

Three colour design proposals for the Market Square in Warsaw

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ABSTRACT

Research on the history and theory of colour planning in the built environment has been undertaken as the need to regulate colour and has become crucial as the proliferation of unlimited hues of artificial paints that, when applied without guidelines, may easily lead to visual chaos in the built environment. This particular study concentrates on colour planning for the Market Square in Warsaw. The methodology employed included archival research and field studies. As a result, two colour design proposals from 1928 and 1951–53 were discovered, analysed and compared with the recently applied colour scheme supervised by the Monument Conservation Board. This paper investigates how the colour design proposals were developed and applied, and finally, what atmosphere a coherent colour design proposal creates in a historic representative square. The results achieved also indicate that the analysed colour schemes provided a warm and welcoming atmosphere that was balanced with features of elegance and ceremony. Additionally, the designs deepen the theoretical knowledge on colour planning and may help to establish guidelines on colour.

KEYWORDS Colour, Colour Planning, Architecture, Urban Design, Warsaw

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1. Introduction

A market square, usually a rectangular square surrounded by dwellings that house workshops on the ground floor with flats above, is a very characteristic feature of a Central European city or town. Rooted in the Middle Ages, a market square has been the centre of an average Polish town for many centuries, and up to now, most of the market squares in Poland kept their original, historical urban shape. Over the centuries, however, façades have often been rebuilt in different architectural styles and colours have been adjusted to the new circumstances, accidentally or planned.

In recent years, many attempts have been undertaken to refurbish Polish market squares and research on colour planning for market squares has been conducted in search for how colour was treated and applied in those refurbishments. The colour design proposals discussed in this paper were examined in order to establish the ways colour has been organized in terms of composition within such an important urban area. In essence, this paper enquires into what role colour plays, what image colour helps to create, and finally, how colour contributes to physical ease and well-being of both inhabitants and visitors.

So far, a few examples of colour planning for Polish market squares have been presented in the literature. An attempt to coordinate colour in Wrocław was discussed in earlier studies (Białobłocka 2017, Białobłocka and Urland 2019). The main ideas of a colour design proposal for Płock were briefly analysed by Romuald Koziół (1964). Colour and historical preservation of cultural heritage was the subject of the conference 'Polychromies and sgraffito on the façades of Old Town centres rebuilt after 1945' that took place in Warsaw in 2015. In the conference proceedings, apart from discussing conservation issues, a few examples of colour planning were described such as selected issues related to colour design proposals for Gdansk's Old Town (Kriegseisen 2015, Kołodziej and Brzuskiwicz 2015), Warsaw's Old Town (Kania 2015), and Lublin's Old Town (Żywiecki 2015).

In this paper, the case study of Warsaw is discussed (Białobłocka 2019). Two different colour design proposals for the Market Square are analysed from the point of view of the colour composition and further compared with the newly restored situation.

2. Methodology

The methods employed included archival research, interviews with people responsible for colour protection in Warsaw, and field studies. Archival materials included

architectural designs and written sources such as comments in the press and building regulations. Private communications with public officials took place in September 2010 and archival research and fieldwork were conducted in summer 2017.

Regarding archival materials, research was carried out in August 2017 in the following archives and museums in Warsaw: Archiwum Akt Dawnych, Archiwum Akt Nowych, and in the Archiv of the Muzeum Warszawy. Archival material including designs from 1928 and 1951 were discovered in the Museum of Warsaw. Furthermore, nine protocols on the polychrome restoration of 1953 were found in the archive Archiwum Akt Dawnych.

In regard to potential comments in the press, the main professional magazine on architecture of that period *Architektura* did not include articles on colour design proposals for Warsaw. General comments on the reconstruction of the Old Town after World War II were published in daily local newspapers, e.g., *Trybuna Ludu* and *Stolica* [7] (Huml 1978). The examined building regulations did not include regulations on colour.

The current colour scheme was discussed with the public officials from the Warsaw Monument Conservation Board in 2010. Fieldwork that analysed recently applied colours was conducted in August 2017 under different daylight conditions, in the morning, midday and evening.

