

POLISH ARCHITECTS WORKING ABROAD IN THE 1980'S – SYRIA. STANISŁAW NIEWIADOMSKI¹ AND WOJCIECH ZABŁOCKI²

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After Second World War, Polish architects were often working abroad. We can find their works around the world. They worked as part of international teams who were doing architectural and urban design projects in foreign countries. They also participated in international architectural competitions. The designs of Polish architects abroad have had a major influence on the technical and functional solutions on projects around the world. These international projects displayed a unique architectural style with Polish influences on the design.

The lack of architectural opportunities in Poland prompted many Polish specialists to embark on cooperation with the other countries. Polish architects were sent to foreign countries by the Polish Company „Polservice” in the 60's, 70's and 1980's. Many of them were sent to the Arabian countries. One of those countries was Syria. Polish architects worked as a chief consultants, designers, coordinators and supervisors, on architectural and urban designs in different Syrian cities.

Unfortunately the works of Polish architects working abroad, especially in the Middle East, are mos-

tly unknown in Poland³. My article is based on the knowledge and graphic materials collected during several talks with the architects working in Syria and also during my several visits to Syria as a teacher from the Faculty of Architecture Warsaw University of Technology. In this article I would like to show two significant projects in Syria made by Polish and Syrian architects, one designed by Stanisław Niewiadomski in Homs⁴ and second designed by Wojciech Zabłocki in Latakia⁵. Both architects were working in the 1980's in Syria, where those complex were designed. S. Niewiadomski worked for the General Company for Engineering and Consulting company in Damascus as an architect and consultant. W. Zabłocki worked in the Military House Est company, first in Aleppo⁶ and then in Latakia. Both worked in cooperation with the other Polish and Syrian architects.

Stanisław Niewiadomski created the Master Plan for the new University in Syria – Al Baath University in Homs. The layout plan was executed by the General Company for Engineering and Consulting.

¹ Stanisław Niewiadomski 1928-2008, graduated at the Faculty of Architecture Warsaw University of Technology in 1954, in 1982 he got the PhD degree, in 1992 he was employed as a professor at the Faculty of Architecture WUT.

² Wojciech Zabłocki born in the 1930, Polish architect and athlete, graduated at AGH University of Science and Technology in Krakow in 1954, in 1964 he obtained his doctorate and got the PhD degree, in 1978 obtained habilitation, in 1999 professor degree.

³Architects in Syria: Ewa Bogusławska (in 80's); Jerzy Bogusławski (in 80's); Krzysztof Dyga, Andrzej Nasfeter, Stefan Kuryłowicz (1979 Opera international Competition); Roman Dylewski (in 80's), Zbigniew Gliński (in 80's), Wojciech Karbownik (in 70's and 80's), Stanisław Karpel (in 80's), Lech Kołacz (in 80's); Jerzy Koziński (in 60's), Olgierd Kuncewicz (in 70's and 80's), Jacek Kwieciński (in 80's), Jan Maissner (in

70's), Stanisław Niewiadomski (in 80's); Maciej Nowakowski (in 60's, in 80's); Lech Rogowski (in 60's), Henryk Roller (in 80's); Andrzej Ryba (in 80's), Krystian Saibert (in 60's), Stefan Steller (in 60's); Juliusz Wilski (in 70's, in 80's), Wojciech Zabłocki (in 80's), Engineer Stanisław Kuś Engineer Wiktor Humięcki.

⁴ Homs – third largest city in Syria, with the population over 800,000. Located in the west – center part of the country 162 km far from Damascus on the Orontes River. Homs is important industrial city.

⁵ Latakia – the main sea-port of Syria, located on the Mediterranean Sea in the north-west part of the country 348 km far from Damascus.

⁶ Aleppo – second largest city in Syria, with the population over 2 million located in the north part of the country, 350 km far from Damascus. Traditionally city of trade.

