

LEISURE ARCHITECTURE OF THE 1960s and 1970s AS AN EXAMPLE OF POST-WAR MODERNISM

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Abstract

The article presents an analysis of recreational centers from the 1960s and 1970s as examples of post-war modernism. Today, these facilities are regarded as a legacy of past eras, embedded in the panoramas of many health spa towns. They are characterized by typical design solutions, both in terms of form-shaping and their relationship with the surrounding environment. Based on selected examples, an analysis was conducted on recreational buildings from the 1960s and 1970s, identifying characteristic elements of their architecture. Subsequently, the transformation processes of these structures were examined, defining the features and solutions that shape their regional character. The study included an analysis of the form of the buildings and their scale, as well as their relationship with the immediate surroundings. Particular attention was paid to the design of building façades and the structural solutions employed.

Keywords: Leisure complex; Regional architecture; Health spa resort; Identity architecture

Introduction

Resort architecture from the 1960s and 1970s continues to shape the skylines of many cities in Poland, including those of spa significance. Today, these structures are often abandoned and falling into neglect. The period during which they were built was characterized by a specific political, social, and economic context. Leisure facilities were intended to serve the entire society, which engaged in mass holiday travel. At that time, these facilities were very popular. Workers, regardless of their profession, enjoyed vacations in state-owned resorts located in various parts of the country with the support of their workplaces during holidays. The state thus created a vision of prosperity in difficult times when access to basic goods was severely limited. Functional architecture was used to build a new reality, a new order, a new country, and a new civilization. While resort architecture supported mass vacations, it simultaneously limited individual leisure opportunities.

Resorts representing post-war modernism were characterized by simple forms devoid of ornamentation. This was an expression of the pursuit of showcasing the function of the building – its utility as the most important value.

Buildings were constructed using prefabricated elements. Their primary building material was raw concrete, shaping the object's rectangular prism form. Characteristic elements of the façades were window openings arranged according to a specific, unchanging rhythm. An essential feature of the architecture was the closeness to the landscape, which played a significant role. The simple form of the buildings and light color scheme created a contrast with natural elements.

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Analysis of the resorts shows that their form underwent transformation. In later periods, the resorts emphasized elements of local architecture by using natural materials and seeking the essence of the relationship with the landscape (e.g., Jaszowiec resort).

The article aims to analyze characteristic elements of resort towns from the 1960s and 1970s that determined their form and connection with the surroundings.

To achieve this, a site inspection was conducted on selected implementations, considering:

- the scale of the objects and their form,
- the arrangement of window openings and balconies,
- construction and material solutions,
- connections with the landscape.

Given the multifaceted nature of the issues, the current state of research was analyzed in the following areas:

- development and functioning of workers' holiday resorts in the Polish People's Republic as an element of state social policy, recreational infrastructure, and 20th-century architecture,
- prefabricated and modernist architecture in Polish resorts – its technological and aesthetic development, impact on resort functioning and landscape,
- directions of renovation and renewal of 20th-century recreational architecture in Poland – conservation, adaptation, and technological strategies, including modern materials, repair techniques, ecological solutions, and integration of new functions while preserving heritage values,
- integration of resort architecture with the natural environment throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

Particularly, analyses were conducted examining the issue of identical architectural elements in resort centers as examples of post-war modernism in the context of conservation, modernization, or adaptation efforts. This topic was developed by authors such as Jakub Lewicki [1] and Bolesław Ciarkowski [2]. Other important research problems include building relationships with the landscape, addressed in works by Marian Wimmer [3] and Steen Eiler Rasmussen [4]. For the issues of this article, understanding the state of research focused on the circumstances of post-war modernist objects, with special attention to recreational buildings, as done by authors Filip Springer [7] and Anna Cymer [8], proved essential. Contemporary literature studies have shown that recreational objects from that period, based on Marcin Wojdak's book [9] presenting their actual state, deserve attention and renovation. The author, documenting these places, emphasizes their unique atmosphere. The European context of leisure architecture, oscillating between modernist experimentation and state patronage, is explored in the research of J. Gosseye and H. Heynen [5], while technical aspects of facade protection and the implementation of innovative, eco-friendly materials for reinforcing the structure of historical objects are analyzed in the works of teams led by Y. Ivashko, I. Sandu, and G. Deák [6], [20], [21].

Due to the limited state of research on the architecture of post-war recreational centers, the analysis of their historical, artistic, and social values remains insufficiently recognized, which complicates their protection and promotion as significant elements of cultural heritage. There is a lack of in-depth studies regarding the technical condition of these buildings, including assessments of material and structural degradation. There is also an issue with the absence of a coherent methodology and conservation guidelines that take into account the specificity of modernist architecture from the 1960s and 1970s. Additionally, insufficient archival documentation hinders the reconstruction of the original character and function of these resorts. As a result, the adaptive potential and cultural value of many of them remain underappreciated and at risk of being forgotten.

