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Route 66: Study of cultural and architectural context

Abstract

Route 66 – America's Mother Road – continues to resonate in the Polish perception of US history, culture and architecture. In this study, we used an innovative, multi-stage qualitative visual research method. As part of a research tour organised in 2018 to explore the cultural significance of Route 66 from an architectural perspective, photographic documentation and in situ freehand drawings were prepared and were then used for further research. In the final phase of the project, we used visual analysis to understand the cultural significance of the roadside architecture along Route 66. The results reflected Polish perceptions of Route 66 and its users' characteristics. The genius loci along Route 66 was shown to be based on fragmented architectural structures, the randomness of forms and the dominant natural landscape.

Key words: architecture, landscape, tourism, cultural significance, visual research method

Introduction

In Poland, Route 66 has been a symbol of the American dream and American liberty for many years. In the 21st century, the route continues to attract the attention of Polish viewers and readers, as reflected in texts published by popular websites (Sosnowska 2020; Białek 2023). In early 2022, the National Library catalogue cited 48 items relating to Route 66, of which only 4 were translations from foreign languages. Although the number of Polish publications devoted to this "Mother of all roads" (Steinbeck 2012) may seem limited, only 12 publications mentioning Route 66

and published after January 2000 can be found in the international Scopus database.

The main objective of this study was nevertheless not to solely analyse the roadside architecture along Route 66. Main aim was to demonstrate the effects of the application of a qualitative method in research on architecture, and to answer the question on how to combine the perspective of cultural studies with architecture so as to better understand the role and place of architecture in human life.

Route 66 – cultural context

Route 66 was opened as a federal highway in November 1926, just a few years before the Great Depression. It was a part of an economic expansion programme and was to serve as a link between communities. However, no one could have predicted the great changes that the commissioning of this route would entail (Knudson 2012). The new highway proved not only to be a convenient link between the West Coast and Chicago, but also a driving force that changed the surrounding towns, settlements and residents forever. The growing popularity of Route 66 also

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attracted small and larger businesses. The most important change was not just economic – it went much deeper.

Symbolically and physically, the highway, together with its accompanying commercial services for travellers, became the newest and most influential landscape in 20th-century America. The automotive world: the highways, the drivers and passengers of cars, trucks, buses and motorcycles - created a new way of expressing the American lifestyle – the freedom and passion to move and travel, whether for work or recreation (Jakle, Sculle 2004). Trains and railways, dominant in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, did not provide the kind of independence that Americans found in cars. From the beginning, they associated them with everything the railway was not. Private, rather than owned by a large company, independent of a timetable, the car was understood as a vehicle for escaping into adventure (Nye 2011, 104). Travelling by car was reminiscent of the days of the pioneers. Jean Baudrillard (2011) also wrote about viewing reality from the windows of a speeding car in his famous manifesto America.

Route 66 – architectural context

Architecture is created at the intersection of engineering, construction and technology as well as art, creativity and sometimes fashion. It must also answer societal needs and aspirations, and should serve the well-being of individuals and groups, which is why it always reflects the social and cultural context. The dynamism of local American architecture calls for innovative modes of research that are open to faster interpretations and reinterpretations (Bauman 2006). It also requires a specific perspective – preferably one from the window of a moving car. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour (2013) presented such a discussion of local architecture, and in their manifesto Learning from Las Vegas offered an in-depth analysis of the titular city, which is an extreme exemplification of eclectic and functional architecture that abolishes the rift between function and form, mass and ornament. Marta Mroczek (2016) presented an insightful analysis of roadside architecture – she called it auto-architecture. Its distinctive features found in the desert or in the vicinity of small settlements have become important landmarks.

