

ARCHITECT-ACTIVIST. THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ATTITUDE BASED ON THE WORKS OF WALTER SEGAL

Mateusz Gierszon

*Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology,
Narzynskiego St. 26/28, 31-463 Cracow, Poland
E-mail: mateusz.gierszon@poczta.fm*

Received 18 November 2013; accepted 10 February 2014

Abstract. Architecture is a public activity, it is political. This truth is particularly strongly manifested in modern architecture, which through merging with political agenda of a welfare state, has been recognized as a tool for shaping the community, both by improving the standard of housing and disciplining people. In this way, architect has been assigned an important social role. The work attempts to capture a moment in the history of the twentieth century, in which a wave of criticism of modernism led to creating a new paradigm of architecture and a new model of architect: social design and *architect-activist*. As a model of architect's attitude might serve the activity of Walter Segal, his socialized designing and model of constructing houses with the use of self-build method. *Segal method* is interesting because, on the one hand, it is derived from the ideas and achievements of modern architecture, and on the other hand, it creatively forms part of criticism of modernist building practices. Libertarian and, at the same time, communal aspects of Segal's methods, together with the ambivalent attitude of the architect, make his work and attitude as co-designer and organiser of the process associated with anarchist idea. *Segal method* and his attitude of the *architect-activist* included within it, may be considered as mature model of a modern, strong trend of construction based on the principles of participation and sustainability.

Keywords: Segal method, participation, sustainable design, modernism, anarchism, self-build method.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Gierszon, M. 2014. Architect-activist. The socio-political attitude based on the works of Walter Segal, *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 38(1): 54–62.

Introduction

Architecture is political

Architecture is political to a large extent. That which is monumental, created by architects has always been like that. The vernacular architecture too, though to a different degree. These are cliches, but it is worth to note them at the beginning of this paper. In case of architecture, rejection of political thinking means actually supporting *status quo*. This reluctance, often shame and fear of combining the words 'architecture' and 'politics' is particularly strong in the post-communist countries like Poland, where still equating opinions or activities with deeds of 'the previous regime' in the public debate serves as an eristic tool. Meanwhile, both attitudes: 'politicization' of architecture in the past, in the Eastern bloc, and the escape from politics today,

have a common denominator: reluctance of seeking alternatives. These result in strengthening dominant trends.

Simplifying, one may say that the activity we today associate with the architectural profession has always had political aim but of course, drawing a line between an architect and a builder is not a subject of this paper. B. Tschumi is worth quoting as he claims that difference lies in the concept. 'The concept – not the form – is that which distinguishes architecture from ordinary construction' (Tschumi 2004). Using this definition, one can notice the difference between political meaning of *architecture* and *construction*, especially housing, that reflecting the socio-economic relations, remained

only building without an architect until the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, only modernism put cheap housing as a political problem that had to change existing imperative.

This paper attempts to present a moment in the history of the twentieth century, in which the process of professionalization of vocational education and architectural practice of the nineteenth century and after the experience of after-war modernist reconstruction of Europe was followed by emergence of a new *architect-activist* model. An example defining the main features, set of values and principles guiding this new model of the architect is Walter Segal.

Walter Segal appears to be the adequate example because of his construction method representing a true alternative, as well as his balanced views and manner of acting on this truly new approach. Because of this, his work can be treated as a model. What brings this definition closer is contrasting the model of the *architect-activist* with the attitude of *architect-expert* and presenting their different approaches to the theory of modernism.

Aim of the paper is also to remind Segal's method and his understanding of architect's role and to present them as the still up-to-date (in particular situations) alternative to the mainstream ways of building cheap houses.

Article has a contributory character; it focuses on the participatory aspects of *Segal method* and describes the associated attitude of the architect, what leads to the presentation of general conclusions. Narrowing the topic enables clear presentation of the relationships between the architect and users and following selection of design and construction methods. This approach also results in a narrow, problem-look at so capacious terms as 'modernism', 'social housing' or even 'user participation'.

The article is based on the analysis of available sources describing Segal realisations, mainly regarding his architecture and organisation, as well as on the sources describing Segal's ideas and placing his methods in an anarchistic context.

