural heritage in the field of single-family residential architecture. The work concludes with a discussion of the research outcomes and a final reflection. The last part is an index of literature, figures, and sources. The end of the dissertation is followed by an appendix with the author's proposal for developing Building Certificates which would make it possible to create a structured description of analysed buildings.

Regarding methodology, the reviewed dissertation is an analytical study of a problem-oriented nature, focusing on a clearly outlined subject, time and structure. The author aims to describe the construction history, valuation issues and prospects for the protection of the modernist legacy of single-family houses in the Silesian Province. The entire complex task is presented in an extensive informative, documental and systemic context, whilst also providing an analysis of structural, urban planning and architectural solutions.

Evaluation of the dissertation and content analysis

In researching single-family buildings, the author of this dissertation undertook an extremely interesting, albeit simultaneously challenging task. Though it seems widely known, the subject of the research is basically unexplored and has, so far, been on the margins of interest of Polish researchers. The vast number of buildings also required identifying the right analytical tools. Moreover, the progressive degradation of the architectural substance and the lack of understanding among owners made it necessary to undertake research and intervention.

This made it all the more important to carry out painstaking, systematic work aimed at sorting out the many aspects related to the creation and potential preservation of individual single-family buildings dating from 1945 to 1989. I support the author's decision to restrict his focus to the Silesian Voivodeship and its major cities, which in view of the enormous number of houses that can be analysed, may still seem an almost impossible task.

The presented work is an efficiently structured scientific argument, wherein the author discusses in detail the issues of the architecture of single-family buildings in a wider spatial, historical, and conservational context. Mr Bródka correctly identified the research problem which he sees as "a significant lack of scientific knowledge on the architectural heritage of single-family houses designed to order by private clients in Poland in the second half of the twentieth century. This gap lies in an insufficient understanding of the scope and cultural value of such architecture ... There is also limited insight into the current state of preservation of these buildings, as well as the potential mechanisms for their protection as Poland's architectural heritage" (p.10). However, the aims of the work are much broader and include an analysis of the wider context in the field of single-family housing not only in Poland, but also internationally.

This very interesting and ambitious endeavour was broadened with an attempt to catalogue the existing buildings. Sorting these out made it necessary for the author to create his own original "Building Certificates," which can also help other researchers.

The examined issues are presented in a logical order, resulting from the adopted methodology. The scope of the work, divided by theme, chronology and area is precise and includes the use of case studies located in the Silesian Voivodeship. The layout of the work is very clear, which allows for accurate reading of the content.

The work is divided into ten distinctive parts, five of which form its core.

Chapter I is an introduction to the dissertation and the issues discussed in the subsequent sections. This part describes the research problem and its accompanying questions, explains why it was chosen and specifies its accompanying questions. It also discusses the aim of the research, the associated tasks and the author's methodology.

Mr Bródka clearly defines the subject of the research, which is late-modern single-family houses built between 1945 and 1989, commissioned by private investors in selected areas of the Silesian Voivodeship. Furthermore, in identifying the research problem, the author poses a number of questions which he intends to answer within the content of the dissertation. The goal of this, in turn, is to solve the problem by completing and systematically organising the missing knowledge on the architectural heritage of custom-designed single-family houses from the second half of the twentieth century. This involves assessing their architectural and stylistic significance, along with developing recommendations for their preservation and protection.

The chapter also discusses the chronological and spatial scope of the study, namely the years 1945-1989, along with the Katowice Urban Area and the Bielsko-Biała Urban Area located in the Silesian Voivodeship. Moreover, the substantive scope of the research is supported by literature and archive studies, field research, inventory and documentation, architectural and stylistic analysis, technical condition evaluation, comparative analysis, and valuation.

Discussing the state of research and the literature on the subject in Chapter II, Mr Bródka makes extensive references to research papers, articles, and books on the analysed issues. The author collected a wide range of source materials and literature, including the most important Polish and international publications.

The examination of the state of research is divided into publications on the history and analysis of single-family buildings in a broad international context, reaching back to the history of architecture from the twentieth century and its modernist beginnings. This is followed by a very general study of the state of research on Polish buildings, taking into account the most important literature. One should add that Mr Bródka also makes references to catalogues and typical designs for single-family buildings, which is certainly an indispensable aspect taken up in the dissertation.