Architecture organises space, but this is not all – its significance goes beyond the mere structure of organised space (Whyte 2006). Umberto Eco (1997, 174) noted that [...] we commonly do experience architecture as communication, even while recognising its functionality. The way architecture is interpreted changes with the times, as well as the dominant culture, so researchers should [...] explore how architecture is interpreted by its users and viewers (Whyte 2006, 171). Our research on Route 66's roadside architecture is an exploration of the architecture itself, but more importantly it is an analysis of the Polish viewer's interpretation of roadside architecture (Diener 2000).

Landscapes of everyday life, such as roadside architecture, have begun to attract the attention of cultural researchers since the early 1980s (Jackson 1984), but specific roadside heritage studies are recent and still few (Ruiz,

Rodriguez and Coronado 2014). The starting point was to identify the roadside architecture of Route 66, the features constitutive of areas adjacent to US highways, and its compliance (or non-compliance) with UN Sustainable Development Goals no. 3 and 11: "Good health and quality of life" and "Sustainable cities and communities". The road as an essential and constitutive element of American culture has its visual and spatial manifestation in roadside architecture (United Nations 2022).

Research assumptions

Qualitative research in architecture requires a clear and precise definition of the research procedure so that the results can be intersubjectively verified. It is in qualitative research, where the researcher and their subjective approach plays a key role, that the procedure gains significance. This is because it is important that the results do not become merely a record of individual impressions. As Uwe Flick emphasises: [...] You should try to make the design of your research and the methods as explicit and clear, and with as much detail, as possible (Flick 2007, 114). In the context of the subject under study, we assumed that the main user of Route 66 was a viewer that moves fast (by car), and the genius loci of the area stems from experiences and perceptions created by scattered architectural structures that blend into the landscape context. The visual method was chosen as the most appropriate to identify the factors that determine the distinctive atmosphere that results from the architectural and landscape conditions along the road.

Of all the arts, architecture has the greatest impact on nature, the landscape, the human environment and thus determines an individual's wellbeing and the life of a community. It is also sometimes seen as a purely sculptural or visual art. Simon Unwin (2019) proposes that the concept of extra-linguistic metaphor – a visual metaphor related to user experience – should be introduced to its study.

If architecture can be a metaphor, it expects an audience capable of deciphering it and understanding its meaning. While some disciplines ignore the importance of the visual, [...] cultural studies has always assumed an analysis of the visual [...]. [It] is concerned with "how culture is produced, enacted and consumed", so it is unavoidable that scholars working in this field will focus on visual issues (Pink 2008, 128). We proposed a carefully designed three-step method.

Method and procedure

John W. Creswell (2013) in his fundamental textbook Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches, clearly indicates that sound work by a researcher who uses qualitative methods must include the following steps:

- 1) data collection/documentation, during which the author [...] should identify what data the researcher will record and the procedures for recording data (Creswell 2009, 181),
- 2) interpreting data, or transforming data into information which involves [...] *making sense out of text and image data* (Creswell 2009, 183),

3) interpretation, namely explaining their meaning. The essence of this task is best encapsulated by the question: What insight is gained from this? The insight can be the researcher's personal interpretation, couched in the understanding that the inquirer brings to the study from her or his own culture, history, and experiences (Creswell 2009, 189).

It must be highlighted here that the researcher who draws on their culture, history and experiences (Creswell 2009, 189) becomes an important part of the research process. The individual, subjective view of a single researcher does not invalidate the cognitive value brought by research carried out in this way. But it definitely requires what Uwe Flick wrote about, namely defining the research procedure in such a way that it is [...] explicit and clear, and with as much detail, as possible (Flick 2007, 114).

The participants of the research project on Route 66's roadside architecture were three architecture researchers affiliated with the Cracow University of Technology (Beata Malinowska-Petelenz, Magdalena Jagiełło-Kowalczyk, Małgorzata Petelenz) and two cultural studies researchers (Anna Petelenz, Radosław Rybkowski).