The most important findings up to the present day include the discovery of two different colour schemes for Warsaw's Market Square. The initial idea was to gather together the data according to a questionnaire established for a research project in the attempt to analyse colour in the built environment. The questions on the form covered the sources of inspiration, the design methods, and the implementation of the colour plan. The findings, however, were limited; they provided data on the design principles but little information on the initiation and implementation of the colour design proposals. Further examination of scattered sources is required to deepen the understanding of what inspired the colour concepts and how the colour plans were implemented.

3. Colour planning for Warsaw's Market Square

3.1. The 1928 colour planning

Successful attempts to coordinate colour within the Old Town of Warsaw (Stare Miasto) were made in 1928. Initiated by the Society for the Preservation of Historical Monuments, a commission responsible for the polychromy scheme was appointed in 1928.

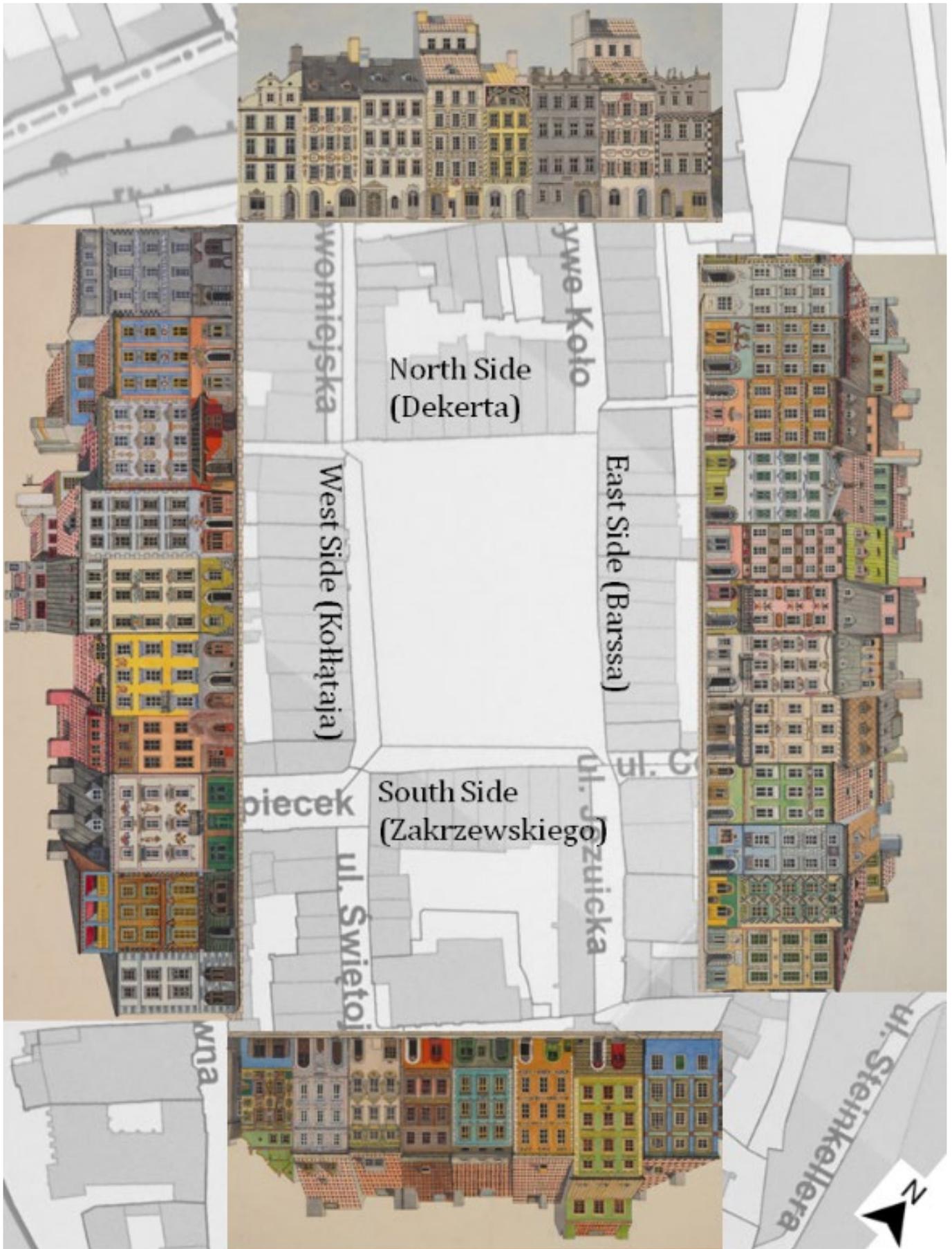


Fig. 1. The 1928 colour design proposal for all four sides of the Market Square, Warsaw. Source: Muzeum Warszawy, call number: MHW 15965-68. Author unknown. Photo: Rafał Chmielewski.