Idea

Modern architecture was an idea of intellectuals. It resulted from technology, from the revolution of engineering in the nineteenth century. Still, the form and the rules which were adopted by it, such as frugal details, was an intellectual construct. The promise of modesty, and being therefore more accessible, on which Loos (2006) based, was a political idea. The very principle of international style, aesthetics not related to latitudes, was created by the elites – just like Gothic,

Renaissance and Baroque introduced earlier. However, after the nineteenth century it was no longer possible to rely on the canon of beauty or the church authority anymore. Thus, technology and need became the base. Reason became the authority (De Botton 2010).

The idea of reason, technology and human needs became international. The similarity of needs, stomach capacity, comfortable temperature range, range of arms and body height concerned each person. Understanding this was a great impetus to the democratization of architecture, and modernist settlement was an expression.

Modernism from the beginning was the multithreaded stream in the architecture. Among the architectural avantgarde forming CIAM putting political significance to the architecture was very frequent. In case of housing architecture political gesture mostly had a vertical structure and came from the authority represented by the architect to the users.

Of course, there are shades of this spectrum depending on the architect and investor. On the one hand one must remember the Soviet Constructivists, who, like Moisei Ginzburg with his Narkomfin project from 1928, optimistically treated architecture as a tool of (although sometimes oppressive and unintentional) change of awareness that can be used to form the new man (Trzeciak 1974). On the other hand one may set the project of the Warsaw Housing Cooperative in Zoliborz made for the workers by Barbara and Stanislaw Brukalski in the '30s of the twentieth century. During its realisation the architects interviewed the future tenants in order to identify their needs. However, also here the tenant was a valuable source of information but not a participant of the designing process. This vertical relationship between the architect and the resident and such attitude of the architect for the purposes of the article will be called the *architect-expert* model.

In the context of *architect-expert* attitude, Le Corbusier's Pessac near Bordeaux from 1923 appears as particularly valuable example of housing for working class. Houses were designed by the architect in accordance with modernist aesthetics ignoring local architectural tradition. Shortly afterwards the tenants rebuilt them according to their taste, often returning to local standards (De Botton 2010).

This example is interesting because as a relatively small realisation, deprived of scale associated with post-war Europe reconstruction, with the opportunity of easy access to the future users, it has after all the same limitations: the vertical relationship between the architect and resident, understanding the architecture as a tool for raising residents and modernism as the universal answer.

Changes in Europe, primarily associated with industrialisation and, after 1945 with the reconstruction of cities, accelerated the process of emancipation. Postwar European countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain liberated people from the dependencies on family, clan or region, taking care of them. Modernism was delighted with strength. Big gestures could destroy entire city quarters, build settlements, the size of which has not been matched by anything before or afterwards. For the cost of standardization they introduced central heating, electricity, ergonomics and functionality. Along with the increase in state care, the standard of housing was increased. Great amounts of work which had been done in the reconstruction of Europe, alleviated some 'hunger of housing'. The flats were new, very often in good locations and of high standard, with extensive functionality. During this time, especially after the rejection of socialist realism in the countries of the *Eastern bloc* the international style won the hegemonic power.

Great force of democratization and emancipation not only liberated from the existing communities but it also destroyed them. With time, the achievements of modern architecture became its criticism. Increase of the housing standard, access to basic services, physical security and comfort were all that modernism could give, as a fundamental feature of the post-war combination of politics with architecture was just giving, designing not *on behalf of the people* but *for the people* and insisting on acceptance of this offer. Without dialogue. At that time, writing of education through architecture Barbara Brukalska meant that one should enable and not dictate new ways of living, and that restricting residents' freedoms is abuse of power by constructors. The next generation of Polish modernists, Zofia and Oskar Hansen, already in 1958 designed living blocks with fully liberalized plan so that people themselves could arrange their *space on the storey*. This was designed Warsaw Housing Cooperative in Rakowiec. Although the project was not approved, the implemented blocks were designed on the basis of dozens of interviews with prospective residents. This way, several types of apartments for different types of families were designed (Springer 2013). However, in most cases, especially in the face of pressing problem of post-war reconstruction, an *architect-expert*, representing strong investor designed housing and the future without dialogue with residents. He demanded approval of this vision, identifying it with rationality. Reason became a hostage, rationality was used oppressively. 'Utopia seeks to overcome the breakdown, to achieve integrity' (Berdyayev 2003a).

