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A Woman in Architecture: Writing Urban History through Barbara Brukalska's Contemporary Kitchen

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Abstract

English Version:

This thesis revisits the work and legacy of Polish architect Barbara Brukalska (1899–1980) through a feminist lens, focusing on her design of the “Contemporary Kitchen” (*Kuchnia Współczesna*, published 1929), which was conceived in the context of the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (*Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa*, WSM) in Warsaw’s Żoliborz district. While often reiterated as a “modernist pioneer” figure, Brukalska’s archive, writings, and collaborations reveal a more complex position within the Polish avant-garde and European urban history. Three lines of inquiry frame the study: the archive as a site of narrative-building; the kitchen as a laboratory where gendered and classed socio-spatial imaginaries are negotiated; and critical storytelling as an outlook for architectural writing and urban studies explored through qualitative interviews with scholars, curators, artists and practitioners. The analysis is therefore encompassed through a manifold methodological framework, incorporating archival inquiry, qualitative interviews and walking around the grounds of the WSM. By bringing together different voices from the archive, experts, and my own positional reflections, this work proposes a multilayered framework for writing architectural and urban history. It illuminates how epistemological and linguistic barriers have marginalised Central and Eastern European figures, and how storytelling can reframe the architectural discourse. Brukalska’s Contemporary Kitchen thus emerges not only as a design object but as a site where domestic and urban scales intersect, and through which alternative models for writing in urban studies can be imagined, contributing to the growing scholarship of feminist approaches to architectural writing.

Deutsche Fassung:

Diese Arbeit beleuchtet das Werk und Vermächtnis der polnischen Architektin Barbara Brukalska (1899–1980) aus feministischer Perspektive und bezieht sich dabei insbesondere auf ihren Entwurf der “Zeitgenössischen Küche” (*Kuchnia Współczesna*, 1929), die im Rahmen der Warschauer Wohnbaugenossenschaft (*Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa*) im Warschauer Stadtteil Żoliborz konzipiert wurde. Obwohl Brukalska oft als „Pionierin der Moderne“ charakterisiert wird, zeigen ihr Archiv, ihre Schriften und Netzwerke, in denen sie eingebettet war, eine komplexere Position innerhalb der polnischen Avantgarde und der europäischen Stadtgeschichte. Drei Forschungsansätze bilden den Rahmen der Studie: das Archiv als Ort der Narrativbildung; die Küche als Versuchsfeld, in dem geschlechts- und klassenbezogene sozio-räumliche Imaginationen verhandelt werden; und kritisches Storytelling als Perspektive für Architekturkritik und Stadtforschung, untersucht anhand qualitativer Interviews mit Wissenschaftler*innen, Kurator*innen, Künstler*innen und Praktiker*innen. Die Analyse erfolgt anhand eines mehrstufigen methodologischen Rahmens, der sowohl Archivrecherchen als auch qualitative Interviews und Begehungen des WSM-Gebiets umfasst. Durch die Zusammenführung verschiedener Stimmen aus dem Archiv, von Experten und meinen eigenen positionellen Reflexionen schlägt diese Arbeit einen vielschichtigen Rahmen für das Schreiben von Architektur- und Stadtgeschichte vor. Sie beleuchtet, wie epistemologische und sprachliche Barrieren mittel- und osteuropäische Akteure marginalisiert haben und wie kritische Ansätze in Schreiben den Architektur- und

Stadtforschungsdiskurs bereichern können. Brukalska's "Zeitgenössische Küche" erscheint somit nicht nur als bloßer Entwurf, sondern auch als Schnittstelle, an der sich häusliche und städtische Dimensionen überschneiden. Dadurch können alternative Modelle für das Schreiben in der Stadtforschung imaginiert werden, was zu der wachsenden wissenschaftlichen Auseinandersetzung mit feministischen Ansätzen im Bereich der architekturbezogenen Literatur und beiträgt.

Polska Wersja:

Niniejsza praca analizuje dorobek i spuściznę polskiej architektki Barbary Brukalskiej (1899–1980) poprzez pryzmat feministyczny, koncentrując się na jej projekcie „Kuchni Współczesnej” (opublikowanym w 1929 roku), który powstał w kontekście działalności Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej (WSM) w warszawskiej dzielnicy Żoliborz. Choć często przywołuje się ją jako figurę „pionierki modernizmu”, archiwum Brukalskiej, jej pisma i współprace ukazują jej bardziej złożoną pozycję w ramach polskiej awangardy i europejskiej historii urbanistyki. Trzy linie badawcze stanowią ramę dla studium: archiwum jako miejsce budowania narracji; kuchnia jako laboratorium, w którym negocjowane są uwikłane w płęć i klasę społeczną wyobrażenia przestrzenno-społeczne; oraz krytyczne opisywanie historii (critical storytelling) jako perspektywa dla studiów architektonicznych i studiów miejskich, badana poprzez jakościowe wywiady z badacz(k)ami, kurator(k)ami, i artyst(k)ami. Analiza została zatem ujęta w wieloaspektowe ramy metodologiczne, łączące badanie archiwalne, wywiady jakościowe oraz spacerowanie badawcze po terenach WSM. Łącząc różne głosy z archiwum, ekspertów oraz moje własne refleksje pozycjonowane, niniejsza praca proponuje wielowarstwowe ramy dla pisania historii architektury i urbanistyki. Ilustruje, jak bariery epistemologiczne i językowe marginalizowały postacie z Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej oraz w jaki sposób opisywanie historii może przekształcić dyskurs architektoniczny. „Kuchnia Współczesna” Brukalskiej wyłania się zatem nie tylko jako obiekt projektowy, ale jako miejsce, w którym przenikają się skale domowa i miejska, oraz za pomocą którego można wyobrazić sobie alternatywne modele pisarstwa w ramach studiów miejskich, przyczyniając się tym samym do rosnącego rozwoju badań nad feministycznymi podejściami do pisarstwa architektonicznego.

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I want to thank architect Maria Brukalska for allowing me to utilise the family's archive repository of her parents-in-law for this research. Additionally, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to the various experts who shared their knowledge, time, and research insights with me. Special thanks to Daria Dorota Pikulska, who has opened the door of the archive at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław and answered all my questions throughout my query. The same pertains to the team at the Museum of the Warsaw University of Technology.

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And finally, I'd like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Kristin Veel, for all her guidance throughout this project, holding space for the process, and for encouraging me to pursue my interests, even if they challenge disciplinary boundaries.

My gratitude also belongs to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation for always supporting me throughout my academic trajectory and making it accessible to me through their program and a full-time scholarship.

Note on Translations

In the scope of this work, materials in three languages (Polish, German, and English) were consulted and translated. As a native speaker of both Polish and German, I have undertaken the translations myself. However, to support the visibility of the cultural and linguistic Polish context of the research subject, some Polish titles of sources and primary document citations are presented in full within the text, next to their translations.

For the sake of clarity and readability in English, certain names have been simplified. For example, in Polish, the conjugation of names differs depending on the context of the sentence; for instance, “Brukalscy”, or “Brukalskich,” refers in Polish to both Barbara Brukalska and Stanisław Brukalski as a couple, or the name (Zygmunt) Kasiński becomes “Kasińskiego” when referring to the street name. In this work, the couple will be referred to as “Brukalskis”, and street names will be provided in the Polish conjugation, such as “Kasińskiego Street”.

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Introduction

1915 marked the year in which something decisive changed the role of women in Polish architecture. The newly opened Warsaw University of Technology (*Polytechnika Warszawska*), including the Faculty of Architecture, was the first in Poland to admit women to study within the discipline. Among the first female graduates were Barbara Brukalska (1899-1980), Helena Syrkus (1900-1982), Nina Jankowska (1889-1979), and various others, many of whom later became representatives of the younger generation of the Polish avant-garde. Almost all of these “architectonics”, as they were clumsily called at the time (“*Architektoniczki*”, instead of the now common feminine “*Architektki*”), were professionally and maritally linked to male architects. Yet, each of them has a notable legacy of their own, having established their place in architecture in different ways. This not only included the study of architecture (or graduating from it, for that matter), but also writing, networking, and engaging socially in the demands of the changing society during the interbellum and after the Second World War.

What they all have in common, however, is that this legacy has long been, and in some cases still is, rendered invisible in the discourses of architectural history and urbanism. This work takes a closer look at one of these arguably forgotten practitioners, Barbara Brukalska, and the context in which she practised and collaborated.

Brukalska is the author of the so-called “Contemporary Kitchen” (*Kuchnia Współczesna*), a kitchen design she created as part of the development of the Warsaw Housing Cooperative (*Warszawska Spółdzielnia Mieszkaniowa*, in short WSM) in the district of Żoliborz, designed in 1927, realised in 1928, and finally published in 1929 in specialist literature. Later, she was the first woman in Poland to be appointed a professor of architecture in 1948. Her most important written work, “Social Principles for the Design of Housing Estates” (*Zasady społeczne projektowania osiedli mieszkaniowych*), was to be published the same year; however, it was censored under the rule of socialist doctrine.

In this study, Brukalska's legacy will be examined within the scope of an interpretive and hermeneutical historical analysis through a feminist lens. Her kitchen design is of particular interest; nonetheless, her life and discursive position are also central in the context of this analysis. In the few existing literature, Brukalska is mainly depicted as a ‘pioneer’ or a ‘tomboy modernist icon’ of the Polish avant-garde, typically accompanied by one or two pictures showing her in her twenties, with a bobbed haircut and a modern dress. This imaginary, however, seems incomplete, or even does her oeuvre an injustice, once one turns to her archive. Moreover, it also appears to serve injustice to other contemporaries, friends, and collaborators of Brukalska, who do not fit into the stereotypical picture of the modern woman with bobbed hair, such as Helena Syrkus, for example.

Through literature mapping, qualitative interviews with scholars, archival research, and analysis of her writing, this work aims to revisit the work and life of the (inter)nationally entangled practitioner Brukalska and unveil the unwritten potentials of her work within the international parataxis of the avant-garde. In doing so, this text aims to look beyond the undercurrents of writing about architecture and, respectively, urban studies, bringing together

different *voices* (Doucet et al., 2024): the archival voice, the ‘expert’ voice, and the voice of critical storytelling, reflective of my own positionality.

This leads me to the following primary question: *How can an intersectional feminist reading of Brukalska’s ‘Contemporary Kitchen’ challenge her position within the Polish avant-garde and reveal the kitchen as a critical site for negotiating gender, class, and urbanism?* This question will be addressed through three lines of inquiry.

1. In what way does Brukalska’s archive repository disrupt the imaginary of her as a modernist female architect?
2. How are imaginaries of gender and class spatially and discursively encoded within the design of the Contemporary Kitchen? And how can this be understood in connection with the urban scale?
3. And finally, how can ‘critical storytelling’ about women in architecture challenge the modes of architectural writing and offer a different model for writing urban studies?

The structure of the analysis is therefore threefold. First, the biographical and geo-historical context is laid out as a foundation to better understand the architecture considered. This includes information gathered from existing scientific literature, her archive repository at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, and qualitative interviews.

Next, the Contemporary Kitchen is approached through the architect’s own writings. This includes an article about the kitchen in question from 1929, as well as excerpts from her seminal work “Social Principles for the Design of Housing Estates” (1948). Through this, the implicit intertextual imaginaries of gender and class will be elaborated, as well as the possibilities of socio-spatial production of these dimensions within the scope of Brukalska’s scalar approach to urbanism.

Thirdly, a deeper understanding of research processes and complexities of methodological approaches to writing will be explored through the voices of researchers and creatives, who illuminate the mechanisms in their research, share moments of surprise, and discuss challenges in writing about women in architecture. Through this, the role of critical storytelling about the history of architecture within the field of urban studies will be put into question, drawing on the expertise of various scholars who are currently creating momentum for this topic in Poland and internationally. Through the interviews, perspectives from scholarly writing, photography, and curation emerge. Hence, this triangulated layout presents the results in an interlaced manner, bringing information from literature into conversation with direct quotes of the experts, as well as my findings and interpretations.

Bridging together the aspects of the materiality of the archival record, the intertextuality of her writings, and the conversations had, I also put into question my own motives and experiences that led me to produce this text, concluding my studies. With this, I therefore propose two things: On the one hand, a polygonal piece of architectural (urban) history and on the other, an expansive disciplinary reflection on how to tell that very urban history, working with a multilayered framework. For this, my own positionality and interaction with the discursive gap illustrated in the literature review is taken as the starting point, and motivation behind the present work. Subsequently, the aim is also to make Polish figures visible in

English writing, which includes performing a translational transfer based on predominantly Polish literature and source material. Ultimately, this text represents a process, not a definitive statement, pointing instead in multiple directions that necessitate further research. In the end, Brukalska's story, and the glimpse through her kitchen serve as a door that opens many other perspectives, yet to be written.

Literature Review

In the following section, the topic will be grounded through a thematically structured literature review, placing it within existing literature and discourse around Polish women architects, Barbara Brukalska, and the interwar architectural milieu. This review includes academic literature, such as journal articles, as well as books, anthologies, and other types of scientific publications. Furthermore, it also presents non-academic sources, including journalistic engagement pieces, exhibitions, and multimedia, such as podcasts.

Forgotten Women Architects and their (Re)Discovery

The work of the women precursors in Polish (and international) architecture and urbanism is historically underexposed, even though their legacy has gained attention in recent years. In her 2022 paper "Present but Invisible. Successful and Innovative Women Architects of Modernism in Design Practice and Architectural Discourse" (*Obecne, ale niewidoczne. Skuteczne i nowatorskie architektki modernizmu w praktyce projektowej i dyskursie architektonicznym*), author Magdalena Bernat explains how the absence in discourse and collective memory of (Polish) women architects is linked to a deliberate historiographical neglect, rather than a lack of influence as practitioners of their time. With a comparative lens on different examples across the twentieth century, she elaborates that Polish women architects have been present and very much active, but have been made invisible through a lack of representation in historical canons in the aftermath of their active years as architects and planners. Through that, Bernat (2022) is problematising a discursive injustice that poses a continuing issue for present-day practitioners.

Examples from international literature, similarly, suggest that the position of women*¹ in architecture and the history of architecture is a marginalised one. Despina Stratigakos has prominently discussed this statement in her 2016 work titled "Where are the Women Architects?". In it, Stratigakos discusses the persistent discursive phenomenon of mystifying re-iterations of the male "genius" and the "starchitect" oeuvre within the field of architecture, which stylises individual male practitioners as originators of whole building epochs and dwelling cultures. Building on that, the author asks where are women* in architecture today and under which working conditions they practice their profession. Through that, Stratigakos dedicates herself to the status quo of the gendered mechanisms of power and exclusion in the work field of architecture (Stratigakos, 2016). On a similar note, "Women Architects. Will

¹This text employs the term women, historically referring to the protagonists of the twentieth century, however it is important to point out a historic uncertainty of and possibility for the practitioners mentioned to may have identified as other genders than cis-women in present-day terms. In order to employ a gender-sensitive reading to the text, women*, when referring to present times, are written with a star, as current-time perspective offers different terminology than given in the interwar period, however, because of the historical reference and temporality of the subjectmatter, the reference to the interwar protagonists is left as women without a star, as which they described themselves, for fluent reading purposes.

Women Design Better Cities?” (*Architekti. Czy kobiety zaprojektują lepsze miasta?*), was published in 2022, concerning the Polish case. In this book, author Agata Twardoch, a prominent architect and writer, presents conversations with Polish women* architects and discusses their position and production conditions in the (sexist) architectural field in present-day Poland (Twardoch, 2022).

A further noteworthy mention in this context is also the upcoming “The Bloomsbury Global Encyclopedia of Women in Architecture 1960-2020” edited by Lori Brown and Karen Burns (2025), which presents a global overview of short biographies and contextual texts about women* working in architecture (among them a selection of practitioners from Poland, introduced by Tomasz Jeleński and Piotr Marciniak). The two volumes however, are yet to be published in print².

Stories of Politics, Subjectivity, and Collaboration

In line with this, recent examples of international literature deal with the problem of the historical and discursive injustice of the invisibility of women architects and planners (Bendsen et al., 2023; Espejel, 2018; Pepchinski & Budde, 2022). These works, drawing on examples of women's contributions to the architectural modernism movement across different places and decades, highlight the need for a more inclusive representation of modernity and its architectural activities as a collaborative effort across genders. However, each of these works offers different focal points of the topic.

In exploring the legacies of four women (modernist) architects, Carmen Espejel (2018) offers the perspective of subjectification through architecture, questioning if architecture can be gendered, and aggregating the historic distinctions between the feminine (interior) and masculine (exterior). Mary Pepchinski's and Christina Budde's collection offers a multifaceted reflection on the politics of gender equity in architecture inspired by the discursive upheaval of the subject after 2018, when, in light of the centenary of women entering into the profession, exhibitions about women architects were taking place in Germany (Pepchinski & Budde, 2022).

To a certain degree, the examined literature shares a focus on the notion of collaboration, highlighting how women (within the circles of modernists across the twentieth century) have been historically overlooked in their contributions. The works also emphasise the importance of writing and publishing their biographies to make these stories and achievements more visible, thereby enabling their inclusion in the architectural canon.

In their book “Untold Stories: on Women, Gender, and Architecture in Denmark”, authors Jannie Rosenberg Bendsen, Svava Riesto, and Henriette Steiner (2023) examine women practitioners in Denmark from 1930 to 1980, exploring the concept of collaboration as a multi-faceted analytical lens. On one hand, they present collaboration as a crucial factor for working across genders and different projects; on the other, it also refers to women working together and supporting each other. Additionally, collaboration is discussed in terms of love and marriage as a working condition for women architects, who often remained in the shadow

² See: https://www.bloomsburyvisualarts.com/encyclopedia-work?docid=balwomen_reference. (Last accessed: 15.08.2025)

of their male spouses. While the book offers a new perspective on the specific history of twentieth century architecture in Denmark, it can also be applied to international examples of women practitioners, as the book provides a broader perspective on the question of forgotten women* in architecture, which fundamentally relates to a problem of the historical archive and historiography across disciplines, necessitating a new approach to the methodologies used to study and interpret these materials and these figures. They also advocate for celebrating these “forgotten” protagonists, which involves resisting the glamorisation and mystification of individuals (ibid.).

About Polish Women Architects

The same year as Stratigakos’ treatise on the contemporary position of women* in architecture came out, a book containing several essays on the works of Polish women protagonists from the twentieth century was published for the first time. The volume “*Architektki*” (Kunz, 2016)³ came out as part of EMG series “*Architektura jest najważniejsza*” (Architecture is the Most Important Thing) in memory of the architect and professor Tomasz Mańkowski⁴, who died in 2012. In this volume, art and architecture historian Marta Leśniakowska interprets some of the works of Barbara Brukalska, labelling her as a “subtle builder of surfaces and forms” (2016a, p. 39), as she writes about some interiors and furniture for international expositions in the second half of the 1920s, her own home in Żoliborz, as well as her greenery focussed approach to the Warsaw Housing Cooperative. In the scope of the same book, other authors also present essays on the works of Brukalska's colleagues, such as the already mentioned Helena Syrkus⁵, but also Anatolia Hryniewicka-Piotrowska⁶ (Kubiak, 2016; Ochęduszek, 2016). These figures are only a few prominent examples, among a longer list of women architects and planners who began their professional activity in the interwar period. Scholars have noted that the Polish professional environment is a uniquely early case of women being active in architecture, in international comparison (Leśniakowski,

³ And later in the same series, ‘*Pionierki*’ (2019), which presents Polish female pioneers in urban planning and research (Dąbrowska, 2019).

⁴ See: <https://www.wydawnictwoemg.pl/ksiazki/serie/architektura-jest-najwazniejsza>. (Last accessed: 15.11.2024).

⁵ Helena Syrkus (1900-1982) gave the name to the Praesens group and was also an important figure in the design and implementation of the WSM project in which context Brukalska's kitchen design was realised. Helena and her husband Szymon Syrkus were largely responsible for the design of the WSM housing estate in Warsaw's Ochota district (Ochęduszek, 2016). Helena continued her work as an architect in socialist Poland after the Second World War and was a central figure in the reconstruction of Warsaw. The Syrkus couple corresponded with Walter and Ise Gropius for decades (Kędziorek et al., 2019). Shortly after the end of the war, Walter Gropius helped Helena to track down her husband Szymon, who had been interned in Auschwitz and survived the war. The decades of correspondence covered topics including architecture, CIAM and personal experiences. The correspondence in German was presented in a comprehensive exhibition and publication by Katarzyna Uchowicz in 2019 and translated into Polish and English. Together with the Brukalskis, the Syrkus couple are written about as driving forces behind the popularization of modernist ideas from the CIAM and CIRPAC environment in interwar Poland. Helena Syrkus wrote a programmatic theory of practice for architecture and urban planning on 845 pages, which was published in 1984: “*Spoleczne cele urbanizacji. Człowiek i środowisko*” (Social Goals of Urbanization. The Human and the Environment) (H. Syrkus, 1984).

⁶ Anatolia Hryniewicka-Piotrowska (1896-1989), was also a graduate of *Politechnika Warszawska* (Technical University of Warsaw), and designed the *Pawilon Pracy Kobiet* (Pavilion of Women's Work) at the 1929 ‘General National Exhibition in Poznań’ (*Powszechną Wystawę Krajową w Poznaniu*). The pavilion is considered an important architectural artifact of the representation of women's work and the work of women in the interwar period. Examples of handicrafts and women's magazines were exhibited in the pavilion and were intended to symbolize the activities of Polish women in science, society, art and business (Kubiak, 2016).

1996; Pilecki-Institut Berlin, 2024). Curiously, as to these three practitioners, who were collaborating not least in the avant-garde group *Praesens*, there is no comprehensive monograph or publication dedicated to either of their life's work. This phenomenon of lacking monographical material is discussed by scholars Klara Czerniewska-Andrzejczyk, Michał Duda, Tomasz Fudala, Katarzyna Uchowicz, and Anna Wrońska in the podcast “*Piszcie O Moich Dokonaniach: Gdzie Są Monografie Polskich Architektów?*” (Write About My Achievements: Where Are the Monographs on Polish Female Architects?) (Rasmus-Zgorzelska, 2024).

However, there is a breadth of academic literature, and also some journalistic engagement pieces, which deal with specific examples of the women's oeuvre. As of most recent, Brukalska and Syrkus have been the topic of discussion in a panel organised at the Pilecki Institute in Berlin, which was hosted by architecture historian and curator Aleksandra Kędziołek (Pilecki-Institut Berlin, 2024). The panel addressed the dimension of the Networks among the international avant-gardes. On a side note, the host has been planning an upcoming exhibition about Barbara Brukalska and Helena Syrkus at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław together with art historian Małgorzata Jędrzejczyk, both of whose voices are represented in the scope of this research.

Furthermore, the historic figures are featured in various online articles on architecture and history, such as Cymer (2018), which compares early kitchen interiors of Polish women architects in the twentieth century. Moreover, Polish women architects and landscape designers have been the subject of recent artistic exploration. Austrian artist Aglaia Konrad photographed some of the built environments created by Alina Scholtz (1908-1996)⁷, Barbara Brukalska, Halina Skibniewska (1921-2011), Helena Syrkus, and Zofia Hansen (1924-2013) in present-day Warsaw. Combining methods of walking and photographing, Konrad gathered visuals of green spaces and architectural elements connected to these five women and exhibited them in the Austrian Cultural Forum in Warsaw in 2023. Accompanied by contextualising texts by architect Jelena Pančevac, the photographs were published in November last year at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (Konrad & Pančevac, 2024). Some of these women are also featured in a current exhibition “*Architektki*”, at the Warsaw Pavilion of Architecture ZODIAK, which highlights generational transfer between women architects in Warsaw and Poland (18.07.2025-19.10.2025). In the scope of this exhibition, one of the curators, Anna Cymer, has conceptualised a historical “Atlas of Warsaw Women Architects” and their works in Warsaw, among them, some of Barbara Brukalska's contributions in the scope of the WSM are mentioned (*Architektki*, 2025; Cymer, 2025).

Barbara Brukalska: The Imaginary of a Modern Woman

The few existing works of literature about Barbara, whether academic or non-scholarly, share a familiar imagery of the architect as a modernist icon, or even as the ‘Polish star of the world avant-garde’ (Szymczyk, 2020). In the articles and blog posts that exist online, the picture of a young Brukalska in her twenties is commonly used (see: Fig. 23). It shows a confidently

⁷ For further reference see: “*Alina Scholtz: Projektantka Warszawskiej Zieleni*” (Alina Scholtz: Designer of Warsaw's Green Spaces), (Czerniewska & Solarek, 2022).

posing young woman, either in her silky dress with a geometric pattern, or a fur coat, glancing back at the camera – but more importantly, with a short, modern haircut, in the style of Josephine Baker, as is pointed out, for example, by art historian Marta Leśniakowska, on numerous occasions (Leśniakowska, 2011, 2016a; Szymczyk, 2020). This image is reiterated across academic and popular science literature. Adding to this, an example of children's literature representing Barbara Brukalska was also found in the scope of research. In the special volume of the series “Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls” by Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo, Sylwia Chutnik has written “100 Historii Niezwykłych Polek” (One Hundred Stories of Extraordinary Polish Women), where a drawing of a smiling Brukalska in her short tomboy hairstyle can be seen (Chutnik, 2021). The reviewed literature and material clearly show that this image is a common imaginary of the practitioner in the few discursive spaces in which she appears.

