

**Tomasz Krystkowski\***

## ***Bold visions, reality, future opportunities. Evolution of the spatial layout of a modernist multifamily residential estate on the example of the Retkinia housing estate in Łódź (Poland)***

### ***Abstract***

Modernist multi-family housing estates provide homes for approximately eight million people in Poland. In Łódź, almost half of the population lives in housing estates. These complexes, built on a massive scale from the 1960s until the political transformation in 1989, will continue to play a significant role in the city's spatial structure for decades to come. This article focuses on Retkinia, the largest housing estate in Łódź. Developed from the early 1970s, its fundamental shape was formed by the late 1980s and early 1990s. The article presents the evolution of the estate's spatial form, from the bold visions of the architects who designed vibrant commercial-service centres, individualized public spaces, green recreational areas with rich facilities, and experimental buildings, to the much poorer implementation of those plans – resulting in a spatial layout lacking many essential elements, later supplemented and adjusted to current needs, yet still “unfinished”. The research is based on archival queries, analysis, and the assessment of the estate's space (mutual relations of buildings, public spaces and their equipment, transport layout), as well as studies of the relevant literature. The results indicate that the existing spatial layout offers many possibilities for transformations in the context of the current residents' needs and contemporary challenges.

**Key words:** Łódź, Retkinia, post-war modernism, housing estate

### ***Introduction***

It is estimated that as many as eight million people live in modernist estates in Poland (Węclawowicz 2007). This figure includes almost half of the population of the city of Łódź – about 300,000 out of a population of 660,000 (Hanzl, Rembeza 2022, 97). Such housing complexes have for a long time played and will continue to play an important role in the spatial structure of many Polish cities. This article is a continuation of several years of research concerning issues related to post-war urban planning and the architecture of Łódź.

Here, we describe how the spatial form of the largest housing estate in Łódź, Retkinia, evolved from the first plans and projects (concepts for the development of the western areas of Łódź in the 1950s) to the present day. We

also identify challenges and potential solutions related to further transformations of the estate, balancing functionality, sustainability, and the evolving needs of the community. Although more than 50 years have passed since the construction of the estate began, Retkinia still constitutes an unfinished spatial layout that offers many possibilities for adaptation.

The territorial scope of the research covers the area of the estate, about 3.1 km<sup>2</sup>, essentially limited by streets: Bandurskiego and Waltera-Janke Avenues from the east, Maratońska from the south, Popieluszki from the west, and Kusocińskiego from the north (Figs. 1c, 2).

### ***State of research***

The post-war architecture and urban planning of Łódź have been attracting increasing interest from researchers and city enthusiasts for at least several years. Some publications concern general trends (Stefański, Ciarkowski 2018), while others focus on specific periods. However, in both cases

\* ORCID: 0000-0002-5619-2457. Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning, Lodz University of Technology, Poland, e-mail: tomasz.krystkowski@p.lodz.pl

the process of estate development constitutes only part of the broader discussion (Gryglewski, Wróbel and Ucińska 2009; Sumorok 2010). The book *Blokowiska Łodzi* [Housing Blocks of Łódź] provides a kind of compendium of multi-family housing complexes in Łódź (Borowski, Koliński 2022).

Social, sociological, and economic issues related to Łódź estates have also been the subject of research by many scientists. Anna Janiszewska, Ewa Klima, and Agnieszka Rochmińska conducted research on the quality of life in Łódź estates over a decade ago. Their studies focused not only on the residents but also their apartments, buildings, and the surrounding spaces (2011). The work of Paulina Tobiasz-Lis explored, among other topics, social issues related to the appearance of gated housing estates in Łódź (2011). Ewa Szafrńska devoted many articles to describing changes in the social, spatial, and functional structure of Łódź estates. Additionally, she discussed the “difficult” heritage of the PRL period, which includes multi-family housing complexes. Szafrńska considered the possibilities for further transformations of Łódź estates (2010; 2011; 2012). She is also the author of a book that is both an extension and a kind of summary of these studies (2016).

Estates are also covered from a historical, urban, and architectural perspective in the *Atlas historyczny miasta Łodzi* [Historical Atlas of the City of Łódź] (Krystkowski 2022b, c). Michał Bamberski (2024) is currently writing a doctoral dissertation on Łódź estates. This topic is complemented by fragments of Marek Grymin’s book (2009), in which he describes the relationships between religious buildings and the spatial structure of the estates, and by publications by Maria Nowakowska (2020; 2021) and Aneta Pawłowska (2021) concerning sculptures in the space of Łódź.

The Retkinia Zachód-Południe fragment (together with part of the Widzew-East estate) has been the subject of previous research by the author of the present study. An analysis of the relationship between the existing configuration of pedestrian routes and the location of the estate’s key spaces (main places of activity by residents) was presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> International Space Syntax Symposium in June 2024.

## Methods

A detailed analysis of the Retkinia estate was initiated at the beginning of 2023. Research methods included analyses of source texts (trade journals, daily press), historical maps, aerial photographs, orthophotos, as well as original development projects. Extensive empirical observations were made in the estate area over several months. In total, 30 observation points were designated within the main public spaces, along the main pedestrian routes, and in the spaces between blocks, where information on the outdoor activities of space users was collected during walks and observations; observations were conducted on different days of the week and at different times of the day. This allowed not only a better understanding of the estate’s structure, but also the way in which its spaces are developed and function. On that basis, various analyses were also carried out (e.g., analysis of the estate’s spatial structure with a typology of urban

enclosures, their function, and the activity of space users, as well as analyses of transport and pedestrian routes). However, the article focuses primarily on the extended historical themes (clearly different visions of the estate from different periods), which are discussed only very generally or omitted in the literature. This work can therefore complement the current state of research on post-war multi-family housing estates in the city. It can also make it clear that Retkinia could have looked different from how it looks today.