The hegemony of modernism expanded spectrum of attitudes and concepts. Many trends associated with the philosophies of design appeared and the next generation of modernists, as mentioned O. Hansen, J. Habraken or W. Segal have widened the range and significance of participation of residents in their works.

Partial weight shift from the architectural form to the organisation of the investment process was associated with the fact that failures of estate modernist ideas were frequently failures of state policy and local governments, primarily failures of the social and economic system, not failures of the architecture itself. The most spectacular example is the famous Pruitt Igoe in St. Louis, but also already mentioned housing in Warsaw Rakowiec appears symptomatic. Although blocks of flats were designed for the specific families, housing allocation was already carried out in alphabetical order, with no regard to the work of designers (Springer 2013). This policy was included within modern architecture and modernist architect was delighted with it, but it was not an inherent characteristic of modernism.

The allegations mentioned in this part were presented here because this short replay, a reminder of the promises, practices, design and construction of modernist housing estates, as well as a reminder of a certain typical political attitude of architects, facilitate further discussion on the role of *architect-activist*, who emerged – I believe – on the basis of unfulfilled promises of modernism.

Reaction

Lack of flexibility and individual spaces, no possibility of having impact on the architecture, decisions made behind clerical desks, pride and arrogance of great modernist projects and, finally, condescending attitude towards citizens – all these were reasons for criticism of modernism, which was led by libertarian groups. Voice of anarchists was one and not the strongest one out of extensive trends critical of modernism, alongside architects and architecture critics, neighborhood associations, sociologists and activists associated with the emerging concept of sustainable development. But it was mainly the voice critical of urban development model, which was the modernist planning tool and expression of modern architecture. Anarchist criticism did not create a positive architectural theory, it was often immersed in the *here and now*, in experiments or fighting with the city bureaucracy. Anarchist criticism touches rather the issues of urban politics, sociology and the nature of ownership than the problem of architecture (Ward 2002).

The variety of research is consequent reaction to general trend of modernism: unifying, simplified and sterilized. Of course, the similarity of buildings is only apparent because there existed many local modifications of modernism. However, some specific *architect-expert's* attitude or philosophy of the design seems to be quite common.

In its search, architecture rich in detail, diverse and individualistic, associated with alternative trends, seems consistent with postmodern mainstream in architecture. However, postmodern architecture, declaring use of archetype, rooted in culture and forms understandable to everyone, in fact allowed itself to be read only by the elites who loved Renaissance architecture of Venice. Ways to restore architecture to wider social groups were shallow and speculative. They lacked both technological research and organisation. They lacked a more flexible structure and participation. Therefore, it was an attempt to return to elite architecture, elite role of architect and rejecting egalitarian forces of modernism. Postmodern architecture did not seek to fulfill dreams of modernism, it rather called on to forget them (Krier 2011). Strategy of mastering architectural language was the return to normal or natural path of development. Actually, more to sleek imagination rather than historical facts.

Criticism of the politics and architecture / urbanism plexus from the anarchist point of view was born parallelly to postmodernism, however it came from a totally different position. First of all, the issue of architectural form was of little importance, since it was supposed to be the result of social relations, and it was them, manifested in the design and construction, that was the most important (Ward 1996). This was connected with a broader critique of both economic systems socio-politically (Debord 2006) and ecologically (Bookchin 2009) dominant in the 50s and 60s. Strategies and problems of anarchist criticism would be rather located close to some of the participants of the last CIAM congress who remained in the sphere of influence and ideas of modernism, as Oskar Hansen and John Habraken.

The moment dividing triumphant modernism contesters to participative stream of architecture and postmodernism is then a wish of fulfilling the promises of modernism (despite of the criticism) and the hopes connected with the social awareness of meaning of the architecture. This architecture stream, not connected with style but with rules, with designing method, resisted postmodern formalism, elitism, commercialization and a certain regression of the idea of form, function and design interdependence.

