



**Artur Zaguła\*, Miłosz Gortyński\*\***

## *Oskar Hansen's Open Form in the context of the Open Society concept by Karl Popper and the architectural realities in Poland before 1989*

### *Abstract*

In this article, the authors examine the relationship between Oskar Hansen's concept of Open Form and Karl Popper's idea of the Open Society. Their analysis and comparison aim not only to deepen the understanding of the development of modernist concepts in architecture and urbanism, but also to show that the theories emerging from different premises, assumptions and circumstances can be united by certain shared fundamental ideals and values. The hermeneutic and historical-interpretive methods allowed us to recognize material and social realities in the complex context of the post-World War II era. In addition, a case study of one of Oskar Hansen's completed housing developments allowed verification of the theoretical basis of Open Form with an attempt to materialize it. The analysis of both theoretical concepts made it possible to formulate the basic values linking them: individual freedom; countering authoritarianism; social participation; flexibility and adaptation; and rationalism. In conclusion, it was pointed out that both the Open Form and the Open Society are attempts to heal our common environment, as a vision grounded in a sincere and profound belief in humanity. This perspective is especially vital today, as we increasingly live in ideological bubbles and focus more on what divides us rather than on what unites us.

**Key words:** Open Form, modernist architecture, Open Society, continuous linear system

### *Introduction*

Oskar Hansen, an extraordinary Polish architect and architectural theorist, together with Karl Popper, a famous philosopher and political theorist, may at first sight seem to be figures from two different realms. They came from different cultural and ideological backgrounds, what is more, they were specialists in their own specific professional fields. However, both the concept of the Open Form by Oskar Hansen (1922–2005) and the idea of the Open Society by Karl Popper (1902–1994) combine some fundamental ideals and values. This connection is worth acknowledging, also because Hansen emphasizes that the foundation of architectural concepts is the idea itself<sup>1</sup> (Włodarczyk 2009,

21, 29). Previous researchers of Hansen's creativity used to link his concepts<sup>2</sup> with, for example, Sartre's existential Marxism (Ockman 2014, 33), and Hansen himself pointed out Erich Fromm as a source of inspiration<sup>3</sup> (Ockman 2014, 55–58; Hansen 2005, 9, 10, 11, 14, 60, 71).

The combination of the idea of the Open Form and the Open Society has been noticed as a potential possibility

*of art teaches that conscious architects implemented philosophical programs with their designs. [...] To sum up, in our team the most important person was not the one who drew the project, but the one who brought the idea to the table during the conversation* (Włodarczyk 2009, 148). Hansen clearly indicates that his architectural practice was unconditionally related to theoretical reflection.

<sup>2</sup> Hansen himself has always and repeatedly emphasized that the concept of the Open Form was his own idea and was not inspired by earlier theories. He confirms this in an interview with Włodarczyk: *Wojciech Włodarczyk: Almost everyone talked about Open Form in the 1950s, even if it wasn't called that: Olle Baertling, Umberto Eco, Yona Friedman, Espace Group... Oskar Hansen: I must confess that I simply didn't know about all this. I thought this was my discovery* (Włodarczyk 2009, 142).

<sup>3</sup> In the book *Zobaczyć świat* [Seeing the World] prepared by Hansen, the name of Erich Fromm appears several times, and in the author's essay a longer fragment of *To Have or Be* by the same author is quoted.

\* ORCID: 0000-0002-5617-9041. Institute of Architecture and Town Planning, Lodz University of Technology, Poland, e-mail: artur.zaguła@p.lodz.pl

\*\* ORCID: 0000-0002-5719-880X. Doctoral Candidate at Lodz University of Technology, Poland.

<sup>1</sup> In a conversation with Wojciech Włodarczyk, the following sentences are uttered: *There is no space without philosophy. [...] The history*

(Stanek, van den Heuvel 2014, 25), but so far it has not been seriously developed. Only Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen noted in her article, in the section titled “Open Form – Open Society?” as follows: *Hansen’s opposition between open and closed recalls Karl Popper’s notion of “open” versus “closed society” put forward in The Open Society and Its Enemies (1945), which contrasts humanism marked by freedom of thought and action with the lack thereof within abstract and depersonalized systems; the former called for human engagement rather than passive acceptance of the given situation (Pelkonen 2014, 145).*