The main concept of the Master Plan was created by S. Niewiadomski. Later this plan was finished by Syrian architects. In spite of several changes during the construction of the University complex, the general idea of this master plan, designed by S. Niewiadomski was realized. The Polish architects Jerzy Bogusławski⁷ with his wife arch. Ewa Bogusławska⁸ and arch. A. Gucewicz worked together with S. Niewiadomski on the University design. They designed the University buildings for Human Studies and the Student's Affairs Center. The landscape design was created by the Aleksander Heber in the cooperation with the Syrian architects. All technical drawings of this design were done by Syrian draftsmen. In spite of lingual barriers, the Polish – Syrian team worked together without any problems during the design process.

The Al-Baath University in Homs has been and still is the newest in Syria. It's realization decision was made in the 1980's. The main idea of the University complex was to locate all the faculties in one place. They started from Humanities through Technical one, to the Faculty of Medicine. The site provided by Government for this development is located 2,5 km far from City Center and Old City of Homs (fig. 1). The University was designed on an undeveloped site in the South-West part of the city. This gave the architects the possibility to design everything from the beginning, with complete freedom in urban and architectural design. Today, not all buildings are finished and the complex is still under construction.

For the safety reasons, it was designed as an enclosed area with guarded gates leading in to the University complex. The main entrance to the University complex had to be located in the East part of the site. This location give the access to the University complex from the one of the most important streets in Homs which lead to Damascus, the capital of the country. Those location gave good link to the other part of the country (fig. 2). The Rector's Building with administration rooms had to be located near the main gate. The two parking's lots for VIP's and guests are located close by.

Stanisław Niewiadomski designed the Master Plan of the Al-Baath University as a flexible urban

layout, giving the freedom to the architects. He created the main idea of the urban layout of this complex.

At the beginning, the urban layout was based on a basic solution using simple floor plans and architectural forms. During the development of this project, many new design ideas were created taking into account functional and use requirements. The architects started to make drawing of the individual faculties based on unique shapes, connected with the location on the site and individual facility needs. The architects searched for the proper architectural form for these designs. They successfully blended the typical Arabic architecture with the new European one. They even tried to make completely innovative architectural solutions using the combination of Polish unique architectural styles of design and Arabian design tradition.

The main design idea, created by S. Niewiadomski, was to establish one big pedestrian axis running from east to west. The axis started at the main gate, leading to the main square in the middle of site and then turning at an angle towards the Sports Complex. A second smaller axis, running north-south, was connected with the main square and the newly designed Students Affairs Center. This was supposed to be part of this design that tied the student facilities closer with the main University. The University Headquarters' decided to locate the Library on the main square. The design based on those axis was simple and flexible. The pedestrian traffic followed these axis as walkways for students and academic staff. These pathways were designed enhanced with a large amounts of flowers, flower beds, flower pots, rows of trees and bushes. Water plays an important role in the Arabian society and architecture. These pedestrian routes are also filled with many fountains and water basins. Both water and green areas provide a cooling and humidification of the air, which is very important in such high temperatures climate as is in Syria (fig. 3)⁹.

City of Homs is located between two big mountain ranges from which there is little protection from the constantly blowing winds. These city location obliged architects to design an adequate wind barriers. The new buildings would offer some wind pro-

⁷ Arch. Jerzy Bogusławski graduated at the Faculty of Architecture Warsaw University of Technology in 1950, Students Affairs Center design at Al-Baath University.

⁸ Arch. Ewa Bogusławska graduated at the Faculty of Architecture Warsaw University of Technology in 1968, Faculty of Human studies at Al-Baath University.

⁹ Syria is located in the climate of Mediterranean Sea, Temperatures in Syria reaching up to 35°C in the shadow.

tection. The site of the University wasn't protected from the blowing wind. S. Niewiadomski located the sport complex in the south-west part of the site. The stadium would offer some wind protection particularly the spectators seats (grandstand) act as a wind barrier.

Vehicular traffic was designed to enter at the back part of the site where the rear parts of the buildings were. Those solution separate vehicular transportation from the main pedestrian walkways. The parking lots for students and staff were located at the rear part of the buildings. All parking lots have good access to the city communication system by the guarded gates.