Along with often naive admiration of architects, such as J. Turner, of construction without architects, slums and squatting, the concept of participating users has grown strong. This approach was consistent with architectural criticism of the reality of welfare state, the act of 'giving' houses to workers by middle class officials. Colin Ward emphasized the unbearable assumption that future citizen would be a helpless and indifferent consumer, he criticized the fear of giving tenants possibility of having impact on their own environment. He did not criticize the idea of social housing, establishing a certain standard of housing for everyone. In his books, Ward expressed the need and ability of residents to shape their own environment. The need of creativity (Ward 1996). The point at which some architects felt that in many areas of how they live in their houses and with their neighbors residents know better, was the moment of emergence of the *architect-activist*.

Following the example of search for new, democratic and socialized forms of design, and the example of one of the first mature connections of architecture, technology and activism is the method of construction, and later housing projects houses by Walter Segal.

Segal method

Segal method is a complex method of socialized designing and self-help in construction of social houses, on which Walter Segal has been working in the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century (Broome, Richardson 1991). The main idea was to simplify design and construction of building so that inexperienced constructors and residents could also build houses themselves at low costs. Houses in accordance with individual needs and capabilities. This way, Segal became initiator, co-designer, construction teacher and advisor for the construction of two neighborhoods in London's Lewisham district: Walters Way and Segal Close. *Segal method* is part of a broader trend in architecture that arose in the 60s and 70s. It emphasized the subjectivity of users, but even on this background it may be distinguished thanks to broad participation and social importance of the construction process as well as the complexity and repeatability.

Segal's generation approach is new and different than older modernists', although they wish to use the same tools, developed by industrialized architecture and to fulfill the promises of modernity. *Architect-expert* designed for users, boldly spreading visions of cities and communities, adapted so as to meet needs of given projects, they created a new man. Suffice it to recall the words of Brukalska, inhibiting aspirations of architects. Segal's approach is different. He used to take this

burden off the resident, one can say he was less ambitious but also less condescending. In his concept, scarcity is treated as some kind of context, which may prove to be an opportunity. Lack of money, lack of knowledge and skills. In this way, the need to use one piece in many ways becomes ingenuity, lack of resources creates a very reasonable structure design, economic weakness is an impulse for creating a community and modesty with economy are linked to respecting resources. Properly used, these shortcomings create higher quality of life and housing environment (Nawratek 2008). Just as the need of creating a community of mutual assistance.

The first project realised according the method proposed by Segal was a project of fourteen social housing estates at Segal Close in London district of Lewisham. Effort of convincing district council to the project started in the second half of the 70s and representatives of local authority and W. Segal or C. Ward were involved in it. A scheme of action was developed in order to allow public aid and to create a new system of social housing, designed for people waiting for allocation.

The first residents were chosen by way of a ballot – all were taken from the housing waiting list. It was decided that potential self-builders would not be excluded due to their age, a lack of skills or income limits. The residents were added to the scheme on a first come first served basis as they applied. At the same time the detailed shape of the formal and legal aspects of the project was prepared, including the aspect of the ownership. These issues were very important for Segal and the agreement achieved by the council and tenants became a model. The future builders were to become the owners of their houses according to the agreement of a shared ownership, but the council would finally allow them become the sole leaseholders if they were able to buy the council out. The self-builder purchased part of the estate from the council on a 99-year lease and paid a portion of the standard rent for the balance of the equity. The cost of the lease was reduced by a sum representing the value of the self-builder's labour while building the house. The self-builder took full responsibility for maintenance what reduced long-term costs for the council. The self-builders were also guaranteed the access to appropriate mortgage.

During the waiting for all decisions and approvals the self-builders were able to attend classes that covered a range of subjects including lectures on construction principals, installation and logistic problems as well as a series of talks on the legal and organisational aspects of the project. In addition, to facilitate learning technology and work on construction sites, Segal designed a guide for residents. Finally, the project started in year 1979.

One of the features of the method proposed by Segal was its flexibility which influenced the council's decision of accepting the project. Due to the restrictions that governmental regulations imposed on councils it was not possible to invest in small, wooded sites with complex morphology. Lewisham council 'unfortunately' had a lot of similar, recently purchased sites. Segal's flexible construction was a solution to this problem.

The construction system which was used by Segal in his London project was very similar to the wooden Scandinavian / Canadian frame. It was a light timber construction frame. All elements of the design, finish of the walls, floors and ceilings were installed 'dry', which greatly reduced the level of construction difficulty. Use of small column spacing module reduced price of construction components and made them light so that there was no need of construction equipment. Thanks to this and to properly shaped architecture of buildings, residents themselves could create houses of appropriate standard. In this way, using tools developed by modernism on this small scale, its promises were fulfilled (Broome 2008).