Therefore, the analysis of the relationship between the Open Form and the Open Society and the conclusions drawn from it can enrich our understanding of both architecture and social theories. Especially since residential architecture, which was mainly practiced by Hansen, is by its very nature a social activity and at the same time entangled in politics. Both the historical and interpretive method will be helpful in this regard, as it allows for the recognition of material and social reality in a complex context. Especially since, as Karl Popper wrote: *To sum up, there can be no history of “the past as it actually did happen”; there can only be historical interpretations, and none of them final; and every generation has a right to frame its own. But not only has it a right to frame its own interpretations, it also has a kind of obligation to do so; for there is indeed a pressing need to be answered (Popper 1966, vol. 2, 268).* While this inherently subjective nature of historical interpretation must be constrained through data triangulation, it also allows for a broader perspective on the subject of research. For similar reasons, Gadamer’s hermeneutic method will be useful, understood as a theory of interpretation of works of culture and art (Zwoliński 2005, 253; Gadamer 1993). Finally, we will use a case study, the analysis of which will provide the data needed to verify the hypotheses.

### **Open Form and Open Society**

First of all, it should be noted that Oskar Hansen most likely did not know Karl Popper’s theory when he created his own theory. Popper’s work was not translated into Polish or published until 1987. The first Polish edition appeared in the so-called second circulation and the official edition comes only from 1993. Therefore, when asked whether Hansen’s intention in implementing the Open Form in the modernist architecture of Poland were to lead the local population towards an Open Society as envisioned by Popper – democratic, pluralistic, decentralized, free from the desire for historical justification and capable of controlling its own political forces without bloodshed (Popper 1993, 292, 293) – the answer should be negative. Hansen could not have known the English version of Popper’s text because he did not speak that language. This was one of the many reasons why he did not remain in London (Włodarczyk 2009, 43; Ockman 2014, 41), despite being an important member of Team 10. It seems, therefore, that the similarity between the Open Form and the Open Society in Polish architecture was an accidental, ironic brotherhood of thought between two men with opposing but interdependent views. It was also a convergence of views of the European intellectual elites of the time, as Hansen

himself recalled in relation to his speech at the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne) congress in Otterlo in 1959: *Of course, there was a certain atmosphere, it had to exist, because an artist does not grow out of stone, but out of mood (Włodarczyk 2009, 30).*

Being aware of the circumstances outlined above, let us attempt to identify the fundamental ideas and values underlying both attitudes:

1. Individual freedom to make decisions within society.

Both Popper and Hansen pay particular attention to this aspect of both social and material reality – built space. An Open Society is one in which everyone has the right to make their own decisions and the opportunity to improve their situation, for example, through social advancement, both horizontally and vertically (Baranowski 2009, 72). Popper clearly emphasizes the contrast with a “closed society”, in which the community is treated as a single body with one collective will that directs the actions of all its members, depriving them of individual freedom. Hansen, in his founding text entitled *Forma Otwarta* [Open Form], writes: *Does “TO BE OR NOT TO BE” depend on “Hamlet” today? We are afraid of decisions made for us. We don’t trust each other. Closed form – the decision is made for me – I am standing next to the action. It is impossible to find yourself here – your SELF. All these are someone’s souvenirs, someone’s emotions, someone’s estates and houses (Hansen 1959, 5).* Therefore, he shares the way of thinking contained in Popper’s concept. However, this does not mean that the political views of both protagonists are identical. Hansen, a liberal Marxist and supporter of a socialist society, agrees with Popper, an anti-fascist and anti-communist, supporter of liberal democracy.

2. Counteracting authoritarianism in society and architecture.

In fact, Popper’s entire book *The Open Society and Its Enemies* is directed against authoritarianism. He believed that the main cause of most forms of authoritarianism and totalitarianism was a theory he called historicism. He argued that it was based on erroneous assumptions about the nature of scientific law and prediction. He considered Plato’s theory to be the foundation of this type of views, and Georg Hegel and Karl Marx to be the foundations of modern historicism based on Plato. The analyzes of their views in subsequent volumes of the book were intended by Popper to serve as arguments to oppose the authoritarian tendencies of the “closed society”. Hansen – although he believed in the ideas of socialism – opposed authoritarian tendencies both in social matters and as an architect. His opposition to socialist realism had a dual character, both political and aesthetic. On the one hand, he did not agree with the bureaucratic and corrupting nature of the authoritarian power of the communists, as well as with the “closed forms” of buildings constructed during this period. His attitude towards modernism in architecture and urban planning was similarly unorthodox. The theory of Open Form focuses architecture on the user and departs from the orthodoxy of the modern movement proposed by Le Corbusier. Open Form can be described as an art form defined by the user, not the creator (Springer 2022). The role of the architect should, according to Hansen,