## Retkinia

Łódź survived relatively intact from World War II, remaining almost the same as it was in 1939 in terms of spatial structure. However, the city faced many problems, including poor sanitary and hygienic conditions, largely resulting from the mixing of residential and industrial buildings (Krystkowski 2022a). In an attempt to solve the difficult housing situation, new districts were built around the organism shaped in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – which became the so-called “Strefa Wielkomiejska” [Historical Urban Core], which is now the most valuable area of the city (Urząd Miasta Łodzi 2012).

The first plans for estates located on the western (but also eastern) side of the city date back to the period just after the end of World War II. At that time, they were seen as predominantly single-family housing complexes. This situation changed in the 1950s, when planners tried to balance the north–south spatial layout of the city by implementing new multi-family housing districts on its western and eastern edges.

In the first general plan for urban development of the city (*Ogólny plan zagospodarowania przestrzennego miasta Łodzi; plan kierunkowy na rok 1961–1980* [General Spatial Development Plan of the City of Łódź; directional plan for 1961–1980]), the areas designated for expansion were primarily located in the western areas (Retkinia, Karolew, and Brus), which were considered to be the most suitable due to microclimatic conditions. Their location in relation to the city centre and the Łódź–Kalisz railway line was also considered favourable, although the transportation network itself required significant expansion (Jaworski 1958, 92, 93).

## First concepts

The first concepts for the development of the western districts of Łódź (Retkinia, Brus, and Złotno estates), developed by Krystyna Krygier and Henryk Jaworowski in the 1960s, assumed the creation of a very hierarchical structure, with a clear hierarchy of residential and service buildings. According to press reports, it was planned to divide each estate into smaller units for 5,000–6,000 residents. These units were to be equipped with a primary school and a small commercial and service centre, to meet the daily needs of the residents. The individual units were planned to be separated from vehicular traffic, without intersecting streets (Gp 1964).

Such solutions are reflected in the model of the eastern part of Retkinia (Zagrodniki-Piaski estate) shown in Figure 1.

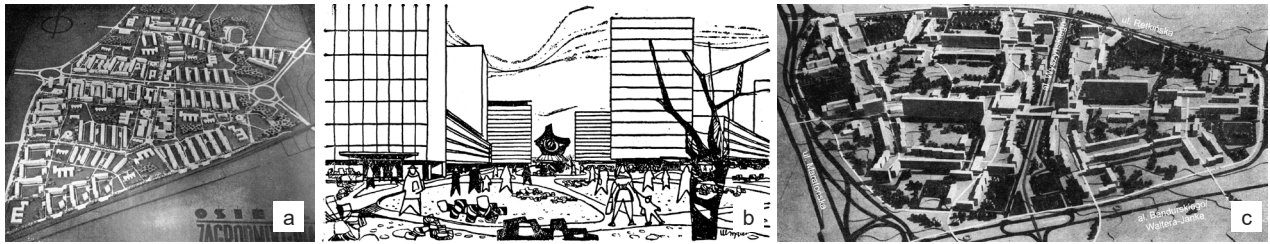


Fig. 1. Projects and visions of Retkinia:

- a) model of the eastern part of Retkinia from the early 1960s (Zagrodniki-Piaski housing estate, source: Kuydowicz 1961, 455),  
 b) sketch by Krygier depicting a vision of the housing estate from the late 1960s (source: *Klimat wielkiego osiedla* 1969, 6),  
 c) a model of Retkinia-East from the early 1970s (source: Krygier, Sumień 1973, 209)

#### II. 1. Projekty i wizje Retkini:

- a) makieta wschodniej części Retkini z początku lat 60. XX w. (osiedle Zagrodniki-Piaski, źródło: Kuydowicz 1961, 455),  
 b) szkic autorstwa Krygiera przedstawiający wizję osiedla z końca lat 60. XX w. (źródło: *Klimat wielkiego osiedla* 1969, 6),  
 c) makieta Retkini-Wschód z początku lat 70. XX w. (źródło: Krygier, Sumień 1973, 209)

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to ascertain precisely when this model was created, who its author was, or the details of its concept.

However, it can be seen that the entire layout was clearly divided into smaller units, in which residential buildings were most likely to be concentrated around educational facilities located among greenery and distinguished by their form. The individual units were differentiated in terms of spatial composition, which was shaped quite freely. They consisted mainly of rather low and elongated buildings (comprising shorter segments arranged in the shapes of the letters “U” or “L”), which were combined in various ways, creating more or less readable layouts (comb-like, block-like) and urban enclosures. Variety was provided by low and high point-block buildings. Such measures were most likely aimed at breaking the monotony of the entire layout.

Thanks to the small scale of the buildings, the individual units would probably have had a rather intimate character, but due to the impossibility of accessing the relevant archival materials, it is difficult to determine the exact sizes and proportions of the buildings and accompanying spaces proposed by the designers. Nonetheless, the whole gives the impression of a calm space, complemented by a network of small streets and pedestrian routes running next to the buildings and through the main areas of the estate. In this concept, there are no large parking complexes (although garages were probably planned a short distance from the residential buildings) or large-scale volumes. The model resembles the large-scale estates being built in Łódź at that time in Dąbrowa or Teofilów. These estates were criticized for the monotony of their form, to the extent that [...] *you don't even have to be tipsy to not find your way home in the evening* (A.P. 1966, 3).

A distinctive element of the entire layout was the axis of the central hub. According to press reports, more specialized commercial and service centres (diversified offering: shops, service points, post office, cinema, community centre) were planned in the centre of each district (Retkinia, Brus, and Złotno). It was intended that the centre could be reached on foot within 10 min, even from the farthest unit. The axis not only crossed the entire layout but also connected the individual units. It was marked not only by

differently shaped commercial and service buildings but also by a group of higher point-block buildings.

