Surrealistic Historical Park in Rabka

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Abstract. Rabka Zdroj (Spa) is a popular Polish resort. The Silesian Rehabilitation and Spa Centre built here in 1949 was designed by Stanislaw Gruszka in the International Style, which was innovative at that time. The park surrounding the spa building has interesting tree specimens laid out according to a simple geometrical principle with free fillers. In the west part, the path arrangement is geometrical with three symmetrical gardens on rectangular terraces. Whereas in the south part, its form of abstract winding paths is quite unique, resembling a totem placed horizontally. The research conducted shows that the shapes applied here and the deformed symmetry may refer to the works of Miró or Hans Arp. The project’s author was related to the community of Warsaw artists fascinated with futurism and surrealism in the 20 years of Poland’s independence after World War I. In the late 1940s the destructive influence of the communist ideology did not yet manage to leave its mark on the architecture of the structure discussed, and thus the place was given its unique beauty. Nowadays the park is being revitalized following the project designed by the author of the article and his team and its implementation has gained financial support from the EU. The leitmotif for the revitalization is to emphasize its surrealistic forms. In the surrealistic garden, there will be created a multi-layered narrative structure with an emphasized outline of plant field paths and surrealistic benches and deckchairs especially designed. Educational paths are designed to discuss various topics, like the history of modernist spa buildings in Malopolska (Little Poland – a province in the south of Poland, whose capital is Cracow), the history of Polish poster design in the 20 years of Poland’s independence between WWI and WWII, as well as the park’s natural aspects. Another abstract idea will also be found in the Rabka Code, a game enabling to develop tasks of one’s own choice to be solved in the field. The present article discusses the research carried out on the history of the structure and its formal relations as well as the design decisions already taken. It should be stressed that a surrealistic path layout is a very rare solution in the history of park architecture. Even if parks may have surrealistic sculptures, the surrounding area usually retains its modernist, simple geometrical form. In the future surrealistic sculptures may also appear in the park in Rabka Zdroj. Nowadays, however, it is more important to maintain its unique aesthetic values both in the park plan and in the detail of decorative structures.

1. Introduction
The Silesian Rehabilitation and Spa Center in Rabka Zdroj is surrounded by a particularly interesting park. Its south part has a surrealistic path layout, which is a unique example of projecting surrealistic forms onto a park plan. Basically, surrealistic features in parks were limited to elements of decorative structures and sculptures, with their modernistic perpendicular path layout. The Spa Center building
and the local park were created in 1949. The designer’s name was Stanislaw Gruszka, an architect from Silesia, a region in the south of Poland [1].

In the 20 years of Poland’s independence after World War I, Silesia and Warsaw competed each other in erecting modern architecture in the modernist International Style. The Cracow region, where Rabka Zdroj is situated, maintained its distinction by promoting regionalism in the newly created Zakopane style, with its folk and highlander motifs as well as characteristic wooden architecture. In the 1930s, whereas in the Nazi Germany the development of modernist architecture was brought to a halt due to the banning of the Bauhaus architectural school, in Poland the International Style became a symbol of the regained independence from the three partitioning powers: Austria, Prussia and Russia. The modern artistic idea expressed in the International Style was characterized by connections with futurism and surrealism. Thus the surrealistic motif in the park created near the spa building in that particular style is not surprising. The building’s wings are rectangular with a flat roof, however their modern connecting passage is in the form of the letter S and there are two semicircular breaks in the building. The surrealistic aesthetics did not reach its culmination in Poland until the 1960s and 70s, when the communist terror was alleviated. The surrealistic park in Rabka Zdroj was thus one of the last accents of independent ideas in the Polish post-war art at the time before communism began to lose impetus.