Fig. 1. Przyczółek Grochowski Housing Estate in Warsaw, 1970s. The trade pavilion – note the free interpenetration of spaces and partial, characterized by artistic values, roofing providing shelter from the sun and rain exposure (photos by A. Zaguła)

Il. 1. Osiedle Przyczółek Grochowski w Warszawie, lata 70. XX w. Pawilon handlowy – zwraca uwagę swobodne przenikanie się przestrzeni oraz częściowe, charakteryzujące się walorami artystycznymi, zadaszenie zapewniające schronienie przed działaniem słońca i deszczu (fot. A. Zaguła)

be limited to creating a “perceptual background”, so that architecture becomes a tool that can be managed and adapted to the needs of users. His participation in the work of Team 10 and his symptomatic presence in 1959 in Otterlo, when CIAM was closed down, demonstrate the revisionist and anti-authoritarian nature of his activities as an architect.

Taken together, both concepts can be seen as striving to create a space – physical and social – in which individuals have greater freedom and opportunity to express themselves (Fig. 1).

3. Participation as an element of the social and creative process.

This idea results directly from the values shared by Popper and Hansen analyzed above. Popper emphasized the role of citizens in shaping politics and society through active participation and criticism. The Open Society by its nature assumes the participation and cooperation of free citizens. This is possible thanks to the existence of a space of tolerance, freedom and responsibility. Only in such conditions can there be a variety of forms of cooperation between citizens and the implementation of various, often fundamentally different concepts and lifestyles. The Open Society assumes citizens' capacity for self-organization and, at the same time, their responsibility for what happens in the public space. This requires the presence of civic organizations that either cooperate with public authorities or operate independently. This is the essence of liberal democracy, which Popper strongly advocated.

In his concept, Hansen emphasized the importance of user participation in the process of creating and modifying space. Referring to art in his programmatic text, he wrote: *It will create a sense of need for each of us, help us define and find ourselves in the space and time in which we live. It will be a space consistent with our complicated and yet unknown psyche. This will happen because we will exist as organic elements of art. We will walk in it, not celebrate*

*it. Its diverse individuality, along with its randomness and activity, will become the wealth of this space – its co-participant* (Hansen 1959, 5). As we know today, these were the utopian dreams of the creators of the late avant-garde; the audience never truly engaged in such activities to the extent that was envisioned. However, at the theoretical level, Hansen is clearly a supporter of including architecture users (Hansen 1959, 5) or art recipients in creative activities.

As we can see, both authors believed in the decentralization of power and the importance of active participation of individuals. Citizens' involvement in shaping society and, within it, co-creating art and architecture was a key element of both the Open Society and the Open Form.

4. Flexibility and adaptation.

Popper believed that society should be open to change and criticism, which allows for continuous evolution and improvement of social institutions. Since no one holds a monopoly on the truth, citizens should develop critical thinking to engage meaningfully in discussions, especially public ones, about laws, acts and decisions made. This fosters a flexible and adaptive framework for the development of the Open Society.

The Open Form theory advocates the concept of art as a process in which flexibility and variability in works are encouraged (Fig. 2). Hansen wrote about it: *Being a composition of spatial subtext – it will become a multi-layered, constantly living phenomenon. In relation to the convention of a closed composition, which relies mainly on the craftsmanship of the crafted object, the convention of an open composition will consist in action characterized by a “passepartout” of changes taking place in space. It will be the art of events. Time works more strongly than it did so that we can continue to trust only the unchanging, once established relationship of elements* (Hansen 1959, 5). Hansen's theory had a significant impact on Polish concepts of environment, happening and performance in the 1960s.





