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Importance and Protection of Architectural Detail – Krakow Case Study

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Abstract. Nowadays, cities experiencing fast-paced growth need to tackle a plethora of issues. It has become necessary to marry multiculturalism and individuality, booming tourism and the day-to-day lives of the residents. Not unlike other cities, Kraków is experiencing rapid development – many townhouses are being modernised, and their appearance is evolving; it is especially the details. One pertinent task is to adapt historic townhouses to their new functions, while respecting the needs of their owners. This is why the protection of precious architectural details has become a particularly pertinent issue. State laws and local legislation adopted by local authorities protect buildings as a whole – in terms of their form and mass – but provide insufficient protection to precious architectural details of historic townhouses. Only few buildings have become officially recognised as monuments and entered in a relevant register. One of the objectives pursued in this paper is to popularize the need to preserve and protect the architectural heritage in the form of historic details of Kraków townhouses. The analysis of townhouses from the turn of 19th and 20th century produced the necessary basis for drawing several key conclusions. The manner of rendering details provides a link between the townhouses and the cultural heritage of the region, as well as to its flora and natural resources. What is more, architectural details enable us to identify connections between the form and its background – objects created in different periods of time – in terms of composition and space. Their continuity testifies to respect for the place, its culture and tradition. What is more, the paper also emphasizes the role of details in creating friendly urban space. They constitute an immanent part of the buildings, closely related to the human scale. They catch our eye and inspire curiosity, motivating us to ponder on the meaning of metaphors and symbols that they represent. The diversity of detail renderings ensures variable stimulation of spatial perception, while their artistic value and capacity to influence our emotions leave a permanent mark in our memory, facilitating the identification and memorisation of forms. The ambiguity that the details contribute to architecture catch our eye and create the specific atmosphere of a place. Although such details can seem of secondary importance, they constitute an essential part of the urban structure, and determine its quality. As a result, urban space becomes friendly and attractive. Diversity in terms of forms and materials, the vast array of textures and colours, not to mention the artistic value, strengthen one's identification with one's living quarters and offer props that facilitate the memorisation of forms. The dynamism of the 21th century necessitates, once again, the unification of physical urban structures – buildings, spaces, streets – with the cultural and economic aspects of life. Architectural details found, among other things, on townhouse facades, can be instrumental to this process. Good quality details, referring to the history of the city and found across public spaces, contribute to the formation of new civilizational patterns and can provide inspiration for the development of new architectural forms.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, cities experiencing fast-paced growth need to tackle a plethora of issues. It has become necessary to marry multiculturalism and individuality, booming tourism and the intimate day-to-day lives of the residents, personal freedom and social responsibility. Not unlike other cities, Kraków is experiencing rapid development – many townhouses are being modernised, and their appearance is evolving; it is especially the details (among others many original windows and doors have been replaced with new plastic ones) and elements found on the ground level, often converted for commercial purposes, that are being modified. One pertinent task is to adapt historic townhouses to their new functions (provision of tourist facilities - hotels, restaurants, shops), while respecting the needs of their owners (reconstruction or modernisation of the buildings). One pertinent task is to adapt historic townhouses to their new functions (provision of tourist facilities), while respecting the needs of their owners. This is why the protection of precious historic architectural details has become a particularly pertinent issue. State laws and local legislation adopted by local authorities protect buildings as a whole – in terms of their form and mass – but provide insufficient protection to precious architectural details of historic townhouses. Only few buildings have become officially recognised as monuments and entered in a relevant register. One of the objectives pursued in this paper is to popularize the need to preserve and protect the architectural heritage in the form of historic details of Kraków townhouses (Figure 1-2).

2. Research objective, methodology and purpose of the study

The paper is based on research carried out within two projects financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland. The traditional method applied in this study generated a pool of information on above 100 townhouses from the turn of 19th and 20th century. The first stage of the research consisted in a detailed analysis of source materials. Archival materials collected at the second stage of the study served for the preparation of copies of original layouts and provided important information on the period in which specific buildings were erected, on their authors, history, and further modernisations. The third stage of the research involved an *in situ* study of the townhouses, including the preparation of their photographic documentation.