Despite widespread prefabrication (already widely used in the construction of other estates in Łódź), the designers of the subsequent concept for the estate (Krystyna Krygier, Tadeusz Sumień, and Szymon Walter) tried to give it an individual character – the “climate of a large estate” (*Klimat wielkiego osiedla* 1969). The shaped space between the buildings was designed to help achieve this goal. The plan was to create a whole repertoire of streets with different functions, leading to public transport stops, shops, playgrounds for children, sports facilities for youth, or recreational areas for the elderly. The streets themselves, of different shapes and with surrounding buildings of different heights, were to be additionally varied with passages or overpasses. The ground floors of the buildings would be occupied by various types of service premises, shops, and cafes. The space was also to be enriched and diversified with small architectural elements. The plan was to use “repetitive prefabricated elements to create unique spatial forms” (Sob. 1970). Recreational areas – extensive but concentrated – were also to play an important role (Sob. 1969). Sports areas with fields, tennis courts, swimming pools (Sob. 1970), as well as walking areas “with picturesque corners” were planned (*Klimat wielkiego osiedla* 1969). The architects’ visions were reflected in attractive sketches (Fig. 1b) published in the daily press, showing varied, potentially attractive, and lively spaces, in contrast to later models of the estate (Figs. 1c, 2).

#### *Project implementation: early 1970s to late 1980s*

The above proposals seem to disappear in the next concept, also proposed by Krygier and Sumień, developed in the early 1970s and selected for implementation after an internal competition between two “Miastoprojekt” design teams (Fig. 1c, 2). According to these plans, Retkinia was to take on an elongated shape (approx. 2.5 × 1.2 km) and consist of three housing complexes: “Wschód” [East] (23 thousand residents), “Śródmieście” [Centre] (13,000 residents), and “Zachód” [West], comprising two large housing units (each with 16,000 residents) (Krygier, Sumień 1973, 208), located

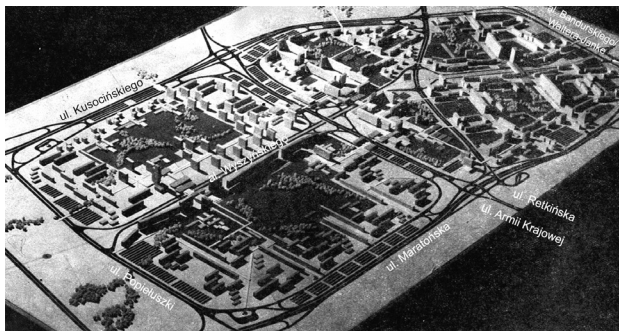


Fig. 2. Model of Retkina, early 1970s  
(source: Krygier, Sumień 1973, 208)

Il. 2. Makieta Retkini, początek lat 70. XX w.  
(źródło: Krygier, Sumień 1973, 208)

along the main communication artery (Wyszyńskiego Avenue) with a tram line running in a trench. The three housing complexes were designed in different ways. The aim of their spatial differentiation was to break [...] *the monotony of standardized "large-panel" architecture and facilitate the identification of "one's own estate and building"* (Krygier, Sumień 1973, 208).

What distinguished this concept from earlier plans was primarily the much larger scale, in common with many other estate plans from that period. Although they were concentrated around green areas and educational complexes, individual fragments of the layout ("Wschód", "Śródmieście", and "Zachód") were not clearly divided into smaller units, as in the earlier project. Despite the fact that the large areas were to be filled with rather low buildings (situated differently than before), the designers proposed the creation of a series of high and elongated "slab buildings", sometimes several hundred metres long, significantly affecting the perception of the whole. Additionally, in some parts of the estate the buildings were spaced with significant distances between them, affecting the spatial cohesion of the whole.

Although the large areas were separated from the immediate vicinity of the streets, the road arteries were very vis-

ible throughout the estate layout. Along with the parking complexes located along them, they separated individual housing complexes, forming clear boundaries that were also spatial barriers.

The main commercial, service, and cultural centres – one of district significance, the rest of estate significance (A.P. 1969) – were planned to be grouped into compact complexes located at tram stops along the main communication artery of the estate. Depending on the concept, they were seen as large volumetric structures directly above the road artery and tram stops or as complexes of light pavilions located on both sides of the artery and connected by footbridges (spanning the trench and connecting the tram stops) (Sob. 1972; Szafer 1981, 191–193). The commercial and service centres were situated on pedestrian axes perpendicular to Wyszyńskiego Avenue, which were to connect them with the areas of the three main housing complexes.

Some parts of the estate were to receive special design solutions (Fig. 3). For example, Retkinia Zachód-Południe was developed based on a new urban norm project, which increased the area of green spaces per resident (to 5.5 m<sup>2</sup>). The main element of this part of Retkinia was the planned estate park with an area of 9 ha (Sob. 1973). Additionally, the spatial layout was to feature a linear building layout located along the tram route and a freely shaped group of 11-story point-blocks located in the southern part (Krygier, Sumień 1973, 209).

As in other parts of the estate, the main commercial centre was planned at the tram stop, above the street (a complex of light commercial and service pavilions). In addition, the creation of a complex of so-called associated services was planned, consisting of a kindergarten, school, community centre, and child care point (Sob. 1973).

Despite attempts to break the monotony and give different characteristics to parts of the estate, the large scale of the layout and the spatial solutions used by the architects made the whole fit into the trend of [...] *purist, "model urban solutions"* (Gliński, Kusztra and Müller 1984, 68). Individual fragments lacked the intimate character that could be found in earlier proposals.

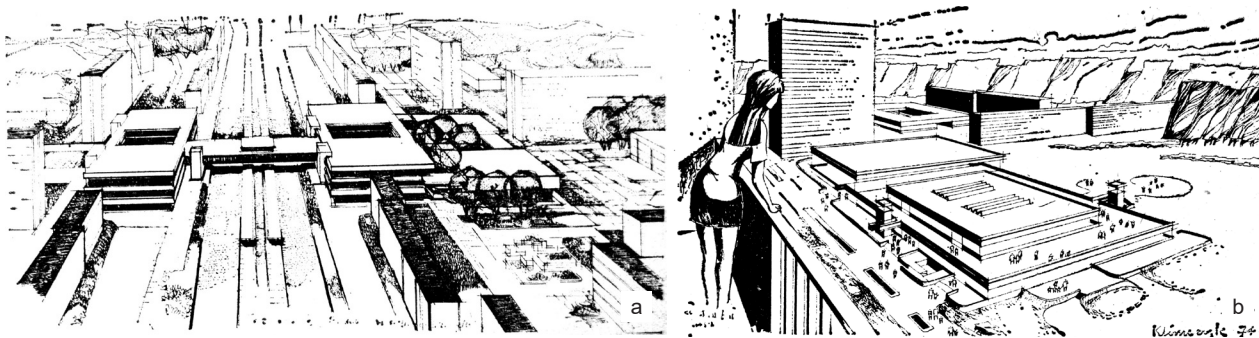


Fig. 3. Sketches of the estate's service facilities:

- a) a shopping and service complex planned over Wyszyńskiego Avenue (drawing by J. Wachowiak, source: Sob. 1974b, 6),  
b) a prototype school (drawing by M. Klimczyk, source: Sob. 1974a, 6)

Il. 3. Szkice obiektów usługowych osiedla:

- a) zespołu handlowo-usługowego planowanego nad al. Wyszyńskiego (rys. J. Wachowiak, źródło: Sob. 1974b, 6),  
b) prototypowej szkoły (rys. M. Klimczyk, źródło: Sob. 1974a, 6)



Fig. 4. Retkinia residential buildings: a–e) buildings from the 1970s and 1980s, f–g) buildings erected between 1989 and 2005, h) buildings erected between 2006 and 2015, i) contemporary buildings (photo by T. Krystkowski)

Il. 4. Zabudowa mieszkaniowa Retkini: a–e) obiekty z lat 70. i 80. XX w., f–g) obiekty powstałe od 1989 do 2005 r., h) obiekty powstałe od 2006 do 2015 r., i) obiekty współczesne (fot. T. Krystkowski)

The vast majority of buildings in Retkinia were built using the Szczecin system, with only a few structures made using the Wk-70 system. However, the estate built in the 1970s and 1980s is not a homogeneous spatial layout. It is a combination of several different smaller layouts, among which the comb layout, created by 5-story blocks, mostly elongated (from 2 to 12 staircases), can be considered dominant. In addition, many nest layouts can be distinguished, shaped by a series of varied structures (5- or 11-story point-block buildings, 5- or 11-story 2-staircase buildings, 5-story characteristic L-shaped buildings), linear layouts (created by elongated 5-, but also 11-story, even 10- or 11-staircase “slab buildings”), or the least popular block layouts (created by 5-story blocks) (Fig. 4).

The readability of the entire layout can be considered on two scales, macro and micro. On the macro scale, the main compositional axes (communication arteries) are very clear and distinctly divide the estate into individual parts. On the micro scale (individual parts of the estate), readability is disrupted, which on the one hand results from the way buildings are positioned relative to each other, as well as from the insufficient number of landmarks, and on the other hand is related to the configuration of internal streets

and pedestrian paths (paths without continuity, paths that suddenly end, improvised paths). These elements negatively affect the level of integration of the individual parts of the estate.

Despite attempts to diversify the form of the estate (varied residential buildings), the overall concept was quite monotonous and less varied, at least when compared to the presented models (Figs. 1c, 2). There were few structures that really stood out from the rest. An exception can be found in one of the few commercial-service buildings, the “Okrągłak” [Circular building] (Fig. 5a), located near the intersection of Wyszynskiego Avenue and Retkińska Street. There were few commercial-service buildings in the initial phase of implementation in Retkinia. To meet the current needs of residents, in some parts of the estate, apartments located on the ground floors of residential buildings were adapted for service premises. In addition, several prefabricated pavilions were built, made of concrete prefabricates or as buildings with a light steel structure (Fig. 5b).

The spaces between buildings are greatly varied in size. In many places, the sense of enclosure is very distinct, although the type of enclosure is often difficult to classify. Often, it is also impossible to determine the central angles,

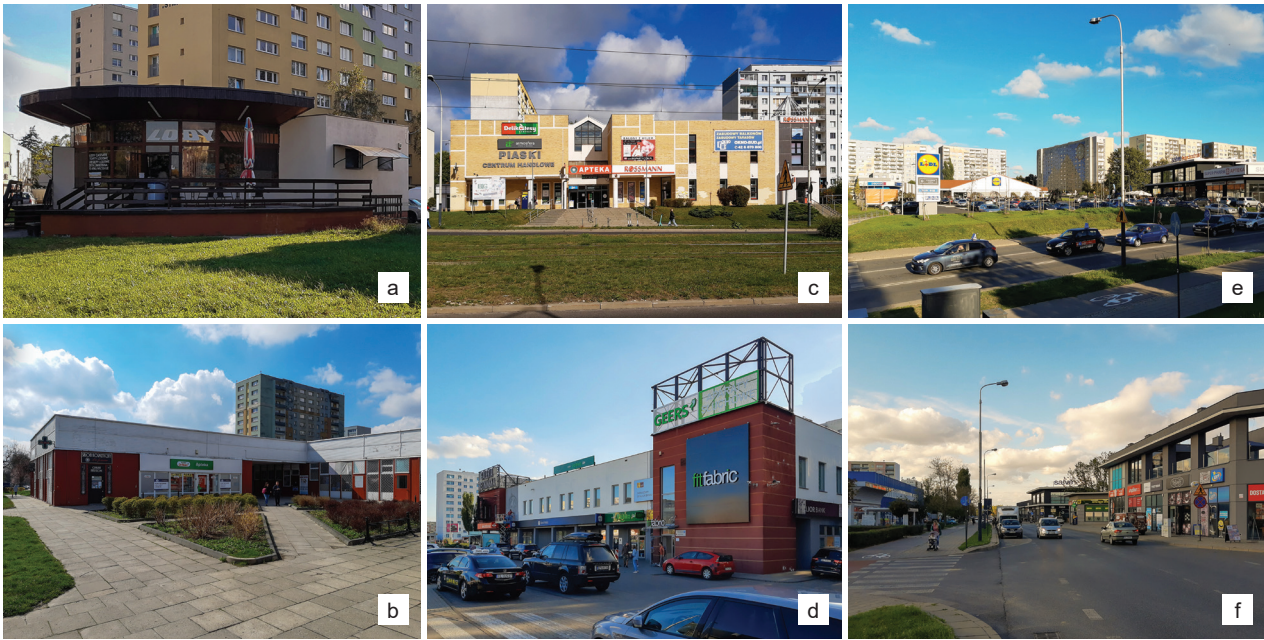


Fig. 5. Commercial-service buildings and complexes of the estate completed: a) and b) in the 1970s and 1980s, c) at the beginning of the 1990s, d) at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, e, f) contemporary (photo by T. Krystkowski)