Fig. 2. Przyczółek Grochowski Housing Estate in Warsaw, 1970s. The gallery building manifesting the Open Form. Its author, Oskar Hansen, designed the structure to allow its inhabitants to move freely through the block, choosing any staircase according to their preference (photos by A. Zaguła)

- II. 2. Osiedle Przyczółek Grochowski w Warszawie, lata 70. XX w. Budynek galerii ucieleśnienia Otwartą Formę. Jego autor, Oskar Hansen, zaprojektował konstrukcję tak, aby umożliwić mieszkańcom swobodne poruszanie się po bloku, wybierając dowolne schody według własnych preferencji (fot. A. Zaguła)

It was fully expressed in his competition entry for the international monument to the victims of fascism in Auschwitz-Birkenau (together with Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz and Julian Pałka, in 1957).

5. Rationalism as the main value in society and architecture.

For Popper, critical rationalism is the basis and most important feature of the Open Society as opposed to the irrationality of the Closed Society. In his book, Popper defines rationalism as [...] *readiness to listen to critical arguments and to learn from experience. It is fundamentally an attitude of admitting that "I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort, we may get nearer to the truth."* It is an attitude which does not lightly give up hope that by such means as argument and careful observation, people may reach some kind of agreement on many problems of importance [...] (Popper 1966, vol. 1, 225). This does not mean, however, that Popper supports every type of rationalism. He distinguishes two types of it – “critical rationalism” and “non-critical rationalism” or “consistent”. The former is an advantage of the citizens of the Open Society, the latter is its radical form, which Popper defines as irrational faith in reason (Popper 1993, 243). The former is intersubjective in nature, the latter is largely doctrinaire and is often the basis for creating utopian visions of an “earthly paradise”. This is what prompts Popper to criticize him, because he believes that the basis of rationalist politics is the belief that it is impossible to create heaven on earth (Popper 1993, 271).

It seems that a rationalist approach also characterizes Hansen’s beliefs. The last sentences of his programmatic text read as follows: *Open form is not just a speculative invention of our times. It is primarily a post-observation conclusion of existing systems* (Hansen 1959, 5). This may be due to the fact that he shares the view that the basis of rational reasoning is based on arguments and observations. However, according to Popper’s classification, it is closer to “non-critical rationalism”. All his energy was directed towards the future, towards building a new, egalitarian, ideal society. Behind this was a utopian belief in human possibilities of creating “paradise on earth”, but also in the new system of socialism. It was supposed to enable the implementation of the Linear Continuous System (LSC), a new settlement system created by Hansen. In a 1968 discussion, Hansen stated: *It seems to me that the LSC is very realistic and I believe that it will be implemented. First of all, because it corresponds to the common interests of society and the government. On the one hand, the LSC, having a huge margin of flexibility, is based on the irrational features of life, on the other hand, it allows you to shape matter much more rationally than in traditional structures of human habitats* (Szczerski 2009, 80). However, for many different reasons, this utopian vision had no chance of being realized in the Polish People’s Republic. Another argument that Hansen’s rationalism is “non-critical” is the language he uses both as a writer and a speaker. It is an extremely persuasive language, as Jacek Friedrich writes: *However, Oskar Hansen’s*



statements are particularly worth considering due to at least three features: firstly, Hansen manifests in them, to a greater extent than most of his writing colleagues, the desire to create holistic approaches, methodical, systemic; secondly – his publications are of an extremely persuasive nature, you can read in them a kind of sense of mission, which, of course, characterizes the modern movement in general, but in Hansen's works it reaches a particularly high level; thirdly, and finally – Hansen, like few others, tries to impose his own terms of discourse on the recipient in his statements: hence the strong appearance of rationality, objectivity, and science accompanying statements that are otherwise very subjective and arbitrary (Friedrich 2009, 47, 48).

As we can see, although both of them referred to a rationalist view of the world, there are clear differences in its interpretation. While Popper represents what he calls “critical rationalism”, Hansen is a representative of a “non-critical rationalist”.

To sum up, it should be said that despite clear differences in worldview, there are many ideas and values that are shared by both theorists. It is worth noting that both in Popper's Open Society and Hansen's Open Form, what matters most is the human being as an individual who needs a piece of common space in society. Although Open Form was an ideal used in art and design in the post-war period, its main goal was not necessarily social progress, but rather the development of a decentralized type of democracy implemented by each person using each public space.