Segal was a modernist: his design is simple and functional, the form follows functionality, construction and social needs. Tools developed by modernism remain in use. The design is modular which facilitates expansion, minimizes losses of materials and allows for the use of less expensive components available on the market. Construction frame is prefabricated on site. Technology assuming prefabrication, combining dry plates used to shape roof, walls and floors make the construction a simple process of breaking or twisting the components.

Segal did not forget about any of the Five principles of modern architecture by Le Corbusier (2013). Frames of buildings are put on poles. This is not a formal procedure but it makes Segal constructions cheaper and adapted to harsh land on which he used to build. Frame allows to compose plans freely whereas participation of residents in the design allows for using this tool in the development of distribution of rooms and facilities adapted to the needs of individual families. Dry technology of constructing walls facilitates subsequent changes. Frame structure proposed by Segal allows for forming windows freely, for large surfaces and using ribbon windows. In the proposed technology the architect also applied flat, green roof and it were only his followers, such as Architype lab, who began using pitched roofs. All these elements, *the principles of modern architecture* were functional. Both in construction-architectural terms and socially. None of them was treated as a goal itself. This was – as Ward claims – Segal's charge against modernists.

Considering *Segal method* in the context of his era, common objectives and instruments show reevaluation of ideas and practice of Segal's projects. Together with creators of post-war housing estates, he shared the belief of necessity to ensure some minimum quality of life for everyone, associated with basic needs, common to every human being. In addition to physical, physiological, social and ergonomic needs, he included the need of creating. Particularly visible is the consequence with which construction of a house expands autonomy of residents – through technology of forming creative possibilities of residents' intervention and socialized design, through organisation of investment which gives the opportunity to learn and develop community and through ownership relations.

Anarchism

Segal belonged to the first generation of architects who decided to propose a tool for future residents to freely shape their houses within the framework defined by technology, building standards and regulations.

He was one of the first who managed to create a functional tool: reproducible method that does not need its author while being widely available. He was also one of the first who tried to put socialised design and the freedom of creating in a particular system. These two elements: freedom of creating associated with subjectivity and universality were the foundation of the anarchist ideas since the nineteenth century. M. Bakunin believed that limiting the impact of humans on their lives takes place due to the fact that people are 'regarded as a minors, an eternal students, who are considered to be too little capable (...) to assimilate the knowledge of their teachers and to be able to work without their discipline'. At the same time he emphasized the need for the universality of freedom, claiming that 'in order to be free, I have to be surrounded and recognized as such by free men' (Bakunin 1965).

In this sense, the attitude of *architect-activist* is associated with the adoption of the horizontal relationship between the designer and tenants. Architect still occupies a special place, he still is a specialist, still – as *architect-expert* – gathers the information, asks residents, but it is their answers what makes decisions. It implies a certain range of the rationality different than that represented by the architect. In front of the large group of problems lacking one, right solution residents' opinion gains the meaning. 'Freedom seems to be associated (...) with the right to imperfection' (Berdyayev 2003b).

In direct contact with residents *architect-activist* is to primarily stimulate their participation in designing process and to reconcile and organise their individual

ambitions while closing them in the framework of the law, requirements of ergonomics, construction, technology, and basic functionality. This puts him at a particular position and gives him certain authority over the project. This power may manifest, as in the case of L. Kroll projects, in direct sequencing of demands reported by residents, or may be partially contained by the system, as in the case of *Segal method*. Questions concerning nature of participation, method and relation between expert and lay decisions are ignored by Segal. This bypasses the problem, proposing a flexible system instead, but in fact it is a closed one. Decision of residents means accepting restrictions relating to *Segal method*. Such approach puts the architect in the position of expert but also of activist – a man who organises the process both on the inside and outside, a man who is a representative of residents before authorities or in the face of law, not the mediator between the authority and residents. While designing with local community, architect can act in accordance with its system of values. Residential architecture formed in this way is, thus, understandable and accepted by residents. Of course, these don't have to be values from which the idea of, participation results: egalitarianism, democracy and personalism. This might be xenophobia and fear. All in all, architect doesn't design society anymore but only advises. It is abandonment of modernist ambitions, plans to create a new man.