Il. 5. Obiekty i zespoły handlowo-usługowe osiedla zrealizowane: a) i b) w latach 70. i 80. XX w., c) na początku lat 90. XX w., d) na początku XXI w., e), f) współcześnie (fot. T. Krystkowski)

due to their spreading out over the area. In the case of the most popular comb layouts, the central angles range from  $\sim 30^\circ$  to  $\sim 46^\circ$ . These values are presented in more detail in Table 1, including the Building Coverage (BCR) and Floor Area (FAR) ratios (also given in Figs. 6a, b). For most areas of the estate, these values are quite low (ranging from 0.08–0.37 and 0.38–1.40 for low buildings), with the exception of fragments of linear layouts built using long and high “slab blocks” (values 0.18–0.40 and 2.03–4.53).

For years, little attention was paid to the shaping (arrangement or equipment) of the spaces between buildings. For several years, the estate was a construction site lacking basic elements of the space between the blocks, such as pavements. Many pedestrian paths connecting important parts of the estate were elephant paths. The space itself was

“diversified” by building materials or construction waste (e.g., damaged slabs). Such problems, often mentioned by the local daily press, affected many similar estates in Poland (Basista 2001).

Until the end of the 1990s, the facilities on the estate were rather basic and devoid of aesthetic or functional qualities (vast lawns, asphalt sports fields, poor and poorly equipped playgrounds on gravel). There were some sculptures, although only in some parts of the estate (mainly in Retkinia-Wschód) (Figs. 7a–c). Among the most interesting were the several-metre high openwork “Morela” [Apricot] (author Ryszard Popow), located within the road intersection, outside the estate itself but in its immediate vicinity (Fig. 7c), the smaller but characteristic “Bociany” [Storks] and “Macierzyństwo” [Motherhood] (author Michał Gałkiewicz,

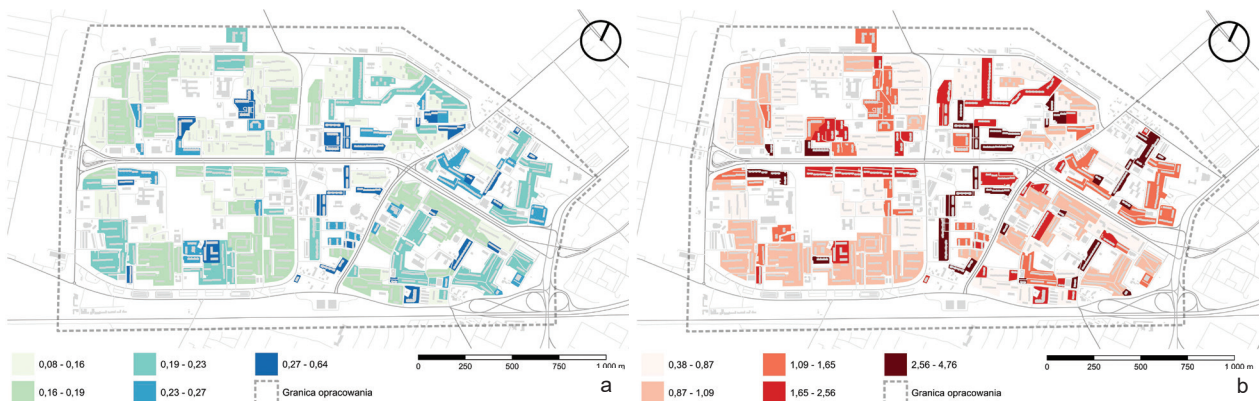


Fig. 6. Łódź, Retkinia, schemes of: a) Building Coverage Ratio (BCR), b) Floor Area Ratio (FAR) (elaborated by T. Krystkowski)

Il. 6. Łódź, Retkinia, schemat: a) powierzchni zabudowy, b) intensywności zabudowy (oprac. T. Krystkowski)



Fig. 7. Sculptures within the fragment of the Retkinia-Wschód estate:

a) „Bociany” and b) „Macierzyństwo” by M. Gałkiewicz, c) „Morela” by R. Popow (photo by T. Krystkowski)

Il. 7. Rzeźby w obrębie fragmentu osiedla Retkinia-Wschód:

a) „Bociany” i b) „Macierzyństwo” autorstwa M. Gałkiewicza, c) „Morela” autorstwa R. Popowa (fot. T. Krystkowski)

Figs. 7a, b), as well as the somewhat hidden “Autonomizm X – Dziurawiec” [Autonomism X – Holey-Thing] (author Andrzej Jocz) in the inter-block space of the estate (Nowakowska 2020; 2021; Pawłowska 2021).

Not all elements of the estate were realized according to the original plans. Despite obvious shortcomings and problems, a backbone was created that could be supplemented and adapted to the needs of residents in the following years. During construction, some passages under long buildings, which were intended to shorten the way for residents, were abandoned. In some places, planned “offsets” in the shapes of residential buildings, which were supposed to prevent the monotony of the entire estate, were also abandoned. However, the separation of pedestrian traffic from vehicular traffic, and above all the creation of separated estate alleys with playgrounds, rest areas, and small architecture, were seen as important elements that were successfully implemented (Sobierajska 1975).