### *Juliusz Słowacki Housing Estate in Lublin as an example of the implementation of the Open Form*

The housing estate designed and built by Zofia Garlińska-Hansen (1924–2013) and Oskar Hansen in the years 1964–1970 is a material example of the implementation of the Open Form in architecture described above (Fig. 3). Therefore, this architectural implementation is a case study that allowed us to verify the credibility of the ideas described above. The estate was intended to reconcile a sense of individuality and belonging to a community.

The ideal of democratization of living space and individualistic approach was realized by surveying future users (Filas 2009, 103, 107, 108), who could express their own opinions, needs and proposals. This gave the designers the opportunity to plan the apartments to meet their desires and expectations. Zofia and Oskar Hansen embodied the principles of Open Form in architecture, enabling the adaptation of living spaces to various family models, needs and preferences. As a result, a characteristic feature of the designed buildings emerged, i.e., the asymmetrical location of balconies, which reflected the personalization of interior spaces. The principles of Open Form were usually implemented by Hansen within the detailing of the buildings. There were variations in the size and location of balconies, entrances and passageways, for example, in the “Wężowce” [“Serpents”] as well as staircases (Fig. 4). In the Słowacki Housing Estate, such details included also loggias on the south side, which residents could paint in any color they wished, or pantries protruding from the north side, projecting beyond the wall line, both enlarging the space of



Fig. 3. Plan of the Juliusz Słowacki Housing Estate in Lublin, 1964–1970.

1 – Co-operative headquarters, 2 – nursery, 3 – square with church (year of construction 1998), 4 – open Form Theatre, 5 – retail pavilions, 6 – primary school, 7 – kindergarten, P – car park (drawing by M. Gortyński)

Il. 3. Plan osiedla im. Juliusza Słowackiego w Lublinie, 1964–1970.

1 – siedziba spółdzielni, 2 – żłobek, 3 – plac z kościołem (rok budowy 1998), 4 – Teatr Formy Otwartej, 5 – pawilony handlowe, 6 – szkoła podstawowa, 7 – przedszkole, P – parking (rys. M. Gortyński)

small kitchens and creating a spatial, rhythmic, artistic accent in the façade of the blocks (Szczerski 2009, 86, 89).

Oskar Hansen's ideal of free transformation of space and forms, thanks to which citizens could enjoy the opportunity to jointly shape their places from the bottom up, responding to the needs of society, was also embodied in the LSM Housing Estate (Fig. 5). Hansen incorporated a space called the “amphitheater” or Theater of Open Form, which was an artificial mound filled with platforms, benches and tables. In the Hansens' opinion, the function of this space was to foster interpersonal relationships (individual in community), without suggesting a spatial dominant, so that everyone would sit and look in their preferred direction. This proves the Hansen's ideological hostility towards the traditional hierarchy, including those embedded in architectural design.

The Linear Continuous System, which was the urban planning proposal of Hansen, was materialized in the design of the Juliusz Słowacki estate, composed as longitudinal, ribbon-shaped blocks called “Wężowce” [“Serpents”] and point blocks called “Betki”. According to the design, the “Wężowce” were to surround the estate from the northern side, separating it from the outer parts of the city, emphasizing the autonomy and isolation of the space. The slalom shape of the residential block was an Open Form experiment, the aim of which was to search for architectural solutions that would decentralize and democratize, while also providing asylum to the residents. “Wężowce” marked a trail among bushes and trees as well as mounds of earth coming directly from the pits dug for the construction of the foundations of the estate (Fig. 6). Despite his atheistic beliefs, Hansen was convinced of the need to preserve this land as a substance spiritually coherent with the place where the architecture was conceived.

It should be noted that Hansen was a specialist in the field of sculptural form and it was on this foundation that





Fig. 4. Juliusz Słowacki Housing Estate in Lublin, 1964–1970. The façade of the blockhouse. Note the asymmetrical arrangement of balconies (photos by A. Zaguła)

Il. 4. Osiedle im. Juliusza Słowackiego w Lublinie, 1964–1970. Fasada bloku. Zwraca uwagę asymetryczny układ balkonów (fot. A. Zaguła)



Fig. 5. Juliusz Słowacki Housing Estate in Lublin, 1964–1970. Block located nearby T. Zana Street. One can grasp an attempt to adapt and individualize the space according to its inhabitants' needs (photos by A. Zaguła)

Il. 5. Osiedle im. Juliusza Słowackiego w Lublinie, 1964–1970. Blok położony w pobliżu ul. T. Zana. Widać tu próbę adaptacji i indywidualizacji przestrzeni zgodnie z potrzebami mieszkańców (fot. A. Zaguła)

he developed his concept of Open Form. He regarded architecture as a tool for encoding Open Form into the mass consciousness of the society of which he was a part. It is significant that playgrounds, designed as an integral part of the Słowacki Estate, represent a style that allows potential

users to define, interpret and use the space freely. These are not conventional playgrounds; rather, they are functional sculptures with no predetermined purpose. According to Hansen, their role was to encourage children to invent their own games, using simple, primitive objects (Fig. 7).