2. Methods

The research described below was conducted by the author of this article in 2018 while working on the project of the revitalization of the park near the Silesian Rehabilitation and Spa Center in Rabka Zdroj, which was carried out by his design studio “Hortus” in Katowice. The present author also designed the greenery as well as elements of decorative structures and prepared educational paths. In 2019 the project won a competition to have its implementation financed by means of the EU funds. The work involved taking inventory of the greenery by identifying species and assessing their age [2], [3], [4] as well as by analysing the undergrowth [5]. In order to verify the greenery composition elements a tree species analysis method was used [4]. A composition analysis was applied to show the characteristic composition elements, accents, symmetry axes, distinct tree lines and groups of trees planted in circles. The knowledge about the historical background for the park’s project was acquired by analyzing the architectural activity in the 20 years of Poland’s independence after World War I, especially the evolution of the International Style and its relations to various trends in art. The studies of the works of outstanding surrealists and futurists provided comparative material for composition analyses and a source of inspiration for elements of decorative structures. By examining the history of spa architecture modernization, it was established that a motif of the International Style was a proof of Poland’s progress and modernity in the early years of its independence. Since poster art always keeps pace with the latest achievements, this type of art was selected as a modernity gauge in art. A search query in the Museum of Poster in Warsaw helped to choose examples of artistic activity characteristic of that period and corresponding with the park composition. The research on the spa architecture and posters made it possible to prepare educational paths in order to support the knowledge of the historical background of the surrealistic garden. It was essential that the park should also include elements of games available on the Internet, as a sign of modernity being characteristic of that place. As a result, a letter code system was developed enabling to hide various messages on the educational path boards.

3. Greenery species analysis

In the park area there were identified sixty-three species and varieties of trees and bushes, out of which twenty-eight taxa represent native species and their varieties (figure 1). Among the native species the dominating ones are the following: Norway maple (Acer platanoides L.), sycamore maple (Acer pseudoplatanus L.), European beech (Fagus sylvatica L.), European ash (Fraxinus excelsior L.), Norway spruce (Picea abies H.Karst.) and little-leaf linden (Tilia cordata Mill.). There is a large
number of foreign species as well like northern red oaks (*Quercus rubra* L.) and northern white-cedars (*Thuja occidentalis* L.). One should also mention specimens rarely found in the Karpaty Highland, where Rabka is situated: European beech ‘Rotundifolia’ (*Fagus sylvatica ‘Rotundifolia’*), European beech ‘Pendula’ (*Fagus sylvatica ‘Pendula’*), European ash ‘Pendula’ (*Fraxinus excelsior ‘Pendula’*), butternut (*Juglans cinerea* L.), willow-leaved pear (*Pyrus salicifolia Pall.*), and European mountain ash ‘Pendula’ (*Sorbus aucuparia ‘Pendula’*). The analysis revealed rows of little-leaf linden trees along the north and south borders of the park. On the lower terrace in the west part there is a circle of Norway maple trees. On the middle terrace one finds a distinct symmetry axis with European beeches ‘Rotundifolia’, followed, on both sides of the stairs, by symmetrically located northern red oaks, horse chestnuts, northern white-cedars, and a circle of northern white-cedars at the end of the axis. Northern red oaks also seem to form a line along the diagonal from the middle terrace to the south-west. Such diagonal arrangements are found in other modernist gardens located in the south of Poland [5]. Other two parallel diagonal lines of trees one can find in the center of the park. Another essential element seems to be two butternuts growing along the axis of the path which leads from the circle of northern white-cedars to the north-west towards a branching silver maple (*Acer saccharinum* L.). The surrealist garden has circles, single accents and symmetrical pairs of trees with Norway maples, sycamore maples and silver maples. The peculiar path layout is steadied by the choice of trees, which is symmetrical and not too diverse. The trees, however, are planted in a peculiar way so as to emphasize the path layout, with their arrangement similar to symmetry and yet not reflecting it ideally.

Figure 1. Greenery species analysis

4. Composition analysis

The park, with a distinct east part surrounding the spa building, has a surrealist garden to the south (figure 2). The garden’s layout is symmetrical, however slightly deformed. In the west part, there are three terraces descending gradually to the west. To the south of the terraces there is a freely composed park with a distinct axis from the European beech ‘Rotundifolia’ to the circle with northern white-cedars. Originally, both parts of the park seem to have had south and north borders emphasized by rows of lindens. In the park it is possible to distinguish groups of trees and circles made up of them,
which were emphasized by circular paths. In different parts trees form symmetrical arrangements, for instance butternuts creating a kind of gate towards a group of northern white-cedars and a large silver maple; the axis leading from the middle terrace; the symmetry axes, distinct to a different degree, on the other two terraces. The most interesting composition element, however, is the south part of the layout, surrealistic in its form.