#### *After the political transformation*

After the political transformation in 1989, the fundamental spatial layout of the entire estate did not undergo radical changes. The emerging residential buildings mostly filled previously undeveloped areas, and did not disrupt the previously established structure. The residential buildings constructed in the 1990s and early 2000s stood out primarily due to their architecture, which differed from earlier buildings, and in some cases, their urban form. Many buildings, although constructed over a period of more than a decade (from the time of the transformation), and despite being in some cases prefabricated and in others using traditional technology, are quite similar to each other. The buildings are distinguished mainly by the details of the balconies (differently shaped railings), sloping roofs,

or finishing materials. The space around them is shaped similarly. The buildings clearly enclose the space, creating internal courtyards. These are built up on all sides or sometimes open, but still strongly perceptible (the value of the central angle ranges from  $\sim 24^\circ$  to  $\sim 50^\circ$ ). These spaces are publicly accessible and serve the residents. The mentioned buildings create “mini-urban” layouts of a block character. Some of the developments also stand out with slightly higher Building Coverage (BCR) and Floor Area (FAR) ratios (0.18–0.29 and 0.89–1.38 for low-rise buildings) compared to similar-sized blocks built in the 1970s and 1980s.

The latest buildings (from around 2020), differ from the oldest buildings primarily in architectural form, with simple shapes in subdued colours. Some also stand out from the surroundings due to their significantly higher Building Coverage (BCR) and Floor Area (FAR) ratios (0.42 and 2.11, although low, 5-story buildings predominate), as well as central angle values ( $\sim 55^\circ$  to  $\sim 62^\circ$ ) resulting from the small distance between buildings. Unlike the developments from previous decades, where the space in the immediate vicinity of the buildings was open (public), the new developments are closed. This space is also sometimes devoid of features that could serve the residents (e.g., the immediate surroundings of the buildings is a parking lot). Therefore, one might wonder to what extent the new developments add value to the estate, forming closed enclaves for the rest of the residents or going beyond the main area of Retkinia (new developments in Kusocińskiego Street).

At the same time, since the mid-1990s the blocks built in the 1970s and 1980s have been undergoing a process of thermal modernization and related aesthetic improvements. The latter took very different forms, with colour compositions of dubious value and more subdued realizations in recent years.

Religious buildings are a group of important buildings in the structure of some large-panel housing estates. In Retkinia, there are three churches: the parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Retkińska Street, the parish of the Holy Family in Wyszyńskiego Avenue, and the parish of the Holy Eucharist in Popieluski Street. Another church, the parish of Christ the King, is located on the outskirts of the estate, between Retkinia and Karolew, in Bandurskiego Avenue. Except for the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Retkińska Street, construction of these buildings began after 1989 (Grymin 2009). Two of the churches are located near important streets. They are clearly exposed, but the way the immediate surroundings are shaped reduces their role as local landmarks. Both churches are located in chaotically developed areas – in the vicinity of unarranged greenery, large parking lots, and an overhead power line in the case of the church in Bandurskiego Street, and in the vicinity of garages, low pavilions housing various workshops, and areas of improvised parking in the case of the church in Popieluski Street. The two other churches are located “inside” the estate structure. The largest, and at the same time the oldest and most interesting in terms of architecture is the church located in Retkińska Street, which was rebuilt during the construction of the estate at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. However, it is obscured and almost completely dominated by nearby 12-story “slab blocks”. The church located in Wyszyńskiego Avenue was for years a “temporary” chapel situated near recreational areas and arranged greenery. Due to its small size, it is lost in the overall estate layout. Currently, the construction of a larger, final building is underway. Despite the differences in the scale, quality of architecture, and the shape of the immediate surroundings, the churches have something in common, i.e., a weak spatial connection with the estate struc-

ture. This reduces their role as important buildings on the estate scale.

The greatest changes concerning the development of Retkinia after 1989 mainly involved commercial-service buildings, which were lacking during the main implementation period of the entire concept. A significant number of commercial-service buildings were built near public transport stops, in areas planned as commercial-service centres. Therefore, it can be said that they continue the original assumptions of the estate designers to an extent.

However, the visions of the designers, who saw these centres rather as shopping streets with service premises located on the ground floors of buildings, friendly and attractive spaces for residents with appropriately shaped small architecture, did not materialize. The commercial buildings that began to be built more intensively in the 2000s are mostly typical buildings for popular supermarket chains, supplemented by service pavilions built in recent years (Fig. 5e, f). These buildings do not create coherent urban and architectural complexes. The space around them is often dominated by expanses of parking lots. The main clusters of commerce and services in Retkinia are therefore complexes primarily shaped for car users. Despite their flaws, these complexes broke the residential monoculture of the estate.

Many spaces accompanying residential buildings have undergone significant positive transformations in recent years. These changes largely concern the main recreational areas of the estate. Some of these have finally been equipped adequately to their function. New sports fields, playgrounds, brine graduation towers, and outdoor gyms have been built (Figs. 8a–c). The quality of greenery has also significantly improved, with intentionally shaped ornamental compositions. After several decades, the estate has at least partially begun to look as its designers imagined.



Fig. 8. Selected main public and recreational spaces of the estate:  
a–c) fragment of Retkinia-Śródmieście, d) still unfinished “park” in the Retkinia Zachód-Południe (photo by T. Krystkowski)

Il. 8. Wybrane główne przestrzenie publiczne i rekreacyjne osiedla:  
a–c) fragment Retkini-Śródmieście, d) ciągle niedokończony „park” w części Retkinia Zachód-Południe (fot. T. Krystkowski)



Table 1. Type of development, Building Coverage (BCR) and Floor Area (FAR) ratios, and the value of the central angle in inter-block enclosures (elaborated by T. Krystkowski)

Tabela 1. Rodzaj zabudowy a współczynniki powierzchni i intensywności zabudowy oraz wartość kąta środkowego we wnętrzach międzyblokowych (oprac. T. Krystkowski)