The first stage of the study consisted of a research tour. The tour was made possible by an institutional grant to study selected cities in the US and their response to natural disaster risks. The team's itinerary was planned months before the actual visit to the US in August 2018. The research covered the western part of Route 66 (from Los Angeles to Las Vegas and back) with a number of detours deep into the country to investigate the wider landscape and the area's architectural context. The diversity of the authors' areas of expertise was expected to result in an interdisciplinary study and a holistic approach to determining the quality of space and genius loci along Route 66. The researchers focused on several themes that linked the authors' fields, such as architecture and nature, the cultural context of US architecture, and the role of the road and architecture in landscape interpretation. The following detailed stages were distinguished in the research

- 1) in-situ photographic and drawing documentation,
- 2) selection of visual data.

In-situ photographic and drawing documentation

During the Route 66 exploration, all members of the team took photographs of places that each individual member felt were worth documenting. Malinowska-Petelenz also drew views of particular interest to her, thus documenting the team's most unique impressions. The sketches became visual metaphors for the places that were visited.

Architecture gains meaning through the cultural context brought in by its audience, so an analysis of the buildings and the surrounding landscape alone could not produce satisfactory results. The team therefore used photographs both as a form of "objective" documentation of the architecture in its surroundings and as a personal interpretation of its meaning. These sketches represent a personal, subjective view, and the very making of these sketches became [...] a powerful methodological tool in anthropolog-

ical research [...] and also served as a probe to trigger and explore their social memories, transcending the limits of lineal textual representation (Afonso, Ramos 2004, 76).

Selection of visual data

In the next stage of the research process, from among hundreds of photos and numerous sketches, we selected those that we considered significant from an architectural and culture studies perspective. By selecting the iconographic material together, we achieved a kind of objectivity, as we selected for further analysis only those materials that, via consensus of all team members, provided a good illustration of the cultural context of Route 66's roadside architecture. Thus, at the level of iconographic material selection, care was taken to ensure its semantic intersubjectivity. In the visual material that emerged, several thematic groups can be distinguished: the road (Fig. 1), roadside architecture (Fig. 2), advertising elements (Fig. 3), Modernist New Regionalism (Fig. 4), Las Vegas as a distinctive and different space (Fig. 5) (Malinowska-Petelenz, Petelenz 2019).

After returning to Poland, the second phase of research was initiated. Over the course of several meetings and discussions, we unanimously selected 20 photographs (Figs. 1–5) and four sketches (Figs. 6, 7) that best represented Route 66's roadside architecture and documented its characteristic elements.

In the subsequent stages of group work, the team split itself into two sub-teams according to their research background and experience. Sub-team A analysed the prepared data/visual material in terms of cultural meanings. Sub-team B, on the other hand, analysed the same visual material from an architectural research perspective. Both components used MAXQDA2020, a popular Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). This software can encode photographs and other visual material by specifying a fragment of an illustration (this is always in the form of a rectangle) and assigning it a meaning by including this fragment in a given code (see Fig. 8). The benefit of MAXQDA was particularly evident in the next stage of the adopted research procedure - this was due to the epochal shift towards visuality in our culture (Kuckartz, Rädiker 2013).

Determination of codes – characteristic elements – sub-team A

The team explored interest in the "ordinariness" or "everydayness" of culture, culture as a process by which a society or social group produces meanings. This approach allowed the team to document [...] both the "how" and the "what" of culture, both in terms of production and context (Lister, Wells 2004, 4). The focus was placed on distinguishing the key characteristic elements that occurred repeatedly in the visual landscape along Route 66, which were then classified into the groups listed in Table 1.