Bohdan Urbanowicz (1911–1994), who was a painter, architect and professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, pinpointed an increasing degradation of the historic Old Town in the 1920s. The reasons he identified for the initiative of repainting the buildings surrounding the square on all four sides were the poor results of illegal works carried out by the house owners (Urbanowicz 1953:143). At that time, in the 1920s, the properties were privately owned, yet, due to their historic value, the Market Square was listed in the building conservation inventory and, in fact, any work, including colour, had to be conducted in cooperation with the respective conservation units. The 1928 colour design proposal for the Market Square was honorarily created by a group of seventeen artists under the leadership of the well-known Art Deco painter Zofia Stryjeńska (1891–1976) (Kania 2015:9). The art historian, critic and professor Irena Huml (1928–2015) also indicates that the group of artists contributed greatly to the renovation of the Market Square's building façades as the artists not only conceived the colour design but also offered it to the City Council (Huml 1978:174). The commission accepted the design which was implemented in the same year (1928).

The base of the 1928 colour design proposal was a sketch by Zofia Stryjeńska that indicated what colours the façades had to be painted and the artists of her team designed the details (Kania 2015:11). Regarding the composition of the colours, each side of the square is treated differently (Fig. 1).

Named after Jan Dekert, the north side (Strona Dekerta), shows building façades painted alternately with two light colours, which are nuances of yellow and grey. Apart from grey, the following colours are applied on darker architectural details: black, blue, brown, green and red. As a rule, one colour is applied to the wall surfaces, whereas two or three different colours are used on the details. Ground floor levels are not differentiated from the upper levels. The chromatic lightness is a feature that differentiates this row of buildings from the other colourful rows [1].

Named after Hugo Kołłątaj, the west side (Strona Kołłątaja) is characterized by strongly contrasting light and dark colours. Unsaturated and highly saturated colours are applied in an irregular way. Three façades are monochromatic, painted either blue or bluish grey; four façades are enriched with wall paintings; and three façades are covered with strong, contrasting colours, i.e., brown-orange and blue, yellow and blue, and peachy and blue [2].

Named after Ignacy Zakrzewski, the south side (Strona Zakrzewskiego) is characterized by the use of various strong colours as each building is painted differently, either

with light or dark colours. Five façades are two-colour, two façades make the impression to be monochromatic, yet small surfaces are enriched with different colours, and one façade is covered with wall paintings [3].

Named after Franciszek Barss, the east side (Strona Barssa), shows similar colourfulness as a main feature. The thirteen façades are painted green, bluish grey, orange, pink and yellow with no obvious rhythm. The architectural details are painted either a neighbouring shade of the hue applied to the façade surface or a contrasting hue. [4].

In regard to the colours used on the walls, two groups of colours dominate in this colour design proposal: 'warm' saturated yellows, oranges and peachy pinks co-exist with 'cold' light greys, beige-greys and bluish greys. Greens are applied only on a few elevations (Fig. 2).

A characteristic feature of the 1928 design was its colourfulness, i.e., the use of vivid hues and contrasting colour compositions that was inspired by the Expressionist art movement and folk art (Kania 2015:9)

The colour design described above was implemented using Keim mineral colours and was officially presented to the nation on 11 November 1928, the 10th anniversary of the National Independence Day. In the press, the main complaint was the lack of colour harmony. A further criticism concerned the lack of reference to the original, historical colours. Yet a torrent of harsh criticism received a new colour design in post-war years under different political circumstances (Kania 2015:10, Urbanowicz 1953:146).



Fig. 2. Details of all the building façades above the ground floor level facing the Market Square from the 1928 colour design proposal.