Type of development:	Building Coverage Ratio (BCR)	Floor area ratio (FAR)	Value of the central angle
Buildings from the 1970s and 1980s			
comb layout (low)	0.13–0.23	0.65–1.17	from ~30° to ~46°
block layout (low)	0.20–0.24	1.00–1.16	from ~16° to ~25°–34°
nested layout (low) – point-blocks	0.08–0.20	0.38–0.95	*
nested layout (low) – longitudinal, 2-staircases	0.19–0.37	0.95–1.83	from ~48° to ~51°
nested layout (low) – L-shaped buildings	0.15–0.17	0.69–0.82	*
nested layout (high) – point-blocks	0.12–0.15	1.35–1.40	*
nested layout (high) – longitudinal, 2-staircases	0.11–0.16	1.32–2.41	from ~46° to ~51°
linear layout (low)	0.17–0.25	0.80–1.14	~30° to ~50°
linear layout (high)	0.18–0.40	2.03–4.53	*
Buildings from the 1990s			
block layout (low)	0.18–0.28	0.89–1.38	from ~24° to ~37°
Turn of the 20 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup> century buildings			
block layout (low)	0.20–0.29	0.88–1.46	~28° to ~50°
block layout (high)	0.38	2.54	–
Contemporary development (last 5 years)			
block layout (low)	0.20	1.21	~46°
mixed layout (low/high- with low-rise buildings dominating)	0.42	2.11	~55° to ~62°

\* no possibility to determine reliable values of the central angle

### Summary

The spatial layout of the Retkinia estate in Łódź has undergone considerable transformation. The composition, architecture, and volume of buildings, as well as the forms of the spaces between them, have changed from unified but more intimate forms, through large-scale, “model” solutions, to individualized, small layouts. Although more than 50 years have passed since the construction of the estate began, the whole is still not a completed urban layout.

Despite positive changes in the estate’s space, there are still areas requiring further transformations. These include areas with the potential to become main public spaces, including unarranged greenery areas which lack proper maintenance, equipment, or clear boundaries (Fig. 8d). By introducing properly shaped new buildings, it would be possible to spatially organize some parts of the estate, maintain its coherence, and emphasize the importance of certain spaces.

This applies to areas that are commercial centres. There is potential for the development of trade and diverse services to strengthen Retkinia’s functional offer. However, it is important that new buildings create architecturally and

urbanistically coherent complexes that add value to the entire estate structure. Such developments could not only enrich the landscape but also serve as landmarks, of which there are still few.

Another issue to address is the integration of individual parts of the estate, which are currently very varied. This is influenced by the fact that many important pedestrian routes lack continuity, with some of them being still improvised paths.

The above issues cover only part of the problems to be solved. Solving issues related to form (including aesthetics), functions (diversity of function), equipment, and the significance of spaces could have a positive impact. For example, increasing the availability of high-quality public spaces and amenities can significantly strengthen residents’ outdoor activities, as mentioned by Jan Gehl (Gehl 2009; 2014). These elements also play a huge role in creating a suitable environment for walking (walkability), which is one of the key features of liveable and sustainable neighbourhoods.