The main purpose of the study is to raise awareness of the need to preserve and protect the cultural value of historic details of Kraków townhouses constructed at the turn of the 19th and 20th century.



Figure 1. Townhouses and palaces on the Market Square in Kraków (photo B. Makowska 2017)

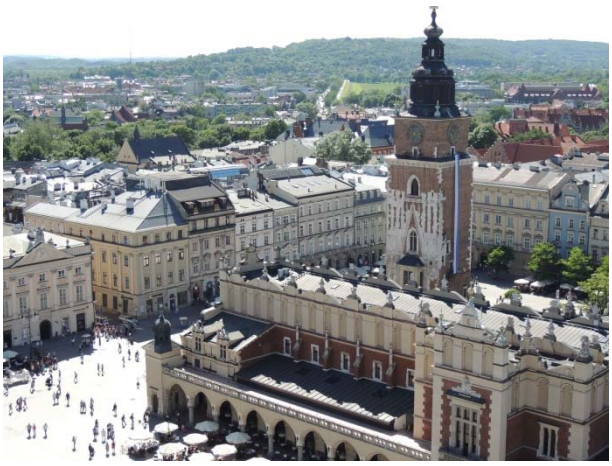

Figure 2. The Cloth Hall on the Market Square in Kraków (photo B. Makowska 2017)

The facades of the Kraków townhouses from the turn of the 19th and 20th century are of major historic value. Unfortunately, some of them have not undergone any conservation works for years, resulting in severe damage. Wooden window and door frames have been particularly affected [1].

Many of the original wooden elements have been replaced with new plastic ones. Also portals and doors with stained glass structures placed in fanlights, steelwork, such as balustrades and bars have suffered. Very often the doors are damaged, especially in the lower parts and near the handles, and in many cases they have simply been replaced with new ones. Unfortunately, sometimes the new and the old elements do not match harmoniously. That is why it becomes very important to preserve the original historic details, including their original layout and colour.



Figure 3. Townhouse at 10, Fenna St. in Kraków (photo B. Makowska 2010)



Figure 4. Townhouse at 4, Stachowicza St. in Kraków (photo B. Makowska 2010)

Unfortunately, the progress of computerization brings new technological details to the architecture such as cameras intercoms installed in front doors, external cables, etc. New installations placed in the plaster destroy the wealth of textures and often compete with sophisticated details of portals e.g. townhouses at: 10, Fenna St. and 4, Stachowicza St. in Kraków (Figure 3-4).

3. Details of townhouses form the turn of 19th and 20th century

Townhouses built between 1890 and 1914 became popular in Kraków and they were characterised by high technical and functional standard, with individual and very valuable formal solutions. Before WWI, these were four-storey houses, so-called metropolitan [2], which grew out of previous traditional two or three-storey houses, situated between a street and a garden. Particular attention was paid to providing the house façades with an individual and sometimes original character, enriching them by decorative elements and details characteristic for local tradition.

When it comes to the townhouse composition and mass, no explicit compositional relationship between the exterior and the interior ca be found (except for the frontal section), while we frequently encounter asymmetric (Figure 5) architectural divisions (Art Nouveau or original architect`s style) or symmetrical (Figure 6) layouts (reference to historic styles), complexity and stylistic pluralism, as well

as the use of detail to emphasize the building mass and protruding ornaments. The building facades were characterised by the contrast between the smooth plane and sophisticated decorations (which gradually became increasingly simplified and less protruding from the walls), as well the distinct nature of the frontal (representative) and back (ancillary) facades. Details and decorations were often used on the facade and in the interiors alike (recurring motifs), and were typically added to architectural surface of with a traditional layout (tripartite division). Both windows and doors had rectangular (vertical), oval or kidney-shaped forms, and were encased in richly ornamented frames (which become simplified over time). The facade materials were rich and diverse, with contrasting textures, colours and hues. Brick (brick walls), stone or stone wall panels were often used [3].