The analysis of the state of the research concludes with a section devoted to the subject of the protection of the twentieth-century architectural heritage. In the subsequent section of this chapter, the author cites the available archival materials. It is gratifying to note that these include both publicly available archives and numerous legal acts. The author also makes use of materials to which access is very limited, including unpublished materials and documents from private collections, as well as interviews with the designers of the studied buildings. An excellent addition to both the introductory section and the whole dissertation is the attempt not only to clarify but also systematise the terminology used, which I consider to be a very important contribution to the organisation of architectural writing. Among the entries, one should highlight the attempt to clarify the typology of the atrial house, as well as the systematics of roofs.

Chapter III of the dissertation titled "General Research" is an extensive description of the origins and contexts of the emergence of single-family architecture across the world and in Poland. I consider this description essential in seeking references for reflection on the architecture of the Silesian Voivodeship. The chapter begins with an outline of the development and evolution of the single-family house model, as well as the architectural trends prevailing in the first half of the twentieth century. This also includes elements that determined the changes in character of the model associated with social and political changes, as well as new approaches and trends in urban planning and opportunities for popularising new trends (e.g. exhibitions, media, CIAM activities). The outline developed by the Mr Bródka is a broad and multifaceted view of the problem, which considers not only the social and political transformations, but also changes in ideology, technology and materials. The outline of these new trends is presented using examples of the Key Houses in Europe and the United States, which are an excellent illustration of the trends discussed.

The next part of the chapter is devoted to similar issues, but those which concern the second half of the twentieth century. Here too, Mr Bródka examines the causes of the development of single-family architecture, bearing in mind however, the changed and complex political situation after World War II. In this section, the author also examines some very interesting but little-known themes related to the popularisation of new architectural trends, such as the American "Case Study Houses Program," along with the exhibitions Interbau 1957' in Berlin and Expo 58 in Brussels, as well as opportunities related to the development of new technologies and materials. Also in this section, the author presents the most important examples of buildings in the United States and

Europe. The identification of the trends from that time is crucial for the discussion of the national context and the changes in single-family architecture in Poland between 1945 and 1989. This is a very good concept, which further leads the author to a detailed analysis of individual houses in the Silesian Voivodeship. The study is very thorough and covers not only economic or political aspects, but also others that are needed to understand the phenomenon of the Polish single-family house. I consider the findings in this subsection extremely valuable, with a key impact on the formation of the idea of the home in the communist era. The author looks into design standards, including the issue of repetitive and "typical" designs, which significantly determined the Polish spatial landscape at that time, juxtaposed with nonstandard, individual projects, which were also constructed. The author aptly observes that some of the most crucial factors that determined the emergence and shape of single-family housing in the analysed years included legal regulations and guidelines regarding both the size of plots and the actual area of the houses. This is excellently reflected in Figure 27 (p. 83).

Another key element related to the emergence of individual single-family houses in post-war Poland includes social factors, namely a change in the national borders and migration to the so-called "Recovered Territories." An excellent illustration of these factors is a map of the level of investment in single-family housing in Poland after 1971 (Figure 29, p.87).

The next section shows characteristic examples of selected and well-known houses built during the socialist period in Poland. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the findings.

Chapter IV, titled "Detailed Research," describes the Silesian Voivodeship. It opens, quite rightly, with a description of the voivodeship and its borders between 1945 and 1989. This is a necessary point of departure for presenting architects and the context of their professional activity within the discussed boundaries. Mr Bródka examines the problem of architectural education provided at the Silesian University of Technology, as well as the structure of design offices. It is a slight shame that he did not mention the opportunities which opened up at the beginning of the 1980s and the activities of Pracownia Usług Architektury (Architectural Services Office), which at that time was affiliated with SARP (Association of Polish Architects). A very important, albeit short section is devoted to investors, their position and professional structure.

In the subsequent section, Mr Bródka writes about the most representative group of architects who were active in Silesia during the discussed period. They include Henryk Buszko and Aleksander Franta (as a team), Jerzy Gottfried, Jurand Jarecki, Mieczysław Król and Stanisław Kwaśniewicz. The next section is devoted to selected custom-designed houses located in the voivodeship. These are case studies designed by the aforementioned architects. Moreover, the author states: "As a result of extensive field research and interviews with respondents, including residents of single-family house neighbourhoods in various cities, and then, when possible, contacting architects or their relatives, a group of twelve more architects was identified. It is worth noting that this group includes both architects who had gained considerable regional and national recognition, as well as those who were less known or even completely forgotten" (pp.108-109). This translated into a final research sample of buildings designed by eighteen architects, resulting in a total of ninety-two properties in the Silesian Voivodeship and an additional group of several properties from outside the region. What was important was their location in selected cities and holiday and spa destinations.