The main entrances to all faculties and other buildings are located near the main pedestrian walkway which incorporates greenery, fountains and the water basins. All supplies and storage facilities are located at the rear of the buildings.

Student dormitories would be located on the south side of the site. The dorms are located near to the Sports Complex. This location for the dorms allow for both day and night activity. The architectural form and the floor plans of the dorms had been changed. Today the floor plans of the dormitories in the Al-Baath University are designed as the typical dormitories in Syria. We can see the same plan of the dorms in Damascus and Aleppo – two other big university complexes in Syria.

The Master Plan was designed by The General Company For Design And Technical Consultation in 2001 (fig. 4). This is the plan for the urban layout of the University complex as it is today. Most of the design done by S. Niewiadomski in the 1980's has been preserved. The University Al-Baath complex is still under construction. Some of the faculty buildings are still not completed. The main design idea given by S. Niewiadomski is still kept by the Syrian architects today.

Another polish architect working in Syria in 80's was **Wojciech Zablocki**¹⁰. At first he was working as a member of an international design team in Aleppo. This group prepared the design for the Olympic Sport Centre including stadium, multi-purpose sports hall and swimming facilities in Aleppo. The

Syrian architect working under this design was Fauzi Khalifa, who was responsible for the general plan of sport city. Khalifa designed the two stadiums in the complex. Zabłocki designed the sports hall for 10,000 spectators and the swimming facilities. Construction work for Sport City in Aleppo started in 1982 and was not completed until 2006. Architects Stanisław Karpiel, Anna Szulc and Jacek Kwieciński, along with other Syrian architects were also involved in this project. The structure was designed with the cooperation with Polish Professor of Structure Stanisław Kuś.

Wojciech Zabłocki spent only one year in Aleppo. He won the architectural competition for the Olympic Sport Center in Lattakia for the Tenth Mediterranean Olympic Games in 1987. He moved to Lattakia, when he started to work on the design. He had complete freedom of design for this large (160-hectare) project. The complex was divided into building areas and the design was based on an organic character. The entire project was done under the direction of Zabłocki in cooperation with Polish and Syrian architects. Also working in the design of main stadium was another Polish architect, Andrzej Ryba. The design of the sports hall complex was aided by the Syrian architect, Asian Arslan. The design Olympic swimming pool facilities was aided by the Polish architect, Jacek Kwieciński. Marian Smoczyński worked on the design of the tennis club. The landscape was designed by Aleksander Haber.

Structure engineering was done with the cooperation of Polish and Syrian structural engineers. Wiktor Humięcki was the structural engineer for sports hall complex and the main stadium, Samir Zarak designed the structure for the Olympic swimming pool. May Helou designed the logistic center, tennis club, and yacht club.

The Latakia Olympic Sport Center was designed in the west part of the city about 6km distance from the city center. It was constructed on an undeveloped site and the design of the development plan was completely new. The idea of this complex was to link Mediterranean sea with the sports facilities (fig. 5). The main walkway running across the Olympic center towards the sea was end by a pier with the Olympic torch¹¹. The main idea was to be in harmo-

¹⁰ Other designs realized by W. Zabłocki in Syria – three residences: one in Damascus, second near to Damascus and third near Latakia. He also made few not realized design during his stay in Syria.

¹¹ W. Zabłocki, *Architektura Architecture* Publisher by BOSZ, Olszanica 2007, page 110.

ny with nature and to try and find local architectural idioms in the environment and incorporate them into the architectural solution. The urban and architectural designs were based on a curved line incorporating flexible shapes taken from the nature. The design solutions reflected natural shapes such as river beds, water basins, and even water creatures. On one hand the architects had great freedom in design but, on the other hand, it was a difficult project.

It was challenging for the Polish and Syrian architects to make such a prestigious design. The architects had a lot of freedom and they did not have any financial barriers. This investment was financed mainly on the loans taken from many countries, especially from Japan. Only one requirement was given to the architects. They had to design the architectural and structural solutions that could adapt to the technical abilities of the Syrian construction industry.