Fig. 6. Juliusz Słowacki Housing Estate in Lublin, 1964–1970. The “wężowiec” block enveloping the north side of the Słowacki Estate. The building appears to be a continuous architectural body, formed in harmony with the natural contours of its surroundings (photos by A. Zaguła)

Il. 6. Osiedle im. Juliusza Słowackiego w Lublinie, 1964–1970. Bryła „wężowca” otaczająca północną stronę osiedla. Budynek sprawia wrażenie ciągłej bryły architektonicznej, ukształtowanej w harmonii z naturalnymi konturami otoczenia (fot. A. Zaguła)



Fig. 7. Juliusz Słowacki Housing Estate in Lublin, 1964–1970. One of many playgrounds built according to Oskar Hansen's design, manifesting the principles of Open Form (photos by A. Zaguła)

Il. 7. Osiedle im. Juliusza Słowackiego w Lublinie, 1964–1970. Jeden z wielu placów zabaw zrealizowanych według projektu Oskara Hansena, ucieleśniających zasady Formy Otwartej (fot. A. Zaguła)

The analysis of the Juliusz Słowacki Housing Estate in Lublin clearly reveals an attempt to implement the principles of Open Form. All of the aforementioned ideas – individual freedom; counteracting authoritarianism; participation; flexibility and adaptation; rationalism – underpinned this project. Unfortunately, these positive intentions often ended in failure, whether due to the utopian thinking on the part of the designers, economic and executive reasons, or,

finally, the communist government, which had the power to thoroughly change or even completely undermine the most well-intentioned premises. The appearance of the estate reveals the shortcomings of the architects' design. For instance, the residents received balconies without any protection against weather conditions, which is why many of them added self-constructed, makeshift covers and shelters. Moreover, the apartments designed on the basis of surveys



ultimately ended up in the hands of entirely different occupants, which was a consequence of socialist social policies implemented within the context of an extremely inefficient centrally planned economy.

### Discussion

The bitter truth behind the idea of Open Form is that it can only serve its true purpose if the people who use the space created on its principles share its ideas. This only happens in a society created in Hansen's imagination and not in reality. The examples of the Open Space in places such as Juliusz Słowacki Housing Estate in Lublin were used in unfortunate ways, which were not predicted by their designers. The decentralized amphitheatre was quickly adopted by local people to become the improvised space to smoke and drink. The playgrounds for children were full of concrete structures, which posed a risk of falls and injuries during play. Even the flats in the Juliusz Słowacki Housing Estate in Lublin, which were personally designed for specific families, after architects interviewed them about their needs and preferences, were ultimately occupied by completely different people.

According to the authors' belief, the idea of the Open Society presents progress as the natural destiny of every

society. Zofia and Oskar Hansen certainly dreamed of creating a humanistic, progressive society in post-war Poland through architectural design. Unfortunately, the revolutionary nature of the political system they lived under, affected the way they were thinking about the citizens and their place in the state. The linear system was a materialization of an openly authoritarian way of thinking about the surrounding world. Popper held humanistic views, however, they were based on a traditional set of principles derived from Christianity. Therefore, his view of progress, or to be precise evolution, was quite different. It actually exists, as it exists in the aging Hansen's architecture today.