Figure 5. Townhouse at 35, Karmelicka St. in Kraków (photo B. Makowska 2008)



Figure 6. Townhouse at 30, Piłsudskiego St. in Kraków (photo B. Makowska 2006)

When enriching by details the facades of the Kraków townhouses, local architects made frequent references to the monuments erected in previous centuries [4]. The examples of creative interpretations of local traditions are manifold: protruding eaves, attics referring to the Cloth Hall (Figure 2), triple casement windows and portals reminiscent of those found in the Wawel castle, the triple partition of the windows obtained with the use of stone jambs, pot-shaped imposts inspired by the imposts found in the Wawel cloisters, stone balustrades, buttressing, mascarons, simplified two-light mullion windows. Also roofing support in the Wawel yard provided creative inspiration for several buildings. Likewise, the appearance of patriotic motifs resulted from the search for the roots and references to tradition: “galleries” of kings, leaders, artists, scholars, as well as motifs related to industry, commerce and science.

One way of rendering homage to local architecture was the reinterpretation of Gothic motifs – like the Leontopodium motif with leaves attached to the avant-corps to form a crocket, or window sills with “plate” motifs. There have also been attempts to reinterpret the attics motif, referring to its

"specific Polish soft line". Some examples include a simple section above the eaves supplemented with a cast iron balustrade fixed to brick support (townhouses at: 19, Miodowa St.; 11, Łobzowska St.; 28, Wielopole St.; 60, Długa St.), the third floor highlighted as attics (townhouses at: 15, Zwierzyniecka St.; 13 and Na Groblach Sq.), or a Modernist, simplified attics form (townhouse at 3, Reformacka St.).

The influence of urban fortifications on the facade style can be traced in the machicolation-like frieze and imposts, as well as in the finial frieze topped with a battlement and embrasure motifs. The examples are townhouses at: 3, Kurniki St. (Figure 7-8), 1, Studencka St.; 12, Kremerowska St.; 23, Krasińskiego St. and 3, Reformacka St.



Figure 7. Townhouse at 3, Kurniki St. in Kraków (photo B. Makowska 2008)



Figure 8. Townhouse at 3, Kurniki St. in Kraków (photo B. Makowska 2008)

Details of facades of distinctive townhouses demonstrated an attitude towards features characteristic for historical Kraków architecture – rhythms, lines and directions, enriching by details, material, similarities of shapes, etc. (Figure 9-10). They strengthened connections with the cultural context and played a certain role in creating aesthetic integrity between the contemporary and historical spatial structures. Certain insularity of Kraków environment contributed to maintaining of more uniform character of artistic expression of the city, which favoured organisation of urban structure. Form and character of architecture functioning in close and distant surroundings of houses were to a large degree the determining factors in developing a creative idea and proposing solutions for house elevations.

The manner of rendering details provides a link between the townhouses and the cultural heritage of the region (reference to important historic objects), as well as to its flora (at the level of floral motifs) and natural resources (local materials and technics). What is more, architectural details enable us to identify connections between the form and its background – objects created in different periods

of time – in terms of composition and space. Their continuity testifies to respect for the place, its culture and tradition [4].