Research Methods

Studies of recreational architecture from the 1960s and 1970s, as representative examples of post-war modernism, are based on an interdisciplinary approach combining historical, technical, and conservation analyses. The foundation is a critical review of source materials—archival maps, construction plans, photographs, and technical documentation—enabling the reconstruction of the socio-political context and design process. Analysis of these materials also allows identification of the building technologies used at the time, including prefabricated reinforced concrete systems. This base is supplemented by contemporary scientific publications and conservation reports, providing data on the effectiveness of earlier restoration efforts.

Field studies focus on a comprehensive inventory of objects using both digital and traditional methods. These include photographic documentation, detailed technical condition assessments, and geometric measurements to verify compliance of existing structures with original designs and applicable standards. Architectural relationships with the landscape are also analyzed, including the degree of integration with terrain topography—such as terraces embedded in hillsides—and the impact of modern infrastructure (e.g., parking lots, roads) on the historical spatial layout.

This study presents analysis results of three selected objects showcasing diverse design approaches and adaptive strategies.

Architectural and urban analyses aim to evaluate objects in terms of scale, form, technology, and historical value. Special attention is given to the study of functional layout, façade design including window and balcony arrangement, architectural details (e.g., mosaics, concrete reliefs), and construction solutions such as prefabricated walls and ceiling panels. These elements document stylistic features of the era and allow assessment of the adaptive potential of analyzed objects. Proposed modern uses assume preservation of distinctive elements—like reinforced concrete structures—while incorporating modern, energy-efficient building materials that enable sustainable modernization.

Urban and architectural landscape relation studies identify key spatial and compositional features determining the cultural value of the complexes. They also indicate the crucial role of harmonious integration of buildings with their environment—both visually and functionally—highlighting their importance as integral elements of post-war landscape heritage.

Results and Discussion

Resort in Gródek nad Dunajcem – current Hotel Lemon Resort Spa

Lemon Resort Spa in Gródek nad Dunajcem is an example of successful revitalization of a post-war recreational center originally built in the 1970s as a typical holiday facility for workers of one of Kraków's industrial plants (Fig. 1). The complex is located picturesquely on the shores of Lake Rożnowskie, surrounded by greenery and the hilly landscape of the Rożnowski Foothills, which from the beginning supported rest and integration with nature.

The original complex was distinguished by thoughtful modernist architecture – it consisted of several pavilions with clear, simple forms and a low building scale. The buildings were designed with functionality and harmony with the surroundings in mind. Positioned in terraces on a slope, they naturally blended into the terrain. Characteristic features were horizontal

bands of windows and wide balcony doors, which not only provided excellent interior lighting but also established a connection between users and the landscape of the lake and green hills.



Fig. 1. Resort in Gródek nad Dunajcem - historical photo, source of the photo:

<https://www.facebook.com/photoofbid=747624648671912&set=pcb.747624872005223>, date of access: 05.09.2025

The spatial arrangement of the objects was simple, logical, and functional, referring to typical solutions used in recreational architecture of the 1960s and 1970s. The constructions were based on a skeletal system, mainly reinforced concrete, with flat roofs and minimalist façades. The materials originally used were primarily concrete, glass, steel, and local façade materials, complemented by prefabricated elements. Altogether, this created a coherent and modern complex for its time, well connected with the natural environment.

Over time, the facility gradually lost its appeal, and its technical condition deteriorated. A turning point came in 2012 when the entire complex was taken over by a new investor who aimed to preserve its modernist character while adapting it to contemporary hotel standards. The revitalization was based on respect for the original architectural fabric – existing volumes and spatial layouts were preserved, and glazing was enlarged to enhance the connection with the landscape.

Technological improvements included new heating and ventilation systems, energy-efficient windows, and ecological finishing materials such as wood, Corten steel, and stone. The interiors were renewed in a minimalist spirit with subtle allusions to the 1970s, giving the whole a historical and aesthetic coherence.

Thanks to these measures, Lemon Resort Spa retains the architectural identity of the original center while gaining new function and quality (Fig. 2). This example demonstrates that recreational architecture from the Polish People's Republic era – well-designed and rooted in the landscape – can today be a valuable resource for creative revitalization rather than merely a relic of the past. It is worth noting, however, that the complex itself is rarely associated with 1960s and 1970s architecture and is more often seen as a modern, luxurious complex, which may indicate that social perception of this era remains ambiguous and does not necessarily involve appreciation of its architectural heritage.