Determination of codes – characteristic elements – sub-team B

In the course of the discussion, the team distinguished a number of semantic terms to be crossed with the visual

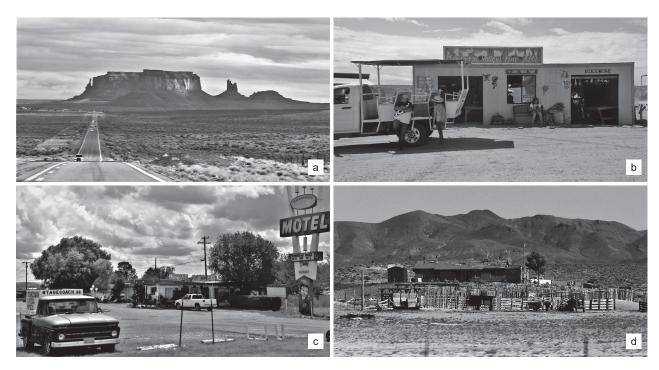


Fig. 1. Road: a) Monument Valley, Utah, b) roadside shack, Monument Valley,
c) Stagecoach Motel, Route 66, Seligman, Arizona,
d) Route 95, road to Hawthorne, Nevada – old abandoned house
(photo by B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

II. 1. Droga: a) Monument Valley, Utah, b) przydrożny barak, Monument Valley,
 c) Stagecoach Motel, Route 66, Seligman, Arizona,
 d) Route 95, droga do Hawthorne, Nevada – stare, opuszczone domostwo
 (fot. B. Malinowska-Petelenz)



Fig. 2. Roadside architecture: a) Bull Moose Lodge motel, Alpine, Wyoming,
b) wooden roadside architecture – Alpine, Wyoming,
c), d) distinctive buildings along the main historic Route 66, Williams City, Arizona (photo by B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

II. 2. Architektura przydrożna: a) motel Bull Moose Lodge, Alpine, Wyoming,
b) drewniana architektura przydrożna – Alpine, Wyoming,
c), d) charakterystyczna zabudowa wzdłuż głównej, historycznej Route 66, Williams City, Arizona
(fot. B. Malinowska-Petelenz)



Fig. 3. Advertising elements: a) Cruiser's Route 66 Café bar, Williams, Arizona,
b) Roy's Motel bar & Café, Route 66 – iconic lone gas station stop, Mojave Desert, Amboy, California,
c) Bull Moose Saloon advertisement, Alpine, Wyoming, d) liquor store advertisement, Route 95, Nevada (between Luning and Hawthorne)
(photo by B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

II. 3. Elementy reklamowe: a) bar Cruiser's Route 66 Cafe, Williams, Arizona,
b) bar Roy's Motel & Café, Route 66 – ikona samotnego przystanku na stacji benzynowej, pustynia Mojave, Amboy, California,
c) reklama Bull Moose Saloon, Alpine, Wyoming, d) reklama sklepu alkoholowego, Route 95, Nevada (między Luning a Hawthorne)
(fot. B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

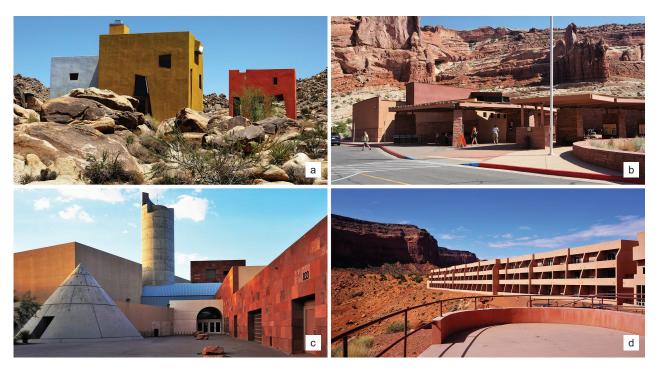


Fig. 4. Modernist New Regionalism – examples: a) The Monument House, Mojave Desert, Joshua Tree National Park (design by Josh Schweitzer, 1990),
b) Visitor Centre building in Arches National Park, Moab Utah (design by Chamberlin Architects 2004–2005),
c) Las Vegas Central Library and Children's Museum, Las Vegas suburb, Nevada (design by Antoine Predock, 1990),
d) Hotel View Monument Valley, Utah (design by Robert Maze Desert Sky Designs, 2008) (photo by B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