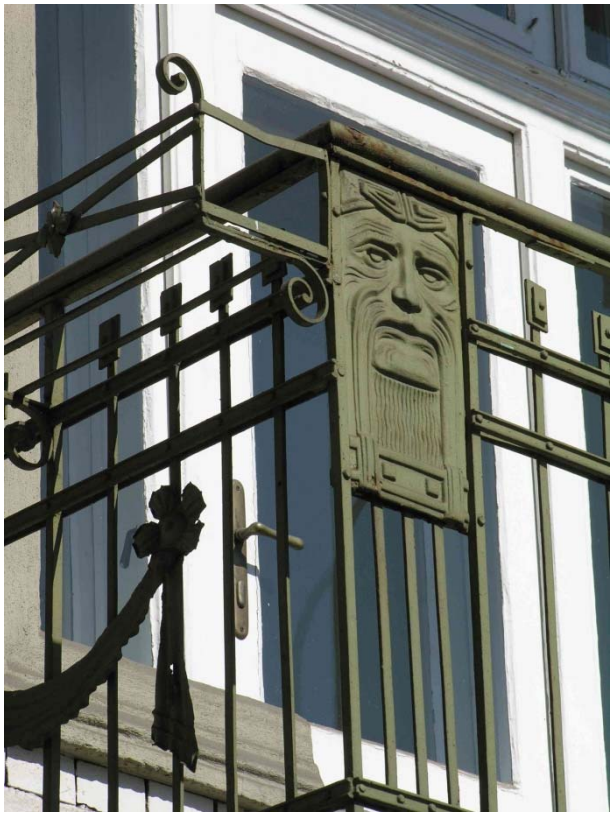

Figure 9. Townhouse at 30, Wielopole St. in Kraków (photo B. Makowska 2006)



Figure 10. Townhouse at 30, Wielopole St. in Kraków (photo B. Makowska 2006)

Details play also important role in creating friendly urban space. They constitute an immanent part of the buildings, closely related to the human scale. They catch our eye and inspire curiosity, motivating us to ponder on the meaning of metaphors and symbols that they represent. Sometimes, by way of an unexpected association, they reveal to us the comprehensive concept developed by the artist and his key idea [5]. The diversity of detail renderings ensures variable stimulation of spatial perception, while their artistic value and capacity to influence our emotions leave a permanent mark in our memory, facilitating the identification and memorisation of forms. The ambiguity that the details contribute to architecture catch our eye and create the specific atmosphere of a place [6]. Although such details can seem of secondary importance, they constitute an essential part of the urban structure, and determine its quality. As a result, urban space becomes friendly and attractive. Diversity in terms of forms and materials, the vast array of textures and colours, not to mention the artistic value, strengthen one's identification with one's living quarters and offer props that facilitate the memorisation of forms.

4. Results and discussions

The following results and discoveries have been achieved in the research:

- Intensive cultural development, general atmosphere of art and culture heyday, as well as the growing importance of middle class contributed to strengthening of artistic and functional values of townhouses, which were the reflection of culture of the described periods, as well as the reflection of historical culture that they originated from;

- One of the first stages in evolution was to slacken strict discipline in elevation composition. Projections (breaks) were introduced and the height of facades was diversified, symmetry was broken, the structure of interior was becoming more and more visible from the exterior in elevation articulation, tectonics was enriched with arcade and architrave loggias, with jutting eaves, details were gradually becoming more simplified and flattened, projection corners and divisions between storeys were sometimes emphasised. In some projects division into storeys was not emphasised by cornices. It consolidated the wall, became an announcement of later changes and allowed to contrast details and decorations with its smooth, plastered or brick surface. Elevation was gradually re-formed from emphasising the weight to more immaterial lightness with slightly distinguished base course (glazed ground floor, moving the weight of decorations up). Some townhouses show the departure from classic division of elevation into the ground floor, vertically articulated main part and horizontal finial (townhouses at: 15, Krasińskiego St. and 3, Kurniki St.), traditional ornament has been replaced with the play of light and shadow.
- New sources of inspiration in shaping house elevations introduced a new meaning to architectural reality, which used tradition in a creative way, at the same time moving with the times of its origin, in a few cases it had characteristic features of modernity of first modernists, it established pioneering ideas with regard to the next century. Impulses that inspired the creators often originated in material, presented - in accordance with Nolde thesis [7] - in a real way, without "false" decoration. Brick was often used on account of its practical, economic and aesthetic values, colour effects, an opportunity to combine it with other materials;
- House elevations with details and decorations filled with intensively experienced ideological and emotional contents, were an important factor connecting people in the age of struggle for independence;
- Thanks to breaking the tight framework of historical styles, the architecture of distinctive townhouses has again approached the arts, it ceased to be mere imitation, allowed bigger creative freedom. The facade was enhanced by a factor of beauty. The most distinctive townhouses were an artistic solution of an architectural task set by a context of objective, place and life. They preserved this context in a visible way in elevation forms – their beauty arouses our full interest, which appeals to us with the new meaning. Some projects, by approaching the works of art, had an ability to attract and keep our attention, at the same time pointing out to a more extensive context behind them. Thanks to forms of decoration a bilateral transfer took place, which attracted observer's attention and indicated more extensive context behind it, the context that it accompanied;
- House facades appealed to visual impressions (in the times of historicism to notional perception). In applied solutions one may perceive an influence of Impressionistic painting. The facade has become more shifting in an Impressionist way. Thanks to diverse facades with their picturesqueness, architecture from the described periods was characterised by ambiguous reality that enriched its dialogue with the environment and with recipients, affecting their aesthetic sensitivity;
- A new value emerged in the decor of elevations of distinctive houses. It was an effect of creative freedom of architects who made a synthesis by multiplication of inspiration sources, which resulted in experimenting and in creating original works. However, these synthetic trends did not mean any simple compilation of ideas taken from the West, but their original interpretation rooted in native architecture.