Figure 2. Composition analysis

5. The surrealistic garden
At first glance, the composition of the path layout and greenery in the garden to the south of the spa building seems accidental. It is only after a thorough analysis of its form that its unusual outline becomes visible. In a projection one can notice a sort of totem with fantastic figures placed on each other (figure 3). There is a kind of symmetry in the garden, but many times broken in its distinction to a different degree, which applies to both the path and tree layouts. The path outline drawn after analyzing the projection form reveals its considerable abstract character. It can be noticed that certain elements, however with slightly different shapes, find their counterparts on the other side of the longitudinal axis of the garden. There appears a kind of slightly disturbed symmetry, as if the designer, when imitating the ways of creating meanings in the surrealistic art, tried to show movement and other meanings related to the object presented in the projection. The source of inspiration for the surrealistic garden in Rabka Zdroj may have been pictures and sculptures by Hans Arp. For instance, “Human Concretion” (1935), “Torso” (1930), and particularly “Growth” (1938) have the same structure making us believe for a while that the form refers to the human body, but after a while we discover its movement and a variety of meanings, impressions and desires. Similar forms could be found in the pictures and sculptures by Joan Miró, where oval forms, very colorful, as if created by a child, have a deep layer of meanings and references. Miró himself claimed, “For me a form is never something abstract. It is always a sign of something. It is always a man, a bird, or something else.”[6] His works like “The Harlequin’s Carnival” (1925), “Hirondelle Amour” (1933), and “The Escape Ladder” (1939) could have been known to the designer of the park in Rabka Zdroj. The works reach the heart of the matter through forms which are nearly totally transformed. Miró’s “Dutch Interiors” (1928) was a masterly transformation of certain acknowledged works from which he extracted unexpected
meanings by bringing to life objects considered so far as dead and explicit. It was only after World War II that Miró began to calm his pictures by focusing on single objects or their small groups, e.g. “Figures and Dog in Front of the Sun” (1949). They can be directly related to the way of shaping paths in the surrealist garden in Rabka. Perhaps this simplification of composition, being a natural evolution of the surrealists’ creativity mentioned above, was applied in the park in Rabka Zdroj.

Figure 3. Unusual outline of paths in surrealist garden.

6. Decorative structures
The source of the shapes of bench seats designed for the park in Rabka Zdroj is the picture of Hans Arp “Constellation with Five White and Two Black Forms” (1932). Similar forms, however colorful, were created by Alexander Calder, for instance “Untitled Abstract Composition” (1942). As mentioned in the Introduction, the surrealist aesthetics did not reach its culmination in Poland until the 1960s and 70s. At that time the works of Arp, Miró and Calder had gained their unique abstract simplicity. As art undergoes constant evolution, it was decided that the benches designed for the park should refer to the abstract forms characteristic of the late period of the artists’ creativity. Three types of benches referring to surrealism have been designed (figure 4). Their framework is of steel pipes, bent in the shape of a circle or a simple arc. In the case of deck-chairs for the garden heliotherapy the form is wavy. The seats and backs are made of plastic resistant to outdoor conditions and UV radiation. The deck-chairs are covered with wooden rungs, the only plastic element is a board used as headrest.

Figure 4. Benches designed
7. Greenery designed
The park in its present state needs tree removals rather than having more trees planted. Since the park was created, the trees have expanded and the spa managers have added new specimens. After cutting out the withering trees, the composition will be completed by the tree species or their varieties already present in the park, esp. the European beech (figure 5).