- II. 4. Neoregionalizm modernistyczny przykłady: a) The Monument House, pustynia Mojave, Joshua Tree National Park (proj. Josh Schweitzer, 1990), b) budynek Visitor Center w Arches National Park, Moab Utah (proj. Chamberlin Architects 2004–2005),
 - c) Las Vegas Central Library i Children's Museum, przedmieścia Las Vegas, Nevada (proj. Antoine Predock, 1990),
 - d) Hotel View Monument Valley, Utah (proj. Robert Maze Desert Sky Designs, 2008) (fot. B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

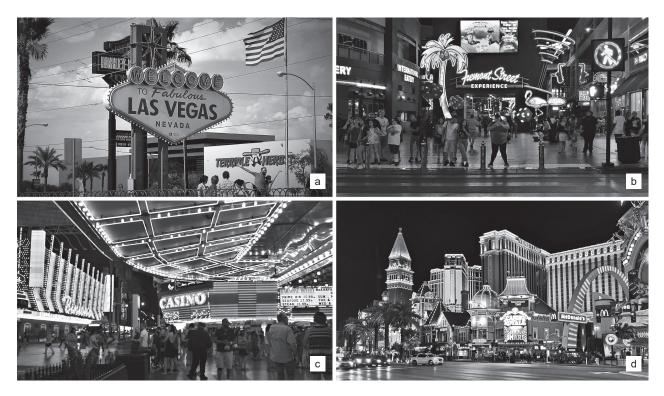


Fig. 5. Las Vegas, Nevada:

a) the iconic sign at the entrance to Las Vegas, b) signs and neon lights along Freemont Street,
 c) shops and casinos along Freemont Street, d) the nighttime lighting of the Las Vegas Strip (photo by B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

Il. 5. Las Vegas, Nevada:

a) legendarny znak przy wjeździe do Las Vegas, b) szyldy i neony wzdłuż Freemont Street, c) sklepy i kasyna wzdłuż Freemont Street, d) nocne oświetlenie Las Vegas Strip (fot. B. Malinowska-Petelenz)



Fig. 6. The road as cultural heritage in the US, open landscape:
a) Arches National Park, Utah,
b) Roy's Motel & Café, Amboy, California
(drawing by B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

II. 6. Droga jako dziedzictwo kulturowe USA, krajobraz otwarty:
a) Arches National Park, Utah,
b) Bar Roy's Motel & Café, Amboy, California (rys. B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

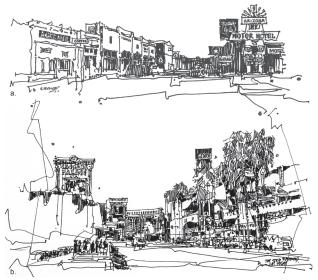


Fig. 7. The road as cultural heritage of the US, urban interiors:
a) Route 66, Williams City, Arizona,
b) The Strip, Las Vegas, Nevada
(drawing by B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

II. 7. Droga jako dziedzictwo kulturowe USA, wnętrza urbanistyczne:
a) Route 66, Williams City, Arizona,
b) The Strip, Las Vegas, Nevada
(rys. B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

Table 1. Codes of characteristic elements present along Route 66, linked to cultural context (elaborated by M. Petelenz)
Tabela 1. Kody elementów charakterystycznych obecnych wzdłuż Route 66, powiązane z kontekstem kulturowym (oprac. M. Petelenz)