3.2. The 1951–53 colour planning

New attempts to coordinate colours of the Market Square buildings took place 1951–53 in the post-war reconstruction of Warsaw's Old Town (Stare Miasto). Colour planning was part of a much bigger reconstruction project of the Polish capital that had been devastated in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. The historic city centre was rebuilt and the gradual reconstruction was presented yearly to the nation on the 22 July, the National Day of the Rebirth of Poland, which was introduced as a public holiday by the socialists in 1945 in replacement of the National Independence Day of 11 November.

As in 1928, after the war, the area of the Old Town was listed in the conservation inventory and for this reason the development plans had to be approved by the Monument Conservation Office. However, the ownership changed from private to public and due to the prevailing political system, all the designs had to be additionally approved by committees consisting of not only designers and public officials but also members of the Party.

In short, designs had to follow the rules of art recognized by the Party. Due to the official political doctrine, the Old Town was to be reconstructed as a residential area in an architectural style rooted in the Polish tradition and embellished with Social Realism decor. As the official doctrine valued only Gothic, Renaissance and Neo-Classical architecture, it is not surprising that the pre-war polychromy created by Art Deco and Modernist artists was not acceptable. In contrast to the 1928 proposal (perceived as not consistent, with too many bright colours with high saturation and underlining the independence of the artists), the new colour design was to be the result of a collective work: harmonious, with light colours and gilding sparkling in the sun. In the protocols, the term 'pastel' is often used to describe hues with high value and low saturation making feel the colours pale, soft and delicate. In accordance to the official political doctrine, the scheme aimed to create the atmosphere of a happy workers' housing estate (Zbiegieni 2015:49, Kania 2015:17).

The analysis of written sources does not provide information on the compulsory use of certain hues and shades. A uniform colour composition honouring historical colours was the aim, but it rather seems that the whole idea consisted of emphasising the success of socialist doctrine and had to differ from the previous colour design created under the capitalist system twenty-five years earlier. The final colour scheme, especially the range of hues applied and their degree of saturation was also a result of the limited availability of paints and their low quality.

One of the first designs was made by the Miastoprojekt Group who presented a uniform colour design proposal kept in grey shades with tints, whereas the design by the Wojciech Jastrzębski team was kept in light colours commonly used in the 19th century (Kania 2015:13–14, Urbanowicz 1953:149).

The 1951 design by PKZ, Pracownia Architektury, consists of fifteen drawings for the Old Town including the north side (Strona Dekerta) [5]. According to the drawing, the façades should be either two-colour (six façades) or three-colour (two façades). The walls were to be painted one single hue and the architectural details a different hue, such as in five cases, in which the selected hues are expressed in terms of opposite sensations, i.e. a warm hue on the walls and a cool hue on the architectural details. The categorization of warm and cool colours, as recorded in the meeting minutes, is a way to describe hues with reference to their psychological effects on people rather than using colour attributes. The drawing was coloured using the aquarelle technique, and as such it provides the feeling of a somehow uniform, light colour composition. The rhythm is introduced by the alternate, but not consequent, use of warm and cold hues applied to the façades and the architectural details.

In regard to the colour composition, the colours for the building façades are described on the drawing (from left to right): carmine red with grey ground floor; yellow; grey; green with gilding; pink with light yellow ground floor; grey-green with gilding; orange; and, bluish grey with gilding (Fig. 3).



North Side (Dekerta)

Fig. 3. The design preserved in the museum provides information on colours for the Dekert's side, which is indicated on the city plan below. Author of the drawing: PKZ Pracownia Architektury. Source: Muzeum Warszawy. Call number: MHW 130/PI.

The team led by the painter Jan Sokołowski that based its concept on the previous greyish design by the

Miastoprojekt Group, developed the idea of the so-called colour discretion and the horizontal sgraffito decorations. The realization of the design was supervised by the Capital Reconstruction Office, directed by Warsaw's first chief architect Józef Sigalin (1909–1983). Committee members included the main city conservator Piotr Biegański (1905–1986), the general conservator Jan Zachwatowicz (1900–1983), the chief designers Jan Sokołowski (1904–1953) and Mieczysław Kuźma (1907–1983) as well as the Minister Aleksander Wolski (1913–1988) who represented the investor, this is, the state. The nine protocols dated from 29 April 1953 to 17 July 1953 communicate the discussions that concentrated on the improvement of the design proposal led by Jan Sokołowski, mainly on the façade colours applied and the amount of surface decorations [6].