In Chapter V, titled "Architecture of the surveyed buildings," Mr Bródka focuses on discussing thirty examples of completed single-family houses, for which he also identified the spatial classification using a typology of five layouts located in Katowice, Tychy, Ustroń, Gliwice, and Wiśla, as well as Pierścieniec, Bielsko-Biała, Szczyrk, and Sosnowiec, among others. This is an excellent study, almost a panorama of single-family housing in Silesia, which includes not only photographs, projections and sections, but also drawings and parts of design documentation.

In the next section, Mr Bródka focuses on the shapes of buildings, their composition, functional structure, and classification, along with spatial arrangements, and (usually completely unexplored) interior designs and finishing materials. The section concludes with a description of the current technical condition of the buildings and the transformations that took place from their construction to the present day.

The next subsection of the chapter is devoted to projects that were not built in Silesia, as well as buildings designed abroad (in Oran, Algeria).

This very interesting chapter concludes with a section devoted to the valuation of the buildings, which is based on an analysis of their scientific, architectural and cultural significance. As the author notes, some of the buildings discussed were “discovered” and documented for the first time. This is followed by a summary of the main findings of the chapter.

The final core chapter of the dissertation includes recommendations for the preservation of the single-family housing heritage. As Mr Bródka rightly points out, these are guidelines for an effective approach to preserving the architectural heritage of single-family houses from the second half of twentieth century. He also focuses on effective practices undertaken worldwide, as well as general guidelines aimed at preserving single-family houses with a view to public awareness and popularisation, institutional support, and scientific and academic initiatives. In doing so, he emphasises that the abovementioned areas of conservation should be interconnected and complement each other within a coherent framework. He writes: “This is particularly important as many owners of houses from the socialist period do not have access to resources concerning historically compatible restoration practices, which often leads to unintended damage to the original architectural features and finishes. Providing access to practical guidance on preservation and restoration could greatly help homeowners in making informed preservation choices” (p. 200). The comments in this section are proposals and address both the role of heritage organisations and associations, local governments, and conservation authorities. They also include comments on practical knowledge and tools for restoration techniques, material solutions, lists of qualified craftspeople and companies that have experience in the conservation of mid-twentieth century residential architecture.

Chapter VI. is a summary of and reflection on the research findings. Mr Bródka bases his analysis on the conclusions of each stage of the research (chapters of the dissertation), interpreted as answers to the research questions adopted for this work. These are in-depth answers to the ten questions posed earlier, aimed at solving particular research problems and filling the gap in the current state of knowledge. Thus, as he observes in the conclusion, future research will undoubtedly transcend regional boundaries, since other cities and regions are likely to contain similarly undiscovered houses and have the potential for “broader comparative studies in post-Soviet countries, where similarities in architectural heritage can lead to insightful comparisons and discussions between Poland and its neighbours” (p.204). The reviewer strongly supports this point of view.

Part VII closes the dissertation with an extensive index of literature, which contains 270 publications and thirty-three legal acts. This suggests excellent knowledge of the issues discussed in the work and a thorough study and research of the subject-related literature. Unfortunately, it does not include a list of the source documents, archives and preservation studies, as well as the interview transcripts used in the work, as part of the oral history method employed.

Finally, part VIII is list of figures and sources, which contains eighty-eight items, including photographs, drawings, tables, diagrams and maps. The entire work concludes with summaries in English Polish and Italian.

An additional part is the Annex, which contains an introduction to methodological questions, and in particular, a description of the assumptions of the “Building Certificate” catalogue based on the “immobile heritage registration certificate” used in conservation documentation. It refers directly to the method of collecting data on historic buildings proposed by the National Heritage Institute. It then includes an example of such a certificate according to the systematics and model proposed by the author, which can become a practical model for cataloguing initial data.

I applaud Mr Bródka’s decision to take up a seemingly peripheral topic, perhaps a little unrewarding, yet extremely interesting from the informative point of view, but also not easy from the point of view of research. Mr Bródka’s study is a very mature and extremely valuable work that fills an important gap in research on the history of Polish architecture of the twentieth century. Certainly, the development of a methodology for cataloguing and then valuating single-family buildings can be a significant step for the potential protection of the most essential elements of the Silesian housing heritage. The contextualisation and hermeneutic approach to the subject significantly increases its value, as it provides not only for a dry description of the studied phenomena but also allows one to understand the processes governing the development of architecture during the discussed period.