It was precisely Marta Leśniakowska who first published about and positioned Brukalska in the Polish discourse around gender and architecture in her essay “*Modernistka w kuchni. Barbara Brukalska, Grete Schütte-Lihotzky, i 'polityka puchenna'*” (Women Modernist in the Kitchen, Barbara Brukalska, Grete Schütte-Lihotzky and 'Kitchen Politics'), which appeared in the magazine *Konteksty, Polska Sztuka Ludowa* in 2004. It is the first publication to take up Brukalska's kitchen in connection with her position as a woman in the Polish architectural avant-garde. The title hints at a metaphor enshrined in the plans of the kitchen design of Brukalska, in which she seemingly draws herself as a figure into her design. Leśniakowska builds her argument in the context of the contradictions of the universal ideals of the modernists and their implicit kitchen politics. The author thus questions the position of the kitchen designer herself and argues that Brukalska was largely left out of the planning context of the WSM project (in which her kitchen design was embedded), its public relations work, and the ideological decision-making in this regard.

Leśniakowska (2004) uses the famous kitchen debate between Khrushchev and Nixon at the American National Exhibition in Moscow in 1959 to elaborate on the male dominance in the kitchen politics of the twentieth century. In the article, the kitchen debate functions as a symbol of the fact that even the domestic realm was dominated by men as a political sphere, even though numerous female figures contributed greatly to changes in the household. “*Modernistka w kuchni*” therefore indicates that the designers of the modernist kitchen - because of their position as women in the architecture of the time - were arguably never able to achieve complete interpretative sovereignty over the inherent politics of their designs. In writing so, the architectural historian argues against a myth of interwar modernism as a sacrosanct men's club and highlights the numerous contributions of women figures within these architectural circles, while also addressing the conditions of production as women (Leśniakowska 2004). However, Brukalska also stands out as a representative of quite a vast number of Polish women who entered into architecture quite early and successfully in an international comparison (Leśnikowski, 1996, pp. 216, 231).

Leśniakowska was also involved in an exhibition titled “*Przyszłość będzie inna, wizje i praktyki modernizacji społecznych po roku 1918*” (The future will be different, visions and

practices of social modernisation after 1918) at the Zachęta Gallery in 2018⁸. A real-size replica model of the Brukalska kitchen was on display there (Fig. 35). In the exhibition catalogue “Glass Houses. Visions and Practices of Social Modernisation after 1918”, Leśniakowska has published an article on Brukalska and her collaboration with architect Nina Jankowska: “Room with a View. Barbara Brukalska & Nina Jankowska Ltd.” (2018). It addresses the metaphorical and symbolic significance of one of the two historically known designs of the “*Dom i Ogród*” (House and Garden) counselling initiative, which was active around 1930 at the Żoliborz settlement of the WSM and was founded and managed by Brukalska and Jankowska. Departing from this, the author points towards colonialist imaginaries in the larger scope of modernist architectural thought, which, for example, employed imported “exotic” plants in their designs as symbols of cosmopolitanism, modern travel and the expansion of the “New World” (ibid.). Another important seminal work on the position of women practitioners by Leśniakowska was her contribution “*Lekceważone córki Almae Mater - pionierki architektury w Polsce*” (Disregarded Daughters of the Almae Mater - Pioneers of Architecture in Poland) in the anthology “*Architektura i wnętrze 1905-1923*” (Architecture and Interior 1905-1923), edited by Joanna Kucharzewska and Jerzy Malinowski (2007).

Even though Brukalska is a recognised figure among the discourses of architecture in Poland, there is no explicitly dedicated work to the architect and her life’s work. However, a personal biography appears in the scope of the book “*Kreatorki: Kobiety, Które Zmieniły Polski Styl Życia*” (Creators: Women, who changed the Polish Lifestyle) (Pańków & Pańków, 2018). Additionally, Brukalska’s original article on her kitchen design from 1929 has recently been republished in the anthology “*Teksty Modernizmu: Antologia Polskiej Teorii I Krytyki Architektury 1918-1981*” (Texts of Modernism: An Anthology of Polish Architectural Theory and Criticism 1918–1981) (Jędruch et al., 2018).

Looking Eastwards: Dynamics of Centre and Periphery

However, in the case of the first Polish women practitioners in the fields of architecture, art history, and urban studies, it is not only the discursive invisibility on a gendered level that should be noted, but also their Polish, or Central and Eastern European, positionality in the non-Polish discourse. Not only is a myth of the modernist men's club discursively persistent, but also that of Western European architectural modernism as its main avenue, particularly the discursive dominance of the Bauhaus. This is problematised within the following examples of history of architecture; therefore, there are attempts to supplement the image of modernism with an image of “multiple modernities” (Tragbar, 2021), positioning the many networks and personal connections within these circles as a lively exchange and collaboration across countries and cities. Noticeably, art historian Małgorzata Jędrzejczyk (2023) employs the concept of “migrating ideas” to describe the international ideo-transfer in the vivid epistolary exchange that the architects and urbanists maintained.

⁸ The exhibition was curated by Joanna Kordjak and was dedicated to social innovations in architecture, film and print after Poland's independence with a focus on marginalized positions of this period, i.e. women, children and ethnic minorities (see Zachęta 2018, at: <https://zacheta.art.pl/en/wystawy/przyszlosc-bedzie-inna?setlang=1>). (Last accessed: 17.11.2024).

In terms of East-West collaboration and visibility, there has been an extensive study of the intellectual exchange between the couples Helena and Szymon Syrkus and Walter and Ise Gropius, that culminated in an exhibition, emphasising the exchange between the two women, Helena and Ise who have continued a multiple-decade long exchange of private and professional input (Kędziorek et al., 2019). Other works dealing with aspects of collaboration are Wenderski (2017, 2019), which examine collaborative entanglements between Dutch, Belgian and Polish protagonists of the time, further Stolarska-Fronia (2019) dealing with the Polish artistic avant-garde working in Berlin, or Jędrzejczyk (2023), Kędziorek (2018), Kohlrausch (2021), Rozbicka (2024), Störckuhl and Makala (2021), and Szczerski (2020), mapping out networks of modernity in Central and Eastern Europe, writing against a Western European trope of the modernist movement.

However, an example of the “Western” discourse around the modernist movements, which takes up Polish among other Central- and Eastern European influences of the avant-garde, was the traveling exhibition “Central European Avant-Gardes. Exchange and Transformation, 1910-1930”, curated at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2002, after which the exhibition was also shown at the Haus der Kunst in Munich and the then Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin (Benson & Forgács, 2002; Benson, 2002). The accompanying anthology “Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910-1930” re-published primary sources and translations of manifestos of Polish visual artists and sculptors, among other Central- and Eastern European modernist materials. The only Polish woman to appear in the picture, however, is the sculptor Katarzyna Kobro (1898-1951). Nonetheless, the position of women modernists was included in the exhibition. In the accompanying catalogue, Monika Król discusses “Collaboration and Compromise. Women Artists in Polish-German Avant-Garde Circles, 1910-1930” - in particular the constellation of the married couple as a working collective in art (and architecture). Król (2002) addresses the significance of spousal collaboration for the visibility of forgotten figures, such as women, their artistic autonomy and recognition of authorship.

A much earlier example would also be the travelling exhibition “Constructivism in Poland 1923-1936. BLOK, Praesens, a.r.” in 1973 at the Museum Folkwang in Essen, and subsequently at the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, in Otterlo (Stanisławski et al., 1973). The theme of this exhibition was the historical development of Constructivism and the reconstruction of its influences, policies, manifestos and programs in collaboration with the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. Women figures who were explicitly brought into the picture are, again, sculptor Katarzyna Kobro, graphic designer and architect Teresa Żarnower (1897-1949) and architect Helena Syrkus. Brukalska was mentioned here only once in connection with her husband and in passing as co-author of the Żoliborz residence of the Brukalskis. Another early example of a work dedicated to the Polish avant-garde in particular is Izabella Wisłocka *“Awangardowa Architektura Polska 1918-1939”* (1968), which presents a comprehensive synthesis of the origins of the milieus movements in Polish.

It is due to the efforts of individual historians like Marta Leśniakowska, or Katarzyna Uchowicz, that women architects' legacies, like the one of Brukalska, have been dealt with in a Polish-speaking professional or academic discourse. In the course of this research, however, no English-speaking - or German for that matter - piece of academic literature could be found

that takes up her work from the interwar period in detail and elaborates on the intersections of gender and international collaborations. However, it is essential to mention the work of historian Martin Kohlrausch, who has dealt extensively with the legacy of the Polish architectural modernism on the international scene, also shedding light on its female figures, such as Helena Syrkus, in his book titled “Brokers of Modernity: East Central Europe and the Rise of Modernist Architects, 1910-1950” (Kohlrausch, 2019). And similarly in “Races to Modernity: Metropolitan Aspirations in Eastern Europe, 1890-1940”, which the author co-edited with Jan C. Behrends, he writes about the ambitions of the “*Warszawa Funkcjonalna*” (Functionalist Warsaw) project and efforts of the Polish architects to position themselves on the map of Modernism in Europe, while also being a venue of an Eastern Modernity in its own right, among other places, such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia (Behrends & Kohlrausch, 2014; Kohlrausch, 2014). Apart from Kohlrausch's writings, however, it is difficult to speak of an international discourse that would represent Barbara Brukalska, her kitchen design, or even pick up on her work in the context of the *Praesens* group or in collaboration with her husband, Stanisław.

Theoretical Framework

Attending to the triangulation of inquiry encompassed by the research question, the theoretical basis is to be laid out in three parts. By employing notions of feminist historiography, concepts of spatializations of gender and class, and a critical approach to architectural knowledge production, the three lines of enquiry are undergirded by different theoretical nodes. The first line of question about the disruptive potential of Brukalska's archive repository at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, leads to the question about archival representation and the narrative that emerges from within that archive. Secondly, the concept of the spatial production of gender and class will be of relevance when investigating how these dimensions are encoded and reproduced in the design of the kitchen. Lastly, the notion of critical narrative and storytelling in relation to Barbara Brukalska will be mobilised for the third stream of inquiry.

Archival Representation

The first line of inquiry approaches the archive not as a neutral repository of facts but as a site that negotiates questions of representation and omission. Following Antoinette Burton's (2005) insistence that archives are historically contingent constructions, Brukalska's archive can be understood as both enabling and constraining her presence within architectural history. What is preserved, such as drawings, published writings, letters and furniture plans, becomes a possible foundation for her recognition, while what disappears or remains unrecorded reinforces dominant gendered hierarchies of knowledge dissemination. Beatriz Colomina's (1994) engagement with modernist architects archives as sites of mediated and gendered knowledge production further complicates this view, as she positions architectural archives as not only material collections but also discursive spaces shaped by how architects were writing themselves (or not) into representations about modernism, such as Le Corbusier for instance. Thus, the engagement with the archive repository can be conceptualised as an active participation in a discursive space, that holds the possibility of producing Brukalska's image as a modernist female architect, or disrupting it, selectively amplifying some professional

achievements while potentially silencing other (embodied) practices that informed her design work. Expanding this, Karen Burns (2017) argues that recovering feminism's intellectual and archival legacy is essential to counter both reductive stereotypes and the myth of neutrality in architecture. Without this history and theory, lived experiences of gender risk being disconnected from the broader discourse, whereas feminist theory provides the abstractions necessary to link personal knowledge to, for example, architectural action.

At the same time, the active engagement with Brukalska's archive connects to what Diana Taylor (2003) terms the repertoire from a performative perspective: the *embodied practices*, *gestures*, and *everyday enactments* that rarely enter official records or written history. In the case of the "Contemporary Kitchen," this repertoire might include the unrecorded ways women inhabited, resisted, redefined, or rejected its standardised design. Avery Gordon's (1997) concept of *haunting* provides a lens to engage with these absences as *presences*, *ghosts* that shape how women's work is (not) remembered and reinterpreted. To think of her archive as *haunted* is to acknowledge both what is there and what is missing, opening a sphere of the affective, and to allow those absences to disrupt the imaginary of Brukalska as a classic modernist heroine. Instead, her archive potentially becomes a contested site where questions of gender, class, and authorship linger, by what has been excluded from the record.

Production of Space, Gender, and Class

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) triadic conception of space and Doreen Massey's (1994, 2005) relational spatial theory, this study approaches the kitchen as a site where gender and class relations are materially and symbolically negotiated. Lefebvre's framework distinguishes between *perceived*, *conceived*, and *lived* space, highlighting how everyday practices, design logics, and symbolic meaning-making intersect in the production of spatial arrangements. Of particular relevance here is the dimension of *conceived space*⁹, illuminating how architects and planners inscribe social imaginaries into design, which becomes particularly visible in the interwar modernist tendency toward standardisation and functional ordering of space, extending even to domestic interiors such as the kitchen. Building on this, Massey's notion of *power geometry* foregrounds the unequal positioning of different social groups in relation to mobility, resources, and control, underscoring how class and gender as dimensions of power are spatially encoded and reproduced, challenging dichotomic distinctions between private and public space. Her conceptualisation of a *progressive sense of place* further helps situate domestic design within broader urban and social relations, rather than as an isolated spatial sphere.

Complementing these frameworks, Irene Nierhaus (2019; 2014) reconceptualises dwelling as a mediated, socially charged process, where the interior becomes a 'show-place' (*Schau-Platz*) in which gender and class categories are continuously negotiated. This challenges the myth of the home as a private, apolitical realm, showing instead that domestic

⁹ In his threefold concept, Lefebvre distinguishes between three domains, which are interlaced in the social production of space. While *perceived space*, or *spatial practice* refers to the physically and materially encountered spatial configurations in every day use, *conceived space*, or *representations of space*, is the domain of mediation, or conceptualisation, that imposes power, or control over the tangible space. And then *lived space*, or *representational spaces* points toward the symbolic domain, how space is inscribed with meaning through lived experience and emotional relations (1974/1991).

spaces perform identity and social norms through both material arrangements and everyday practices. In parallel, Robin Evans (1978/1997) illustrates how ordinary architectural elements, such as corridors, layouts, and domestic plans, encode hierarchies, temporalities, and moral norms, offering the home as a site where social power is structured, regulated, and experienced. Together, these perspectives provide a conceptual lens for reading Brukalska's Contemporary Kitchen as both a symbolic concept and a material design, where gendered and classed relations are inscribed, mediated, and negotiated.

Critical Storytelling

A growing body of feminist scholarship on architecture has consistently challenged canonical historiographies that privilege heroic narratives of architects as singular creators, while marginalising the contributions of women and other underrepresented groups (Borden et al., 2000; L. A. Brown, 2016; Stratigakos, 2016). Scholars such as Lori Brown, Despina Stratigakos, and more recently Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner (2024), have argued for new ways of telling and disseminating stories that foreground women's experiences and collaborative practices in architecture and urbanism. This entails recognising subjectivity, situatedness, and positionality as integral to architectural knowledge production (L. Brown et al., 2024; Haraway, 1988), thereby undoing the "*god trick*" of supposedly objective and universal scholarship. These accounts resonate with broader calls for transdisciplinary and explorative modes of inquiry in architecture (Doucet & Janssens, 2011; Frichot, Gabriellson, et al., 2017; Frichot, Grillner, et al., 2017), where storytelling is acknowledged not merely as an adjunct but as a critical methodology for challenging exclusionary dynamics of writing, scholarly recognition, and authority. Recent projects such as the aforementioned "Untold Stories: On Women, Gender and Architecture in Denmark" (Bendsen et al., 2023) illustrate the potential of feminist historiography to recuperate silenced narratives while at the same time rethinking the epistemological frameworks through which architectural histories are written, which is mobilised in the scope of the third line of inquiry.

Extending these debates, Isabelle Doucet, Hélène Frichot, Janina Gosseye and Naomi Stead (2024) highlight how conventions of architectural writing themselves contribute to invisibility of underrepresented perspective: *voices* of positionality are silenced through claims of academic neutrality, *languages* are marginalised under English's academic dominance, *genre* conventions constrain possibilities of expression, and *revisions* risk erasing traces of the versatility of a topic. These four "*acts of disappearance*" in writing illuminate how architectural discourse polices what counts as knowledge, and for whom. Thus, attending to such dynamics means not only diversifying the archive of architectural history but also interrogating the epistemic frameworks through which this history is produced and narrated from there. By foregrounding *storytelling*, *positionality*, and *reflexivity*, feminist approaches insist that historiography is an active site of power where inclusions and exclusions are constantly negotiated (Riesto et al., 2024). This perspective underpins the third line of inquiry in this thesis to explore Brukalska's Contemporary Kitchen not as a marginal project, but as a vital architectural text that tells a story connecting scales of the domestic to the urban realm, negotiating dimensions of gender and class through space. This conceptual framework lays the groundwork for examining the complexity of her position as a woman practitioner within

the Polish (and international) avant-garde and for proposing an alternative, more inclusive approach to engaging with architectural and urban history and writing.

Methods: Attending to the Dissonance

In the following subsections, the process of case selection, positionality, and analytical strategy will be presented. This encompasses the threefold methodological framework including archival research, qualitative semi-structured interviews, and walking. The chapter concludes with the limitations of this research.

Case Selection and Positionality

The presented case selection is based on the experienced discrepancy between the canons that were presented to me during my studies, and a critical engagement with my own positionality as a queer woman* of Polish heritage, who has been raised and educated in a Western European context. Reflecting on my heritage, while growing up in the German education system, I have often asked myself, where the examples from the “East”¹⁰ were in histories about, well, frankly anything. This question arose during my bachelor’s, and then also during this program, propagating “European” urban studies, embedded in a “global” context. Finding that both (Central-) Eastern European (among many others) perspectives are underrepresented both in theoretical canon, and practical examples, I began to not only nag some of the teachers, but to look for my own history of urban studies, which allowed to critically reflect on my education.

Therefore, while engaging with examples of feminist research on the discussion of how to study space, gender, and architecture, I decided to attend to my perceived invisibility of the East, looking for the histories of Polish women that have shaped urbanism. As I began to conduct my first research, I quickly came across the name of Barbara Brukalska. In the few pieces I read online, she is described as an ‘icon’, a ‘modernist’, an ‘innovator’, and I wondered - if she was so iconic, how come there isn’t more written about her? A seminal work since the beginning of my first investigations has been the essay of historian Marta Leśniakowska as mentioned above, who 21 years ago brought her kitchen design into a discussion about gender politics in context with the architectural profession and housing development. Through this, Brukalska’s kitchen emerged as a fascinating example, that complements the canons about the modernist kitchen centring Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky’s “Frankfurt Kitchen” as the luminary of modernist interventions in domestic space. The example also sparked a question about how to best spatialise this topic of interest, to make it a strong case for urban studies. However, a deeper look at the material connected to the design quickly revealed the potential to connect it to the urban scale from a historic, as well as a theoretical perspective.

Fast forward, in November 2024, I was seated in a room packed with students and scholars at an event hosted by the Intersect Hub at the University of Copenhagen. The panel discussed the transformative possibilities of critical storytelling, with professors Lori Brown and

¹⁰ This term is understood with caution and sensitivity to the various scopes of geographical framings that could be encompassed with this term, however in this context it draws from the historic temporality of the division of Europe between countries with socialist and non socialist historical legacy.

Isabelle Doucet reflecting on their current projects. They were talking about their work, how writing and curation hold the power to transform our understanding of history, and thus, how to question what architecture “is really about”. Their examples and self-reflective storytelling drew me in, yet at the same time, I found myself moving back and forth within the labyrinth that my own research had become, echoing with fragments, contradictions, and unresolved questions that obscured the meaning of the architecture I was trying to grasp. How do I tell this story? Where is my point of departure? The more I listened, the more I realised that my answers might not only lie in structural clarity, but also in attending to the dissonance of the material itself. Posing questions about the unwritten and the unseen, Isabelle Doucet noted at one moment that “doing” history of architecture is not only an effort to talk about that very history, but also to *listen*. Writing follows later. And through that listening, writing is transformed into a critical revisiting of materials and subjects that have been time and again invisibilised. So, how can I best *listen* to Barbara Brukalska, as well as her contemporaries and their legacies? Doucet and Brown at least stressed the urgency of writing against certain reiterations of architecture and their protagonists, avoiding the trap of clichéd categories, such as the sole creator. Instead, they encourage engagement with the materials in different ways, inquiring about the processes behind their results, and critically unpacking the yet unwritten.

The metaphor of *listening* to the material is understood here as a call for a critical hermeneutical approach - an approach that understands architecture and the urban built environment through a historical lens, and vice versa. By foregrounding the dimensions of gender and class as spatial categories, it proposes to methodologically explore how socio-spatial relations are (literally) built and represented, and from which ideological and historical context they emerge.

“Stone, brick, glass, and concrete don’t have agency, do they? They aren’t consciously trying to uphold the patriarchy, are they? No, but their form helps shape the range of possibilities for individuals and groups. Their form helps keep some things seeming normal and right, and others “out of place” and wrong. In short, physical places like cities matter when we want to think about social change.” (Kern, 2020)

This also raises the question of who builds, under what conditions, and for what purposes. In order to bring to the surface the social relations that are built into the bricks of the city, this work examines an example of the modernist kitchen as a contested space that encapsulates the history of gender, class, and care politics. However, Barbara Brukalska’s Contemporary Kitchen poses a methodological challenge. It is a design, of which there is no longer a remaining original, yet its legacy is symbolic of the changes in dwelling practices taking shape in the early twentieth century. Thus, the methodological question arises in writing about architecture that no longer exists. Where is the field here, then? The same challenge arises regarding the architect, of whom there seems to exist a somewhat one-dimensional imaginary. Engaging with the literature at hand, the loose threads all pointed me in the same direction: the archives.

Thus, the work at hand addresses this complexity through consulting primary source materials, which are complemented by two main qualitative empirical datasets. One is archival research, and the other is qualitative, semi-structured interviews with “experts”. These two sets of data are supported by further fieldwork, involving walking around the

present built environment of the WSM Żoliborz. During this process, visual material (photographs and videos) was generated to further support the contextual basis. All of this is based on a comprehensive review of academic, as well as non-academic literature, engagement pieces, exhibitions, publications, and artistic works that engage with the topic of Barbara Brukalska, Polish women architects, and the context in which the case study is to be placed.

Archival Research

In the context of this research, the digital archives of the Warsaw University of Technology, the Polish Library Network and the Polish National Library were used to access primary source material as well as information archived online by the Warsaw Housing Cooperative, WSM Żoliborz.

Asking myself who the person behind the plan might have been, other than the information I had gathered from the primary sources and the few articles giving an outline of the person Brukalska seems to have been, I first consulted online collections of the Polish National Archive, as well as digital libraries. Important sources have been the data banks of national digital libraries of Radom, Warsaw (Mazowiecka), and the online collections of the Warsaw University of Technology. There I could retrieve the historical journals, as well as some older articles for more detailed background research. This, however, did not necessarily give me a better understanding of Brukalska's position, as there were barely any architectural plans or personal photographs. Curiously, I have been seeing photographs credited to the family's archive in some articles, yet I could not find any record of where that archive was located, or if it even existed as a whole. Luckily, in my first interviews with art and architecture historians and curator Aleksandra Kędziorek and later Katarzyna Uchowicz, I learned that there is indeed an extensive repository of Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski, currently housed in the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, however, a collection not publicly available. Upon written enquiry, art historian Daria Dorota Pikulska invited me to visit for a *kwerenda* (query), though not without warning: the Brukalski legacy in the depository counts more than 1000 objects, which are not yet officially listed and catalogued. Still, it turned out that this research query occurred at a fortunate moment, as only one year ago Maria Brukalska, the heir of the Brukalski legacy, returned it to the repository of the Museum after a longer period of absence. Throughout the last year, art historian Daria Dorota Pikulska has invested all her efforts in working towards a detailed inventory, dating, describing, and determining the authorship and provenance of the respective objects. As this work is ongoing, the collection is not publicly accessible, and ownership remains within the family. Yet, the museum is entitled to allow researchers to engage with the archive through prearranged inquiries.

Upon my inquiry, I was informed that the archive holds various personal memorabilia, letters, documents, drawings, and architectural plans, most of which are from after the Second World War. Hence, the query at the museum lasted a week and took place in July 2025 (see detailed notes from the query in: Appendix 1). This "field trip" also allowed for an investigation into the folders of Helena Syrkus that are not digitally accessible as part of the museum's collection. In a separate query, further deposits of both Brukalska and Syrkus were consulted in the archive of the Museum of the University of Technology in Warsaw.

“As I immersed myself in the historical material surrounding this space, I became increasingly frustrated with the lack of fit between what I had expected of an architectural archive and what was ultimately available.” (Chee, 2016, p. 156).