The dynamism of the 21th century necessitates, once again, the unification of physical urban structures – buildings, spaces, streets – with the cultural and economic aspects of life. Architectural details found, among other things, on townhouse facades, can be instrumental to this process. Good quality details, referring to the history of the city and found across public spaces, contribute to the formation of new civilizational patterns and can provide inspiration for the development of new architectural forms (Figure 11-12).



Figure 11. View from the tower of St. Mary`s Basilica in Kraków (photo B. Makowska 2017)



Figure 12. View from the tower of St. Mary`s Basilica in Kraków (photo B. Makowska 2017)

5. Conclusions

The analysis of above 100 townhouses from the turn of 19th and 20th century produced the necessary basis for drawing several key conclusions:

- Originality of distinctive Kraków townhouses on the one hand was understood as a clever combination of earlier frequently used forms, and on the other hand as the quest for new inspiration sources and new details and decoration, which was genetically connected with national tradition; decorations and details of distinctive houses strengthened and improved artistic effect of forms generating from the rich cultural heritage;
- Innovation was important in designing townhouse elevations. In this case it meant experience drawn from earlier unknown inspirations, which were feasible thanks to a liberal artistic doctrine, creative predisposition of architects, ideas and experience exchange, new materials and techniques;
- Houses in the described period served as a pretext for architects to present their own artistic beliefs, which often resulted in style pluralism and in emergence of original, innovative solutions. Since no typical, often repeated forms were developed, individual forms emerged (such as corner houses), and tradition of types' diversity was continued;
- Distinctive houses created positive visual connections with architectural context. They reflected the dialogue with culture, with diversity of civilisations being the source for Kraków architecture. This multistage dialogue was conducted between the recipient and the form, as well as between house elevations and other buildings. In many buildings the task of permanent integration of yesterday and today was successfully accomplished. A new and better transition between the past and the present was created than earlier, by borrowing stylistic forms from past epochs;
- Decorations and details on house elevations were often a link between the described periods and the earlier ones. In a symbolic way they extended and integrated new quarters of the city with the historical town and played an important role in creating aesthetic integrity between the contemporary and historical spatial structures; similar artistic features of elevation decor and materials of ancient architectural styles (stone, brick, wood), together with construction technique constituted natural integration factors. This was also supported by preserving similar scale and character of buildings;

- On the one hand, architects as creative beings aimed at making their presence felt by designing works of innovative and individual character. On the other hand, they participated in the process of cultural continuity, started by former generations and epochs;
- In many examples the inspiration through tradition was creative thanks to high degree of processing, abstracting or simplifying of the original model and resulted from the profound knowledge of architectural past.

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