Several comments and suggestions were made during the meetings. For example, the meeting minutes of 29 April 1953 reveal that the preliminary idea of this design based on the use of intense colours (colours with high saturation) worried some committee members who found it too dark but expressed fears that the introduction of lighter colours could lead towards the destruction of Sokołowski's design idea, whereas others claimed that the design was too light, too 'pastel'. It appeared that the 1:100 scale designs were too pale, whereas the detailed 1:20 scale designs were too colourful. In the end, it was decided that colours have to be better harmonized and elaborated decorations to be limited to a smaller number of façades [6].

The meeting minutes of 11 May 1953 reveal that the improved design treats the four sides of the Market Square in different and contrasting ways. Painted dark greys and greens with gilded decorations and ornaments, the north side, or Dekert's side, was the most valuable and noteworthy. The east side, or Barss' side, was painted with warm hues complementing the greys. Rich in architectural details, the south side, or Zakrzewski's side, was painted with light cool blues, whites and greens. And the west side, or Kołtataj's side, was characterized by shades of pink, red and purple. Moreover, on each side a distinct accent colour enhanced the central façade of the building row by lightening colours with the addition of white. Bohdan Urbanowicz mentions that the whole colour scheme also was harmonized by applying dark brown to the window frames of all buildings (Urbanowicz 1953: 151).

During the other meetings, selected colours as well as sgraffito and fresco decorations were discussed on-site. Colours and decorations were kept repainted in order to achieve a harmonized and discreet colour scheme that eventually satisfied the Committee [6].

Finally, in the early summer 1953, the improved colour design proposal was implemented using the technique of

pigmented plaster, sgraffito and wet fresco. The completed reconstruction of the oldest part of Warsaw was officially celebrated on 22 July 1953. In the press, the work was described as a positive achievement. The general monument conservator and architect Jan Zachwatowicz described the whole reconstruction of the Old Town as a step forward in building socialism. He explained that by incorporating the valuable past achievements of Warsaw's Old Town into the new, the socialist capital followed the development rules of socialist culture using the national culture in a creative way [7].

3.3. Current colours of Warsaw's Market Square, analysis of 2017

The currently applied colour scheme is not accidental but planned since the buildings in Warsaw's Old Town are listed by the Warsaw Monument Conservation Board. Since 2 September 1980, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and as such the colours of the façades are supervised by the Warsaw Monument Conservation Office. For the reason that historical archive material is very limited due to the destruction of the city of Warsaw during World War II, based on a private conversation with public officials from the Monument Conservation Board, we know that the Monument Conservation Office utilised the colour design of the early 1950s as a basis for the refurbishment of the historic town.

Currently, the Dekert's side (north side, numbers 28–42) is a multi-coloured composition with one monochromatic and seven two-colour façades. The façades are of various hues with no visible rhythm: two shades of grey, creamy, brown and yellow, two shades of red, and two shades of green (Fig. 4).

The Barss' side (east side, numbers 2–26) provides a feeling of balance in terms of colours used. The façades are monochromatic and the use of colours is limited to warm hues discriminating the façades by introducing various shades of the same colour family.

The Zakrzewski's side (south side, numbers 1–13) gives the impression of a uniform colour composition for two reasons. Firstly, the façades are two-colour with the architectural details being painted lighter and warmer hues, and secondly, the colours are limited to warm shades.

Similarly, the Kołtataj's side (west side, numbers 15–31) is perceived as a uniform colour composition. The row of buildings is covered with shades of warm hues, with the exception of two buildings painted grey.

Regarding the colours applied to the external walls, the range of warm red, maroon, yellow and brown dominates. Cold hues such as grey-green, olive and blue are applied only on a few elevations (Fig. 5).