Still, a similar feeling haunted me as Lilian Chee describes recounting her research on her doctoral thesis. Indeed, this case also reveals a dissonance between the hope of finding documentation and the material reality that one actually finds upon opening the archives. Although the material in the Brukalski archive is abundant, there are few architectural plans and drawings from before the war, particularly those related to the design in question. And even though the plans for the kitchen are nowhere to be found, apart from the article that Brukalska writes in 1929, presenting her kitchen, there are many other facets of the oeuvre that support a deeper understanding of context. In total, more than 1600 archival objects were inspected in person.



Fig. 1: Entrance to the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław. Photos by the author.



Fig 2: The archive at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław. Photos by the author.

Qualitative Interviews

Next to the archive, this research is based on qualitative semi-structured interviews with scholars, artists, architects, and curators focused on Polish and pan-European architectural history. Several participants have also worked particularly on Barbara Brukalska and the Polish interwar period. Out of 21 possible participants selected, the results are based on 14 interviews with 16 respondents in total, conducted over the course of three months. The choice of participants is based on the review of academic literature, popular science materials, engagement pieces, archived exhibitions, and web and social media searches. The list of participants was also further supplemented by the recommendations of the participants themselves. The majority of the interviews were conducted online; two were held in person during the archival query in Wrocław. For the purposes of this work, the given qualitative interviews are not to be methodologically framed as expert interviews. As (Döringer, 2020) argues, there is a certain problem as to who to frame as an expert, and under which normative framework the selected participants could be systematised. Given the diversity of the participants' occupations, expertise, and institutional (dis)affiliations, I refrain from placing the qualitative interviews into this tradition.

However, for the purpose of simplicity, the term “expert” is mobilised throughout the text to address the participants, who are scholars, as well as non-academics. This is to say, the participants of this research qualify as “experts” through their activity, having published and engaged in their work on the topic, or having a particular perspective on writing about architecture (and architects).

The semi-structured interview guide (see: Appendix 2) encompasses questions about the respective participants’ research process engaging with architectural history, and if applicable, Barbara Brukalska and her contemporaries. Depending on the participants' backgrounds and work, some interviews focused more on the subject itself, while others revealed more about personal reflections on their research processes and dynamics within the academic and publishing environments related to topics of historiography and the architecture field. Thus, while the questions explored the hypotheses and topic at hand, further questions of personal positionality as researchers and readers engaging with urban history were raised. The interview guide was developed through an inductive process, based on the literature review prior to the interviews and includes a brief presentation for the expert participants with an outline of the research at the beginning of each conversation. Following this, the questions were adjusted in accordance with the participants’ respective publications, work, or engagement. Through this, the theoretical frame of the interview was inductively established, serving as a conversation starter and offering the opportunity to intuitively adjust and rephrase questions along the lines of the interview guide. The interviews were then transcribed and analysed.

At the beginning of each interview, the respective experts gave their permission to be interviewed in the scope of data collection and processing for this thesis and agreed to be listed with their names and institutional affiliations. A brief description of the research was given, and my positionality was also discussed and addressed. Therefore, the interviewees knew from which angle I am coming from, what questions particularly interest me, and which hypotheses and observations I bring into the conversations.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Occupation/ Institutional Affiliation (selection)</u>	<u>Relevant Work/ Expertise for the scope of this Research</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Lang uage</u>
02.06.2025	Dr. Aleksandra Kędziorek	Art & architecture historian, curator, editor – University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw	“Archipelag CIAM” (2019), co-editor; ongoing project of exhibition regarding Brukalska & Syrkus.	43:13 mins.	eng
27.06.2025	Dr. Katarzyna Uchowicz	Art & architecture historian – Academy of Fine Arts, Warsaw; Institute of Art at the Polish Academy of Sciences.	“Archipelag CIAM” (2019), co-editor; research on the Polish architectural Avantgarde (Bohdan Lachert & Józef Szanajca); accompanied the process of gathering the Brukalski Archive in Warsaw and its deposition in Wrocław.	01:15:39 hrs.	pl
01.07.2025	Dr. Jannie Rosenberg Bendsen	Architecture historian - Aarhus School of Architecture	“Untold Stories” (2024), co-author; particular expertise in relation to the chapter on kitchens, archival research.	01:10:13 hrs.	eng

03.07.2025	Dr. Małgorzata Jędrzejczyk	Art & architecture historian, curator – Pilecki Institute Berlin; Academy of Fine Arts, Katowice	“Migrating Ideas” paper (2023), author; on-going project of exhibition regarding Brukalska & Syrkus.	01:14:29 hrs.	pl
09.07.2025	Aglaia Konrad	Photographer, artist, docent	Publication “Alina, Barbara, Halina, Zofia” (2024) and exhibition on Polish women architects and planners in the Austrian Centre of Culture in Warsaw.	45 mins.	ger
14.07.2025	Prof. Piotr Marciniak	Architect, urbanist, architecture historian – Technical University of Poznań.	“Women in Polish Architecture” (2018), co-author; “Famous and Forgotten” (2016), author; “Bauhaus and the New Worldview” (2021), author. Research on gender proportions in the architectural profession and education. Contribution to the upcoming “Bloomsbury Global Encyclopedia of Women in Architecture”, ed. by Lori Brown and Karen Burns (2026)	01:05:25 hrs.	pl
15.07.2025	Helen Thomas & Jaehee Shin (Women Writing Architecture)	Architects and editors, part of the “Women Writing Architecture” platform	Initiative for building alternative narratives in architecture, an online cross-referencing system, and reflections about knowledge production about architecture and gender.	01:21:11 hrs.	eng
17.07.2025	Jelena Pančevac	Architect, editor, docent	Textual editing and writing in the scope of the publication and exhibition of the “Alina, Barbara, Halina, Zofia” project (Konrad, 2024).	01:05:56 hrs.	eng
17.07.2025	Maja Wirkus	Photographer, editor, curator	“Archipelag CIAM” (2019), co-editor; “We Are Millennium Stars” (2014), co-editor.	01:04:21 hrs.	pl/ger
25.07.2025	Dr. Michał Duda	Art historian, director at the Museum of Architecture Wrocław	Host of the upcoming exhibition by curators Kędziorek & Jędrzejczyk; author of a monography about Polish women architect Jadwiga Grabowska-Hawrylak.	26:51 mins.	pl
25.07.2025	Daria Dorota Pikulska	Art historian, curator – Museum of Architecture Wrocław	Administrator and provenance researcher on the Brukalski archive.	28:25 mins.	pl
29.07.2025	Prof. Martin Kohlrausch	Historian – Catholic University Leuven	Author of “Brokers of Modernity” (2019); co-editor of “Races to Modernity” (2014).	55:04 mins.	ger
02.08.2025	Barbara Nawrocka (Bal Architektek)	Architect, researcher – part of “Bal Architektek” platform; “MiastoPracownia” studio	Representing “Bal Architektek”, engaging in topics concerning Polish women architects, history and present.	01:28:36 hrs.	pl
07.08.2025	Małgorzata Kuciewicz & Simone De	Architects & expographers, creative researchers – founders of	Co-creators of various exhibitions, on landscape architect Alina Scholtz: “Amplifying nature”, Venice	1:37:28 hrs.	pl/eng

	Jacobis (Centrala)	“Centrala” workgroup	Biennale 2018: Collaboration with Aglaia Konrads in the scope of her book.		
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Table 1: List of the interviews in order of conversation.

Walking

To support the impression from the archives and interviews further, walking was also part of this research. Over the course of two days, I have walked around the area of the Warsaw Housing Cooperative Estate, located in the district of Old Żoliborz. The area is contained in a triangular-shaped block bordered by Słowackiego Street, Krasińskiego Street, and Księża Jerzego Popiełuszki Street. Apart from this area, the closely located area around the Villa of the Brukalski family has also been explored. This led me to gain visual material, taking notes (see: Appendix 3), pictures and videos of the neighbourhood, and to produce a map of the route, which has been mapped using Google My Maps (Fig. 19, 43). This has helped me to understand the spatial dimension of the housing estate and to take notes of my embodied experience of the area.

Limitations

This research is limited in terms of time frame, sample size of the case study, and language provisions. In order to fully understand the scope of Barbara Brukalska's oeuvre and legacy, a more ample data collection from a bigger variety of archives is needed, as well as a longer period of fieldwork on the site of the WSM. This also implies a more time-intensive research period, which could not be realised in the scope of the limited time frame for this work. The scope of the material also had to be cut down, thus further important work, such as that of Helena Syrkus, and other contemporaries, had to be deliberately disregarded, to narrow the frame of writing. Overmore, even though I speak Polish as one of my mother tongues, I am limited in terms of academic language provision, particularly in terms of fluency in professional architectural and urbanism-related vocabulary. This did not render the understanding of the primary material impossible, however, it did slow down the process of data processing at times. Given these limitations, this research is therefore to be understood as an ongoing process of urban history writing, which is never fully finished, but always up for questioning.

Unpacking the Material

The following sections will present the material, again reflecting the triangulated research question, theoretical and methodological framework. The first part serves as a contextual grounding, bringing together archival materials, pictures taken while walking, literature, and reflections of experts. First, this will give an overview of Brukalka's biography, and subsequently also the architectural milieu of the interwar period in Poland. This sets the base in order to respond to the first line of enquiry: *In what way does Brukalska's archive repository disrupt the imaginary of her as a modernist female architect?* This section will further also expand on the Polish avant-garde context, challenges of urban development at the time, as well as the WSM, building a contextual bridge to the following section of analysis.

Secondly, the Contemporary Kitchen will be analysed, based on a close reading of primary source material. The understanding of the kitchen is expanded by a synthesis of Brukalska's architectural theory in “*Zasady społeczne projektowania osiedli mieszkaniowych*” (Social Principles of Housing Estate Design). This part of the analysis is also interlaced with further expert inputs, interpreting and commenting on the architecture in question, in tune with the second line of enquiry: *How are imaginaries of gender and class spatially and discursively encoded within the design of the Contemporary Kitchen? And how can this be understood in connection with the urban scale?*

Finally, the last section brings deeper insights from the experts into conversation about their research processes and reflections on challenges within architectural writing. This section correlates to the third line of inquiry: *How can ‘critical storytelling’ challenge the modes of architectural writing and offer a different model for writing urban studies?*

Barbara Brukalska: Architect, Professor, Mother, Lover of Nature

The following section brings the impressions and materials of the archival research in the repository of the Brukalski couple at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, in conversation with existing literature and statements of experts. First, a biographical close-up will be presented, then, a broader perspective on the networks of the avant-garde and the context they were building in. Establishing a narrative transfer to the Contemporary Kitchen, issues of housing at the time will be addressed, expanding on the role of the Warsaw Housing Cooperative.

A label often used to describe the first-generation women architects is “pioneer”. Leaving the martial impetus of this popular term aside, Barbara can, by all means, be put in this frame, as she was among the first women to study architecture, not only in Poland, but in Europe. It is from that period that the most recognisable visual of her is created. A confidently posing young woman, with a modern short haircut, a silk dress with a square pattern (Fig. 23). However, turning the pages in the folders of her archive, which contain images, texts and drawings from her and her husband's life, one quickly comes to see that many other labels can also be applied to her.

Barbara was born Barbara Wanda z Sokołowskich in 1899 into a landowning family, in Brzeźce, not far from Warsaw's territories. Her father was a studied agronomist and landowner who employed and accommodated numerous farmers and agricultural labourers (Pańkow, 2018). In the pictures of her childhood, a smiling and playful young woman can be seen, who seems to have a close relationship with her sisters (Fig. 5).

Brukalska initially followed in her father's footsteps by studying agriculture and horticulture. However, in 1921, she changed direction and enrolled to study architecture at the Warsaw University of Technology (Fig. 6), which was only a few years old at the time (Leśniakowska, 2016a).



Fig. 3: Brukalska posing in a fur coat, around 1930. Courtesy of the family's archive.



Fig. 4: Brukalska in her garden in Warsaw in the 1950s. Courtesy of the family's archive.



Fig. 5: Picture of the Sokółowski family in Brzeźce. Barbara, in a white blouse, surrounded by her siblings and parents. Courtesy of the family's archive.

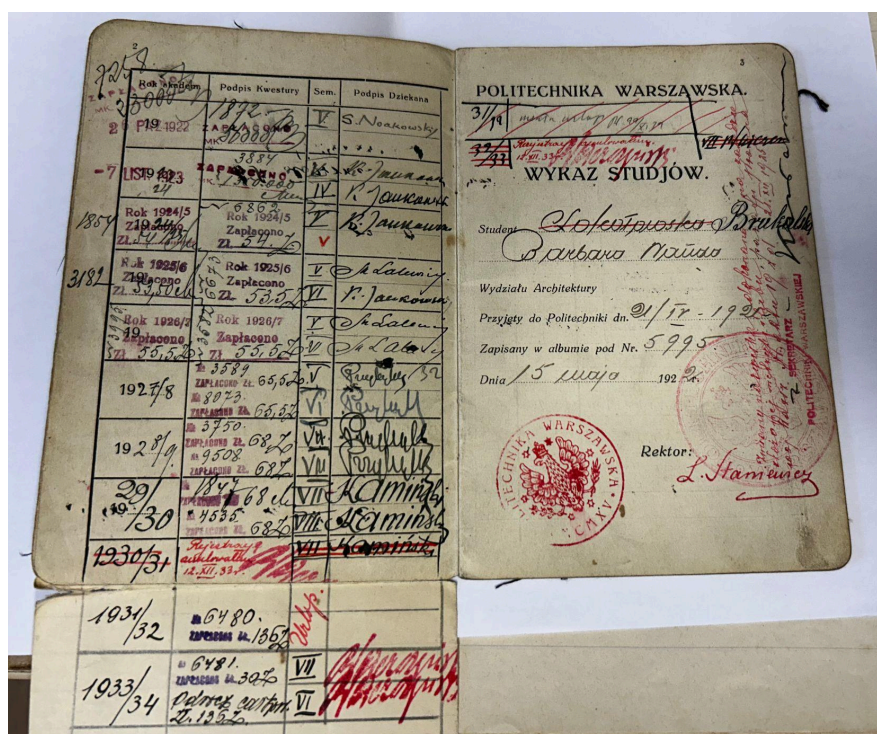
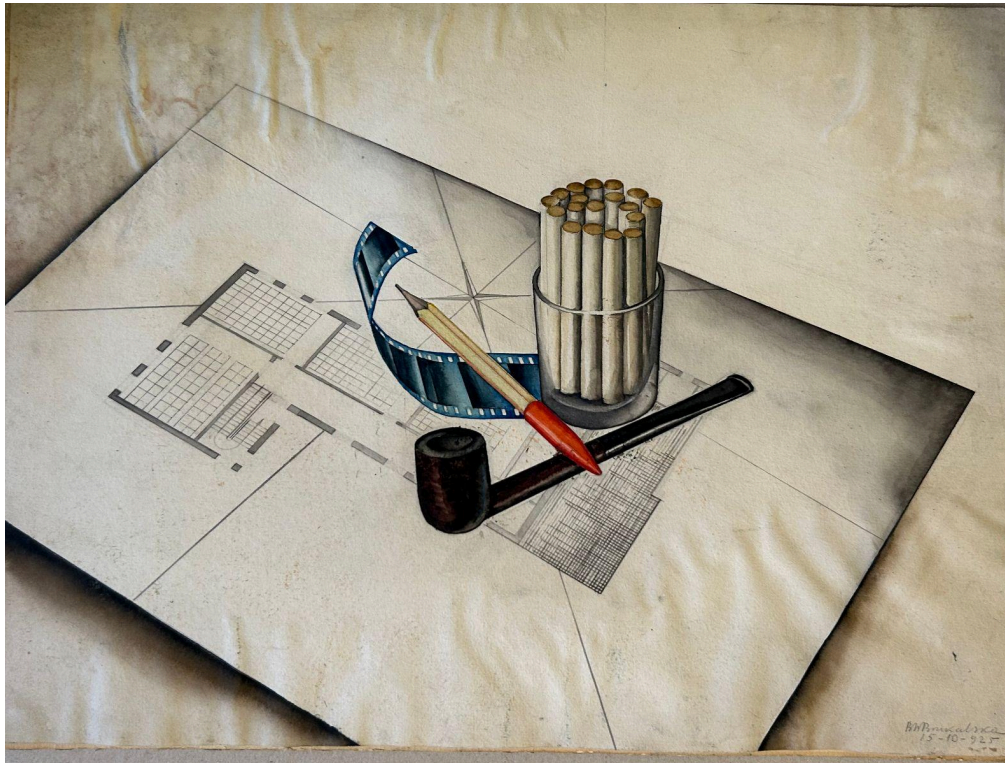


Fig. 6: Brukalska's student book with matriculation record. Enrollment dated to 1921. Archive of the Museum of the Warsaw University of Technology.

Brukalska described architecture as her true passion and, in her later years, spoke with great enthusiasm about the atmosphere in the architecture faculty of the time. Her impressions and anecdotes about the "gods of the olympus," as she called her lecturers with a mixture of humour and deep admiration, were published posthumously in 1983 in the magazine of the Warsaw Architects' Association, *Architektura* (Brukalska, 1983). Apart from architecture, or maybe rather in connection to it, Barbara had some ambitions as a painter, as her legacy features some drawings, aquarelles and still lifes (Fig. 7).

At the Faculty of Architecture, she met her later collaborators, such as Nina Jankowska, but also her husband Stanisław Brukalski, who also had previously studied in Milan. They married in 1925, and shortly after started working on their first joint project (their home in Żoliborz) dating back to 1927 (Fig. 8). The residence is the first avant-garde building at the time in Poland, situated close to the WSM housing estate, where the couple begins to work in the same year.¹¹ Together with her husband, Brukalska worked on designing units for Colonies IV, VII, and IX. She completed her studies in 1934. Again, in the pictures from that time, she indeed embodies the image of a modern woman of the 1920s: bobbed hair, fashion-conscious in a sporty silhouette, and a woman in a (up until that time) male-dominated profession. However, this image is contrasted by later photographs of a more traditionally clothed, older Brukalska, smiling in her garden. Together with Stanisław, the architect had five children (Leśniakowska, 2004).

¹¹ It has been pointed out that the bespoke house clearly references the Schröder Villa in Utrecht by *De Stijl* architect Gerrit Rietveld, 1924 (Leśniakowska, 2016).



*Fig. 7: Still life with architectural plan, film, cigarettes and pipe, dated 1925.
Courtesy of the family's archive.*



*Fig. 8: The Brukalskis outside their home on Niegolewskiego Street 8, around 1927.
Courtesy of the family's archive.*

Brukalska first attracted attention with her interior designs for shop windows and retail spaces¹² at a time when there was no real term for "interior design" or "interior decoration" in Poland. In an interview in 1928 with the women's magazine *Kobieta Współczesna* (The Contemporary Woman)¹³ Brukalska reflected on what she considered to be the outdated terms, “*dekoratorstwo*” (decoration) and “*zdobnictwo*” (ornamentation) and their narrow meaning compared to the German term “*Innenarchitektur*” (interior design). In that article, Brukalska positions interior design as a promising profession for women, as it would offer them the opportunity to work independently of men. Interestingly, she, like her female contemporaries, has continued to work in tandem with her husband, though not exclusively. In that same article, Brukalska also states that women, by nature, would tend to have a greater sense of aesthetics than men. However, in the same breath, she does not define herself as an interior decorator or designer, but as an “architect”¹⁴ who is primarily enthusiastic about the technical aspects of architecture (Jablowska 1928).

The architect was part of one of the three most important Polish avant-garde collectives of the interwar period, *Praesens* (1926–1929), a group comprising architects, painters, and sculptors. The collective pursued a programme that sought to unite architecture, sculpture, and painting in order to create “[...] new building compositions for the apparatuses of living and collective life [...]” (Szymon Syrkus 1926, cited in: Leśniakowska, 2016, 44). As a member of *Praesens*, both Barbara Brukalska and her husband, were affiliated with CIAM (*Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne*), an international network of European modernist architects, which was founded, among others, by Le Corbusier and Sigfried Giedion.



Fig. 9: Stanisław Brukalski's member card of the *Praesens* Journal. Courtesy of the family's archive.

¹² These included exhibitions for the appliance manufacturer Electrolux in 1927 and various commercial exhibition pavilions (Jablowska, 1928).

¹³ The weekly magazine *Kobieta Współczesna* was aimed primarily at middle-class intellectual women and dealt with both everyday topics and political issues relating to the women's movement and women's rights in the Second Polish Republic (Kałwa, 2000).

¹⁴ She uses the term “*Architekt*”, which is the male form in Polish. Back then however, there wasn't a female form of architect in common language use. Apart from that it should be noted that she was still a student at that time.

Circling back, Brukalska is frequently attributed the role of a historical pioneer. During her lifetime, she also regarded herself as a pioneer in her field. In the journal mentioned above, she was described as an exemplar of “fierce femininity” in a profession dominated entirely by men (Jabłowska, 1928, pp. 14–15). Not only was she among the first women to graduate in architecture, but in 1948, she also became the first woman to be appointed professor of architecture at a Polish university. In the same year, she completed her already mentioned work *”Zasady społeczne projektowania osiedli mieszkaniowych”* (The Social Principles of Designing Housing Estates), in which she summarised her experience working at the WSM as a comprehensive theory of architecture and proposal for best practice. However, her book was censored shortly after coming out, due to the review of architect and cooperativist Jan Minorski, rendering the publication as non-conforming to the socialist realist doctrine (Twardoch, 2018).



Fig. 10: Stanisław Brukalski in their residence in Żoliborz. Courtesy of the family's archive.



Fig. 11: Barbara Brukalska on the terrace of their residence in Żoliborz. Courtesy of the family's archive.

But before that, during the German occupation and throughout war times, Barbara continued to work on new settlement plans for the WSM and, and served as an inspector of destroyed buildings during and after the war (Głowala, 2019). Since the beginning of the war, Stanisław was interned in a military prisoner-of-war camp located in Woldenberg (today's Dobiegniew in western Poland), taken prisoner by the Germans (Oflag II C). The aftermath of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 left the city almost entirely in ruins, thus Barbara had left to live with her children in Kraków. Still, she soon returned to Warsaw after the end of the war, finding her way home to the largely unscathed Żoliborz residence (Głowala, 2020). From 1945 onwards, she became actively involved in the reconstruction of Warsaw. Alongside her teaching, Brukalska realised a few individual projects between 1948 and 1974, among them reconstructions, churches, as well as two additional projects for the WSM in Żoliborz: the “*Dom dla Samotnych*” (House for Singles, 1948, Fig. 13) and the “*Społeczny Dom Kultury*” (Community Cultural Centre, 1948–1954, Fig. 14, 15).



Fig. 12: The Brukalski residence on Niegolewskiego Street 8. Photo by the author.



Fig. 13: Lighthouse-inspired staircase of the “Dom dla Samotnych” at the WSM, completed 1948. Photo by the author.

Art historian Marta Leśniakowska has claimed that during Brukalska’s teaching career in socialist Poland, she, like many others, was not free to teach her avant-garde postulates of the interwar years at the Warsaw University of Technology (*Politechnika Warszawska*) (Szymczyk 2020). This fate presumably also concerned others, such as Helena Syrkus, who began to actively endorse the socialist regime, or so it seemed. Experts, however, warn against judging these kinds of ideological turnarounds from today’s point of view, as one needs to “read between the lines” of what might have seemed like circumstances that compelled to comply to the totalitarian rule, as Aleskandra Kędziorek reveals about her research on the bodies of correspondence Helena Syrkus has kept:

“(…) especially in the fifties, there were things that they couldn't say. So, you have to read between the lines, and know the context. And this is for sure something that has to be cross-checked always, you have to know why in this very specific moment she might say things that sound weird, that maybe sound like she's not speaking as herself, but this

happens because of certain political things. So, checking the dates of letters always helped us and see what context she was in.” (Aleskandra Kędziorerek, 02.06.2025, Online)

In the scope of the WSM, Brukalska also contributed to the planning of dwellings and communal facilities, as well as the landscaping of the WSM estates. The influence of her expertise in horticulture is visible and readable in her designs and theory, contrasting the rational structure of some of her architectural work with extensive greenery. For her, a central element of the rational modern way of life was people’s access to recreation and nature, so that architecture would allow a symbiotic relationship with the natural environment (Brukalska, 1948). Her landscape designs (Fig. 27) reveal a tendency towards the neo-romantic, contrasting urban life with a natural idyll that was intended to “ (...) unite urban civilisation with the romantic dream of nature” (Leśniakowska, 2018). This aspect was of particular importance to her, given her background in landscape design. In 1932, she co-founded, together with her colleague Nina Jankowska, the “Counselling Office for House and Garden” (*Poradnia Dom i Ogród*) for the Żoliborz settlement, serving as an advisory on how to incorporate greenery in everyday life housing¹⁵.



Fig. 14: Balustrade of the stairs to the Community Cultural Centre (Dom Kultury) at the WSM, with the Comedy Theatre in the Background.

¹⁵ More about Nina Jankowska and *Dom i Ogród* in: (Andrzejewska-Batko 2015; Leśniakowska 2018).

Completed in 1954. Photo by the author.