Resort "Lucień" in Miałków

The "Lucień" Resort in Miałkówek is a distinctive example of recreational architecture from the Polish People's Republic era, established in the second half of the 1970s at the initiative of the Żyrardów Linen Industry Plants (Fig. 3). The complex is located by Lake Lucieńskie, surrounded by forests, providing an environment close to nature for the relaxation of workers and their families. The project was designed by engineer-architect Stanisław Różga and includes four round hotel buildings connected by glass corridors, along with an L-shaped service and office pavilion and supporting facilities. The resort offered over 120 rooms with bathrooms, a dining hall, conference rooms, playgrounds, and extensive sports infrastructure, making it one of the most modern facilities of its kind in the region.



Fig. 2. Hotel Lemon Resort Spa, source of the photo:

<https://www.facebook.comphotofbid=747624742005236&set=pcb.747624872005223>, date of access: 05.09.2025

After a period of intensive use related to the operation of the linen factories, the resort passed into private hands following the company's bankruptcy in 1997. Despite attempts to continue tourism activities by successive owners, rising maintenance costs, an outdated heating system, and lack of investment led to the gradual deterioration of the facility's technical condition and a decline in guest interest. Ultimately, in 2007, the resort was closed and has since steadily fallen into ruin, becoming an example of forgotten post-war recreational architecture heritage. In recent years, the resort has been put up for sale several times, but due to its poor technical condition and high renovation costs, no restoration efforts have been made. Despite ongoing degradation, the resort in Miałkówek remains an important testimony to the architecture and culture of 1970s leisure time (Fig. 4).

Their unique form and location continue to attract interest from researchers, architects, and enthusiasts of history and industrial tourism. The characteristic geometric forms of the round buildings and the functional spatial arrangement, with glass corridors connecting the segments, reflect modernist efforts to integrate interiors with the surroundings and provide users with contact with nature. The complex's location amid forests and near the lake strengthened the relationship between architecture and landscape, while panoramic glazing and terraces allowed appreciation of natural values, aligning with contemporary design assumptions. The buildings were constructed using a reinforced concrete frame technology with prefabricated elements, consistent with industrial building trends during the Polish People's Republic era. The use of flat

roofs, wide glazing, and ceramic cladding reflected modernist aesthetics. Interiors were finished with natural materials such as wood and stone, complemented over time by elements typical of the 1970s, including synthetic floor coverings and decorative fabrics.



Fig. 3. Resort "Lucień" in Miąkówkę - historical photo, source of the photo:

https://www.facebook.com/photo/fbid=1767813099974296&set=pb.100047338317089.-2207520000&locale=pl_PL,
date of access: 05.09.2025.



Fig. 4. Resort "Lucień" in Miąkówkę—current condition

Contemporary technical assessments of the building show advanced degradation, including reinforcement corrosion, concrete cracking, and destruction of original details, resulting from years of neglect and exposure to adverse weather conditions. The lack of ongoing repairs led to the loss of many authentic elements, such as concrete reliefs and mosaics, posing significant challenges for future restoration work. Modern approaches to adapting such objects should combine reconstructing historic details with using modern, energy-efficient building

materials and technologies such as thermal insulation panels and ecological heating systems, enabling functional restoration while preserving heritage value.

Urban analyses and evaluations of architectural and landscape relationships indicate that "Lucień" harmoniously fits into its environment thanks to well-thought spatial solutions such as pathways and greenery promoting recreation (Fig. 5). Despite its ongoing degradation, the spatial layout and unique form of the object have preserved adaptive potential and serve as an important reference in studies on the heritage of post-war modernism in Poland.



Fig. 5. Resort "Lucień" in Miąkówka—current condition

Resort in Kołobrzeg

The resort in Kołobrzeg, also known as Sanatorium Mewa V, is one of the most representative examples of modernist spa architecture in Poland, built in the second half of the 1960s. Designed by Tadeusz Cwierzdzński and Zofia Eldring, it was commissioned in 1968 as part of the development of the state medical and recreational infrastructure. The facility is located in the heart of the Kołobrzeg Spa District, bordered by the streets Rafińskiego, Ściegiennego, Zdrojowa, and Konopnickiej, providing convenient access to urban infrastructure and proximity to parks and green areas conducive to relaxation and therapy (Fig. 6).

The architecture of the resort in Kołobrzeg is based on modernist principles – the building consists of two rectangular volumes stacked on each other: a longer one along the east-west axis and a shorter, lower one along the north-south axis. This layout allowed efficient use of the plot and the creation of two internal courtyards integrating space around the medical functions. The volumes vary in height and include, among others, a ground floor, a high ground floor, and an upper floor. The building's façades are adorned with horizontal bands of windows, providing good interior lighting and visual connection with the surroundings. Despite the lack of balconies, large glazed surfaces establish a relationship between the interior and the external landscape (Fig. 7).