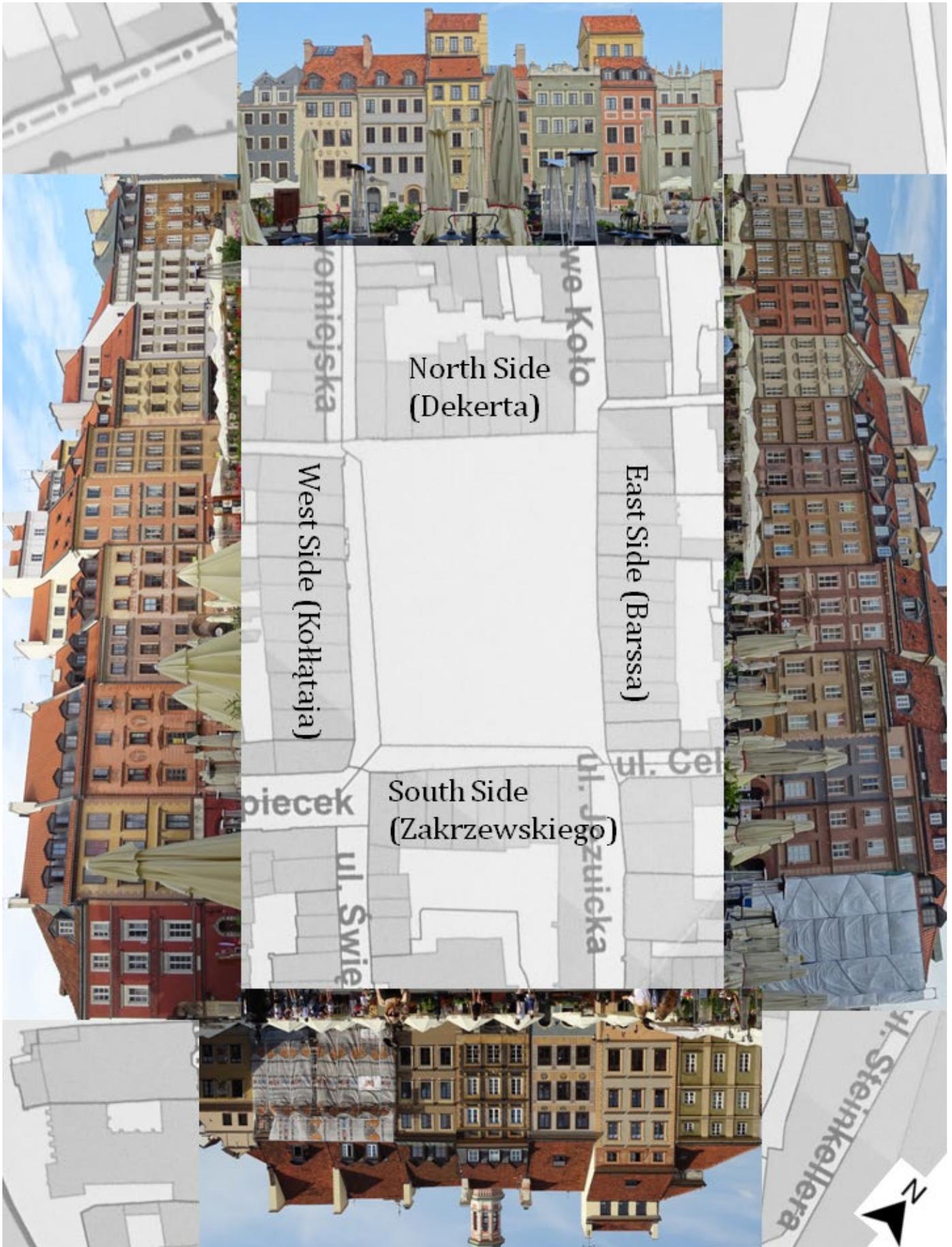


Fig. 4. Colours of the buildings of the four sides of Warsaw's Market Square as of August 2017. Photos by the author.



Fig. 5. Details of the façades above the ground floor of all the buildings facing the Market Square. Photos by the author made in 2017.

4. Conclusions

Archival research revealed the existence of two different colour design proposals from 1928 and 1951–53, and the current colour scheme was discussed with public officials. Both colour design proposals were created as part of post-war reconstructions and aimed at commemorating the victory as well as emphasising the strength of the nation. Yet, they were designed under different political circumstances that influenced the artistic creation.

Furthermore, both colour design proposals were conceived as complex colour schemes by groups of artists, whereas the currently applied colours are a result of paint investigation and archival research coordinated by the Monument Conservation Board in Warsaw.