Fig. 15: Southern view on the *Community Cultural Centre (Spółeczny Dom Kultury)* at the WSM. Photo by the author.

Her most prominent architectural legacy in current research is her kitchen design for the WSM, conceptualised for Colony IV, Unit IVa (see Fig. 16, 18, 19). The colony was destroyed during the Second World War and rebuilt in 1947 (Głowala, 2020).



Fig. 16: Unit IVa viewed from *Próchnika Street*. Photo by the author.



Fig. 17: WSM emblem on the entrance gate between units IVa and IVc on *Próchnika Street*. Photo by the author.

¹⁶ See: <http://www.nagrodabrukalskich.pl/>. (Last accessed: 01.08.2025).



Fig. 18: Cropped WSM plan with numbered Colonies. Illustrated in Brukalskas' work "Zasady społeczne projektowania osiedli mieszkaniowych" (Social Principles of Housing Estate Design), 1948, p. 132. Building IVa: L-shaped building at the bottom of the drawing.

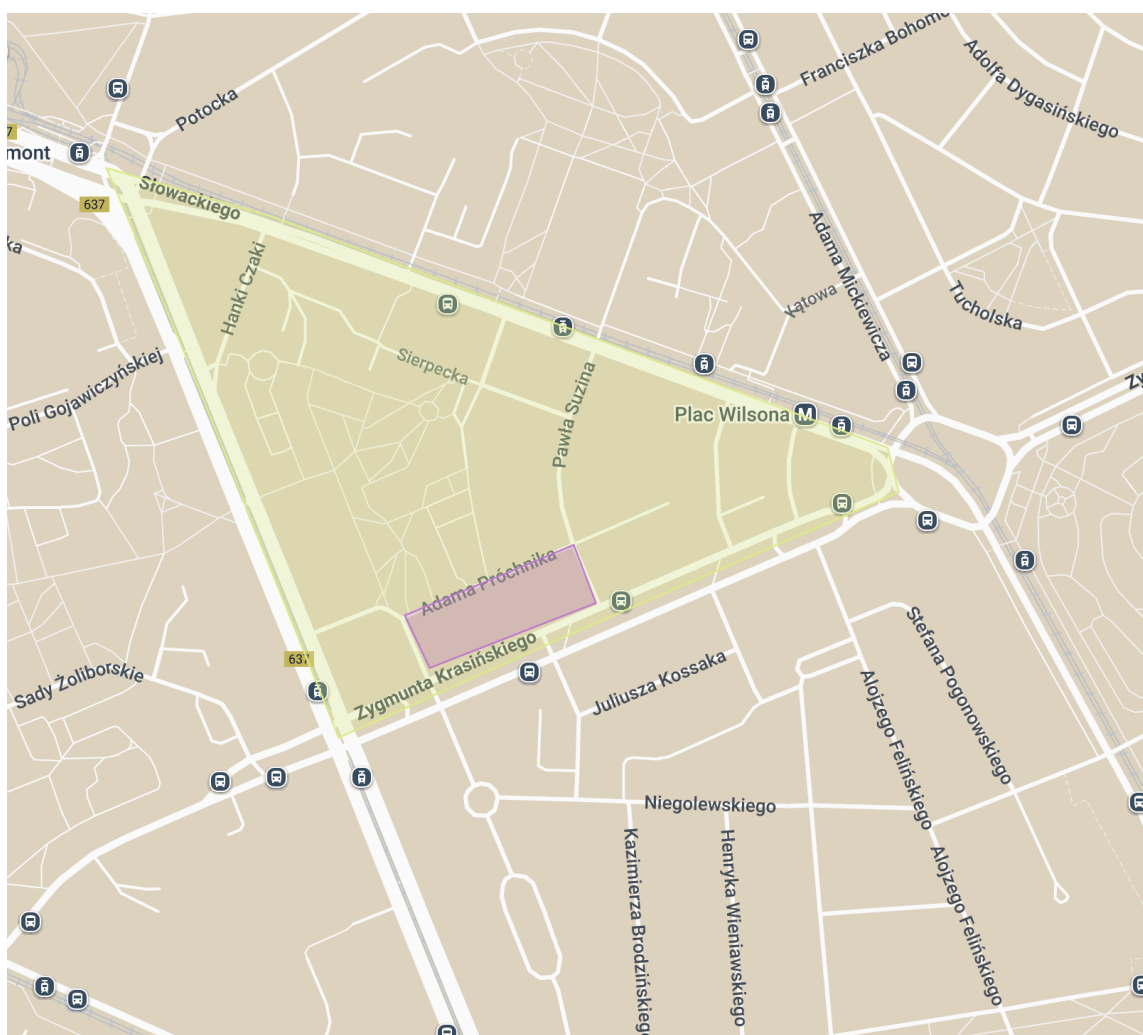


Fig. 19: Map of the WSM. The area is contained in a triangular-shaped block (yellow) bordered by Słowackiego Street (north), Krasińskiego Street (south), and Księdza Jerzego Popiełuski Street (west). Colony IV is marked purple. Map by the author, Google MyMaps.



Fig. 20: Brukalska in her studio reading the Foundation Deed of the WSM to her colleagues, Courtesy of the family's archive.



Fig. 21: Brukalska in front of an aquarell church design, around 1960. Courtesy of the family's archive.



Fig. 22: Brukalska with her son in the 1930s. Courtesy of the family's archive.



Fig. 23: Brukalska in her residence, around 1927. Courtesy of the family's archive.



Fig. 24: Brukalska on a walk, around 1960. Courtesy of the family's archive.

In 1966, Helena Syrkus wrote down her memories of her colleague, describing Brukalska's dedication to her work as an engaged architect:

"All of Barbara Brukalska's work – theoretical, as well as design and implementation – is characterised by independent thinking and, at the same time, deeply rooted inner discipline. She was and still is an architect and social activist through and through. Her primary concern is the *well-being of the people* for whom she designs and builds: children, mothers, adults in their places of work, residence, entertainment and leisure, as well as the well-being of people and groups of people who are to some extent disabled, such as the elderly or the blind. Each of Barbara Brukalska's designs and projects stems from this deeply human concern, as well as from her attention to the *feasibility* of the adopted objectives, their economic and technically perfect implementation." (Helena Syrkus, 1966, Warsaw, Deposit of the Museum of Architecture Wrocław).

"Wszelkie prace - teoretyczne i projektowo-realizacyjne - Barbary Brukalskiej cechuje samodzielność myślenia, a jednocześnie głęboko zakorzeniona dyscyplina wewnętrzna. Była ona i jest nadal architektem-społecznikiem z krwi i kości. Naczelną jej troską jest dobro ludzi, dla których projektuje i buduje: dzieci, matki, człowieka dorosłego w miejscu jego pracy, zamieszkania, rozrywki, wypoczynku, a także *dobro ludzi* i grup ludzkich, w pewnym stopniu upośledzonych np. starców czy ociemniałych. Każdy projekt i każda realizacja Barbary Brukalskiej wynika z tej właśnie głęboko ludzkiej troski, a jednocześnie z dbałości o *realność* przyjętych założeń, o ich ekonomiczne i możliwie doskonałe techniczne przeprowadzenie." (Helena Syrkus, 1966, Warsaw, Deposit of the Museum of Architecture Wrocław).

Helena Syrkus account highlights a deep caring characteristic of Brukalska as a professional. This impression is also further reinforced by her activities as a professor. Brukalska seems to have had a close relationship with her students, as can be read for instance in a letter from 1962 addressed to the female students of the Student House by Kopiński Street, where she thanks them for remembering her name day, and wishing them happy holidays. She addresses them lovingly by “my beloved daughters” (“Kochane moje córeczki”).



Fig. 25: Brukalska in her garden, around 1970. Courtesy of the family's archive.



Fig. 26: Brukalska in her studio. Courtesy of the family's archive.

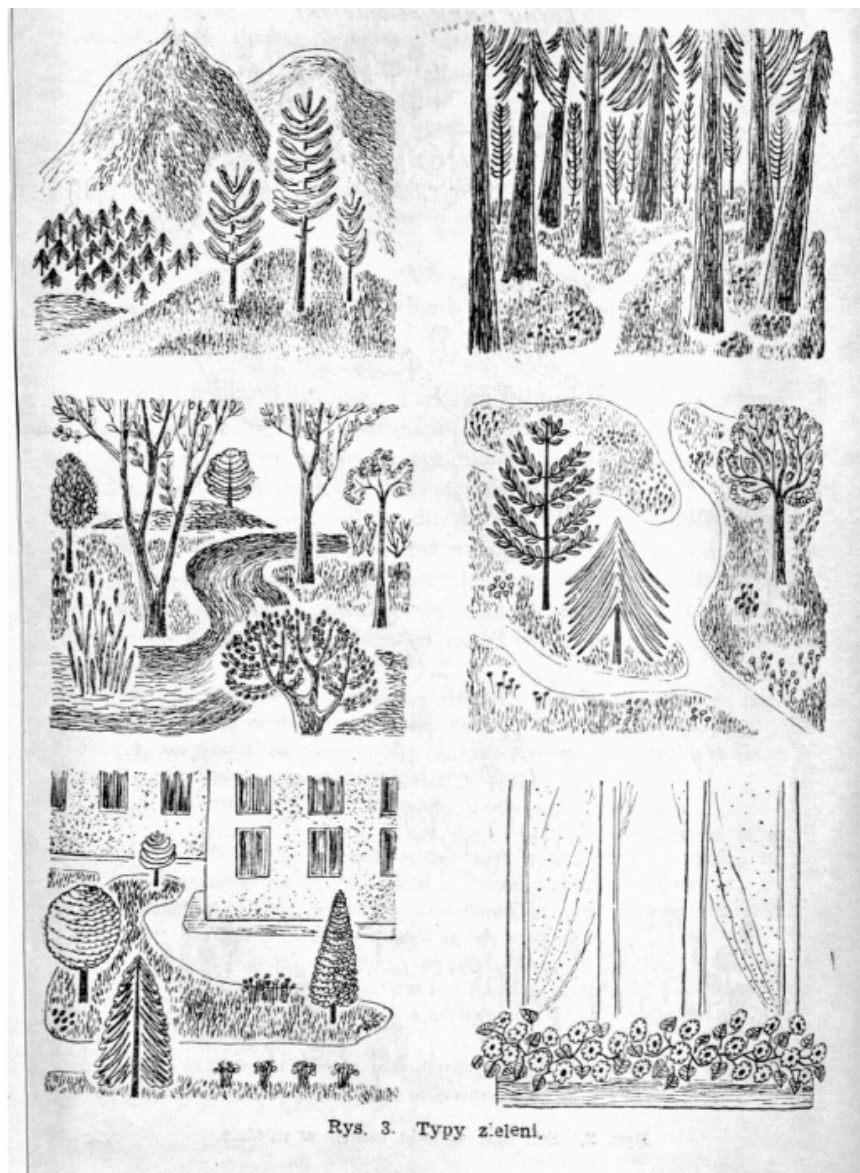


Fig. 27: Brukalska's drawing on "Types of Greening" reproduced in "Social Principles of Housing Estate Design" (1948), p. 88.

Overall, Brukalska's archive reveals a potential rupture of the imaginary of the "modernist in the kitchen", as Leśniakowska wrote in 2004. On the contrary, it shows a woman in many different places and phases. Considering my impressions from the archive, it shows her as a long-practising architect and engaged professor, but also a mother, a passionate gardener, a curious photographer, and an enthusiast of drawing. As an architect, multiple threads could be explored in her oeuvre: her activity in the reconstruction of the city (Fig. 29), her collaboration with her husband on ship interiors they co-designed for transatlantic ocean lines, but also several sacral designs (churches), revealing a devotion to the catholic church. And further, her portfolio also presents a variety of furniture designs (Fig. 28), inspired by an interest in vernacular architecture. One example from her archive testifying to that interest is a photographic series of scarecrows on weekend excursions to Truskawy, on the outskirts of Warsaw (Fig. 28).



Fig. 28: Scarecrow photographed by Brukalska, Truskawy. Courtesy of the family's archive.



Fig. 29: Stool for children "little cow" ("Krówka"), designed by Brukalska. Courtesy of the family's archive.

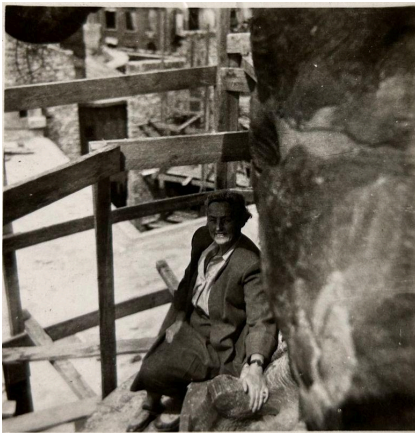


Fig. 30: Brukalska on the reconstruction site of the "Dom pod Orłami" (House under the Eagles) in central Warsaw, around 1948. Courtesy of the family's archive.

In between the Wars – in between Utopia and Crisis

Scholars have marked November 1917 as the symbolic birth of the Polish Avant-garde as an artistic movement, with the first exhibition of Expressionists taking place in Kraków¹⁷. In the same year, one of the most influential journals of the European modernist avant-garde was launched: *De Stijl*. This was followed by Europe-wide cooperation and close exchanges between different avant-garde groups, resulting in the formation of a transnational network of artists and architects. For Poland, important points of international connections were in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany (Wenderski, 2017, 2019). Among the most important architects of the Polish avant-garde were the couples Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski, Helena

¹⁷ As early as 1913, the first cubist experiments by artists who would later become associated with Formism (Polish Expressionism) had taken shape. The third exhibition of Independent Artists in Kraków in the same year is positioned as the beginning of these movements, aligning Polish art with international issues of contemporary art of the time (Stanisławski et al., 1973).

and Szymon Syrkus, Nina and Józef Jankowski, Anatolia and Roman Piotrowski, as well as Bohdan Lachert and Józef Szanajca. All of them were among the members of the *Praesens* group (ibid.).

This architectural avant-garde developed dynamically and was entrenched in a larger geo-historical frame of a multilayered (trans)national dimension. On the one hand, Poland had just regained its independence after the end of the First World War, politically and socially grappling with questions of statehood and infrastructure (Szczerski, 2020). On the other socially emancipatory struggles, such as those of workers, women and ethnic minorities were taking shape, to which politically motivated (socialist) cooperativist movements responded (Matysek-Imielińska, 2020b; Twardoch, 2018). This complexity emerged in various conversations that highlight how Barbara Brukalska and her contemporaries, such as Helena Syrkus, were embedded in the international networks of modernism, which brought together actors across countries and languages. A prominent actant is the already mentioned CIAM, which is cited as an essential element in various experts' research pieces. The Congress's postulates included approaches of standardisation (of housing, and industry), rationalisation of city development, and above all, access to hygienic and healthy housing conditions and education of the masses, envisioning the role of the architect as an actively engaged activist working towards social change (Kohlrausch, 2019, 2021). An important document encompassing these maxims was the Athens Charter, developed at the close of the CIAM in 1933, postulating that the “ (...) city should assure both individual liberty and the benefits of collective action on both spiritual and material planes” (Helena Syrkus 1984, cited Twardoch 2018:57).

In connection to this, the dimension of the *transnational* stands out as a central theme across the interviews, highlighting *networks* or *networking* as a key mechanism within the practice of the architects in question. Art historian Malgorzata Jędrzejczyk is specifically interested in a relational and transferal lens in her research, which, in her opinion, offers a different perspective on architecture than traditional analytical approaches based on material aspects. She emphasises that the framework of the network (not only referring to people, but also specifically to the transfer of ideas) is only recently being increasingly applied to the Pan-European modernist movement(s) in architecture and urbanism. She claims that often a more “global” approach “falls off the radar” and hence emphasises the *collectivity* and *collaborativeness* in the activities of these actors:

“These groups and movements connected to the avant-garde environment had an extraordinary way of thinking about art and architecture, which emerged from correspondence, relationships, and exchange of ideas. They sent each other reproductions of their works, or pictures of other people's work, or magazines. They sent announcements, or advertised for themselves, informed each other, addressed each other through magazines, and that built the grounds for a certain kind of collective thinking about making art and architecture.” (Małgorzata Jędrzejczyk, 03.07.2025, Online)

In the context of addressing the mentioned upcoming exhibition about Barbara Brukalska and Helena Syrkus, which Jędrzejczyk is co-curating with architectural historian and curator Aleksandra Kędziorek, Jędrzejczyk describes the dynamic momentum of the interbellum and sets it into a larger perspective of the following events of the twentieth century. Through this,

she elevates the potential of looking at architecture as a point of access into the larger history of the twentieth century and the dynamics of modernity from a Central-Eastern European perspective:

“In other words, we look at what architecture and the space we live in can tell us about the experience of the twentieth century. An experience which, in the context of Central and Eastern Europe, was imbued on the one hand with great optimism and a belief in the possibility of building a new, better world. Although this world did not always turn out to be better, it nevertheless had such creative power that it held the possibility to reinvent itself on certain scales. So, on the one hand, there is this excitement that this is the moment when the world can be recreated. On the other hand, (...) after the Second World War, there was a fluid transition into the next period of totalitarianism, a system of oppression, which was communism. So, de facto, the twentieth century is a very specific and distinct period for Central-Eastern Europe. Starting with the moment of regaining independence, through this attempt to build a new world, and later these couple of decades of the communist system, have all caused the Polish experience of the twentieth century to be a completely different one than, for example, the nation-states of Western Europe.” (Małgorzata Jędrzejczyk, 03.07.2025, Online, highlights by the author)

The architecture historian places both Helena Syrkus and Barbara Brukalska within these environments, and gives a comparative perspective on their diverging activities and “scales” of work:

“She [Helena Syrkus] was a person who strongly connected and brought various circles of architects together. She was also, to some extent, a bridge between East and West, or between those communities in Central and Eastern Europe and those in Western Europe, or outside Europe in general. Barbara Brukalska, on the other hand, worked on a completely different scale, more in terms of thinking about social housing, which was, of course, important to Syrkusowa and [Szymon] Syrkus. Brukalska also had a slightly more vernacular approach, not necessarily seeking out the latest designs and materials, and was not so much in awe of the somewhat technocratic dimension of architecture, which was present in Syrkusowa's work. In Brukalska's work, the more handicraft-oriented and smaller-scale aspect of thinking about the structural and technological side of architecture was very important. And Brukalska was also a figure who built networks. She was also part of a community based on relationships, but on a smaller scale. She also collaborated with local folk artists and other artists, such as Nina Jankowska, so they operated on two different scales.” (Małgorzata Jędrzejczyk, 03.07.2025, Online, highlights by the author)

Jędrzejczyk's accounts nuance the fact that after the country regained independence in 1918, following over a century of disappearance from the map of Europe, the momentum of building initiatives was immense. Due to the strong industrialisation of Polish cities in the early twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of workers migrated to urban centres, where, however, almost no adequate housing was available. Grappling with the end of the war, and the consequences of the dominion of the Russian Empire before that, Warsaw was infrastructurally in desolate state, and the cities' government relied on the privately funded housing initiatives, to house grew into the industrial hub of what was to become the new Poland (Grzeszczuk-Brendel, 2024; Kohlrausch, 2014; Matysek-Imielińska, 2020b; Twardoch, 2018). Yet, owing to the country's long period of partition, no stable socio-political structures existed to address the rapidly escalating housing shortage and the poor living conditions of the new working class migrating into the city. Still, in the newly born Second

Polish Republic and its infrastructural challenges, access to running water and housing posed a decisive problem in urban development (Grzeszczuk-Brendel, 2024; Marciniak, 2021).

According to various historical sources, in Warsaw alone, the new capital of the Second Polish Republic, between one and two million dwellings were lacking for the rapidly expanding urban population (Matysek-Imielińska 2020:30). The poorest families often lived in dark, one- or two-room apartments, where a wood or coal stove served as the only source of heating. Access to clean water or sanitary facilities also posed a significant problem. In 1927, 39% of the urban population was reported to live in single-room dwellings (which frequently housed entire families) (ibid.). In Łódź, then Poland's second largest city, the proportion is said to have been almost 60% (Matysek-Imielińska, 2020b, pp. 29–36).

For this reason, many members of the architectural avant-garde pragmatically and programmatically turned their attention to the prevailing housing shortage. During this period, a number of cooperative movements were founded, including some with ambitious ideological programmes for a new, better Polish society, designed by the intellectual middle class and oriented towards socialist principles and class justice. Among these initiatives precisely, the Warsaw Housing Cooperative, which was established in 1921, as the first housing cooperative in independent Poland (Heyman, 1976, pp. 80–93). Given the turbulent context of large-scale urban housing challenges, the generation of architects, to which Brukalska belonged, studied in a climate of scarcity and crises, yet at the same time of utopian idealism:

“In the early 1920s, when I was admitted to the University of Technology, the Faculty of Architecture was a growing, vibrant, and open community. To us, the young ones, it seemed that the work of each of us was needed by society as a whole. Even the sound of the word ‘Faculty’ meant something. In a certain sense, it evoked patriotic feelings; each of us experienced the faculty personally. It seemed as if the creative vitality of the group had then achieved a fortunate balance between opposing, yet complementary factors: individual values on the one hand, and collective values on the other.” (Brukalska, 1983, p. 20).

„We wczesnych latach dwudziestych, w czasie, gdy zostałam przyjęta na Politechnikę, Wydział Architektury był rozwijający się żywą i otwartą społecznością. Po prostu zdawało się nam, szczeniakom, że praca każdego z nas jest potrzebna całej wspólnotie. Samo brzmienie słowa „Wydział” znaczyło coś. W pewnym sensie budziło uczucia patriotyczne; każdy z nas przeżywał Wydział osobiście. Wydawało się, że twórcza żywotność zespołu uzyskała wtedy jakąś szczęśliwą równowagę między przeciwnymi, lecz dopełniającymi się czynnikami, jakimi są z jednej strony indywidualne, a z drugiej – społeczne wartości.” (Brukalska, 1983, p. 20).

Relating to this, architect and writer Jelena Pančevac talks about the specific momentum for modernist architecture in Eastern Europe and the meaning it unfolded across different geographies, pointing out the spatial possibilities, charged with utopian hopes resulting from post-war devastation and crisis. Throughout the conversation, Pančevac refers to Poland, former Yugoslavia, as well as Eastern Europe in a broader sense, and the specific conditions under which nation-building and modernist thought were flourishing:

“We are talking about these countries that have had enough, let's say, historical ruptures to think they could start from a clean slate. And then we're talking about modernism, which could have obviously been more implemented, or tested in a place which is

completely devastated, rather than, say, a place which has retained its historical structure. So, in other words, all these utopian visions come from modernism as a progressive emancipatory project. (Jelena Pančevac, 17.07.2025, Online)

Fuelled by this utopian energy, Brukalska and her husband began working for the cooperative in 1927 after winning a competition, while she was still enrolled as a student. The total area of the built environment of the WSM Żoliborz covered around five hectares, and it consisted of nine so-called “Colonies”, composed of several individual units (See: Matysek-Imielińska, 2020c, p. 50). The Brukalski couple were primarily responsible for the design of Colony IV, within which the Contemporary Kitchen was conceived. Brukalska’s projects were realised between 1928 and 1932 (Leśniakowska, 2004; Marciniak, 2021). Other key figures involved in the implementation of the WSM included Teodor Toeplitz (1875–1937), a cooperative activist, Warsaw city councillor, and crucial financial procurer of the WSM. Toeplitz’s house served as a regular meeting place for members of the Warsaw architectural avant-garde, who discussed issues of urban development there (Matysek-Imielińska, 2020c, pp. 51–58). Equally relevant is the sociologist Stanisław Tołwiński (1895–1969), also a cooperative activist and the leading ideologue behind the WSM project. He regarded the Żoliborz settlement as a political experiment for a socialist vision of a new society, in which the social and professional class of domestic servants would cease to exist (Leśniakowska, 2004, p. 192). Tołwiński’s ideology was rooted in anarcho-syndicalist ideas of re-educating society towards a classless and solidaristic people’s rule (Matysek-Imielińska, 2020c). Also historically significant was the architect Bruno Zborowski (1888–1983), who was responsible for the design of the first three Colonies of the WSM. Zborowski also designed kitchen models, drawing upon the traditions of peasant domestic culture, in which the kitchen constituted the centre of the household (ibid.). The WSM design was intended to draw upon this tradition for the “new family,” which also included Brukalska’s kitchen. In this context, Tołwiński and Zborowski were the authors of this kitchen policy (ibid.), encompassing the development of the integrated kitchen-living rooms and the eradication of the servant class.