The main motive shown in all buildings from this investment was a grate arch as a major structure element. In the stadium the main element supporting the roof over the grandstand is 240-metre arch. A 100-metre arch covers the main arena in sports halls. In the swimming pools building, there are to horizontal arches. By using these arches as one symbol was the unifying architectural expression for all the main buildings. The idea of the arch gave the design a unique form.

The sports hall ensemble was located in the West part of the site relatively close to the main road leading to the city center. It's main component was multi-purpose hall with 5000 seats. Near to it was designed a smaller hall with 1500 seats. Next to these halls are two smaller halls designed as instruction/training centers. These halls had the opportunity to be joined to create one bigger area with a movable grandstand. The halls were covered by parabolic structures made form reinforced concrete. Both hall were joined by the passage on the ground floor. They were covered by separate structure (fig. 6)¹².

The main hall would have an arena 30m x 50m. Spectators could enter this hall at the upper level by two ramps at the front of the building leading to the lounge (fig. 7) and then inside to the grandstand. The VIP's and the service areas were located on the lower level. By using the series of circular perimeter arches with the same radius and cross-section but different lengths along the horizontal projection, ar-

chitects created a dome-shaped roof. The maximum span of the arch used in this object was 105m. The smaller hall had the same arena shape and dimensions, but the spectators area precinct was only one side. Halls no 3 and 4 are had similar structural system as smaller hall – based on the convex and concave arches (fig. 8).

The main stadium, with two smaller training stadiums along side it, was designed in the west part of the site (fig. 9). The football pitch was oriented north-south with the dimensions 105m x 70m and an eight-lane athletic track. The seats for 45,000 spectators surrounded the main field. The grandstand was located towards the west and could seat 12,000 spectators. The grandstand is covered by a large structure. Rooms on the first level were for the competitors and staff. The second level was for VIP's and service. The third level incorporated the catering facilities. The fourth level was for administration and the fifth level was for the press, TV and technical equipment. The top level was for commentators' boxes. The structure was based on ten steel frames at 19.65m intervals. The main arch with a 225m span stabilized the structure is fixed rigidly in the foundations (fig. 10).

The two training stadiums were adjacent to the main stadium. One of the stadiums had tracks for 400m runners and a football pitch. The another also had a football pitch and two small running tracks.

The next element of the Olympic Sport Center in Latakia was the swimming pools complex (fig. 11). It was located on the South part of the site. This complex was divided into two parts – the first one for the competitors with the Olympic size 50 m length, 8 lane swimming pool which was located on the west part of the complex. Also incorporated into this facility was a diving pool 21m x 21m. In the east part of the complex was located recreation swimming pools with slides. It was designed as a normal city swimming pool used by citizens. Both sections were separated by a service pavilion. The pavilion included a warm-up pool used during the winter, swimmers changing rooms and administration. The leisure pools were designed with the connection to the large open restaurant and terraces café. The arcades surrounding the pools gave the possibilities to locate there a group of outdoor fast-food bars. The structure was designed to be reinforced concrete.

¹² [without author] „Latakia Sport City on the Syrian Coast”, „Military House Est.” [1987], page 5

The other facilities as yacht club, tennis club, administrative, medical center, media center were designed as a smaller buildings important for the project, but without any impressive shape or look.

The University Al-Baath complex is used by the thousand of students all the time. The Sport City Complex in Latakia is used by citizens as a training and leisure time complex. Both facilities have a very important role in the city life and they are recognizable and used by most of the Syrian people. The polish architects gave local societies something unique by those designs. We can say that Polish architects left the footprint on the Syrian architecture. Their realization are also part of polish architecture history.

The influence of Polish architects around the world, and in particular the Middle East, has been considerable. From the 1960's thru the 1980's, major architectural projects of outstanding design quality were performed by Polish architects with their architectural compatriots in these countries. Many of those designs were prestigious, showing the outstanding character of architecture and being unique in their expression.

Unfortunately, because of the current political situation most of these projects were not heard in the West. That's why, I would like to present some of designs, to underline the outstanding role of polish architects working abroad. I am sure that we should remind those project for the next generations, and create complete description of all polish architect works abroad.

Translation by E. Krajewska

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