It is interesting that the architecture and urban planning proposed by Hansen, retained their decentralized character up until the political transformation in Poland in 1989. This was not because of the societal freedom or subjectivity, but rather due to the authoritarian tendencies of the authorities, who refused to permit the construction of the church that the community had demanded. Today, in the central part of the Juliusz Słowacki Housing estate, a new church, representing a traditional theocratic hierarchy, rises above the linear buildings and trees. This situation demonstrates the paradox of Hansen's theory. The authors of the article *Forma Otwarta jako passe-partout patriarchy*? [Open Form as a passe-partout of patriarchy] wrote: "As is well known,



Fig. 8. Juliusz Słowacki Housing Estate in Lublin, 1964–1970. Other examples of the playgrounds manifesting the Open Form ideals central to their designer's concept (photo by A. Zaguła)

Il. 8. Osiedle im. Juliusza Słowackiego w Lublinie, 1964–1970. Inne przykłady placów zabaw ucieleśniających ideały Formy Otwartej, kluczowe dla koncepcji ich projektanta (fot. A. Zaguła)



the theory of Open Form postulates, among other things, democracy, egalitarianism, "hierarchylessness", non-dogmatic, decentralization and asymmetry." The problem, however, is that the structure of this theory is antinomic to these postulates [...]. For, in our opinion, the structure of this theory is by no means "decentralized." On the contrary – it is precisely centralized (albeit unconsciously) along the axis of symmetry creating schematic, "black and white" divisions and "totalizing" simplifications. At the center of this structure stands a "cathedral" from which the theorist delivers arbitrary sermons sealed with dogmatic exclamations (Klimaszewski, Kozak, and Malec 2009, 133, 134). The problem is also that the radical and unrealistic, but still interesting and valuable ideas of Zofia and Oskar Hansen were inadequate in relation to a society that went through chaos and uncertainty in the cruelest and most devastating conflict in history.

Today, people who at least once in their lifetime had a chance to live in spaces designed by Zofia and Oskar Hansen generally do not express overly enthusiastic appreciation for them. Instead, they talk harshly about the narrowness, darkness, rough surfaces and little to no thermal insulation. Flats become dangerously warm in summer and unbearably cold in winter due to the shape and size of windows, thickness of the walls and lack of thermal modernization, postponed for decades. Entire generations have been raised on the unsafe concrete playgrounds (Fig. 8). One could probably argue that the very people in Poland for whom Zofia and Oskar Hansen dedicated their architectural and artistic legacy were not ready – or perhaps not yet mature enough – to fully embrace or understand it.

## Conclusion

The question is: what common value connects ideals such as Karl Popper's Open Society and Oskar Hansen's Open Form? It is important to note that what matters most in both of these concepts is the human being as an individual requiring a share of common space within society. Even though Open Form was an ideal primarily applied to arts and design in the post-war era, its main goal was not necessarily social progress in the traditional sense, but rather the advancement of a decentralized type of democracy, one exercised by each human being using a public space. Open Form could be also understood in a more personal or private context, as demonstrated by Zofia and Oskar Hansen in their wooden house in Szumin. Although the living space was not particularly large, it was designed to allow for flexible re-organization, in response to changing life situations.

In the end, we cannot help but recognise that both Open Form and the Open Society, as ideals, respond to what everyday life truly demands: a vision for healing our shared environment, grounded in a deep and sincere belief in humanity. Today, we are in a position to evaluate whether the Modernist, democratic and decentralized vision created by architects in the 1960s served its purpose and to what extent. And this history brings an important context to architecture as a cultural phenomenon, the Open Society as a philosophical current and Open Form as a design ideal, all interconnected. This reflection is especially important now, as we increasingly live in ideological bubbles, paying less and less attention to what unites us than to what divides us.