Scholar Magdalena Matysek-Imielińska, or Agata Twardoch position the WSM as an example of engaged architecture with a socialist emancipatory political impetus, which in many ways employed performative mechanisms of writing and speaking to try to educate people on a new way of dwelling and living (Matysek-Imielińska, 2020c, pp. 115–134; Twardoch, 2018, p. 63). However the architecture itself does necessarily make an imposingly disciplinary impression, as another compelling comment by architect and writer Jelena Pančevac suggests:

“I’d call it anonymous architecture, but, you know, with big quotation marks. That is to say, it is almost purposefully not imposing architecture. And this is also a dictum that good architecture is the one you can forget in the sense that you get used to it, and there is like... How should I put it? It becomes part of life. In that sense, I could give the broadest definition of good architecture as that which becomes part of life. Doesn’t matter if it’s big or small, flashy or not flashy, but in a sense, good architecture is forgettable architecture. So that’s something that I noticed about their architecture in some ways. (Jelena Pančevac, 17.07.2025, Online)

Her reflections are about Brukalska’s and Syrkus’ work, but also the other women protagonists featured in the publication of photographs by artist Aglaia Konrad, for which

Pančevac wrote contextual captions. In a way, Pančevac's comment points towards the question of visibility, or invisibility, in the literal sense of the built environment. It is almost as if by describing her examples as “anonymous”, “not imposing”, and “part of life”, she positions these attributes as predicates of modesty, commonplaceness and quiet architecture, implying that the quality of the design of these housing estates lies in their character of everydayness and aesthetic restraint, which poses a challenge in grasping it:

“You almost look around and ask yourself, but where is the architecture? What is special here? And, then it's very particular detailing. It's the use of greenery almost as a design element. It's the use of landscape design, very importantly. I mean, how even the buildings are organised and so on. Meaning that it's not just about the interior. It's not just about the housing unit, but it's also about the setting of different buildings together. [...] So for me, that was an interesting challenge to talk about or write about architecture, which is not explicit or, say, which doesn't have an explicit presence. (Jelena Pančevac, 17.07.2025, Online)



Fig. 31: Greenery in between Colony XII. Photo by the author.



Fig. 32: Greenery in the courtyard of Colony IV, view on Unit IVa. Photo by the author.



Fig. 33: Greenery in the courtyard of Colony IV, Unit IVa. Photo by the author.

On a similar note, curator Aleksandra Kędziorek recognises a historical awareness within the architectural work of Brukalska, Syrkus, and their contemporaries. She points out a connection between vernacular architecture and the housing estate designs of the interwar period and how the architects synthesised practices that today might seem like separate fields of work:

“Another thing that is important for me when looking at their work is the fact that there was a relevance of history for them in their work. What I mean to say is that it not only helped them work across different disciplines from today's perspective, but also connected what was avant-garde and what was just coming to this field with what they knew from before. Even the kitchen design and what they did with the housing estate resulted, for example, from their very good understanding of vernacular architecture, or traditional architecture. There are always many, many nuances in that. So, for me, dealing with history is also trying to look at the field from the categories that these people could have had. That can be a bit different from what we have now. (Aleksandra Kędziorek, 02.06.2025, Online)

This nuances the image of Brukalska, positioning her as a socially, and historically aware practitioner, who was sensitive to the social purposes of the design process in the scope of the WSM.

Sub-conclusions

Bringing back the first line of inquiry (*In what way does her archive repository disrupt the imaginary of Brukalska as a modernist female architect?*) this section has shown how the visual and textual fragments of her biography produce a multifaceted image that complexifies her legacy. The photographs in the repository certainly feature Brukaslka as the figure of the modernist architect aligned with ideals of progress and rationalisation, yet when read alongside other materials, they open up alternative positions and labels that challenge this

singular imaginary. The interplay of images, texts, and my own positioning as researcher reveals the contingency and ambivalence of archival representation, reminding me that:

“For archives do not simply arrive or emerge fully formed; nor are they innocent of struggles for power in either their creation or their interpretive applications. Though their own origins are often occluded and the exclusions on which they are premised often dimly understood, all archives come into being in and as history as a result of specific political, cultural, and socioeconomic pressures—pressures which leave traces and which render archives themselves artefacts of history” (Burton, 2005, p. 6).

Burton’s call for ‘*archive stories*’ about the engagement with and in the archive resonates here, since my own encounter with the Brukalski repository was shaped not only by the presence of documents and different pictures but also by the silences of missing plans from the interwar period, which again influences the imaginary that I can offer. As Burton observes, “history is not merely a project of fact-retrieval (...) but also a set of complex processes of selection, interpretation, and even creative invention - processes set in motion by, among other things, one’s personal encounter with the archive, the history of the archive itself, and the pressure of the contemporary moment on one’s reading of what is to be found there” (Burton, 2005, p. 8). This is especially eminent in the case of Brukalska, where pre-war materials are sparse, while later phases after the Second World War are better documented¹⁸. This unevenness directs attention not only to what is available but also to what is absent, to what remains unheard or silent, and therefore, in Avery Gordon’s sense, continues to ‘*haunt*’ the record of Brukalska.

Here Colomina’s work offers a further lens: her positioning of the architectural archive as a site of mass media production points towards the implicit politics of how archives are conceived, presented and reproduced, questioning what counts as a complete architectural record (Colomina, 1994). In Brukalska’s case, the documents reveal her as part of an entangled network of practitioners and institutions, challenging the idea of a singular, autonomous author. Meanwhile, Taylor’s distinction between archive and *repertoire* invites attention to embodied practices and lived memory that escape the repository, pointing to other possible registers, stories, gestures, or social imaginaries, through which Brukalska’s role might be remembered otherwise. Taken together, these perspectives situate the Brukalski archive as more than a neutral container of historic evidence: it is a site of contested meaning, where presence and absence, text and image, fact and interpretation overlap. This also becomes particularly striking, as its sorting and processing is still a continuous work in progress. Reading it critically allows for a disruption of the smooth imaginary of Brukalska as simply a modernist architect, and opens toward multiple, entangled narratives that both disrupt and reinforce her place in architectural history.

The Contemporary Kitchen as a Laboratory for a New Society

This section presents a close reading of two separate works of Barbara Brukalska. In the first subsection, the design kitchen will be unpacked based on the plan and text that Brukalska presented in the March issue of the Architectural Journal “*Dom, Osiedle, Mieszkanie*, or, *D.O.M.*” (House, Residential Estate, Apartment) of 1929, and interrogated as to its implicit

¹⁸ See further Appendix 1.

negotiations of gender and class. The second subsection presents experts from her seminal work, “*Zasady społeczne projektowania osiedli mieszkaniowych*” (Social Principles for the Design of Housing Estates), which Brukalska formulated as a theoretical exploration of her experience of working on the WSM. This subsection will be supplemented by some of the experts’ statements, which further help to contextualise and establish a connection between the kitchen as an element of domestic space and the urban scale.

Kitchen design played a significant role in the interwar period, as it was a building task that distinctively embodied the modernists' maxims of rationalisation and technical innovation (Zürn, 2016). In the first issue of the *Praesens* Magazine 1926, Szymon Syrkus (1893-1964) comments on the technological task of the kitchen and its purpose:

“An important factor in housing is the rational design of the kitchen, because with the levelling of social differences and general impoverishment, few people can afford to keep a permanent servant. The housing industry is also accommodating working women in this area, providing them with such convenient kitchen appliances that cooking and washing up are no longer ‘unpleasant dirty’ jobs. The general principle of saving space, time and movement is, of course, the guideline here too. The coal-fired kitchen, a source of dirt, tar and smoke, is, of course, a thing of the past: it has been replaced by a gas or electric cooker.” (S. Syrkus, 1926, p. 10)

“Ważnym czynnikiem mieszkania jest racjonalne urządzenie kuchni, gdyż wobec zniwelowania różnic socjalnych i ogólnej pauperyzacji mało kto może sobie pozwolić na utrzymywanie stałej służącej. Przemysł mieszkaniowy i w tej dziedzinie idzie na rękę kobiecie, pracującej zawodowo, dając jej tak wygodne aparaty kuchenne, że gotowanie i zmywanie przestaje być ‘nieprzyjemną brudną’ robotą. Zasada ogólna: ekonomja miejsca, czasu i ruchów, jest i tu oczywiście wytyczną. Kuchnia, opalana węglem, źródło brudu, sadzy i dymu, należy, rzecz jasna, do przeszłości: zastępuje ją kuchenka gazowa lub elektryczna.” (S. Syrkus, 1926, p. 10)

The redefinition of domesticity and the household was a central theme in architecture at that time. In the German-speaking context, several exhibitions focused on innovations in domestic interior design (Hartmann, 1996). For example, the *Werkbund* exhibition *Die Wohnung* in Stuttgart in 1927, *Heim und Technik* in Munich in 1928 and the travelling exhibition *Die neue Küche* in Berlin, Magdeburg and Breslau (today’s Wrocław) in 1929. The architects' association *Der Ring* organised the latter in collaboration with housewives' associations. Not to forget the arguably best-known exhibition *Die Wohnung für das Existenzminimum* 1929, which emerged from the second *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) of the same name in Frankfurt (Zürn 2016). This was also reconstructed in 1930 as *Mieszkanie Najmniejsze* (The Smallest Apartment) by the Polish participants of the CIAM at the WSM in Warsaw and equipped with the interior designs for the different Colonies. Brukalska exhibited her kitchen prototypes in both Frankfurt and Warsaw, including the present Contemporary Kitchen for Colony IV (Jedlińska, 2021), see Fig. 33.

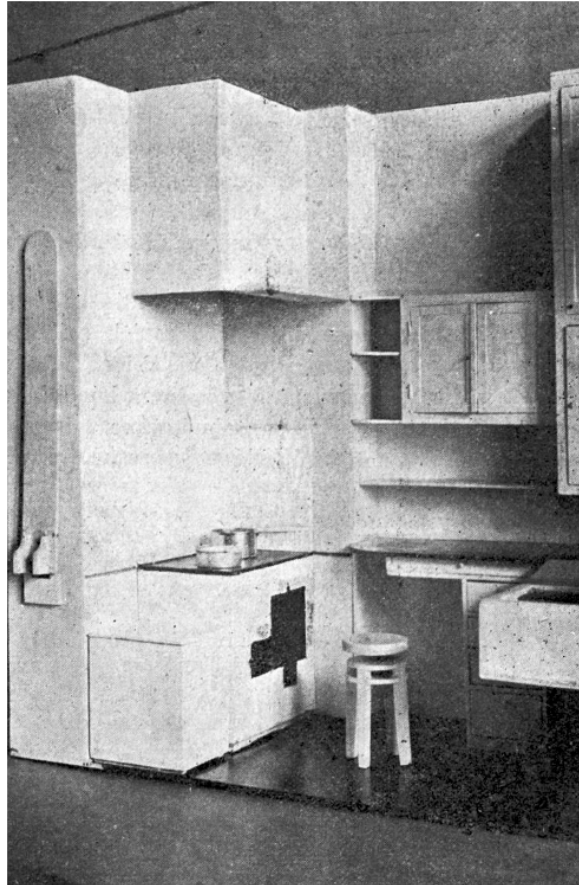


Fig. 34: Model of the Contemporary Kitchen for the WSM Żoliborz, Colony IV, designed by Barbara Brukalska. Image from the exhibition "Mieszkanie najmniejsze" at the WSM around 1927. Published in "Kobieta Współczesna", 1928, nr. 33.



Fig. 35: Real-size model of the Contemporary Kitchen at the Zachęta Gallery exhibition "The Future will be Different", 2018.

As mentioned above, the concept Contemporary Kitchen was foreseen for the Colony IV, in which was composed of three units, realised in 1928 (Heyman, 1976, p. 111). Unit IVa was three condignations high, and in its majority harboured two-chambered apartments of around 40 m², among a few three-room and one-room apartments. Summing up to a total number of 84 apartment units, which featured living-kitchen-rooms with the bespoke rationalised kitchen model (ibid.). Unit IVb contained a total number of 72 three-room “intelligentsia” apartments of 56 m², and Unit IVc, which was the first of the three units to be erected, contained 95 apartments of 1½-rooms, and 2½-rooms (Heyman, 1976, pp. 113–114).

Kuchnia Współczesna

In 1929, the March issue of the magazine “Dom. Osiedle. Mieszkanie.” (House, Settlement, Apartment) featured a dedicated article about the *Kuchnia Współczesna* (Contemporary Kitchen). The architectural plan, drawn by Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski, shows an exemplary three-room “intelligentsia” flat for Colony IV of the WSM in Żoliborz, presented as a model for flats designed for workers and civil servants.

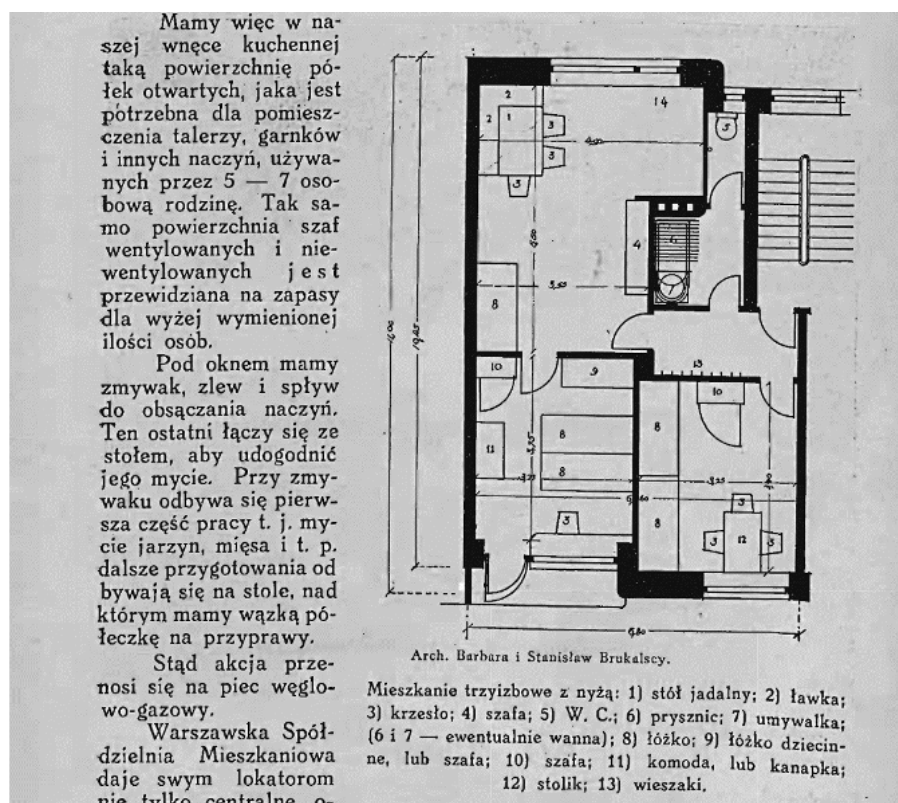


Fig. 36: Exemplary apartment design for the fourth colony of the WSM. Published in “D.O.M”, 1929, nr. 1, p. 9.

From the staircase adjoining on the right, the entrance leads into a small corridor, from which three doors open into the bathroom, kitchen-living room and a separate bedroom. Brukalska instructs that the small bedroom holds space for two single beds or a wardrobe, as well as a free-standing wardrobe and a table by the window. To the left is the parents' bedroom with a double bed, a cot, a wardrobe and a table by the window with a door to the balcony. The partial furnishing of the wardrobes and shelves is part of the flat concept. The bathroom is equipped with a sink and shower without a window, but another door leads into a small toilet

cubicle with a window hatch. The left-hand wall of the toilet is directly adjacent to the kitchenette on the other side of the wall. An optional hatch for two beds for older children is provided in the kitchen/living room. In total, this flat is intended to provide space for a family of five to seven people.

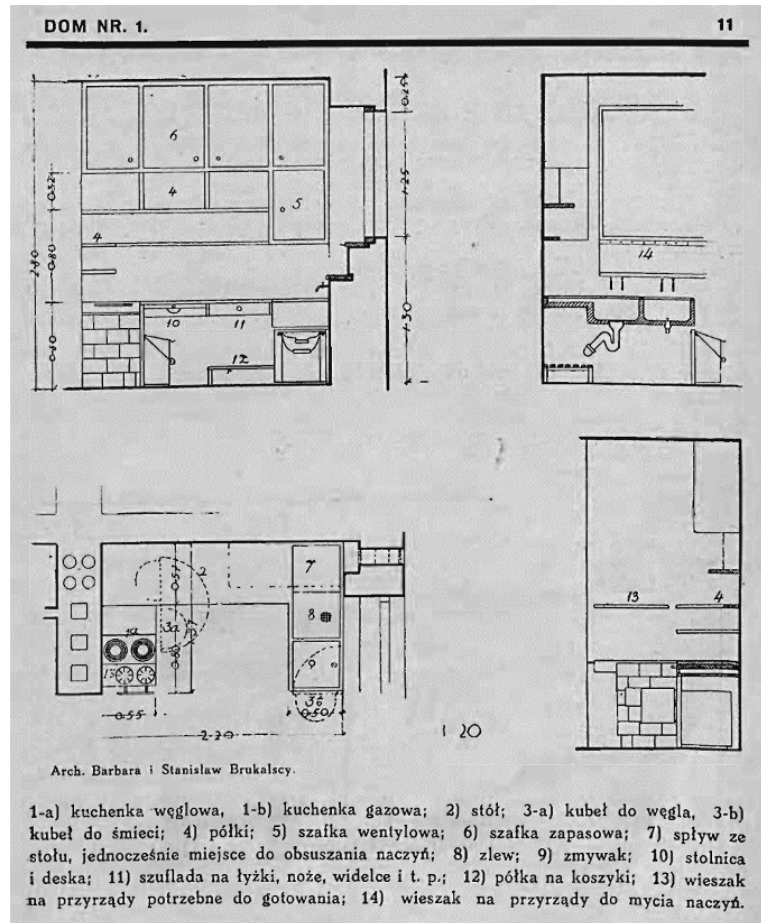


Fig. 37: Plans of the kitchen with descriptions of the built-in components. Published in "D.O.M", 1929, nr. 1, p. 11.

Brukalska goes into detail about the design in her article: This modern kitchen is intended as an efficient “laboratory” to simplify the burdens of housework, evoking the industrial rationalisation that Taylorism proposed, adapted to the household by economist Christine Frederick¹⁹. The Contemporary Kitchen is a compact alcove with a window on the sink side. The space measures 2.20 metres wide and 1.37 metres deep and is open to the living area. Equipped with a large number of built-in cupboards and shelves, there is space for pots and dishes. According to Brukalska, the partially ventilated storage cupboards are precisely dimensioned for an adequate amount of provisions for a family of the size addressed. Below the window is a shelf for washing-up utensils so that they cannot prevent the window from opening. Below that is the sink, which adjoins a countertop. At the sink, Brukalska situates the first work step, the washing of vegetables and meat, which can then be further processed on the adjacent working surface. There is a small spice rack above the worktop. From there, the action moves on to the coal-fired gas hob, which is located opposite the sink. Only a

¹⁹ See further “Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency”, (Rutherford, 2003).

small, replaceable coal bin is provided for the stove, which is intended to replace the large coal bins commonly found in traditional kitchens. Waste is also collected in a replaceable bucket next to the sink (Brakalska, 1929, p. 9). Brakalska writes that waste disposal and the supply of new coal should be possible at the same time, using the uniform, replaceable containers, as the waste can be disposed of at the collection points within the Colony, near where the coal stocks are located. This would reduce the time spent carrying the large coal stocks previously required for traditional coal-fired ovens. The arrangement of the work steps and workload is therefore meticulously pre-planned within this kitchen installation, building up on each other and guiding the user's movements. The necessary utensils are always within reach. The window above the sink provides sufficient daylight to ensure a healthy workflow. It also offers ventilation to prevent cooking odours from lingering too much in the living area. The open kitchen alcove is fitted with a curtain that conceals the kitchen area when not in use, so that the room can then be modelled entirely as a living room (ibid.).

An important element behind this kitchen and apartment concept is the rejection of representative and decorative elements as status symbols and, instead, the introduction of pragmatism into the aesthetic design of new dwelling conditions:

"As we strive for comfort rather than prestige in our domestic lives, living rooms filled with plush furniture, landscape paintings, and other objects attesting to the wealth of the household are slowly disappearing. The focus is shifting towards utility rooms and bathrooms, and is slowly approaching the kitchen. When kitchens were stuffy, dark, inhabited by cockroaches and not always tidy servants, the household and guests had to be satisfied with the hostess's assurance of her almost pathological love of cleanliness and her terrible aversion to even the smallest insect. Let us therefore create conditions in which this praiseworthy passion can find its rightful place." (Brakalska, 1929, p. 8)

„Z chwilą, gdy w życiu domowem (sic!) dążymy raczej do wygody własnej, niż do reprezentacji, powoli zanikać zaczynają salony o okazałej ilości pluszowych mebli, pejzaży wieczornych i innych przedmiotów, świadczących o zamożności domu. Punkt ciężkości przesuwa się w kierunku pokoi użytkowych, łazienki, powoli zbliża się do kuchni. Gdy kuchnie były duszne, ciemne, zamieszkałe przez karaluchy i niezawsze schludne służące, domownikom i gościom musiało wystarczyć zapewnienie gospodyni o jej wprost chorobliwym zamiłowaniu do czystości i okropnym wstręcie do najmniejszego robaczka. Stwórzmy więc takie warunki, żeby to chwalebne zamiłowanie znalazło właściwy sobie teren." (Brakalska, 1929, p. 8)

In this description of the previous circumstances, Brakalska also mentions the housemaid, positioning *her* as an element of the old, dusty and untidy. The maid becomes something not worth preserving, which no longer has a place in the new flats and their kitchens. This mention is remarkable in that the main recipients of these WSM flats, workers, usually did not have any domestic help anyway. However, this can be explained by the fact that the magazine in which the article appears is primarily aimed at an internal bourgeois intelligentsia and was published by the personal environment of the WSM architects and ideologists (Leśniakowska 2004). Brakalska thus addresses the representatives of her own class architectural environment, rather than the addressants of the WSM itself, proposing, or rather, trying to sell, the layout of a workers' flat to an intelligentsia audience:

"We strive to make the flats as affordable as possible so that they are accessible to working-class and civil servant families without maids. The room where this family's life is centred is the so-called kitchen-livingroom, which is quite large (about 24 m²). It has a

corner with a table, benches and chairs – this is the dining room, another corner that can be covered with a curtain – this is the bedroom for older children, and finally a kitchenette that is lit and ventilated by its own window, which is open to the room when working and eating, and then covered with a curtain afterwards.” (Brukalska, 1929, p. 8)

„Staramy się, żeby mieszkania były możliwie tanie, dostępne dla rodzin robotniczych i urzędniczych, nie posiadających służącej. Izba, gdzie koncentruje się życie tej rodziny, jest t. zw. Kuchnia mieszkalna dość duża (około 24 m²). Mamy w niej jeden kąt zajęty przez stół, ławki i krzesła – to pokój stołowy, inny kąt, dający się zasłonić firanką – to sypialnia dla starszych dzieci, wreszcie wnękę kuchenną oświetloną i przewietrzaną własnym (sic!) oknem, w czasie pracy i jedzenia otwartą na izbę, potem zasłoniętą firanką.” (Brukalska, 1929, p. 8)

However, the figure of the maid is consequently not completely excluded from the design. Although her role is not directly envisaged in the kitchen laboratory, her potential is not entirely neglected either. Optionally, Brukalska suggests that she could be placed in a room of her own, or at least in the wall niche across the kitchen alcove:

"Let's throw the maid's bed out of the kitchen, give her a little room or even just an alcove that's open to the kitchen, but let's give her her own corner that's relatively isolated. Now we can no longer think of the kitchen as a subordinate living space, but as a laboratory." (Brukalska, 1929, p. 8)

„Wyrzucimy łóżko służącej z kuchni, dajmy jej pokoik lub choćby alkowę otwartą na kuchnię, ale dajmy własny jej kąt, względnie izolowany. Teraz możemy pomyśleć o kuchni, nie jako o podrzędnej ubikacji mieszkalnej, ale jako o laboratorium.” (Brukalska, 1929, p. 8)

At second glance, however, this seemingly casual remark is quite astonishing, because it places the design concept in a certain tension with the guidelines of the WSM and the ideologist mentioned above, Stanisław Tołwiński, whose left-wing programme envisaged dissolving the "servants" as a social and professional group. The WSM had set itself the goal of enabling housing as a progressive project against entrenched class structures and, above all, helping those in need, especially workers, to live in hygienic conditions, thus ushering in a new way of life (Leśniakowska, 2004; Matysek-Imielińska, 2020b). As Brukalska mentioned at the beginning, the target group of the WSM's kitchen policy was mainly working-class families. However, the reality of the costs was different. Despite these stated ideals, Brukalska was apparently aware that wealthier citizens would also participate in the project. At the time of the development of Colony IV it was after all not only workers, but also increasingly bespoke intelligentsia class families moving to the WSM estate (Heyman, 1976, p. 115). Brukalska seems to take this tension into account in her design and leaves open the question of how the kitchen relates to domestic service. Interestingly, at the beginning of the article, the apartment is presented as an example of a family without a maid, but now she is assigned an optional place in the kitchen-living room, and even the hope for a room of her own is raised. Finally, the maid is not only addressed as part of the inventory, but also as a user of the kitchen. Incidentally, it should also be noted that Brukalska probably did not believe that servants should be "abolished", as she herself employed and housed servants in her Żoliborz residence, albeit their space remained separated from the main house in the storage and laundry room in the basement, outside of the main house (Brukalska & Brukalski, 1930, p. 5).