![Figure 5. Design of the park](image)

Surrealistic variety and ambiguity will be reflected in the functional layer of the designed park’s re-composition. One of the obvious functions in a spa is to aid treatment. There are many studies on the impact of the natural environment on human wellbeing [8], [9]. As a consequence, an aromatherapy garden has been designed with plants emitting phytoncides - a volatile essential oils produced by plants and trees with bactericidal and fungicidal abilities, such as aromatic varieties of Dwarf Cranesbill (Geranium ×cantabriense) and big-root cranesbill (Geranium macrorrhizum L.). Phytoncides have a varied effect on the human body. They can increase or decrease blood pressure,
have also a stimulating or a stress-relieving effect, depending on the chemical composition closely related to the type of plant community [10]. The aromatherapy garden was designed on the lowest terrace in the west part of the park, where Norway maples grow, being typical trees of the Oak-Hornbeam Community. This type of plant community stimulates people positively [11].

On the highest terrace there was designed a heliotherapy garden for sunbathing with plant species preferring full insolation. In the surrealistic garden there were introduced perennial plants which form intermingling patterns, like in surrealistic painting. The plant fields replaced the unnecessary asphalt surfaces, but the original path layout remained clear.

In surrealistic garden the path outlines were recovered and some fields were filled with lawn and perennial strips. Fragments of asphalt surfaces were also changed into lawn areas or perennial fields (figure 6).

8. Educational paths

In the park there were designed three educational paths: a natural one, with the plants and birds occurring in the park, a path on Rabka Spa and other spas in the Little Poland region, as well as a path on the history of the Polish poster in the interwar period. The shapes of the educational path boards were inspired by the same forms as the bench seats. The path on the spas demonstrates the popularity of the International Style in the Polish spas before World War II. Rabka is one of a dozen or so spas in the Little Poland region. They were in their prime at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and in the interwar period. The spa buildings erected here in the 19th century imitated those in the German and Czech spas, namely wooden or stone structures with gabled roofs. After World War I, in Poland the idea of hydrotherapy was fostered as an effective therapy against tuberculosis, gastric disorders and many other ailments. The popularity of spas and national programs of their support caused investors’ interest in those towns. At the same time the idea of the International Style in architecture was formulated and developed. In Poland that style became a distinguishing feature of modernity, a symbol of prestige of the country reunited and restored after 123 years of partitions. The center of the artistic world was Paris, where various artists and architects sought for knowledge and inspiration. For Polish architects, Le Corbusier was their idol, especially because the modernist ideas postulated by him were codified in the Athens Charter, co-edited by Polish architects, e.g. Helena Syrkus.