## References

- Baranowski, Mariusz. "Społeczeństwo otwarte" jako konsekwencja stanowiska krytycznego racjonalizmu." *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 53, no. 1 (2009): 69–82. <https://doi.org/10.35757/KiS.2009.53.1.4>.
- Filas, Paulina. "Lubelskie osiedle im. Juliusza Słowackiego – między wizją a realizacją." In *Wobec Formy Otwartej Oskara Hansena. Idea – utopia – reinterpretacja*, edited by Marcin Lachowski, Magdalena Linkowska, Zbigniew Sobczuk. Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2009.
- Friedrich, Jacek. "Kilka uwag o języku i retoryce Oskara Hansena na marginesie jego wypowiedzi omawiających Linearny System Ciągły." In *Wobec Formy Otwartej Oskara Hansena. Idea – utopia – reinterpretacja*, edited by Marcin Lachowski, Magdalena Linkowska, Zbigniew Sobczuk. Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2009.
- Gadamer, Hans Georg. *Prawda i metoda*. Translated by Bogdan Baran. Inter Esse, 1993.
- Hansen, Oskar. "Forma Otwarta." *Przegląd Kulturalny* no. 5 (1959): 5.
- Hansen, Oskar. *Zobaczyć świat*. Edited by Jola Gola. Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, 2005.
- Klimaszewski, Cezary, Tomasz Kozak, and Tomasz Malec. "Forma Otwarta jako passe-partout patriarchy?" In *Wobec Formy Otwartej Oskara Hansena. Idea – utopia – reinterpretacja*, edited by Marcin Lachowski, Magdalena Linkowska, Zbigniew Sobczuk. Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2009.
- Ockman, Joan. "Oskar Hansen's Radical Humanism: Open Form Against a Cold War Background." In *Oskar Hansen: Opening Modernism. On Open Form Architecture, Art and Didactics*, edited by Aleksandra Kędziorek, Łukasz Ronduda. Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2014.
- Pelkonen, Eeva-Liisa. "Helsinki-Warsaw, c. 1960." In *Team 10 East: Revisionist Architecture in Real Existing Modernism*, edited by Łukasz Stanek. Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2014.
- Popper, Karl P. *Społeczeństwo otwarte i jego wrogowie*. Translated by Halina Krahelska. PWN, 1993.
- Popper, Karl P. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. 1: *The Spell of Plato*, Routledge, 1966.
- Popper, Karl P. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. 2: *Hegel and Marx*. Routledge, 1966.
- Springer, Filip. *Zaczyn: o Zofii i Oskarze Hansenach*. Karakter, 2022.
- Stanek, Łukasz, and Dirk van den Heuvel. "Introduction: Team 10 East and Several Other Useful Fictions." In *Team 10 East: Revisionist Architecture in Real Existing Modernism*, edited by Łukasz Stanek. Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2014.
- Szczerski, Andrzej. "Linearny System Ciągły i awangardowa utopia." In *Wobec Formy Otwartej Oskara Hansena. Idea – utopia – reinterpretacja*, edited by Marcin Lachowski, Magdalena Linkowska, Zbigniew Sobczuk. Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2009.
- Włodarczyk, Wojciech. "Rozmowa z Oskarem Hansenem." In *Wobec Formy Otwartej Oskara Hansena. Idea – utopia – reinterpretacja*, edited by Marcin Lachowski, Magdalena Linkowska, Zbigniew Sobczuk. Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2009.
- Zwoliński, Zbigniew. "Tezy hermeneutyki Gadamera." *Przegląd Filozoficzny* 14, no. 2 (2005): 253–62.

### ***Streszczenie***

#### ***Forma Otwarta Oskara Hansena w kontekście koncepcji społeczeństwa otwartego według Karla Poppera i realia architektoniczne w Polsce przed rokiem 1989***

W artykule przedstawiono wzajemne relacje między koncepcjami teoretycznymi Formy Otwartej Oskara Hansena i społeczeństwa otwartego Karla Poppera. Ich analiza i porównanie mają zarówno służyć poszerzeniu wiedzy na temat rozwoju modernistycznych koncepcji w architekturze i urbanistyce, jak i pokazać, iż wychodzące z różnych przesłanek, założeń i okoliczności teorie łączą pewne fundamentalne ideały i wartości. Metody: hermeneutyczna i historyczno-interpretacyjna pozwoliły na rozpoznanie rzeczywistości materialnej i społecznej w złożonym kontekście czasów po II wojnie światowej. Dodatkowo studium przypadku jednego ze zrealizowanych osiedli mieszkaniowych Oskara Hansena pozwoliło na weryfikację teoretycznych podstaw Formy Otwartej z próbą jej materializacji. Analiza obydwu teoretycznych konceptów pozwoliła na sformułowanie podstawowych wartości je łączących: indywidualnej wolności; przeciwdziałania autorytaryzmowi; partycypacji społecznej; elastyczności i adaptacji; racjonalizmu. W konkluzji wskazano, że zarówno Forma Otwarta, jak i społeczeństwo otwarte to próby uzdrowienia naszego wspólnego otoczenia, jako wizja oparta na prawdziwej i głębokiej wierze w ludzkość. Jest to tym ważniejsze, że żyjąc obecnie w ideologicznych bańkach, mniej uwagi poświęcamy temu, co nas łączy, niż temu, co nas dzieli.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Forma Otwarta, architektura modernistyczna, społeczeństwo otwarte, linearny system ciągły