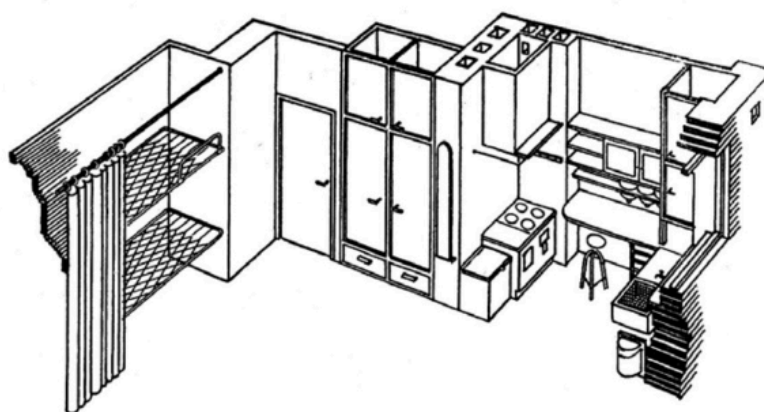
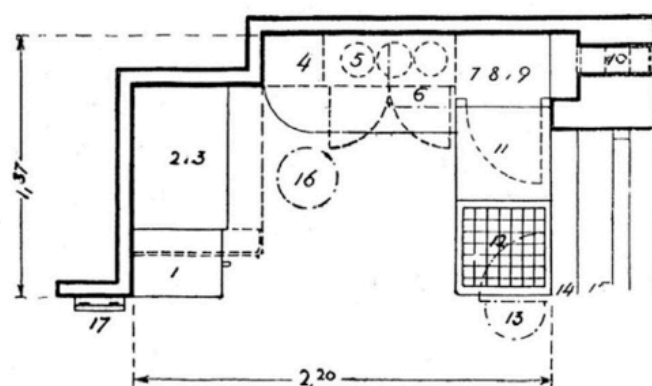


Fig. 38: Plan of the kitchenette alcove in the context of the room with additional cupboards and bunk beds. Published in "Kobieta Współczesna", 1928, nr. 37.

Another noteworthy aspect can be found in the visual dimension of the design. In an article on "Contemporary Housing" in *Kobieta Współczesna* in 1928, written by an anonymous author, fragments of Brukalska's kitchen plan are illustrated. There, the kitchen is described in the context of the planned housing innovations at WSM. The article breaks down the maxims for the new contemporary apartment. Rational and space-saving built-in furniture as part of the "normalisation" of living space, in the interests of housewives who also perform paid work:

"Objection to things! We all know it so well – but it is most familiar to the housewife – the woman who works outside the home and is forced to reconcile her domestic duties with this outside work. She knows best how backward, how disproportionate to the demands of modern life her housework is, work that she has to do in the same way as her grandmother did eighty years ago, even though modern life demands much more of her than it did of her grandmother." ('Kobieta współczesna', 1928, p. 2)

„Sprzeciw przedmiotów! Znamy go wszyscy tak dobrze – ale najbardziej zna go gospodyni – kobieta pracująca poza domem i zmuszona godzić z tą pracą pozadomową zajęcia domowe. Ona wie najlepiej, jak zacofaną, jak niewspółmierną do wymagań obecnego życia jest ta jej praca przy gospodarstwie domowym [sic!], ta praca którą prowadzić musi tak samo, jak ją prowadziła jej babka przed ośmdziesięciu [sic!] laty, jakkolwiek życie współczesne wymaga od niej nierównie więcej, niż od jej babki.” ('Kobieta współczesna', 1928, p. 2)

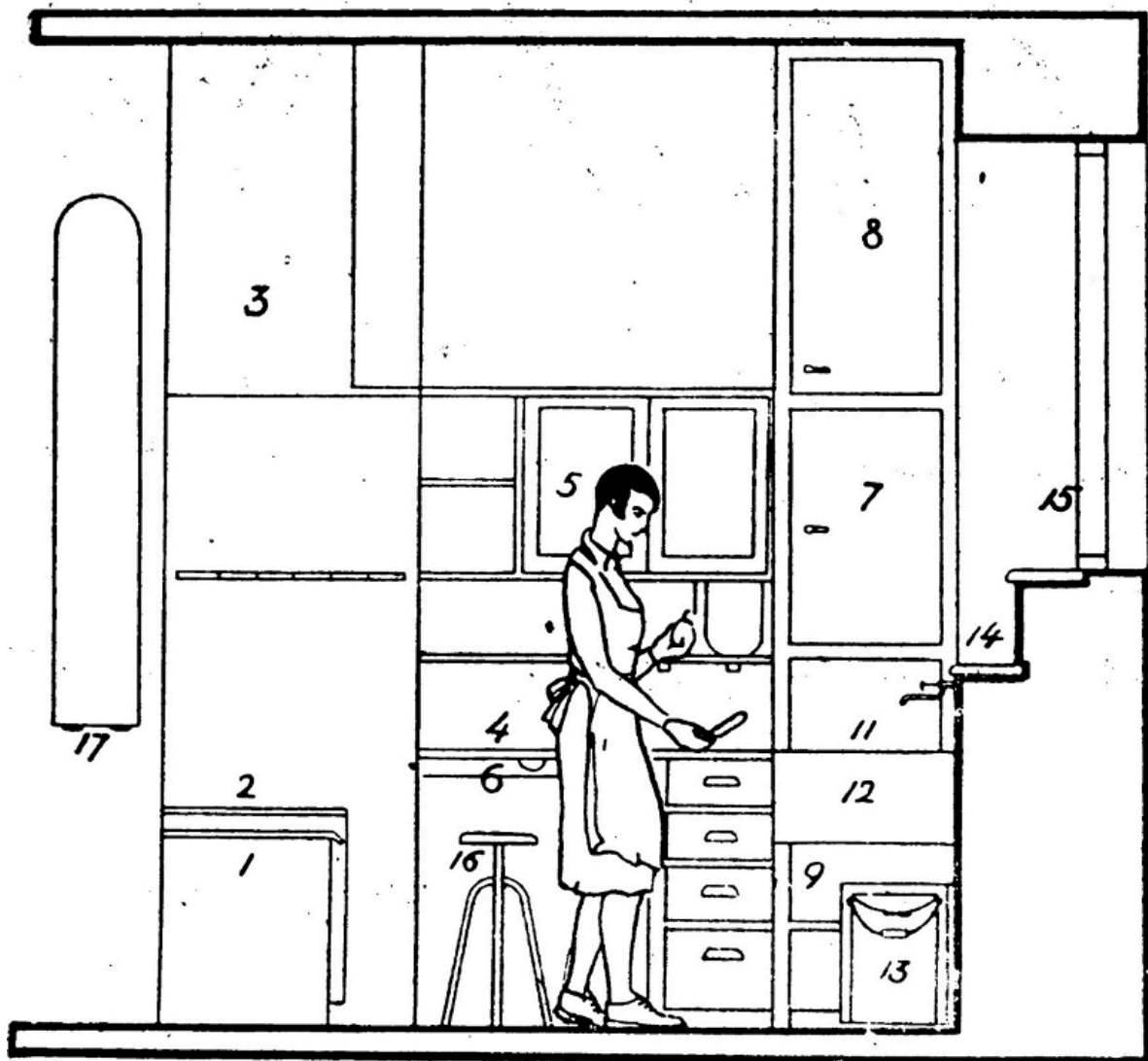


Fig. 39: Brukalskas' kitchen drawing depicting a modern female figure doing kitchen work.
Published in "*Kobieta Współczesna*", 1928, nr. 37.

The individual built-in elements described above are shown on the frontal layout of the kitchen alcove (Fig. 38). At the centre of the plan, however, is her intended recipient. The figure in question is a modern woman with a bobbed hairstyle, loose dress and low-heeled shoes working in the kitchen. Curiously, Marta Leśniakowska compares this figure to Brukalska herself. The author even attributes a 'modulor' character to the female figure in the design, as the woman in the picture corresponds to the average height of women in Poland at the time (approx. 1.65 metres²⁰) in relation to the scale of the drawing (Leśniakowska, 2004, p. 228). This opens up the potential that Brukalska seems to have sought to design the project as a spatialised emancipatory possibility specifically for women and their access to wage labour and make the housewife's, or maids, work easier. In 1928, author Irena Jabłowska quoted Brukalska as an aspiring architect in *Kobieta Współczesna*:

²⁰ This reproduction of the woman modulor, is further inscribed and has been since reproduced, in the standard architectural work of Ernst Neufert (1900-1986), who has shaped his legacy through his activities at the Bauhaus School. In his handbook, used in architecture until present day, "Architect's Data", he puts a female gendered modulor into the spaces of reproductive work, such as the kitchen (E. Neufert, 2002, p. 252).

"This is the result of combining my professional and ... domestic interests. I know what role a well-equipped kitchen plays in the home, and I dream that all newly built homes will finally have truly modern kitchen facilities." (Jablowska, 1928, p. 16)

„To jest rezultat połączenia moich zainteresowań zawodowych z... gospodarskimi. Wiem, jaką rolę odgrywa w domu odpowiednio urządzona kuchnia, marzę o tem [sic!], aby wszystkie nowobudowane mieszkania posiadały nareszcie prawdziwie nowoczesne instalacje kuchenne.” (Jablowska, 1928, p. 16)

This opens up an intermediate space in the design that negotiates class and gender as spatially encoded dimensions. Brukalska is a working woman of the intelligentsia, whose domestic duties are performed by servants, but at the same time, she seemingly addresses herself in the design visually as a kind of prototype of the modern woman, bridging domestic labour and wage labour. Leśniakowska's metaphor of the 'modernist in the kitchen' plays out in this image. On an intermediary level, the figure in the plan refers to the gender-political implications of the WSM ideology mentioned above, challenging class in a way that puts the woman of the intelligentsia to work herself, while also suggesting that the rational design will empower women to pursue other activities than kitchen labour. Literature argues that paid domestic work was discredited in the socialist class-critical ambitions of the cooperativist ideologues, but in reality was the most important means of access to the labour market for working women, especially for women from rural areas (Leśniakowska, 2004). Thus, the kitchen design illustrates the tension between the modernist concept of innovation and gender- and class-specific realities, such as women's access to work and domestic service employment. The ambivalence of the housemaid in *Kuchnia Współczesna* could therefore be interpreted as Brukalska's attempt to show how this type of apartment could be used across class boundaries. The flexibility of the ultra-functional kitchen as a socially universal module, adaptable to "everyone" and their own needs and lifestyle (and income).

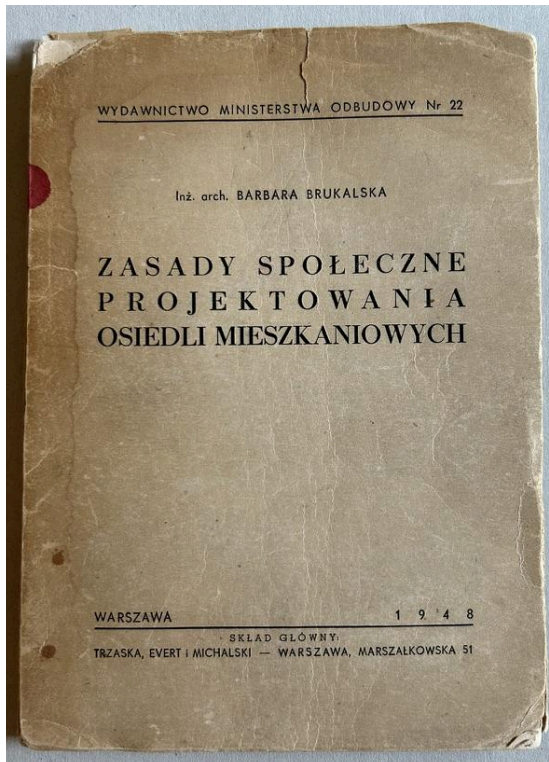
In line with this, Magdalena Matysek-Imielińska positions the kitchen as an arena of friction between "the cooperative's top-down approach and the bottom-up habits of the residents." (Matysek-Imielińska, 2020a, p. 74). The author further problematises the dimension of class in relation to the WSM, demonstrating that the concept of the kitchenette, or the kitchen-livingroom was intended to accommodate workers dwelling habits, rooted in peasant dwelling culture (ibid.:78). Overmore, her investigations into the Cooperative's history show that there was a public discussion about the fates of women who had been previously employed as servants on the labour market, through local communicates, such as *Życie WSM* (Life at the WSM). Matysek-Imielińska compiles a series of excerpts from communicates that discuss the topic. Among them are accounts of an anonymous maid complaining about the small size of the kitchenette and how the estate renders the work of a servant obsolete through its facilities, which allow families to outsource them. The author contrasts this with responses from the Cooperatives side, that claims that these very facilities were also new places of work for former servant and women workers, trying to bridge the class gap between the new social design and access to the labour market by women workers (2020a, pp. 79–84).

Looking back at Brukalska's article, she concludes by positioning the kitchen as a laboratory, not only as a symbol of rationalised innovation for workers in the housing shortage of the interwar period, but also as a desirable new way of living for the bourgeoisie – an arguably (gender and class) reconciliatory element, spatially encoded as a promise of innovation and

progress. This intention seems plausible in view of Brukalska's strong liberal approach in her programme for social housing, which will be explored next, presenting key principles from her monographic work, synthesising her principles, methodology and experiences with the construction of cooperative housing.

Housing towards Social Individualism

The work “*Zasady społeczne projektowania osiedli mieszkaniowych*” (Social Principles of Housing Estate Design) is the result of Brukalska's reflections on experience shaping the WSM.



*Fig. 40: Original edition of “Social Principles of Housing Estate Design”.
Courtesy of the family’s archive.*

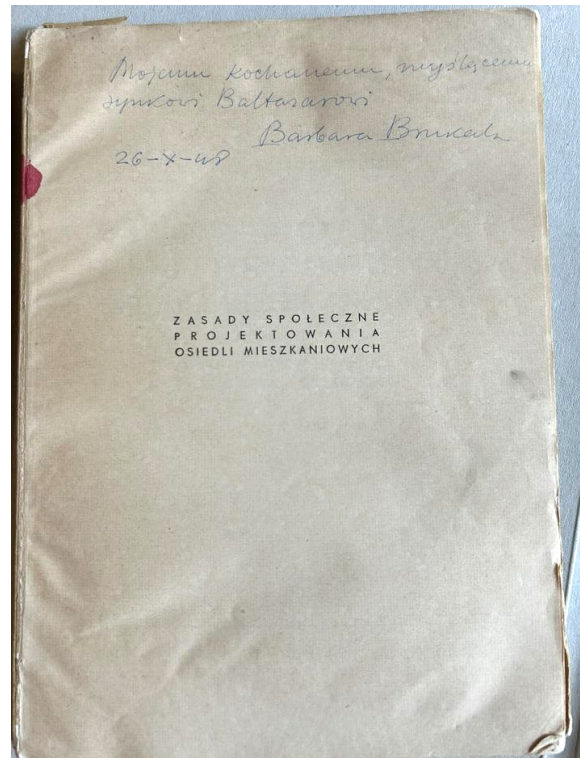


Fig. 41: Brukalska’s dedication to her son, Baltazar Brukalski, reading “to my beloved, hard-thinking son Baltazar”, dated 26.10.1948. Courtesy of the family’s archive.

In the beginning, the architect describes her inner calling to write this book to express her socio-political convictions in view of the architectural (and by this she ostensibly meant above all political) developments in Poland and Europe. It is a testimony to how the architect not only regards her profession as a technical activity with artistic impetus, but also sees her work as a socio-political life's task:

"For there was no other way I could solve the difficult problems arising from the new housing development against the background of a rattle of entrenched liberal-capitalist concepts and the new entanglement of totalising ideals. I had the feeling that in both tendencies there was no room for the recognition of the principles of socialised individualism, which creates a rational organisation of society, but at the same time guarantees every human being complete freedom within the social organisation and enables them to develop their creative powers fully." (Brukalska, 1948, p. 7)

„Nie umiałam bowiem w żaden inny sposób rozwikłać trudnych problemów nowego budownictwa mieszkaniowego, występujących na tle gmatwaniny zadomowionych koncepcji liberalno-kapitalistycznych z nowym splotem ideałów totalizmu. Czułam, że ani w jednej, ani w drugiej tendencji nie ma miejsca na uznanie zasad uspołecznionego indywidualizmu, który stwarzając racjonalną organizację społeczeństwa równocześnie zapewni każdej jednostce ludzkiej w ramach organizacji społecznej całkowitą wolność i da jej pełną swobodę rozwoju sił twórczych.” (Bruckalska, 1948, p. 7)

Bruckalska's enthusiasm for social individualism runs through her entire work. The architect clearly had little sympathy for the communist tendencies that would soon lead up to the founding of the People's Republic of Poland in 1952, so it is not surprising that her book was censored as politically incorrect shortly after its completion in 1948, withdrawn from distribution and banned (Leśniakowska, 2016a, p. 58)²¹.

"The awareness that as an architect I could contribute to reinforcing unnecessary restrictions, tightening nooses where people can be free, did not allow me to be passive, especially not intellectually. I was forced to analyse and organise the issues raised here as far as my abilities allowed. I tried to recognise the influences of systemic phenomena on the contemporary concepts of architects and urban planners in the current problems of social construction and thus to delineate as far as possible the spheres of influence of capitalist liberalism, totalitarianism and social democracy." (Bruckalska, 1948, p. 7)

„Świadomość, że mogłabym jako architekt przyczynić się do wzmocnienia zbędnych ograniczeń, do zaciskania pęt tam, gdzie człowiekowi można pozostawić swobodę – nie pozwoliła mi na bierność, szczególnie intelektualną. Zmusiła mnie do analizowania, do porządkowania nasuwających się tu kwestii tak, jak tylko na to moje możliwości pozwoliły. Starałam się w aktualnej problematyce budownictwa społecznego rozpoznać wpływy, jakie wywierają na współczesne koncepcje architektów i urbanistów zjawiska ustrojowe, a więc w miarę możliwości rozgraniczyć sfery wpływów liberalizmu kapitalistycznego, totalizmu i demokracji społecznej.” (Bruckalska, 1948, p. 7)

Already in the introduction, it becomes clear how Bruckalska's reflections connect to the avant-garde postulates of the interwar period: aesthetics are understood as an irrational factor, and subordinated to the functionality of architecture. Aesthetics arise only as the result of planning based on cause and effect, with human needs hierarchically placed at the forefront, from which the built form then derives (“man as the measure of all things”²²). Bruckalska's programme is pragmatic, grounded in research and adaptability. Architecture, she insists, must constantly engage with its environment and with prevailing social conditions. Its primary task is to enable society to lead a free, healthy, and productive life (Bruckalska, 1948, pp. 7–13). The architect, in this regard, is to rely on science-based, objective, and rational premises, which nevertheless also have to be connected with ideological guidelines. Rational designs for

²¹ Although Bruckalska became a professor at the Warsaw University of Technology in 1948, she was monitored and forced to refrain from teaching or disseminate her Avant-garde postulates from the interwar period. This suppression of the ideas of the former Avant-gardists, as well as the teachings of Le Corbusier, continued for decades at the Warsaw University of Technology, resulting in the invisibilisation of many important Polish representatives of the Avant-garde. While the Avant-garde ideas were being erased at the University of Technology, some representatives of that milieu were still able to develop their ideas in secret at the Akademia Sztuk Pięknych ASP (Academy of Arts), including the architects and professors Zbigniew Ihnatowicz (1906-1995), Jerzy Sołtan (1913-2005) and Oskar Nikolai Hansen (1922-2005). See: Marta Leśniakowska in an interview with Ewa Szymczyk (2020).

²² The concept later closely associated with Le Corbusier's Modulor originated in the interwar period within the context of CIAM (Leśniakowska, 2016b).

social housing require principles. The following paragraphs synthesise the first six of a total of eighteen principles (ibid., pp. 18–35), which she presents as the most critical foundations of her concept to housing and urbanism:

1. Liberty (*Wolność*): Residents should be granted the maximum possible freedom in their private lives. Freedom must be guaranteed to the extent that it does not restrict the same freedom of other community members. According to Brukalska, this contrasts with liberal-capitalist logic, in which the idea of freedom is linked to the financial means of community members. On the other hand, her definition of freedom also contradicts a totalitarian order that makes no distinction between public and private life and in which freedom is directed and monitored by the executive branch of the ruling doctrine (ibid., p. 18).
2. Communal economy (*Oszczędność społeczna*): As opposed to private accumulation, elements of architectural organisation should follow the principle of collective saving. This saving primarily concerns resources, costs, and—in the case of planning—space. This economy serves the benefit of the community, aiming to increase productive capacity and mobility. This however requires technical innovation and the rational organisation of ways of living and dwelling, of social resources, and of access to infrastructure (ibid.).
3. Socially most needed dwellings (*Mieszkania społecznie najpotrzebniejsze*): Brukalska attributes this term to the Polish Association for Housing Reform (Polskie Towarzystwo Reformy Mieszkaniowej) around 1930. It refers to the aim of creating the smallest possible living space for the largest possible number of people, with the deficiencies resulting from spatial scarcity to be compensated for by communal facilities and infrastructure. Examples include laundries, canteens, dining halls, libraries, and childcare centres (ibid., pp.20–21).
4. Socially responsible financial burden of residents (*Spółecznie dopuszczalne finansowe obciążenie lokatora*): Housing and communal participation costs should be structured proportionally to the income of their users (ibid.).
5. Factors determining optimal existence (*Czynniki określające optimum egzystencji*): This entails factoring in the financial situation (the current average per capita income) in connection with the biological minimum of existence (e.g. hygiene, warmth, proximity to nature, and opportunities for physical activity). At the same time, group-specific needs should be taken into account, such as those of children and young people, childless families, or individuals living alone (ibid., p. 22).
6. Social individualism (*Uspołeczniony indywidualizm*): This refers to the fulfilment of psychological needs on the micro-level within one's own four walls. Brukalska cites everyday activities such as leisure, reading, listening to music, social gatherings, and “work beyond one's profession” (ibid., p. 23). In addition, collectively accessible facilities are meant to meet psychological needs on the macro-level of the community. Brukalska grounds this in the insights of the psychologist Alfred Adler, according to whom healthy development rests on the fulfilled self-realisation of the individual in

harmony with the community. One element Brukalska specifies as a condition under this principle is the small kitchen. It serves as basic equipment within the private sphere, to be complemented by collectivised elements such as a central laundry, canteens, a central boiler room, a health centre, and so forth (ibid., 22–24).

In her theory, Brukalska assigns the architect the task of shaping the collectivised community through design in a rational, economical, and efficient way, so that the stated objectives are achieved while also creating the greatest possible freedom for the individual (ibid.:19). Reconciling the two primary principles, individual liberty and communal economy, requires a laborious search for rational solutions. Brukalska bases this on the conviction that favourable conditions of production and labour, as a societal surplus value, rest upon the adequate satisfaction of housing and living needs of people. Moreover, the text puts forward that it is the architect's responsibility to anticipate future societal demands and to respond to cultural change (ibid., p. 122). Builders thus hold a formative power over modes of living, and must reconcile economic considerations with those of comfort, yet always in the interest of the residents:

"What is required is to enable, rather than to impose, new ways of life. This applies both to programmes devised by teams of economists, social engineers, and constructors, as well as to the design itself, whose authorship belongs above all to the architect." (Brukalska, 1948, p. 36)

„Należy umożliwiać, a nie narzucać nowych sposobów życia. Dotyczy to zarówno programów ułożonych przez zespół ekonomistów, techników społecznych, konstruktorów jak i samego projektu, którego autorstwo należy przede wszystkim do architekta.” (Brukalska, 1948, p. 36)

Let us now return to her kitchen. Brukalska's ambivalence within her design regarding perspectives of use and domestic service connects directly to the maxim of social individualism. In her work, the kitchen appears as an element for satisfying the biological need for food, which, although situated in the private sphere, is also subject to a certain degree of collectivisation and shared use in the urban sphere. For particularly large families or for unmarried individuals, the previously mentioned canteens and dining halls offering hot meals were intended both to relieve the homemaker and to foster a sense of community. Similar to her instructions towards her kitchen design, Brukalska presents the concept of estate canteens and also instructs the user to follow simple, directed steps to get a tray and food at the counter, in a laid out manner (Brukalska, 1948, pp. 74–75). This further strengthens the principle of individual liberty within her framework without dismissing the kitchen in the apartment as a central space for reproductive care work (ibid., p. 65). The new kitchen, moreover, was to function as an enabling element, making it possible for the homemaker to take up paid employment:

"We are aware that even such a low level of socialisation of nutritional needs [...], and especially the inevitable further development of socialisation, will result in a reduction in women's domestic work. This is quite natural, since any change in the system or in the technology of production results in the partial or even total redundancy of certain professions. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the women who work at home and are excluded from other professional activities are themselves the ones who protest most against their liberation from the subjugation of the pots. The solution is

simple - and the same as in other cases of sectoral unemployment. It is necessary to enable and facilitate access to other employment for these women, because then they need not fear the loss of the social status of “housewife”: Their own earnings will replace the satisfaction of having part of their husband's earnings at their disposal." (Brukalska, 1948, p. 66)

„Zdajemy sobie sprawę z tego, że nawet tak mały zakres uspołecznienia potrzeb w dziedzinie odżywiania [...], a zwłaszcza nieunikniony dalszy rozwój uspołeczniania, pociągnie za sobą jako skutek zmniejszenie pracy domowej kobiet. Jest to zupełnie naturalne, każda bowiem zmiana systemu lub techniki wytwarzania pociąga za sobą częściową lub nawet całkowitą zbędność pewnych grup pracowników. W tym stanie rzeczy nie można się dziwić, że te kobiety, które gospodarują w domu, a pozbawione są innej pracy zawodowej, same najczęściej protestują przeciwko wyzwoleniu ich z jarzma garnków i balii. Środek zaradczy jest prosty – taki sam, jak w inny wypadkach bezrobocia branżowego. Trzeba umożliwić i ułatwić tym kobietom dostęp do innej pracy zarobkowej, nie będą bowiem wówczas obawiać się utraty stanowiska socjalnego ‘gospodyni’: zarobek własny zastąpi satysfakcję rozporządzania częścią zarobku męzowskiego.” (Brukalska, 1948, p. 66)

Still, Brukalska also makes it clear in this context that these tendencies towards collectivisation related to domestic work, and the looming end of the traditional role of the housewife are by no means intended to dissolve the domestic care and reproduction as known before, as well as previous family dynamics - on the contrary. In fact, she positions the family as the foundation of society. The collectivisation of parts of the household care work is merely intended to serve the principle of rational communal economy, increased labour efficiency and the satisfaction of collective needs (ibid., pp. 66).