Specific and polemical remarks

Mr Jakub Bródka's dissertation titled *Late-modern architecture of single-family houses from 1945-1989 in Poland: research and perspectives for protection on the example of selected objects from the area of the Silesian Voivodship* is a pioneering study that comprehensively discusses issues related to the history, current condition and prospects of potential protection of single-family residential buildings located in the Silesian Voivodship. It is a very important work, also due to the growing interest in this key part of the heritage of the past. The current condition of the buildings and, above all, the transformations conducted by both old and new owners, inevitably lead to the destruction or demolition of extremely valuable buildings. Recognising their value, as well as the possibilities for potential reconstruction and change of function is vital, especially in the context of architecture and conservation. The preservation of these witnesses to the history of Polish architecture will only be possible through responsible and systematic research work.

The work is very well structured and coherent, with individual chapters forming parts that make up a logical argument. With the overall very high level of the work, I will make a few minor comments, which are of a technical nature and do not affect the high grade of the dissertation.

Let me perhaps start with a doubt concerning the title. The term "late-modern" seems somewhat dubious in the context of research concerning the years from 1945 to 1989. It contains a certain thesis, the proof of which can only come from undertaken research. Similarly, positing a rigid chronology and periodisation of the concept of late modernism seems a little premature in view of the conducted scientific discourse.

An important prerequisite for such a diverse and multifaceted work is the proper choice of research material. In this case, in addition to the aforementioned interviews, the author relied on the classic method of historical research consisting of a critical analysis of collected sources and searches in archives and literature. Particularly noteworthy is also the inclusion of much unpublished material, including material from private archives. All this testifies to extensive source queries, excellent technique, thoroughness, and inquisitiveness of the research.

While the analysis of the selection of literature and sources is conducted very extensively, there are several shortcomings and omissions to be noted with regard to the study of Polish architecture. At no point does the author (apart from the Building Certificates) specify the sources of the archival materials, which makes it impossible to verify them. This is all the more important as the identification of such materials could be a good starting point for further research, also for other authors. Although the author mentions these materials quite extensively in the section on research methodology (regarding both archives and field research) (p.13), he does not discuss them in any way. He mentions both archives with limited access and those available to the public, but in no part of the dissertation does he refer to these sources, signalling private archives in the building certificates. For the sake of accuracy, one might add that archival sources are specified in the indexes of figures. However, these lack any detailed descriptions or indication of reference. The reviewer considers this to be an oversight, which does not allow for the scientific verification of the content and also reduces its scientific credibility. If the work is to be published in print, it is imperative that the aforementioned factors are supplemented. Similarly, the interviews with architects, the designers of the buildings in question, are not described and identified as sources. Such interviews, collected in the course of the research, are certainly an important testimony to those times and a contribution to the history of socialist architecture. This is all the more important because the aforementioned interviews were conducted with representatives of the outgoing generation. This was a rare opportunity to enhance and verify the knowledge of past times and history seen through the eyes of their creators. It is regrettable that the author did not identify them in the bibliography, nor did he include any information on the storage of the media of these records.

Also surprising is the lack of references to Polish periodicals or daily press (e.g. the monthly magazine "Mój dom" and "Zeszyty architektury polskiej SARP"), which seem almost indispensable in such an extensive work, although, as can be seen from the text of the work itself, Mr Bródka did use such sources (e.g. "Miasto" and "Architektura"). In his discussion on the state of research on single-family houses in Poland, the author conducts systematic searches and selection of sources. Fully respecting his personal choice, one should note that the findings of other researchers have been in scientific circulation for a long time. It is a shame that the author

omitted works that are already considered standard, as well as the most recent research findings concerning other Polish cities.¹

A certain doubt arising during the reading of the dissertation was the lack of problematising the issue of not only single-family houses, but also of broader symbolic and cultural references to the model of the Polish home after World War II. The dissertation was an excellent opportunity to address this problem, which had already been discussed by other researchers.²

The layout of the dissertation, although classical, does not include hypotheses, but mainly a thesis. The latter appears in the answers to the research questions but is not explicitly outlined. The key question here seems to be about the genesis and role of the phenomenon of individual single-family houses in Silesia and their significance not only for the regions' architecture, but also that of the whole country. The author, having such extensive research material at his disposal, could certainly have made such a thesis and have it followed by a subsequent argument. In this situation, it is difficult not to mention the characteristic features and, perhaps, the development of the Silesian model of the single-family house over the years (like another form of earlier residential buildings, the so-called "familoki," which are unambiguously associated with the region).