Group of elements	Element (Polish)	Coding (English)	Additional commentary		
Vehicles	samochód	car	Vehicles were divided into more specific groups due to being the predominant form of vehicular travel along Route 66. Old cars are also an important element, which (sometimes as a form of display) give the space a timeless character		
	stary samochód	old car			
	grupa samochodów w oddali	multiple cars in the distance			
	motocykl	motorcycle			
The American flag	amerykańska flaga	the american flag	It is both a frequent element and one that is highly essential to the expression of the local place-based identity		
	zalesione wzgórze	forested hill			
	góry	mountains			
Nature	horyzont	horizon	Both individual elements of nature and whole areas characteristic of American open areas were distinguished		
	daleka pusta przestrzeń	vast open space			
	drzewo	tree			
Shabby fence	niedbałe ogrodzenie	shabby fence	An element that defines the geometry and aesthetics of a space		
	kasyno	casino			
	stacja benzynowa	gas station			
	jadłodajnia	eatery	Several types of buildings whose uses could be clearly identified were distinguished, and a group of elements (buildings) whose use could not be determined visually were marked		
D '11'	budynek	building			
Buildings	dom mieszkalny	house			
	sklep	store			
	motel	motel			
	Route 66	66			
Route 66	sztuka	art	The road – a constantly visible, distinctive feature		
Art	Reklamy	advertisement	Aesthetic function		
Advertisements	Las Vegas	Las Vegas	Advertisements are an inseparable element of Route 66's landscape, initially the advertisements associated not only with selling land, but also concerning Las Vegas, were seen as a characteristic, distinct element		
	na sprzedaż	for sale			
	grupa ludzi	people (crowd)			
People	ludzie (policzalni)	people (but you can count them)	People are both an indicator of a site's degree of activity and allow characterisation of the dominant user of a space		

characteristic architectural elements. Five terms that define spatial composition were borrowed from composition theory. Five culturally relevant landscape terms were also distinguished to define its natural and human-made elements. The semantic terms have been presented in Table 2.

Examples of the results of the two teams' work are shown in Figure 8a, b.

Interpretation

This stage of the study demonstrated MAXQDA's benefits. It made it very easy to connect the coding by subteams A and B and to verify the most commonly co-oc-

curring cultural and architectural codes. In cases where sub-team A encoded a given visual material (data) using codes that referred to distinct cultural elements of the land-scape and architecture along Route 66, sub-team B coded that same graphical material suing the second code group – terms used in architectural analysis (e.g., compositional accent, landmark, natural landscape, greenery). The two sub-teams worked separately to avoid biases caused by coding already done by others. The process of this double coding is shown in Figure 8c.

The use of visual methods is a well-established research approach, but it still needs to be employed more widely, including in the study of architecture – particularly in

Table 2. Codes of characteristic elements present along Route 66, linked to architectural context (elaborated by M. Petelenz)
Tabela 2. Kody elementów charakterystycznych obecnych wzdłuż Route 66, powiązane z kontekstem architektonicznym (oprac. M. Petelenz)

Group of terms	Term (Polish)	Coding (English)	Additional commentary	
Composition elements	akcent kompozycyjny	compositional accent	An element that stands out from the background	
	dominanta kompozycyjna	landmark	An element that dominates over its surroundings	
	tło	vast open space	As a background for distinctive elements	
	ściana	wall	A vertical plane that delineates a given space	
	horyzont	horizon	An important horizontal direction that emphasises the horizontality of the open landscape	
Culturally relevant terms	krajobraz naturalny	natural landscape	Landscape – the terrain and open space	
	architektura	architecture	As a mass and other types of structures built by humans, which do not fall under the other categories	
	zieleń	greenery	For example, trees, shrubs, forested hillsides	
	szyld	signboard	One of the most numerous details in space	
	droga	road	Road in the physical sense, but understood as a cultural narrative axis for the landscape	



Fig. 8. Example of coding – codes:

- a) related to architecture,
- b) related to culture,
- c) intersection of codes
- of group a and b (photo by
- B. Malinowska-Petelenz)
- II. 8. Przykład kodowania kody:
- a) związane z architekturą,
- b) związane z kulturą,
- c) przecinanie się kodów grupy a i b
- (fot. B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

demonstrating the role and place of architecture in people's lives (Rose 2016). The use of this method also allowed us to test the validity of the approach, bearing in mind that it [...] is in the initial but developing phase of qualitative research (Rodrigues, Costa and Moreira 2019, 236). It has also been tested whether it can be successfully [...] incorporated into qualitative research projects in various ways: analysis of visual data (photos, videos, posters, etc.) (Rodrigues, Costa and Moreira 2019, 236).