Fig. 6. Resort in Kołobrzeg - historical photo, source of the photo: <https://vivarium.com.pl/www/pliki/produkty/7cde7b6641e6068560a3d55bc57275c2.jpg>, date of access: 05.09.2025



Fig. 7. Resort in Kołobrzeg – current condition

The structure of the building is based largely on a reinforced concrete framework, which was typical for recreational architecture of that period. The façades are kept in a minimalist style, dominated by concrete, glass, and steel, with decoration limited to a single but highly striking accent: a monumental ceramic mosaic by Irena Zahorska and Olgierd Szerłağ. Located at the

main entrance from Rafińskiego Street, the mosaic forms an arch spanning two stories, serving as an excellent example of the use of art in modernist public spaces and emphasizing the unique character of the building.

From its inception, the facility has served a spa treatment function – its interiors include rooms for brine baths, inhalations, hydromassage, and a pool with brine water. The building also offers accommodation for spa visitors, with Sanatorium Mewa V providing 78 beds in single and double rooms with bathrooms. The entire facility is also adapted to the needs of people with disabilities.

Despite the passage of time, the building has not undergone major revitalization; however, its technical condition still allows for use according to its original purpose. The preservation of the original volume, materials, and functional layout makes the resort in Kołobrzeg a valuable example of post-war modernist architecture (Fig. 8). However, the building is not widely recognized as a historic monument; it is rather treated as a functional part of the urban space fabric, which may indicate an ambivalent societal attitude toward the architectural heritage of this period. Nevertheless, its example proves that modernist recreational designs can still play an important role in city structure and deserve further protection and conscious revitalization efforts.

Below is a summary divided into four key features characterizing the analyzed objects.

Firstly, elements of post-war modernism include simple, geometric forms, flat roofs, and rhythmic arrangements of windows and balconies. The resort in Gródek nad Dunajcem features a minimalist volume with large glazed surfaces; the resort "Lucień" in Miałków displays geometric shapes; and the resort in Kołobrzeg has a rhythmic façade and a simple, functional form.

Secondly, building relationships with the landscape is seen in terraces facing the lake and integration with the natural terrain in Gródek nad Dunajcem, panoramic glazing and greenery integrating the object in Miałków, and strategic positioning in relation to the sea, park, and city panorama in Kołobrzeg.



Fig. 8. Resort in Kołobrzeg—detail of the mosaic façade

Thirdly, construction and material solutions in the objects include prefabricated elements and reinforced concrete frameworks, as well as natural materials: wood, glass, concrete, and stone in Gródek; prefabricates, reinforced concrete, and ceramics in Miałków; and reinforced concrete, prefabricates, aluminum, and glass in Kołobrzeg.

Fourthly, the transformation of form involves preserving the volumes and layout of pavilions with interior revitalization in the 1970s style in Gródek nad Dunajcem, structural degradation and loss of mosaics in Miałków, and technical and aesthetic modernization along with adaptation to contemporary sanatorium and hotel standards in Kołobrzeg.

Conclusions

The assessment of this architecture, often referred to by conservators as “dissonant heritage,” is not unequivocal, as it is perceived as a witness to times with which we do not wish to identify.

This type of heritage evokes social controversies because it is associated with a political and ideological period that remains difficult or unacceptable for many. At the same time, however, these structures form an important element of architectural history and serve as a tangible record of social and technological changes in the second half of the 20th century. The conclusions drawn from the analysis indicate that effective protection and adaptation of such structures require a balanced approach that combines the recognition of their historical and educational value with openness to new functions and contemporary user needs. It becomes crucial to develop clear conservation guidelines and conduct broad social debate so that the “uncomfortable” heritage is not permanently marginalized but can become an inspiration for reflection on the complexity of our past.

The analyses show that resort architecture from the 1960s and 1970s represents valuable post-war modernist heritage, distinguished by coherent forms, functionality, and a conscious connection with the environment. Their architecture, based on simple volumes, large windows, and prefabricated elements, retains adaptive potential and regional values that should be preserved and utilized in contemporary transformations. The transformations of these objects require an individualized approach considering both their historical character and the needs of modern users. Developing conservation and urban planning guidelines is necessary to preserve their authenticity and harmony with the landscape. The preservation and conscious shaping of these structures can enrich the tourism and cultural offerings of the regions and contribute to a better understanding of modernist heritage.

Unfortunately, many of these buildings are gradually deteriorating and degrading, and the lack of systemic conservation efforts threatens their complete ruin. It would be a loss if their history and material testimony of the past epoch were irretrievably forgotten. Therefore, it is crucial to undertake urgent actions—from inventory and documentation to properly planned adaptation—that will allow maintaining these structures as carriers of collective memory. Only in this way can the “difficult heritage” survive, serving not only as a source of knowledge about the past but also as a space for dialogue about the future.

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