Segal many times has emphasized the creative possibilities of the residents, appreciated their individual tastes, awareness of their own needs and constraints (Kolakowski 2004). At the same time, in a group of these people Segal saw the power able to shape their own living environment.

Segal's idea assumed socialising mechanism of forced cooperation resulting from poverty and limited opportunities, because of which the residents had to meet, learn how to work together and acquire skills (Nawratek 2008). They had to set up cooperatives, split plots, look after each other's children, help each other at the construction site and in daily life. The distinctive feature of *Segal method* is probably, as stressed by Marcin M. Kolakowski: 'Thanks to this project Segal was able to create not only concrete buildings but also to initiate a process, by which he proved that architecture can contribute to satisfying the human need for cooperation and creation'. Furthermore, apart from creating a community, people acquire individual skills, which are often a chance for occupational activation. *Segal method* is, thus, conceived as a method that creates structure for learning collaboration, developing community but also developing each individual resident (Kolakowski 2004).

The word *method*, used by the proponents of Segal ideas, is a capacious, multi-threaded term which is not accidental either. It points out that creation of communities and citizens participation in construction of their own living environment are investment objectives and not a result of chosen techniques and design. This term also puts emphasis on mutual complementarities as well as impact of construction technology and architectural form on the one hand and community organisation and finance aspects on the other. It also shows education of a certain system in which individual solutions are parts of a logical sequence and support each other.

Segal method, one of which devoted propagators was C. Ward, became the standard method of how to build houses for anarchist circles. M. M. Kolakowski reminds that 'Segal identifies three main aspects of this type of constructing. Firstly, future residents, through their own work, connect themselves with the place where they live in a much more powerful way than in any other type of construction. Secondly, the process awakens awareness of residents about the place they live in, about people with whom they coexist and about architecture itself. Thirdly, buildings are similar but not the same, which creates a balance between community and individuality' (Kolakowski 2004). On the one hand, then, personal initiative and work, the importance of attitudes of individual residents for the final result and their participation. On the other hand, the *method* egalitarian and democratic, aiming at average person.

It's not easy to tell if Segal fully agreed with anarchist vision of the society and whether he consciously alluded to it in his projects. Ward believes that structure of organising construction proposed by Segal, which is common with anarchist theory, results rather from practical reasons than from the architect's personal views (Ward 1996). He employed it because it was useful. In his writings, Segal himself did not reproach political or ideological motivation. In reality, Segal projects, popularization of his methods and work of Walter Segal Self Build Trust has always involved anarchist-minded people and Segal shared with anarchist environment the view on the more concrete matters than design philosophy, personalism or egalitarianism, i.e. the social ownership of the part of the land in each municipality (Broome, Richardson 1991).

Ward believes that this ambivalent attitude of Segal is his strength. On the one hand, they were very rational, embedded in the economic context, created together with the authorities of the London Lewisham district; on the other hand, not taking into account compromises in any of major objectives of the project, such as technology and participation of residents.

Undoubtedly, Segal's concepts and knowledge of anarchist theory, have been influenced by his youth spent in a pre-hippie and anarchic commune in the mountains of Monte Verita in Ascona, city in the Swiss canton of Ticino. The commune's variable composition can be used as a list of names in a contemporary art history textbook. At the same time, as Ward emphasizes, Segal felt some distance to so individualistically understood anarchism and freedom (Ward 1996). The experience which had influence on the formation of Segal's concepts was modernism with its promise of affordable, efficient housing for all and the war, destruction of London and post-war reconstruction of England. In view of shortcomings during the war and post-war period, he was extremely fascinated by the phenomenon of grassroot initiatives by residents of bombed cities, the aim of which was squatting. This was so different from the post-war reconstruction model. Of particular importance was the post-war squatting and war development of the idea of plotlands – suburban plot with a cottage house built using self-build method, which gave shelter and sustenance for a large part of the London community during bombings of the city (Ward 2002). Finally, in the end of the 60s of the twentieth century, triumph of modernism reveals all the flaws of modern construction managed bureaucratically, and in the context of Segal's personal experiences, the idea of commune construction using self-build method and the new role of architect are finally crystallized.