As noted by Rodrigues et al. (2019), the visual research method requires images not only to provide material for investigation, but also to explain and present the results.

Using software that supports qualitative analysis (such as MAXQDA) allows even extensive visual material to be examined relatively easily. The most valuable results were achieved by reviewing the code relationships used during the third stage of the research. We compared the codes used from the perspective of cultural meanings and architectural context with each other. Segments with intersecting codes were sought to understand the relationship between architecture and culture along Route 66, as presented in Figure 9. The visual material selection from stage 1 and its coding in stage 2 demonstrated that, from the perspective of the Polish research team that had travelled along Route 66, the visual representation consisted of vehicles and cars (46 encoded fragments) and not people (21 encoded fragments),

which meant that people in cars were the main users of this space.

The aforementioned sketches proved to be highly valuable material and were coded separately using solely architectural context codes. The results of the analysis have been shown in Figure 10. From this, it can be concluded that signboards proved to be a constitutive element for the visual landscape along Route 66. They most often co-occurred with architectural substance and the wall understood as a compositional element. They also mostly acted as compositional accents.

Considering the entire study of the visual characteristics of the space along Route 66 (the results from the MAXQDA investigation combined with the impressions of the participants in the in-situ landscape observations), the following conclusions can be drawn:

- the area displays a symbiosis of numerous natural elements (mountains, greenery, open space, etc.) and human-made elements (architecture, fences, signs, road, etc.). Codes related to architecture were the most numerous: architecture (29), wall (24), buildings (30), with nature being equally important: greenery (25) and trees (18). The compositional dominance of natural elements can also be seen,
- the variable (moving) elements were dominated by vehicles, not people, so the main users of the space were motorised,



Fig. 9. Relationships between codes of cultural meaning and architectural context (elaborated by M. Petelenz)

Il. 9. Relacje między kodami o charakterze znaczeń kulturowych oraz kontekstu architektonicznego (oprac. M. Petelenz)

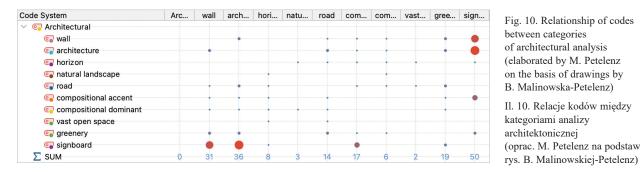


Fig. 10. Relationship of codes between categories of architectural analysis (elaborated by M. Petelenz on the basis of drawings by B. Malinowska-Petelenz)

II. 10. Relacje kodów między kategoriami analizy architektonicznej (oprac. M. Petelenz na podstawie

- the landscape is repeatedly characterised by open space and the visible horizon emphasises the infinity of perspective plans and the compositional horizontality of the vista,

- the main boundaries of the space (walls) are visible in the form of the architectural mass,

- both architecture and the natural landscape are characterised by horizontality (the vast majority of coded areas defined by lying rectangles). This composition is broken up by accents in the form of tall columns with signs or the American flag,
- compositional accents are often present in the space, landmarks are much less frequent - there is a lack of elements that bring structure to the spatial composition, while numerous details can be observed, which increase its fragmentation and a sense of chaos,
- roadside architecture is also characterised by a lack of a coherent, clear façade - obscured by signs and advertisements, the form and overall spatial composition is fragmented.