Further, the concept of collectivisation also points to a scalar understanding of space: the domestic realm therefore extends beyond the apartment, as parts of reproductive care work are also taking place *outside*. On page 54 of her book, Brukalska creates a scalar scheme hierarchising “collective units” and assigns them “proximate constituent elements” in four subordinate interconnected levels (see: Table 2). The hierarchy ranges from the city to the apartment scale, interconnecting the domestic amenities with the collectivised facilities in the urban realm:

Name of subordinate collective units	Name of the proximate constituent elements of each superordinate collective unit
City	District
Neighbourhood	Housing Estate
Housing Estate	Housing Colony
Colony	Flats with amenities for individual households. Room with shared household facilities (Collective House).

Table 2: “Hierarchy of Collective Units”, as adopted from (Brukalska, 1948, p. 54).

This table is complemented by a visual composition, which again, shows a woman figure in the kitchen placed in a scalar relationship with the housing estate and the neighbourhood (Fig.42) .

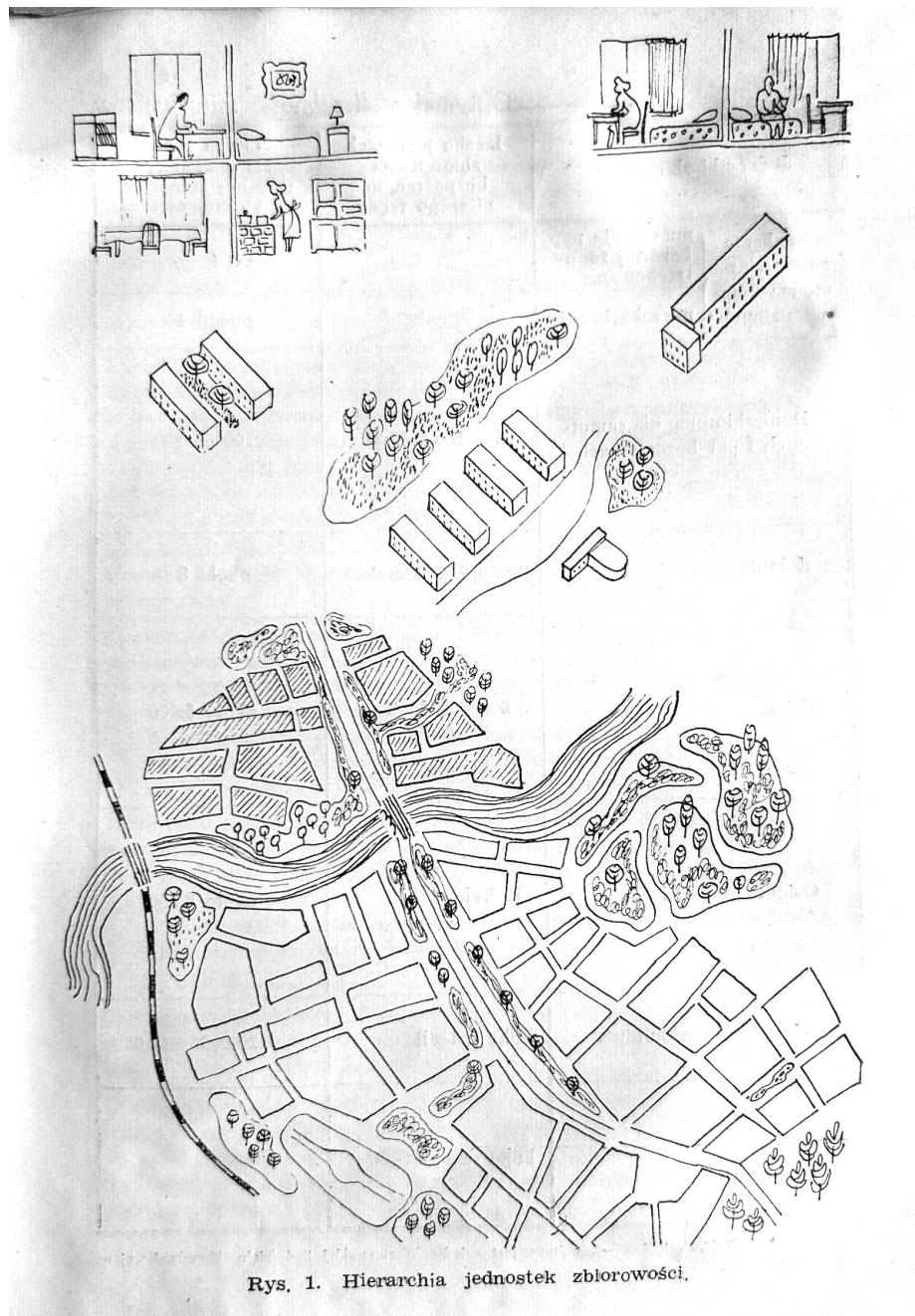


Fig. 42: Drawing of the “hierarchy of collective units”, from “Social Principles of Housing Estate Design”, 1948, p. 54.

The kitchenette is thus not only to be understood on the scale of a private domestic function, but is very much complemented by further scales of urban planning - the Colony, then the estate, and ultimately the city. These conceptualisations help to bridge the domestic space as the context of the kitchen and the urban realm.

In response to this, some of the experts have reflected more on the question of the relationship between the domestic and urban sphere in relation to the architecture of the Polish avant-garde. The artists-architects of the collaborative tandem project Centrala, Małgorzata Kuciewicz and Simone De Iacobis, have reflected on this through the scope of the dualism of “indoors” and “outdoors”:

“I think that for their generation, the concept of indoor and outdoor was much more blurred and they were thinking about the domesticated outdoors, especially with the idea of this “existence-minimum” type of housing. (...) And in this type of small settlements, you have a completely different attitude towards the outdoors.” (Małgorzata Kuciewicz, 07.08.2025, Online)

Kuciewicz brings up the concept of the “Smallest Dwelling” (orig. *Wohnung für das Existenzminimum*), labelling it as ‘domesticated outdoors’, which tried to integrate basic functional amenities that could be used within, as well as outside of the individual apartment unit, extending the users’ dwelling radius to the whole of the housing estate. Simone De Iacobis adds his reflection about the relation between the scales of the kitchen and the housing estate:

“Maybe in other words, they were thinking of this issue of scale and body. They were thinking of the outdoor space in between the blocks of flats as a shared collective space for a community. Almost as if you would transplant a countryside estate into the city and still keep this very entangled web of relationships with people that you know. And so, in a sense, maybe the kitchen in your apartment is also something you use to cook something for other people who are living in your *Klatka Schodowa* [Staircase], or outside. And it’s all like, people are watching your kids. It’s a bit like this pre Jane Jacobs idea that there is a certain oversight: we are raising our kids together, we are watching each other’s back and garden and so on. I think this is quite interesting.” (Simone De Iacobis, 07.08.2025, Online)

This comment brings out the dimension of collectivisation of care aspects, resulting in a blurred out-and-in-door relationship, which ultimately allows for bonds and care networks to form, given that the amenities are to be shared. In alignment with this, Aleksandra Kędziorek has commented on Brukalskas’ kitchen design, responding to my argument of the seeming connection of the kitchen to the urban scale:

“That the kitchen design was so minimalist was not by coincidence, because they also had a lot of infrastructure outside [of the apartment]. So, the housing estate was designed with a common dining room, and it had some facilities at the housing estate. They thought it was not only about an individual, but also the context of the whole community that lives in the housing estate. Therefore, it makes a lot of sense to see this kitchen on an urban scale.” (Aleksandra Kędziorek, 02.06.2025, Online)

She further encourages the perspective of the potential reading of the kitchen example as part of architecture theory, told through the kitchen in the city and its context. Aglaia Konrad also touches on kitchen design. As we talk, the artist encourages me to go into the field as much as

possible and immerse myself in architecture. A methodological call, to which I answered, walking through the estate (Figs. 12-17; 31-33; 43-47):



Fig. 43: Route of the walk around Żoliborz. Route red marks the first day of walking, route orange the second (see Appendix 3). The purple pin marks the location of Colony IV, the green pin marks the location of the Brukalski Residence. Map by the author, Google MyMaps.

In response to my question about how to experience architecture that is no longer present, but only as a reminiscence in the form of writing and reflection on it, Konrad responds that there is a certain similarity with the kitchen design of Austrian architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, which still exists in its original form and has been reproduced in many places and exhibitions. Konrad says the kitchens resemble each other in a similar “spirit”, a shared “attitude” and “politics”.²³ She expands that with an aphorism stating that “architecture is always political” (Protocol of Interview with Aglaia Konrad, 09.07. Online), and that she

²³ Indeed, in Brukalskas article from 1929, she hints towards an exchange of ideas about the kitchen design between the two architects (Brukalska, 1929, p. 11). However in the scope of this research no documentation of that exchange could be traced.

sees the kitchen as an example of gender dynamics, as it was women for whom the kitchen was designed in those days (ibid.).

Further responding to the argument of the domestic-urban spatial relationship established in the kitchen, the architect Simone De Iacobis points out that architecture-related disciplines operate with a “myth of the interior”, which essentially is a trope that the industry operates with. He argues against these distinctions, stating that in the early twentieth century, the divide between these realms now clearly separating the interior from the exterior, the domestic from the urban, and the private from the public, was not as crystallised. He goes on to argue with technological development:

“In a way, architecture is a kind of manifestation of the façade as a permeable space, as a space that connects, rather than separates. And if you think of the technological evolution of central heating systems and air conditioning, they’re all eager to make you stay indoors in the comfort of your technologically created environment, which is completely oblivious to the seasons outside. And in the history of urbanity and architecture, it was never like that. Life was always in between the two spaces. It was always very fluid.” (Simone De Iacobis, 07.08.2025, Online)

The question about the dualism of interior and exterior, opens the perspective to question this dualism in the technological rationality of the Contemporary Kitchen. Its design is intended to spend less time doing tasks within its space, encouraging its user to be out of it quicker, rather than being trapped for the whole day. In the same way, the open plan of the kitchen tries to integrate the activity and the user, with what is happening in the living room, so that the tasks in the kitchen don’t isolate the kitchen worker. Further, as Brukalska has elaborated, the kitchen is also developed in context of further amenities that are outsourced to the interior of the apartment, but part of the fulfilment of domestic reproductive needs. Talking about the progressive impetus of these concepts, Małgorzata Kuciewicz adds a more pessimistic note, stating that either way, only echoes remain of these social housing estates, as they have become mostly financialised:

“We completely lost the social policy of housing. The only houses of mass housing from back then are capital-related. It seems like now it’s only about the price per square metre. This is why the myth of the interior and exterior is thriving. When you ask people how they made the choice of location for their credit, they will never talk about social spaces. The architects, who are stars, they’re creating products for the market economy, and they’re never talking about social spaces.” (Małgorzata Kuciewicz, 07.08.2025, Online)

Basing her argument on this, she argues for a perspective that reconnects the dimension and imaginaries of indoors and outdoors, also in relation to future housing developments: “If we talk about social housing, not in connection to capital, but as social values, then we will be able to blur the outdoors and indoors again in our imaginary, or conception of what that means.” (Małgorzata Kuciewicz, 07.08.2025, Online). The architects therefore make the suggestion that the historic housing models have proposed a more holistic approach to housing and community-building, which was working against the financialization of housing.

The current capitalisation of the very same housing estates has led to a stronger divide between interior and exterior and put less emphasis on the distinction of different disciplines of practice.



Fig. 44: View of the gate between Units IVc and IVb, Krasieńskiego Street. Photo by the author.



Fig. 45: Units IVc and IVb, Krasieńskiego Street. Photo by the author.

Fig. 46: Courtyard of Colony IV, View on Unit IVc. Photo by the author.



Fig. 47: Greenery in the courtyard of Colony IV. Photo by the author.



Sub-conclusions

Bringing back the second line of inquiry (*how Brukalska's work on the kitchen and her social housing principles articulate negotiations of gender, class, and collectivity*), two themes emerge clearly: the negotiation of gender and class roles in domestic space with the collectivisation of everyday life as a programmatic progressive policy. Her 1929 article about the Contemporary Kitchen mediates a choreography of bodily movement, and labour efficiency. Yet this choreography encodes spatialised ambivalences, the figure of a woman in the kitchen, together with the reference to a maid, inscribes both gender and class politics into the plan. Negotiated here is a contradictory promise. On the one hand, empowerment of

women through rationalised domestic labour, on the other, a lingering dependence on the hierarchies of service, even as the WSM rejected the idea of domestic staff.

These tensions resonate with Nierhaus' assertion that: "This means that although dwelling is related to primary needs, it is not immediate, but always mediated and by no means a space free of society. Financial conditions, health policy, body image, gender attributions, design ideals, moral judgements, media role models, family patterns, sexual norms, room layout conventions, etc., are constant companions within our own four walls. Dwelling is an individual and social sojourn in the midst of society." (Nierhaus, 2019, p. 131)

Brukalska's own writings confirm this understanding of dwelling as a site where the private is always permeated by the social (public). Her "Social Principles for the Design of Housing Estates" frames architecture as a vehicle for collective development, tasking architects with balancing "individual liberty" and "communal economy" through spatial solutions. This negotiation recalls Lefebvre's notion that space is socially produced, as well as Massey's emphasis on space as relational, encompassing relations of power. Brukalska's kitchen is not only a place of cooking, but also a node in a wider constellation of reproduction, labour, and collectivism. Her ambivalence regarding domestic service echoes Robin Evans' insight that architectural plans encode social relations as much as spatial functions, embedding hierarchies, exclusions, and possibilities for class reconfiguration (Evans, 1978/1997).

From this perspective, the kitchen becomes a microcosm of the broader collectivising project on the level of the estate, and ultimately, the city. Brukalska links the reorganisation of domestic work to women's emancipation and entry into paid labour: "[...] any change in the system or in production methods results in the partial or even total redundancy of certain professions. [...] The solution is simple... It is necessary to enable and facilitate access to other employment for these women" (Brukalska, 1948, p. 66). Through this, the kitchen becomes a realm of negotiating new emerging gender roles, and a springboard for wage labour emancipation, operating simultaneously as a private space and a potential site of shared provision (through its extension to canteens and dining halls). In this way, the boundaries between domestic and urban are blurred, and architecture emerges as an agent in the formation of collectivised life.

Taken together, these two works illustrate how Brukalska used both spatial design and theoretical writing to spatially mediate the entanglement of class, gender, and collectivity, connecting domestic space to the urban realm. Her proposals challenge a static view of the domestic interior by positioning it within broader social processes, aligning with Lefebvre and Massey's insistence on space as produced and relational, while echoing Evans and Nierhaus' reminders that dwelling and elements of everyday life architecture are mediating social relations.

Towards Critical Storytelling

This section presents further results of expert interviews with scholars, as well as artists and practitioners, addressing reflections on storytelling, writing, and narrative assemblages. These include insights into their research processes, assembling materials, and challenges during their research. Lastly, concerns regarding narrative framing are brought to the surface, which

will support the discussion of the third line of enquiry. This concerns dimensions of positionality, geography, scope of research, and motives behind writing, curating and teaching. Various scholars underline that the multiple activities they pursue interplay with each other, and that there are always questions of perspective, even within academic knowledge production. In line with this, a statement that historian Martin Kohlrausch has shared, echoes throughout this section, that “in essence, such a piece of work consists of leaving things out, (...) this sets the frame, and motivates what one wants to transmit.” (Martin Kohlrausch, 29.07.2025, Online).

Processes and Challenges

Most of the experts fulfil multiple roles, and therefore speak from a diversity of perspectives in their respective research processes. Among the detailed accounts of how some of the publications and projects relevant to the scope of this research were developed, there were mentions of extensive archival queries, contextual research, oral history, walking as a method, didactic processes with peers and students, statistical research, curation of exhibitions, and seizing opportunities of coincidental discoveries.

Approaching the archival depository of Brukalska, I was reminded of the conversation with Danish scholar Jannie Rosenberg Bendsen, who has recounted her research process on modernist kitchen design in the Danish example, involving architect Ulla Taftdrup (1906-1996). Rosenberg Bendsen's process involved multiple trips to various archives, which required a certain flexibility on the researcher's part, involving experience, and an openness to elements of surprise:

“So, the process is sort of that you sort of jump from one source to another. [...] I see it as a kind of puzzle and detective's work, where you have to look at different kinds of archives and homepages to find that big piece of information that goes together with another piece of information, and when you put those two pieces together, you have a picture of it. And then of course, there are still many things that you don't know. Sometimes it's a challenge academically, because you somehow have to retrace your steps.” (Jannie Rosenberg Bendsen, 01.07.2025, Online)

Rosenberg Bendsen's comment illuminates an ethnographic dimension with respect to archival work, which surpasses the function of mere sourcing for evidence, but instead offers a perspective on assembling material and putting the “puzzle” together as an active process, which further adds to the question of archival representation. This very much points to the researcher as an active navigator between the collection of material, “jumping from one source to another”, and the potential of the unknown - a missing piece that remains silent. This provokes the possibility that a different researcher might assemble the “puzzle” otherwise, because of a dissimilar process of work, or timing.

Multiple other conversations also brought up the problem of the research due to the fragmented nature of the materials and sources that the researchers could draw from. In line with Rosenberg Bendsen's comment, many of the experts' processes included travelling to various destinations and archives across the world, in the hopes of finding materials that might point to the next step of the “puzzle”. The scattered archaeology of some women's

legacies reveals the challenge of time-intensive research periods, which do not always keep the promise of information being retrieved, as the materials in question have been scattered across different places, but also moments in time. In line with this, architectural historian and curator Aleksandra Kędziorek talks about the challenge of creating a narrative about the archives in question:

“With Brukalska and Syrkus, we have what is left from their archive. Yes, especially from the twenties and thirties, we just have what survived. So, it's always an attempt to build a story (laughs) and some kind of interpretation. And it's good to open it up to people so they can also be critical about it, complement it with their own stories.” (Aleksandra Kędziorek, 02.06.2025, Online, highlights by the author.)

Speaking towards the third line of inquiry, Kędziorek highlights the process of construction of a narrative frame. An archival story in the process of being made, opening it up for critical inquiry, which again invokes Antoinette Burton's call for archive stories. The statement by Kędziorek is particularly interesting, as she is currently co-curating an exhibition on both Helena Syrkus and Barbara Brukalska, together with her colleague Małgorzata Jędrzejczyk. The curator shares a perspective that highlights the potential of taking stories about individual practitioners as a point of entry into larger historical frames of architecture, urbanism, or even broader, Polish history of the twentieth century:

“After World War II, there was a very smooth entry into another totalitarian system, or oppressive system, which was communism. In fact, the entire twentieth century is a disruptive period, and a very particular and specific one for Central and Eastern Europe. From the very moment Poland regained its independence, through the attempt to build this new world, the experience of World War II, and then those few decades of the communist system, have made this experience a very different one from that of, for example, Western European countries. And despite such moments, talking about architectural histories or changes in architecture, they sometimes took a very similar form. Whether in Poland or in other European countries, in the 1920s, similar trends emerged, but in Poland, they often grew out of a very different background, be it ideological or socio-political. So, this is an attempt to show that the history of architecture, or the historiography of modern architecture, can also be a way of writing Polish and Central and Eastern European history. And these two figures, Helena Syrkus and Barbara Brukalska, tie up almost the entire twentieth century for us, because, after all, they were born in the period when Poland did not exist on the map of Europe. It was still divided between the occupying countries, and then they entered this stage of their professional independence, when Poland became an independent country. They embark on this work of building their living environment and the world a little bit anew and arranging this world according to new ideals. And after that, they also experience these later periods of history.” (Małgorzata Jędrzejczyk, 03.07.2025, Online, highlights by the author.)

This offers an inverted perspective on contextual storytelling. Using stories about two female figures in architecture as a method to open up a wider contextual frame, challenging modes of chronological history writing. On a similar note, in conversation with two of the editors of the Women Writing Architecture platform, architect Helen Thomas described the aim behind creating a platform for architectural knowledge through the lens of gender. Their account

aligns with the third line of inquiry, challenging conventions of architectural writing, as the platform serves as an example of enabling exploratory research processes that also step outside the academic frame. They particularly address the way in which a webpage can serve as an amplifier of knowledge: “I was looking at how you could use web environments as places of collecting facts, let’s say, which become knowledge when put into systems. Creating a mind out of which you can make things.” (Helen Thomas, 15.07.2025, Online). In line with this, co-editor Jaehee Shin later adds:

“(…) through our platform, we discover women’s writing related to architecture. I think this mechanism is really beautiful because it broadens the definitions of architecture by touching women’s lives and their voices. And there are no limits. As Helen said, because it’s not an institutional approach, it’s a completely different freedom and a different way to build this kind of knowledge.” (Jaehee Shin, 15.07.2025, Online)

Through this, Shin opens up questions about the meaning of collecting different types of writings and putting them together in conversation with each other, so that each person can look at it in their own way and draw various kinds of knowledge from that. She touches upon how knowledge and writing are produced through different types of positionalities: “Each woman has a different life. Sometimes I learn so much through their wisdom.” (Jaehee Shin, 15.07.2025, Online).

Making Nuances Visible

Multiple experts have reflected on how serving a sense of justice to underrepresented stories influences their research interests. In doing so, the experts have brought up various layers of storytelling in regard to women in architecture, their position as women, but also as examples from Central and Eastern Europe within the discourses around architecture and urbanism.