In the 20 years of Poland’s independence after World War I, it was especially poster art that kept up with modernity. The creators of posters absorbed novelties every day. Their ambition was to prove in their works that they were modern and able to advertise that modernity, which was more difficult in the case of easel painting and sculpture due to the time their artists needed to create their works. Whereas poster artists could have an idea one day and printed their work on the following day. Besides, what they learned about the achievements of the creators of surrealism, futurism, cubism and other modernist styles gave them inspiration in their own artistic search. A big influence on the community of poster artists, and even many architects was exerted by Adolph Mouron, active in Paris, also known under the name of Cassandre. His futuristic works, referring often to architects’ workshops, transatlantic liners and airplane technologies, inspired many artists. The development of poster art was also boosted by the will to be modern among investors, industrialists and organizers of public life. Another factor stimulating its development was creating labels for various industrial products, e.g. chocolates. The surrealistic park in Rabka Zdroj will have eight boards with the works of that period. The following posters are included: “Hulanicka” [Hulanicka, a dancer, follower of Isadora Duncan] by Tadeusz Gronowski, an architect by profession (1926); “Doroczny bal Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych” [Annual ball at a fine arts school] unknown author (1927), “Wystawa czeskosłowackiej książki dla dzieci” [Exhibition of the Czechoslovakian book for children] by studio “Be i Te” (1934); “Kurs gimnastyki tanecznej Maryny Broniewska” [Dance gymnastics course Maryna Broniewska] by Kazimierz Mann (1936); “Świat kobiecy” [Woman’s world] by Tadeusz Piotrowski (1934); “L’Art Polonais, Polnische Kunst. Schloss Rapperswil” by Antoni Wajwod (1936). Two boards are intended for chocolate packaging labels: „Bałwan śniegowy” [Snowman] by Jerzy Hryniewiecki (1935) and „Kosz z kwiatami” [Basket with flowers] by Kazimierz Mann (before 1939).
The plastic forms in the above-mentioned posters and labels depart from the naturalistic, three dimensional modeling for cubist transformation, economical modernism, oriental motifs, expressive line and bars of color. The dominating element is a flat patch, often irregularly oval; the objects overlap, often seeming to be a collage cut out of paper. Artists reject perspective and depth of space; by avoiding meticulous detail they achieve more inner dynamic as well as richness of associations and connotations. For them art does not mean the faithful, naturalistic rendering of a shape. The paradigm of classical beauty of being faithful to the original, almost photographically, had collapsed with the development of the International Style when it was proclaimed that all styles had died and beauty did not exist; only aesthetics existed and almost anything could be aesthetic. Modernism pressed forward but in the interwar period it was not yet tainted with despair brought about by World War II. Figures presented in the posters are almost magic, as if taken out of pleasant dreams. Such transformation is just one step away from surrealism, where forms lose the clarity of their referents and turn abstract. Another important aspect of the posters is lettering, often specifically created for just one work. As many of those principles are reflected in the surrealistic garden in Rabka Zdroj, it was considered important to demonstrate via posters the artistic background contributing to the garden’s form. On each educational board there was put a letter code with nine letters and index number. It is possible to create messages or watchwords to be found out by park and spa guests. They will be used by the spa staff to organize various competitions, especially for children.

9. Results and discussions
The park near the Silesian Rehabilitation and Spa Center in Rabka Zdroj was created together with the spa building in 1949. The building was constructed in the International Style. Most of the park is in a similar style. An exceptional element of the park is the surrealistic garden in which forms known from painting and sculpture served as a pattern for the layout of the paths and squares. The conducted research revealed a relation between architecture in the International Style and surrealism and futurism, two popular styles in art in the interwar period. Modernist gardens are hardly mentioned in Polish literature. Due to the shortness of the interwar period, very few gardens were created in this style. Even if they are located near modernist buildings, their composition does not seem to be well-developed. Longin Majdecki only points out that such gardens were usually axial, although rather asymmetrical with balanced composition [12]. Geometry was linked in them with free landscape composition and the use of rhythm. Similarly, Janusz Bogdanowski considers modernism only as a kind of calligraphic secession or the simple geometry of the International Style [13]. There is no reference to the use of the parallel diagonal axes of trees and bushes often so intermingled that almost seeming accidental, that is the same importance is attached to both trees and bushes [6]. Nothing is said of the influence of surrealism on a garden composition. Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe point to the similarity of Bos Park in Amsterdam created in 1934 to the abstract pictures by Piet Mondrian [14]. The crossing lines of the paths that are parallel repeatedly as well as the wavy forms are not compared to surrealistic works because the garden with its technical forms, drawn mechanically, seems rather futuristic. The most surrealistic features could be found in the gardens of Roberto Burle Marx, with overlapping splashy forms with clear oval borders, eg. Kronforth Garden, Theresiopolis, Rio de Janeiro [14] or Plaza Senadosalgado Filho (1938) and Residencia Odette Menteiro (1947) [15].

10. Conclusions
The principle behind implementing the park restoration project was to emphasize the surrealistic elements, as rarely found in garden art and proving the object’s uniqueness. According to the design, the composition of the park layout will be made clearer and the park equipment will be completed with flowerbeds and benches especially designed whose form refer to surrealist works (figure 7). The educational paths will explain the historical background of the object and its relation to the art from the period immediately preceding its construction. On realizing the project in 2020, the park may become a source of inspiration for the revival of surrealism and abstractionism in contemporary art.
Figure 7. Visualization of surrealistic garden (draw: Malgorzata Karolak and Marek Grabczewski)

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