Conclusions

Our experience in the study of roadside architecture along Route 66 in the United States confirmed that a wellplanned and executed research procedure can lead to conclusions. Sometimes these conclusions were surprising to ourselves, such as the loss of prominence of the building's facade in favour of an advertisement obscuring it. The overlap of coding that reflected cultural and architectural contexts became an affirmation that travel in the United States is defined by an endless narrative of the road (Fig. 1). Outside of large cities or metropolises (e.g., Las Vegas), the land is mostly empty. Peter Zumthor, author of the groundbreaking book *Thinking architecture* (2010), noted that the difference between the landscape and the city is that the city both inspires and irritates, gives you wings or suffocates. The city can be a place for a sustainable and thriving community, but it can also make individual and social life unbearable. Landscape, in turn, is also about peace and freedom, as nature has a different sense of time. In the landscape, time is infinite, while in the city it can be as dense as space. It is this advantage: the all-encompassing landscape and the car required to experience it that has given rise to the frontier and highway architecture - depicted in novels and films.

The scattered development typical of Route 66 gives an impression of chaos and discontinuity, which is a distinctive feature of its roadside architecture. At the same time, and this is another surprising result of our research, despite the economic and cultural significance of this American "mother of all roads", nature plays an important role. One manifestation of this is the high saturation with the code tree, which appears almost as often as advertisement. And - significantly - it is thanks to the multi-stage research procedure that safeguards against an overly subjective reading of the visual material that it became possible to discern such an intense presence of nature along Route 66. This road is a very good example that architecture that coexists with the natural landscape does not in fact become an attempt at imitating it. Through roadside architecture, nature is reinterpreted and can be read as one of the possible interpretations of the role of the landscape by those who travel it (Stoppani 2019).

An analysis of roadside architecture in the context of US cultural heritage leads to the conclusion that scattered and impermanent development, often artificial-like and gaudy in character, together with the local terrain of the prairies and canyons, form a distinct and unique local outline of the American landscape - created by natural conditions and its roadside, episodic architecture. Its scattering and apparent instability, the desert highway, the road from one neon sign to another, build its genius loci. However, one of the most common features of all these areas seems to be the visual uniqueness created by scattered architectural structures easily noticed by the main viewer – the one who moves fast.

As authors who delved into Route 66 and its roadside architecture, we put ourselves in the role of attentive observers. Through rigorously defined stages of exploration, we were able to see just how deeply roadside architecture is rooted in nature, irrespectively of Route 66's technological advancement. The sustainable combination of culture (and technology and engineering) and nature proved to be the basis of liveable places, no matter how remote they were from their local metropolis. The research trip along Route 66 proved that protecting cultural heritage and showcasing natural beauty is by far the best way to ensure a sustainable future for the communities who live along the road. This is a lesson that other regions that represent a similar combination of cultural heritage and natural scenic beauty should take seriously so as to make this space more welcoming to residents and attractive to tourists.

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Streszczenie

Route 66. Badanie kontekstu kulturowego i architektonicznego

Route 66 – Droga Matka Ameryki – wciąż rezonuje w polskim postrzeganiu historii, kultury i architektury Stanów Zjednoczonych. Zespół badawczy zastosował innowacyjną metodę zorganizowaną jako kilkustopniowa jakościowa metoda badań wizualnych. W ramach zorganizowanego w 2018 r. wyjazdu studyjnego, którego celem było poznanie kulturowego znaczenia Route 66 z perspektywy architektury, przygotowano dokumentację fotograficzną oraz materiały rysunkowe in situ – posłużyły one następnie do dalszych badań. W końcowej fazie projektu zespół zastosował analizę wizualną, aby zrozumieć kulturowe znaczenie architektury przydrożnej wzdłuż Route 66. Wyniki badania odzwierciedlały polskie postrzeganie Route 66 i charakterystykę użytkownika. Wykazano, że genius loci wzdłuż Route 66 bazuje na rozdrobnionych strukturach architektonicznych, przypadkowości form i dominującym krajobrazie naturalnym.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, krajobraz, turystyka, znaczenie kulturowe, metoda badań wizualnych