One should appreciate the fact of addressing the subject of designing standards, including the issue of repetitive and "typical" projects. This is one of the key under-recognised and, simultaneously, stigmatised methods of building single-family housing in socialist Poland. The reviewer believes that the omission of this specific point of reference is a somewhat wasted opportunity to expand on and "disenchant" the phenomenon of the so-called "Polish cube," which determined the Polish spatial landscape for several decades. It is also to be regretted that the author did not elaborate on this topic as a background for providing the discussed buildings with a proper context and point of reference.

It is also unclear how Mr Bródka typified the buildings of his research focus. With thousands of buildings erected in Silesia at that time, finding the most valuable examples is a very difficult task. Therefore, I would also ask for an explanation of the research methodology and the principles of selecting the buildings covered by detailed analyses. Although a clear diagram is shown (Fig.3, p.14), the principles and detailed criteria for the selection are not apparent.

The last question relates to the absence in the collected list of buildings of three houses built in 1973 on Lake Paprocany in Tychy, designed by Stanisław Niemczyk. These have recently been entered into the register of cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, this unique and valuable work should be presented to a wider audience in the form of a book, after addressing the reviewer's minor remarks. The text has been edited very carefully, and the language is clear, which will make it easier for the reader learn about the presented problems. All the comments raised above do not change my positive assessment of the reviewed dissertation and are aimed at pointing out to the author the problems that need to be clarified and made more specific.

Summary and conclusions

Jakub Bródka is one of the few people in Poland who have undertaken and systematically developed a scholarly reflection on Polish architecture after World War II, including its broadly understood conditions and contexts. His contribution to the development of research on this still insufficiently investigated period is significant, and the work is of great informative value.

Mr Bródka has demonstrated the ability to formulate problems and conduct his work independently. This consisted in finding very interesting archival materials and documents, in addition to conducting valuable research and comparative analyses. Moreover, he has demonstrated a broad grasp of the topic and pertinent insights.

¹ There are many such publications, books and articles, for example works about Warsaw and Poznań; see M. Leśniakowska, *Architektura w Warszawie: lata 1945-1965*, Warszawa 2003; P. Marciniak, *Doświadczenia modernizmu. Architektura i urbanistyka Poznania w czasach PRL*. Wydawnictwo Miejskie 2020.

² J. T. Królikowski, "Dom polski-pomiędzy modelem a konkretyzacją," *Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki*, 51/2006, 36-42; J. L. Dobesz, *Dom polski*, Wrocław 2008.

The submitted dissertation is innovative. It shows a new perspective, organises source material and, by expanding established methods, may make an important contribution to the further research on the architecture and culture of the socialist period. After appropriate adjustments and additions, it should be considered for publication as a book.

I thus conclude that the reviewed doctoral dissertation of mgr inż. arch. Jakub Bródka titled *Late-modern architecture of single-family houses from 1945-1989 in Poland: research and perspectives for protection on the example of selected objects from the area of the Silesian Voivodship* is an original solution to the posed research problem and meets the requirements for doctoral theses specified in the Act of 14 March 2003 on scientific degrees and academic titles, and on degrees and titles in the field of arts (Journal of Laws 2017, item 1789) and the Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 19 January 2018 on detailed procedure and conditions for conducting activities in doctoral dissertation proceedings, in habilitation proceedings and proceedings for the conferment of the title of professor (Journal of Laws 2017 item 271). The work confirms the candidate's high theoretical knowledge, skills and predisposition to conduct scientific work, and my assessment is very positive. In view of the above, I request the Council for the Architecture and Urban Planning at the Faculty of Architecture, Silesian University of Technology to accept the dissertation and admit mgr inż. arch. Jakub Bródka to its public defence.

At the same time, taking into consideration the high informative value of the dissertation, the broad context of the discussed phenomena, the collected source material, as well as the high quality of the scientific technique and significance of the obtained results for the understanding of Polish architecture in the twentieth century, I request that the submitted work should receive a distinguished dissertation award.

Pospisano odręcznie przez autora

prof. dr hab. inż. arch. Piotr Marciniak