Architect organises process, animates it using tools: designing and constructing. They are already distributed to residents but Segal monitors use of them. However, the process that he organises, should be conducted without architect and he would not be shaping it. L. Kroll, who was, after all, accused of combining residents' ambitions randomly, did not believe that 'spontaneous assemblies can emerge out of participants (...), maker is essential' (Kroll 1975). He stressed, however, that 'architecture must be created not for residents but in their name' (Kroll 1975).

Criticism

The biggest objection to realisations and projects resulting from libertarian inspirations is impracticality and small impact. There is this anarchist 'blackness' in it, which accompanies the libertarian thought of the nineteenth century. Bakunin 'wants to turn to black, to lower classes and believes that the rebellious blackness, after dropping all chains of history and civilization, will create a better and more free life' (Berdyayev 2003a). J. Turner, with hopes bonded with impermanent, spontaneous buildings, with a

self-regulating organism of slums, seems to share this faith in ‘blackness’. This faith was, however, unknown to Segal. Features of buildings, like poor quality, scale, which forces retail purchase of materials, lack of standards, variability, no access to public services that are characteristic of individual building, are not applicable to Segal’s projects.

Segal sought methods between construction as an act of an individual, total freedom, and massive construction. He was looking for a better tool, leaving residents with considerable freedom while affecting the reality more strongly than individual construction. Criticism of individual construction is related to *Segal method* in part concerning the small scale of the investment but the mechanisms included in the *Segal method* protect against traps of economic construction method concerning low quality of housing environment. The buildings, though designed and built by residents, have a standard resulting from technology which cannot be reduced. Frame, created by *the method*, allows people to act freely, shape layout of interiors, windows, construction of porches, balconies and verandas. At the same time, *the method* creates a border method that ensures aesthetic consistency, technical safety, maintenance of the standard of public space.

More difficult to overcome is the claim that Segal’s proposal is not able to meet housing needs. It cannot match the scale of mass construction. It is difficult to imagine post-war reconstruction of Europe with a huge lack of dwellings, based on small-scale assumptions and artisanal character of settlements’ construction by Segal. *Segal method* has though character of aid. It is an attractive tool for some limited number of project problems as i.e. small social settlements in highly urbanised borough with not a big scale of housing lack as Lewisham. Shared ownership and complicated administrative procedures may also be considered as disadvantages of *Segal method* as they require (at least at the early stages of the project) a large involvement of local authorities. It should be noted, however, that Segal’s proposal is a model of construction, which continues to grow, especially in parts connected with organisation and financing of the projects, mostly in countries with stable demand for housing. It has a chance, as social building in the past, to change the current European paradigm of construction, which reproduces all its modernist mistakes, although we know the exact date of end of modernism.

While describing difference in scale of assumptions of mass modernist construction and Segal Close housing projects, it is worth to look at the attitudes of architects. *Architect-expert* shaping whole cities and sometimes even states; architect planning communities

can be compared with *architect-activist*. Activist, that means a person acting in a community already formed or in the process of forming, but always among particular people, offering them his services. Person acting locally, associated with a given problem, sometimes with a street or even a building. Difference in scale, ambition and impact seems obvious. However, comparison of actual consequences, sustainability of processes initiated by construction/architecture, comparison of impact of architect on residents’ future or changing their consciousness might not be that obvious.

The momentum of participatory architecture is limited, the idea of participation of residents in designing but, above all, in construction has its two main limitations: limited amount of free time, which is needed more the more developed participation is. Secondly, it lengthens the time necessary to complete an investment due to the multiplication of decision-makers and basing construction on inexperienced workers. However, both socialized design and construction of houses by residents themselves improve the quality of design and construction, reduce subsequent remodeling associated with mismatching residents’ needs, increase the attention to detail and the acceptance of results, facilitate maintenance of buildings. Development opportunities for both individuals and communities, which brings about this manner of construction, go beyond the logic of growth and momentum.