## References

- A.P. "Chcemy mieszkać nie tylko wygodnie." *Dziennik Łódzki*, April 13, 1966.
- A.P. "Retkinia – dzielnica dla 100 tysięcy." *Dziennik Łódzki*, March 18, 1969.
- Bamberski, Michał. "Struktura urbanistyczna wybranych łódzkich osiedli mieszkaniowych z lat 1950–1990 wyrazem zmieniających się metod kształtowania przestrzeni." *Builder* 320, no. 3 (2024): 45–51. <https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0054.3462>.
- Basista, Andrzej. *Betonowe dziedzictwo. Architektura w Polsce czasów komunizmu*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001.
- Borowski, Piotr, and Michał Koliński. *Blokowiska Łodzi. Vol. 1*. Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy, 2022.
- Gehl, Jan. *Życie między budynkami*. Wydawnictwo RAM, 2009.
- Gehl, Jan. *Miasta dla ludzi*. Wydawnictwo RAM, 2014.
- Gliński, Andrzej, Zyta Kusztra, and Stefan Müller. "Architektura Polska 1944–1984. Rozdział III. Część I. Lata 1956–1965. Poszukiwania." *Architektura*, no. 3 (1984): 64–80.
- Gp. "Mieszkania dla 180 tysięcy łodźian." *Głos Robotniczy*, March 9, 1964.
- Gryglewski, Piotr, Robert Wróbel, and Agnieszka Ucińska. *Łódzkie budynki 1945–1970*. Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy, 2009.
- Grymin Marek. *Rola zespołów parafialnych w kształtowaniu przestrzeni miejskiej na obszarze aglomeracji łódzkiej w latach 1945–2006*. Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy, 2009.
- Hanzl, Małgorzata, and Magdalena Rembeza. "Greenery and Urban Form vs. Health of Residents: Evaluation of Modernist Housing in Lodz and Gdansk." *Urban Planning* 7, no. 4 (2022): 96–112. <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v7i4.5831>.
- Janiszewska, Anna, Ewa Klimka, and Agnieszka Rochmińska. "Jakość życia na łódzkich osiedlach." *Space – Society – Economy*, no. 10 (2011): 145–79.
- Jaworski, Cyprian. "Co dalej... Perspektywy rozwoju i przebudowy Łodzi." In *Łódź od A do Z: Informator uniwersalny*. (1958), 73–113.
- "Klimat wielkiego osiedla." *Głos Robotniczy*, April 3, 1969.
- Krygier, Krystyna, and Tadeusz Sumień. "Dzielnica Mieszkańcowa Retkinia." *Architektura*, no. 5/6 (1973): 208–11.
- Krystkowski, Tomasz. "Studium zaniezań w kształtowaniu centralnych przestrzeni Łodzi w kontekście powojennych wizji i projektów urbanistycznych z lat 1945–1989." PhD diss., Politechnika Łódzka, 2022a.
- Krystkowski, Tomasz. "Osiedla i zespoły mieszkaniowe z lat siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych XX w." In *Atlas historyczny miasta Łodzi*, edited by Marek Koter, Maria Dankowska, Łódzkie Towarzystwo Naukowe, Politechnika Łódzka, 2022b.
- Krystkowski, Tomasz. "Wielorodzinne osiedla i zespoły mieszkaniowe z lat pięćdziesiątych i sześćdziesiątych XX w." In *Atlas historyczny miasta Łodzi*, edited by Marek Koter, Maria Dankowska, Łódzkie Towarzystwo Naukowe, Politechnika Łódzka, 2022c.
- Kuydowicz, Ludwik. "Budownictwo mieszkaniowe w Łodzi." *Przegląd Budowlany*, no. 8 (1961): 450–57.
- Nowakowska Maria. *Tyle piękna. O łódzkiej rzeźbie w przestrzeni miejskiej*. Stowarzyszenie Nowa Kultura i Edukacja, Taurus Edukacja i Kultura, 2020.
- Nowakowska Maria. *Tyle piękna II. O łódzkiej rzeźbie w przestrzeni miejskiej*. Stowarzyszenie Nowa Kultura i Edukacja, Taurus Edukacja i Kultura, 2021.
- Pawłowska Aneta. *Andrzej Jocz (1941–2019) – ocalić od zapomnienia*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2021.
- Sob. "Dzielnica domów z »taśmy«." *Głos Robotniczy*, October 21, 1970.
- Sob. "Prototypowa szkoła powstanie na Retkini." *Głos Robotniczy*, December 10, 1974a.
- Sob. "Retkinia-Wschód." *Głos Robotniczy*, July 2, 1974b.
- Sob., K. "Retkinia – osiedle niepodobne do innych." *Głos Robotniczy*, November 4, 1969.
- Sob., K. "Nadziemne centrum." *Głos Robotniczy*, September 17, 1972.
- Sob., K. "Eksperymentalne osiedle." *Głos Robotniczy*, October 10, 1973.
- Sobierajska, Krystyna. "Osiedle marzeń." *Głos Robotniczy*, June 13, 1975.
- Stefański, Krzysztof, and Błażej Ciarkowski. *Modernizm w architekturze Łodzi XX wieku*. Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy, 2018.
- Sumorok, Aleksandra. *Architektura i urbanistyka Łodzi okresu realizmu socjalistycznego*. Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010.
- Szafer, Tadeusz Przemysław. *Nowa architektura polska. Diariusz lat 1976–1980*. Arkady, 1981.
- Szafrąska, Ewa. "Wielkie osiedla mieszkaniowe w okresie transformacji – próba diagnozy i kierunku przemian na przykładzie Łodzi." In *Osiedla blokowe w strukturze przestrzennej miast*, edited by Iwona Jażdżewska, Wydawnictwo UŁ, Łódzkie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2010.
- Szafrąska, Ewa. "Niechciane dziedzictwo, czyli wielkie zespoły mieszkaniowe w strukturze społeczno-przestrzennej postsocjalistycznej Łodzi." *Acta Universitatis Lodzianis. Folia Sociologica*, no. 36 (2011): 141–56.
- Szafrąska, Ewa. "Przemiany struktury społecznej, przestrzennej i funkcjonalnej wielkich osiedli mieszkaniowych na przykładzie osiedla Widzew-Wschód w Łodzi." *Space – Society – Economy*, no. 11 (2012): 179–95.
- Szafrąska, Ewa. *Wielkie osiedla mieszkaniowe w mieście postsocjalistycznym. Geneza, rozwój, przemiany, percepcja*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2016.
- Tobiasz-Lis, Paulina. "Osiedla grodzone w Łodzi. Przyczyny i konsekwencje zjawiska." *Space – Society – Economy*, no. 10 (2011): 99–114.
- Urząd Miasta Łodzi. *Strategia Przestrzennego Rozwoju Łodzi 2020+*, załącznik do Uchwały nr LV/1146/13 Rady Miejskiej w Łodzi z dnia 16 stycznia 2013 r. Urząd Miasta Łodzi, 2012. Accessed August 30, 2024, at [https://uml.lodz.pl/files/public/dla\\_mieszkanca/strategia\\_miasta/Uchwala\\_ws\\_strategii\\_rozwoju\\_przestrzennego\\_.pdf](https://uml.lodz.pl/files/public/dla_mieszkanca/strategia_miasta/Uchwala_ws_strategii_rozwoju_przestrzennego_.pdf)
- Węclawowicz, Grzegorz. *Geografia społeczna miast. Uwarunkowania społeczno-przestrzenne*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2007.

## Streszczenie

*Śmiałe wizje, rzeczywistość, szanse na przyszłość.**Ewolucja układu przestrzennego modernistycznego wielorodzinnego zespołu mieszkaniowego na przykładzie osiedla Retkinia w Łodzi*

Modernistyczne wielorodzinne osiedla stanowią miejsce zamieszkania około ośmiu milionów Polaków. W Łodzi niemal połowa liczby mieszkańców żyje na takich osiedlach. Zespoły te, realizowane na ogromną skalę od lat 60. XX w. do czasu transformacji ustrojowej w 1989 r., będą jeszcze przez długie dekady odgrywały ogromną rolę w strukturze przestrzennej miasta.

Przedmiotem artykułu jest Retkinia – największe łódzkie osiedle. Realizowane od początku lat 70. XX w. zasadniczy kształt uzyskało na przełomie lat 80. i 90. XX w. Celem autora pracy jest przybliżenie ewolucji formy przestrzennej osiedla. Począwszy od śmiałych wizji architektów kreślących tętniące życiem centra handlowo-usługowe osiedla, zindywidualizowane przestrzenie publiczne, zielone tereny rekreacyjne o bogatym wyposażeniu czy eksperymentalne obiekty, po znacznie uboższą realizację – układ przestrzenny pozbawiony wielu istotnych elementów, w latach późniejszych uzupełniany i dostosowywany do bieżących potrzeb, a jednocześnie ciągle „nieukończony”.

Badanie oparto na kwerendzie archiwalnej, analizie i ocenie własnej przestrzeni osiedla (wzajemne relacje zabudowy, przestrzenie publiczne i ich wyposażenie, układ komunikacyjny) oraz studiach literatury przedmiotu.

Wyniki wskazują, że istniejący układ przestrzenny daje wiele możliwości przekształceń w kontekście aktualnych potrzeb mieszkańców oraz wyzwań współczesności.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Łódź, Retkinia, powojenny modernizm, osiedle mieszkaniowe