In all three cases, colours were designed for a protected area and for this reason they had to follow the conservation doctrines that generally aimed to reconstruct original forms. The designs had to be approved by public officials from conservation offices. However, the colour schemes differ: the 1928 one was the boldest in terms of the use of colour and also was influenced by contemporary art movements; the 1951–53 one aimed to emphasise the character of the buildings and honour the historical colours in the framework of the prevailing political doctrine; and, in current colour schemes, historical colours are valued most, but due to limited original material, the colours of the early 1950s are treated as a base for the restoration.

In regard to the design principles, the comparative study of these two different colour design proposals and the currently applied colour scheme that is supervised by the local Monument Conservation Board shows similarities and differences.

The 1928 colour design proposal was characterized by multi-colourfulness and the application of saturated colours (strong, vivid colours) that are associated with gaiety and cheerfulness. Judging by the available drawings and descriptions, the second attempt to coordinate colour made in 1951–53 provided a more balanced solution: still colourful in terms of hues, but limited in terms of lightness and saturation and balanced with grey that is associated with elegance and ceremony. And the current colour scheme as of 2017 is again dominated by warm colours that are associated with joviality, and partially balanced with grey that is associated with elegance.

The colour designs discussed indicate that warm hues are widely used and in parallel with the application of grey. In this way, the feeling of cheerfulness is balanced by dignity and ceremony. Regarding the comfort of passers-by, it was provided partially by the application of red and orange associated with enjoyment, but the feeling of tranquilly was limited as the use of blue and green was limited (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. The colours of the façades as of 1928 (design), 1951–53 (design) and the current situation of 2017.

5. Conflict of interest declaration

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest.

6. Funding source declaration

The author received no specific funding for this work.

7. Short biography of the author

Karolina Białobłocka is an architect and researcher on theory and history of architecture. Her research interests focus on the correlation between art and architecture, with special interest in colour. Her previous research project concentrated on historical colour schemes of Lower Silesian architecture and current research focuses on guidelines on colour in urban planning. She obtained a doctoral degree from the Wrocław University of Science and Technology in 2015.

Notes

[1] Archival document, Muzeum Miasta Warszawy, call number: MHW 15965 Rynek Starego Miasta, strona północna /Dekerta, after 1929, author unknown.

[2] Archival document, Muzeum Miasta Warszawy, call number: MHW 15966 Rynek Starego Miasta, strona zachodnia /Kołłątaja, after 1929, author unknown.

[3] Archival document, Muzeum Miasta Warszawy, call number: MHW 15967 Rynek Starego Miasta, strona południowa /Zakrzewskiego, after 1929, author unknown.

[4] Archival document, Muzeum Miasta Warszawy, call number: MHW 15968 Rynek Starego Miasta, strona wschodnia /Barssa, after 1929, author unknown.

[5] Archival document, Muzeum Warszawy, call number: MHW 130/Pl.

[6] Protocols of committee meetings related to the polychromy of Warsaw's Old Town preserved in Archiwum Akt Dawnych in Warsaw (call number: 771 /Zespół 27 Wydziału Architektury zabytkowej Biura Odbudowy Stolicy Urzędu Konserwatorskiego na m. st. Warszawę z lat 1945–1953):

'Protokół Kolegium Opiniodawczego w sprawie odbudowy Starego Miasta zwołanego z inicjatywy Konserwatora na m. st. Warszawę w dniu 29.04.1953'; 'Protokół komisji do oceny projektów polichromii Rynku Starego Miasta z dnia 11.05.1953'; 'Protokół kolegium w sprawie polichromii Rynku Starego Miasta z dnia 15.05.1953'; 'Protokół posiedzenia Kolegium Opiniodawczego w sprawie polichromii Rynku St. Miasta z dnia 23.05.1953'; 'Protokół posiedzenia Kolegium Opiniodawczego w sprawie polichromii Rynku Starego Miasta w Warszawie z dnia 1.06.1953'; 'Protokół Kolegium Opiniodawczego w sprawie polichromii Starego Miasta z dnia 1.07.1953'; 'Protokół Kolegium Opiniodawczego w sprawie polichromii Starego Miasta z dnia 6.07.1953'; 'Protokół Kolegium Opiniodawczego w sprawie polichromii Starego Miasta z dnia 11.07.1953'; 'Protokół Kolegium Opiniodawczego w sprawie polichromii Starego Miasta z dnia 17.07.1953'.

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