Conclusions

Segal method and the architect’s attitude seem to follow the rules of original modernism, fulfill its promises, complement its social significance. Repeating after Juhani Pallasmaa, a view of modernism should be based on ‘dialectic of evolution, which gives more hope than popular theory about the collapse of Modernism. First of all, I see Modernism as a dialectical view of culture, which must forever struggle with its past’ (Pallasmaa 1988). Modernism, in the design of which participate residents, modernist *architect-activist*, are reactions to post-war method of construction. ‘Second Modernism is a realistic view of culture that is not blinded by any illusions. It left its innocent faith in the victory of humanism and finds its potential in the creation of cultural strategies concerning resistance to unwanted, anti-human development’ (Pallasmaa 1988). Early modernism was modernism of change and gesture; modernism of subjugating nature, but also society – a plastic creation which can be changed, i.e. through arrangement. The second, Segal’s modernism, is modernism of process and collaboration. It is more sensitive to human weaknesses and whims.

This subjectivity is the basis for Segal's attitude towards resident. Architecture becomes interesting where it ends. This approach is today one of the most interesting architectural movements which continues modernist myth of architecture as a tool to improve the world. It is also close to the anarchist ideals of direct democracy, personalism and principle of self-determination. Although it is difficult to find direct references to anarchism in Segal's writings, construction process organised by him and the communities grown from it are close to anarchist theory and considered as model by the anarchist writers such as C. Ward. The same applies to the attitude of *architect-activist*, who as an external force supports and advises residents, leaving them the greater part of the power over their own living environment.

Buildings and activities of Walter Segal seem to play a very important role in shaping this new type of architect and architecture. Through carefully considered concepts and reasonable compromises, *Segal method* or rather its contemporary and local adaptations may be in some cases very interesting proposal for the local authorities planning social building.

References

- Bakunin, M. 1965. *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 2. Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza.
- Berdyayev, N. 2003a. *Królestwo Ducha i królestwo Cezara*. Kety: Antyk, 88–89.
- Berdyayev, N. 2003b. *Nowe sredniowiecze*. Warsaw: Fundacja Aletheia.
- Bookchin, M. 2009. *Przebudowa społeczeństwa*. Poznan: Oficyna Wydawnicza Bractwa "Trojka".
- Broome, J.; Richardson, B. 1991. *The self-build book*. Hartland: Green Books, 171–175.
- Broome, J. 2008. *The green self-build book*. Devon: Green Books.
- Debord, G. 2006. *Spoleczeństwo spektaklu*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- De Botton, A. 2010. *Architektura szczescia*. Warszawa: Czuly Barbarzynca Press, 51–74, 159–160.
- Kolakowski, M. M. 2004. Wzajemna pomoc i miejska rewolucja, *Architektura i Biznes* 143(5): 38–43.
- Kroll, L. 1975. The soft zone, *Architectural Association Quarterly* 7(4): 48–59.
- Krier, L. 2011. *Architektura wspólnoty*. Gdansk: Slowo/obraz terytoria.
- Le Corbusier, 2013. *W strone architektury*. Warszawa: Centrum Architektury.
- Loos, A. 2006. Ornament i zbrodnia, in A. Loos, *Architekt, krytyk, dandys, August Sarnitz*. Köln: Taschen, 84–89.
- Nawratek, K. 2008. *Miasto jako idea polityczna*. Cracow: Korporacja Halart, 140–158.
- Pallasmaa, J. 1988. Tradition & modernity: the feasibility of regional architecture in post-modern society, *Architectural Review* 188(1095): 26–34.
- Springer, F. 2013. *Zaczyn. O Zofii i Oskarze Hansenach*. Kraków-Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Karakter and Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej, 93–105.
- Trzeciak, P. 1974. *Przygody architektury XX wieku*. Warszawa: Nasza Ksiegarnia, 123–143.
- Tschumi, B. 2004. *Event cities 3: concept vs. context vs. content*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Ward, C. 1996. *Talking to architects, ten lectures by Colin Ward*. London: Freedom Press, 31–40.
- Ward, C. 2002. *Cotters and squatters. Housing's hidden history*. Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 155–166.

MATEUSZ GIERSZON

*Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology, Narzymskiego St. 26/28, 31-463 Cracow, Poland.
E-mail: mateusz.gierszon@poczta.fm*

PhD student at Architecture Faculty of Cracow University of Technology, works in architectural bureau 'Passive Architecture'. In his everyday work he deals with widely understood ecology in architecture, in particular resources conservation, social ecology and minimalization of negative impact of building on environment. He is interested in participation, self-build, mutual aid and development of local society through building process.