“I think it's important just to show their stories with much more nuance. And it's either with Syrkus not to look at her only as a political agent, and in Brukalska's case, not to look at her work only through this image of a tomboy icon of the 1920s. So, I think that's it: Their work is much, much more nuanced and complex. That's why I think they both deserve publications about them and exhibitions and being shown in this bigger context, because then you can also focus on different aspects of their work, whether it's architecture or urban planning, or furniture design. You know, so there are many, many aspects of that. And with the lack of publications, we just know part of the story.” (Aleksandra Kędziorek, 02.06.2025, Online)

Kędziorek’s call for more publications problematises the reproduction of a single-sided story: If there are no publications, the same imaginaries will be reproduced and reiterated. Thus, the question of *nuance* emerges as a central category of critically telling these women’s stories. Adding to this, Kędziorek also raises the issue of the dissemination of these stories, which go beyond the Polish-speaking discourse. Addressing the internationally active networks that these Polish actors were part of, she says:

“I think it is nice to remember what we discussed at the beginning, that there is this magic barrier on the Odra river, that the knowledge of Eastern Europe somehow doesn't go far west. I have the same impression that the references that we have been researching in Poland are not that known abroad. And that was not the case when these figures were

active. So, this is also important for me. For example, Szymon Syrkus studied at the Bauhaus briefly, then in Riga, in Zurich, so he made a whole tour, and they were all connected. They exchanged magazines, they published together. Even in Poland, we forget that because we had those several decades of socialism and socialist Poland and all those networks were broken, but in the twenties and thirties the connections were much bigger, and it's good to re-establish them somehow.” (Aleksandra Kędziorek, 02.06.2025, Online)

This brings up another important aspect, which is, in Kędziorek’s words, “re-establishing” the collaborative networks through their storytelling, in order to make them visible again in a Western-centred collective memory. This comment reflects upon how certain stories can fade due to historic ruptures and structural power shifts, and why the Polish examples might have been forgotten, not only in the West but also in Poland itself. On another layer, the question of *collaboration* also emerges as a general theme in relation to nuance:

“(…) for me it's about expanding how we look at the history that we read and sort of getting... Well, we all have this idea that this one architect, Le Corbusier, or Walter Gropius, or Arne Jacobsen, just sat there and did all the drawings themselves, but they didn't. They had a studio. They had people working for them, and a lot of them, so they didn't actually draw anything. Maybe they did some sort of sketches in the beginning or something like that, for dissemination, or selling it to the clients. But a lot of them had other people doing it. So, architecture has always been collaborative.” (Jannie Rosenberg Bendsen, 01.07.2025, Online)

Further adding to this aspect, architect and docent Piotr Marciniak comments on the significance of highlighting women’s activity in the architectural and urban field on a broader level:

“It is very important because the effort that has been put in is disproportionate to how women are represented, for example, in publications or in the media. In recent years, there have been titles that are trying to make up for this. For example, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, or *Wysokie Obcasy*, there are attempts to write about a woman or another. This is probably effective and very good. However, there is the whole issue, as mentioned in one of my articles, of nameless women, architects and urban planners, who not only shaped our cities, but also worked at universities. Because at one point, this was a good way, not so much to survive, but to find a place for oneself in this communist reality. And so, definitely, their figures need to be outlined somehow. This is simply a large research gap that needs to be filled, definitely. And I would even say in a popularising or documentary way. Even documentary films, perhaps some publications of a popularising nature. I think that would definitely be necessary. (Piotr Marciniak Interview, 14.07.2025)”

Both Rosenberg Bendsen and Marciniak's accounts problematise the narrative recognition, and visibility of the collaborative aspects of architecture making. In addressing the “nameless” professionals, Marciniak also opens a space for the silent voices that again, speak back to the question of archival representation of women's work and how their contributions are narrated, not only through research, but also popularised through different media of knowledge dissemination. A sense of justice for women working today. This incentivises a perspective, which acknowledges that these kinds of stories are never finished but only reveal the need for more investigation, challenging the boundaries of academic knowledge

production, as again the conversation with the Women Writing Architecture platform revealed:

“Usually, there's this idea of working towards a complete and finished piece of work, which is the final version. But of course, any piece of writing or any piece of work has many, many potential different things along the way. So, you know, that's, and I find that totally fascinating. Why can't academia open itself up?” (Helen Thomas, 15.07.2025, Online)

Architect Helen Thomas not only questions the boundaries of academic knowledge production, but also further puts pressure of the question of historical framing in architectural writing, challenging the modes of history that render women's stories invisible:

“Well, I guess in a way all women feel a need for justice. I think you can't deny that. But I'd say, rather than saying these histories are hidden, it's actually the history that's wrong. When we talked about methodologies and historiographies before, I'd say, actually, it's the frame that's wrong, not the fact that they're hidden. If it were something else, they wouldn't be hidden. So, what is that something else? What are the possibilities for that something else? In a way, this is what we are trying to find out; that's one of my questions.” (Helen Thomas, 15.07.2025, Online)

This further resonates with the accounts of the director of the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, Michał Duda, who problematises the conditions of the momentum of writing women in architecture (back) into the academic, as well as popular discourse:

“There is an absolute lack of these stories, and we also lack researchers. This is a consequence of the lack of money for research, because it's not considered ‘sexy’ in this country. I really think that a lot of time will have to pass before this gap in knowledge is filled, because, you know, we are talking about the ones who are at the very top. Syrkusowa and Brukalska are the top of the top, and we don't even know what's going on ‘below’ them.” (Michał Duda, 25.07.2025, Wrocław)

Duda says this in the context of describing the different challenges with respect to his own research about Wrocławian architect Jadwiga Grabowska-Hawrylak, and women architects in general for the case of Poland, urging for a broader perspective in the field of research about women in architecture.

Cautionary Tales

However, in conversation with the Centrala tandem project, architect Małgorzata Kuciewicz has expressed her concerns about a growing trend in research and exhibition funding that increasingly centres precisely on women's stories. Referring to recent experiences in her practice, Kuciewicz is apprehensive of a “manipulative” mode of storytelling in historical representation that blurs the reality of the respective women who collaborated with their spouses, possibly creating a disbalance in the collective memory. While exchanging arguments about why this research trend is emerging, Kuciewicz raises the concern that leaving the husband's role out entirely, or significantly diminishing it, might result in a repetition of what has happened to these women before. Thus, to overemphasise the respective women's roles in their collaborative tandems again would run the risk of repeating

a historical injustice, but in a reversed dynamic. Kuciewicz says, “What is happening now is that in the frame of bringing back women architects, there is a distortion. Because the truth was, they were the wives. Syrkusowa was the secretary for their whole lives. And now with this lens of women architects, it’s becoming a more important figure than the husband. But I’m sorry, Warszawa Funkcjonalna was the husband.” (07.08.2026, Online). Simone De Iacobis later adds to this: “In a sense, their practice was always a dialogue with their partners. It’s difficult to single them out.” (ibid.).

With this, Kuciewicz and De Iacobis present a more cautious perspective on certain narratives centring on women, highlighting the importance of a critical approach to storytelling in history. While De Iacobis puts forward, that it is important to bring out women’s stories from the point of view of the low number of representation of gender in the profession throughout history, both of the experts reflections also present themselves as a cautionary tale to not just tell women practitioners stories without adequately addressing the collaborative context that they worked in, even if these stories are built on an argument of empowerment. “It’s a bit arbitrary to speak about the history of female architects without thinking of them in the context of their cooperation.” (Simone De Iacobis, 07.08.2025, Online).

Kuciewicz underlines her arguments by highlighting her goal of overcoming gendered distinctions when talking about architecture: “I think that it’s not about women and men in architecture. There is also a mixed gender practice. And this is for me the most important value.” (07.08.2025, Online). She gives the example of the fictional character of Howard Roark, in Ayn Rand’s novel “The Fountainhead”: “I think we shouldn’t put the lens of Howard Roark on women figures.” (ibid.) However, in recounting their past projects, both architects recall that there are always narratorial choices to make, in which way a historical topic, a city, or an architect gets framed and “manipulated”. (ibid.). This can also be related to grants and publishing questions, and current trends in concepts that sell a topic well and create a “common imaginary”, which encourages practitioners to employ “acrobatic narratives”, as Kuciewicz says:

“I’m just being honest, that we did some acrobatic narratives to be in line with the popular concepts, let’s say. Okay, maybe with Alina Scholtz it was, you know, if we hadn’t created that singular hero, like a Howard Roark of landscape architecture in a skirt, the impact wouldn’t be so powerful. This is why we did that.” (Małgorzata Kuciewicz, 07.08.2025, Online)

De Iacobis adds to that: “Sometimes the way you tell stories is instrumental to the message.” (07.08.2025, Online). This points towards the importance of perspective and motivation, from which history is assembled and told.

Dorota Pikulska, the art historian who is currently administering the deposit of the Brukalski archive at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, comments in a similar way on the current discursive developments that centre the historic role of women in the practice of architecture and urbanism:

“Of course, it is very necessary, and it is fantastic that this process has started. It’s just that I am trying to sensitise everyone who comes to study this work, not to look at it from

today's point of view, or from the point of view of our current consciousness. Of course, we have it, and it's difficult to break away from it. However, I always encourage people to try to put themselves in the shoes of those who are being written about today, because it is very easy from today's feminist point of view, and above all from the perspective of living in a free country - which is of great importance considering the aftermath of the Second World War - to view this work not only this way, but at least to try to understand the circumstances of the times in which it was created.” (Dorota Pikulska, 25.7.2025, Wrocław)

Similar to Aleksandra Kędziorek, Pikulska tries to be sensitive towards reiterating Barbara in a way which reproduces a trope of an oppressed woman, who was limited by the constraints of marriage:

“[...] because unfortunately this kind of narrative is repeated throughout all kinds of literature, that these poor women had to marry an architect to be able to co-create and have a shared office. This is not the case with Brukalska. She recounts in multiple letters and notes that she loved co-working with her husband, specifically on their project for their home, which was one of her favourite projects. I think that was an expression that she used.” (Dorota Pikulska, 25.7.2025, Wrocław)

Positionality in Research

In terms of positionality in relation to storytelling in research, the conversation with artist and researcher Maja Wirkus is important. As am I, Wirkus is Polish but was raised in Germany, and has questioned, like me, a seeming epistemological barrier that still seems to be drawn between the former Eastern Bloc and the West. Wirkus describes her motives behind beginning to engage with Polish architectural history and recounts her experiences when she started her research on Helena Syrkus and the CIAM over a decade ago. While studying in Germany, she had questioned why there weren't any examples from the East. She reports that the outlook on German-Polish history was limited, despite their close intertwining:

“When I was studying, I asked myself about examples of modernism from Poland, and in those times, there was nothing on the internet yet. I went to Warsaw then, even stayed multiple years and got to know Kasia [Katarzyna Uchowicz]. During my time in Warsaw, when I started engaging with this topic and doing research, I was going through old books and walking the streets in search of the buildings, as there was literally nothing on the internet yet. It only started in the last ten years, that people started to be interested in that [Polish modernism, CIAM and Helena Syrkus] and produce more and more. [...] And I have to give ourselves the credit that we three [Wirkus refers here to Katarzyna Uchowicz, Aleksandra Kędziorek and herself] were the first to really go into the archives and retrieve live information, which up until then were only somewhere behind a third wall.” (Maja Wirkus, 17.7.2025, Online)

Beyond this, Wirkus refers to a certain politics of positionality in research and a continuous invisibility in terms of the ideological and historical erasure of the East, specifically referring to Polish-German relations on the level of epistemological, psychological and historical necropolitics²⁴ the Germans have imposed on the Polish. She raises the issue of the continuity

²⁴ The term Necropolitics here is borrowed from Achille Mbembe (2019) and was not used verbatim by expert Maja Wirkus. It is employed in this context to subsume her statements about the historical injustices and

of structural invisibility and injustice towards Polish lived experience, which, in Wirkus's reasoning, is the result of a long history of annexation, unpaid reparations, and grappling with the consequences of war, which imposed trauma and dynamics of inferiority within the Polish epistemological (self-)perception. In connection to these continuities of injustice and invisibility, Wirkus problematises the (linguistic) positionality of researchers, and how that plays a role in the research that has been put out to the present day:

“To put it like this, that thinking, that the Slavs are worth less, is still present in the air, but nobody addresses it. And scientists are also not apolitical beings. Why do scientists not look to their left and right? First, because they don't even think of that in the first place, and second, because they often don't look at the material when it's written in certain other languages. This is something I heard many times. Well, you can either learn a new language, but I mean, these days, you can just easily translate with the help of your phone, so I don't think that is a valid reason anymore. But I hear this all the time, and so the same stories get told over and over again, they are like a copy, of a copy of a copy – without any reflection.” (Maja Wirkus, 17.7.2025, Online)

Maja Wirkus expresses her discomfort with a perceived ignorance she observes in the Western discourses about Eastern examples or, respectively, a lack thereof. It becomes clear that the perceptions the expert describes include a certain level of evasiveness and are hard to grasp concretely, but remain affectively inscribed in the discourses that are reproduced. Wirkus's statements account for the importance of positionality and the barriers to linguistic ability, but also interest in looking beyond one's own discourse.

With this in mind, Jannie Rosenberg Bendsen further emphasises the dimension of storytelling and academic writing as a scholar, and expresses her interest in writing that overcomes traditional modes of architectural analyses, by looking at the stories of the practitioners themselves:

“I think it's quite important to tell a story. Sometimes I see myself more as a historian than an academic scholar. I think that it's because I like telling stories, and it's quite interesting to tell these stories and not just do an analysis and then write it very academically. What I learned, when I was in university, like the focus on dissemination, that has changed. People can relate to people and people's stories.” (Jannie Rosenberg Bendsen, 01.07.2025, Online, highlights by the author.)

Rosenberg Bendsen's comment also highlights the potential that emerges from storytelling to disseminate these stories to a general public (“people can relate to people”). Concerning the publication of the “Archipelag CIAM”, about the epistolary exchange of Helena Syrkus, co-editor Maja Wirkus talks about her approach to the narratorial structure and the dynamic arch that she aimed for in the publication, which proposes letters as an explorative and situated architectural material.

“When I edited the German translation, it was important to me that the emotionality of the letters, their fantastical tone, was delivered correctly. Some translations were not perfect. It was important for me that the book would not be a usual mix of chronological

inequalities that were imposed by German racial politics, racializing, excluding, othering and killing Slavs and other “races” based on their racial hierarchies.

recounting and pretty images. Instead, I wanted the letters to be read like a novel, a thriller, that creates a movie in one's head. I believe this provokes much more within us than just looking at images from the beginning. This meant to purposefully leave out images, and let it all come together in one's head. [...] Well, information comes and goes; it is never found chronologically, it is lost, it gets cited in the wrong way, then multiplied, or stays incomplete. That gap of information, that non-chronology, and that micro-history of the gap. This is something that I am very interested in artistically.” (Maja Wirkus, 17.07.2025, Online)

Wirkus's comment reinforces a situated, affective dimension involved in the narrative processes of researching and writing about women in architecture, which also resonates with my own process. On the one hand, the task of translating is never entirely adequate, running the risk of omitting the *emotional* transmission of meaning from the original version. On the other hand, it also further underlines the potential that emerges from the gap in materials as a possibility for further storytelling. It points towards the acknowledgement and acceptance that a story, or publication for that matter, is never fully complete.

Sub-conclusions

The third line of enquiry (*how can 'critical storytelling' about women in architecture challenge the modes of architectural writing and offer a different model for writing urban studies?*) highlights the intricate interplay between the multi-layered narrative dimensions in respect to archival materials, historical silences, and the multiplicity of voices that emerge through both engagement and interpretation with the task at hand. The expert interviews underscore that constructing a historical narrative, particularly regarding women architects from Central and Eastern Europe, is not a neutral act but is always shaped by the positionality, sensible perspective, and motivations of the researcher. Recalling what historian Martin Kohlrausch has shared about the challenges of leaving things out, this resonates with the reflections of Aleksandra Kędziołek and Maja Wirkus (among others), who emphasise the need to navigate fragmented archival materials while remaining aware of epistemic barriers imposed by language, geography, and historical ruptures that have shaped the body of archival material.

Doucet et al. provide a useful lens for framing this discussion, particularly with their attention to *voices* and *languages*. They argue that architectural writing must be attentive to what disappears within conventional academic frames, highlighting the importance of subjectivity and the positionality of the researcher. As they note, “In architecture, the work of knowledge production and of writing as both a method and medium are enabled and constrained by various socially agreed-upon norms” (Doucet et al., 2024). This encompasses not only stylistic conventions but also the linguistic and disciplinary (*genre*) boundaries that structure knowledge production. Their attention to language emphasises the political dimensions of scholarly work: which voices are rendered visible (or audible for that matter) connects to which geographies are represented in research, and whose perspectives are systematically marginalised. The accounts of Helen Thomas and Jaehee Shin from the Women Writing Architecture platform reinforce this, showing how digital platforms can amplify

underrepresented voices and enable knowledge production beyond traditional academic hierarchies and disciplinary boundaries.

The voices from the interviews repeatedly demonstrate that processes of storytelling are inherently interpretive and relational. As Dorota Pikulska from the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław cautions, contemporary readings of Brukalska risk distorting the historical figures if present-day assumptions are not reflected fully in the engagement with the historical context, calling researchers to be attentive to the social, cultural, and political conditions in which historical subjects lived and worked. Similarly, cautionary perspectives from Małgorzata Kuciewicz and Simone De Iacobis highlight the delicate balance between recovering women's histories and overwriting narratives in ways that might misrepresent their collaborative contexts. These insights again echo Doucet et al.'s reflections on genre and the '*god trick*' (Haraway, 1988), revealing how both textual conventions and disciplinary expectations can obscure or simplify historical complexity.

Language emerges as a particularly critical dimension of storytelling, as Beatriz Colomina observes: "When, soon after, I tried my hand at English, I was shocked at the extent to which not only the way I was writing had changed but even what I was saying. It was as if with the language, I was also leaving behind a whole way of looking at things, of writing them. Even when we think we know what we are about to write, the moment we start writing, language takes us on an excursion of its own. And if that language is not ours, we are definitely in foreign territory" (Colomina, 1994, p. ix). This also resonates with the challenges raised by Maja Wirkus and other experts: English as a dominant academic language may facilitate wider dissemination but simultaneously risks erasing the nuances and cultural specificities embedded in local histories and original documents.

Finally, the empirical accounts underline the ethical and methodological imperative of acknowledging *situated knowledge* (Haraway, 1988). Revisions, reinterpretations, and ongoing engagement with sources are not signs of weakness but reflective of the iterative, relational, and temporal nature of research, as Doucet et al. highlight. Thus, the understanding of architectural writing, and urban writing for that matter, as a situated work-in-progress, allows for a richer and more critical engagement with archival sources, opening up space for voices that might otherwise remain unheard. In this way, storytelling in relation to architecture or the urban realm itself becomes an active, generative method: one that balances critical inquiry, ethical responsibility, and creative interpretation while acknowledging both the gaps and silences inherent in archival work.

Thus, the third line of enquiry reveals that constructing histories of Barbara Brukalska, or even Helena Syrkus, and other underrepresented women figures is inseparable from questions of voice, language, genre, and positionality of the subject, as much as the researcher. Storytelling, in this context, is both a methodological tool and a critical act: it not only recovers silenced histories but also interrogates the structures of knowledge production, challenging canonical frameworks and opening up new avenues for cross-cultural and interdisciplinary understanding.

To (not) Conclude...

Circling back to the question: *How can an intersectional feminist reading of Brukalska's 'Contemporary Kitchen' challenge her position within the Polish avant-garde and reveal the kitchen as a critical site for negotiating gender, class, and urbanism?* This study pursued three interrelated lines of inquiry. The imaginary and representation of Brukalska in and through her archive, the gendered and classed spatial implications of her kitchen design, and the methodological challenges of writing about architecture and urban studies, through critical storytelling.

The first line of inquiry underscored the narrative dimension of working within the archive and its power to disrupt, as much as to confirm, historical imaginaries. Brukalska's repository challenged the one-dimensional image of her as a modernist icon, revealing instead a complex practitioner who worked collaboratively and towards social change. The act of reading her archive critically, attentive to what remains, what is missing, and what is silent, made clear that archival records themselves are performative, shaping rather than merely containing the histories they preserve.

The second line of inquiry expanded the reflection to the scale of the kitchen itself, where imaginaries of gender and class are encoded spatially and symbolically. It showed that Brukalska's Contemporary Kitchen was more than a functional design, it was a space where domestic labour, classed and gendered social reform, and modernist technological development were negotiated. Through her writings, it became possible to see the kitchen in connection to the urban scale, reflecting larger questions of social order, collectivism, and class and gender politics in interwar Warsaw. In this sense, the kitchen functions as a bridge between interior and exterior, private and public, interior design and urbanism.

The third line of inquiry turned towards questions of mobilising a narrative about Brukalska as a woman practitioner and as an example of Central- Eastern European urbanism. Here, the notion of critical storytelling and feminist epistemologies brought into view the persistent disappearances embedded in academic writing conventions and disciplinary distinctions. Drawing on Doucet et al. (2024), I considered how voices, languages, genres, and revisions shape what can be said, heard, or remembered. Keeping Beatriz Colomina's words in mind, writing in another language - English - about Polish women architects is itself a translational act that risks erasing nuance, but also opens possibilities for discursive visibility and recognition beyond national borders.

Taken together, these three lines of inquiry reveal that the story of Brukalska's kitchen cannot be confined to a single scale, source material, or narrative. The archive unsettles the imaginary, the kitchen mediates social imaginaries of gender and class, and the act of writing itself determines whose stories endure. Bringing these threads into conversation with each other, I argue that an intersectional feminist reading of Brukalska's Contemporary Kitchen reframes her not as a hero or pioneer alone, but as part of a network, situated, and engaged field of practice, in which she still stands out as an accomplished practitioner of her time. The kitchen thus becomes a critical site for negotiating the intertwined conditions of gender, class,

and urbanism. Conditions which are not only historical, but also methodological, shaping how we write and understand architectural and urban histories today.

On a broader level, this approach also offers a critical perspective for urban studies. By placing the kitchen, which is normally not placed at the centre of analysis in the field of urban studies, this work challenges strict disciplinary distinctions, as well as dichotomies of domestic and urban space, private versus public, grounded in the material itself. It demonstrates that everyday practices of domestic labour are constitutive of urban life and can be understood in a scalar perspective, as this case of Polish modernism exemplifies. Moreover, reading Brukalska's archive alongside her designs foregrounds how imaginaries of gender and class are built into the very fabric of urban space. This intersectional feminist approach therefore, invites urban studies to expand its methodological repertoire and treat archives, kitchens, and stories not as supplements to the urban but as key terrains, or fields, through which the urban itself is reproduced, narrated, and contested.

To sum up, yet not to conclude, this text does not aim to fix Brukalska's place once and for all, but to open up her work as a door leading to other stories and perspectives, still unwritten. The voices assembled here, from the archive, the experts, and also my own, are partial and situated, and it is precisely in their partiality that they gesture toward a more expansive practice of history-writing in architecture and urban studies. If disappearance has been the recurring trope in this inquiry, then perhaps the most empowering task is to create conditions for re-appearance of women*, of spatialised representations of gender, class, and of care labour, and of alternative ways of telling urban stories. The work is ongoing, and necessarily so.

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Appendix

1. Notes from the Archive

Notes from the *Kwerenda* (query) at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, Day 1: 21.07.25.

Processing the first look into the archive was not an easy task, but an enlightening one. On my first day in Wrocław, I arrived at the museum that was closed to visitors. Daria Dorota Pikulska showed me to the archive, and to my surprise, it was a few stacks of folders and large cardboard boxes (containing the chalks and drawings) in her office. It definitely doesn't look like much when it lies all together like that. First things first, we talk a bit more about Brukalska, as always, I admit to - and Pani Dorota agrees - that the scope of this research is quite broad. But I explain to her the reasons for my looking as wide as I can, which is because I want to be sensitive to traces that might lead me elsewhere beyond the scope of this.

She tells me she has meticulously created a whole work-in-progress inventory list, including a preliminary sorting, description, authorship, material, estimated value, and date. She shows me the file on her computer, truly a marvellous excel file. The list is over 1100 positions long. She explains that she doesn't share this list with anyone. She hasn't even shared it with Aleksandra or Małgorzata, who are curating the exhibition at the Museum next year. I understand, as this is, of course, a work-in-progress still, which she has been working on for more than a year already, she tells me.

Hence I sit in front of her computer, we have coffee and tea, and lots of interruptive talks, which are always incredibly inspiring and valuable to me, because they offer glimpses between the lines and instances of the research process that go unmentioned. For the past two years, as Katarzyna has already explained to me, when we talked online, both Katarzyna and Dorota have been in touch with Maria Brukalska, the *Synowa*, daughter-in-law, of Barbara. She is around 90 years old today and is the heir of the archive, after her husband's passing, who was Barbara's youngest son, Baltazar. Dorota tells me that Maria puts great importance on referring to it as the family's archive of the Brukalskis. Dorota describes her as a woman who likes to talk and knows an incredible amount. Dorota regrets that their talks over sweets and tea have not been recorded to become a testimony of oral history. The rights to the archive remain in the family, and Dorota is unsure what will happen to them once Maria might pass away, and fears that the younger generation will try to sell it to them, instead of gifting it. Dorota doesn't endorse accepting offers to buy archives because she doesn't want to create a market for them or drive up the prices. Also, because she believes that these things and architectural drawings belong to the public as much as the family, they should be common. But, she has to give the objects some value for insurance reasons. So some of these objects, like a Xerox copy of some old article, have funny values in the annex, like one zloty. But it needs to be set.

It's funny also, because scrolling through the long list of things, there are some mundane objects or pieces of paper among them, but as soon as they enter the archive, they become something else; they become holy, as I remember now Jelena Pančevac saying to me in our conversation. A place in a list, a value and provenance are required, as they are no longer just

a piece of paper. They are part of the bigger story and picture of these people. Dorota said, working with this archive really felt like “you are handling live history” (*historia żywa*). Dorota mentions that this legacy of Barbara and Stanisław is exceptional, as they also might have known that. The meticulous hoarding and description of some of these drawings, letters, photographs, and a collection of article copies were curated in their own time to a certain degree, the archivist claims.

I think in the beginning, Dorota was concerned that I might be interested in repainting Barbara as this feminist modernist tomboy icon, but on the contrary, I want to look beyond what has been printed time and again about her. The other researchers have already given me a broader perspective, that she was a mother, a catholic, among many other things and layers. And scrolling through the list, I'm surprised by how many church designs there are. I am genuinely astonished. Religion must have played a significant role in her life. Somehow that brought me closer to her, the catholic aspect always reminds me of my grandmothers and their old ways of language and proper expression.

Dorota has tells me about pictures of Zofia, Barbara's sister, who was a nun and was a sister in a convent that cared for the blind. She died young. This was in Laski, where the deceased of the family are buried. The place always had a significant meaning for them because of Zofia, Dorota claims.

There are some photos of their parents, it seems. As I look through the list, I take notes of which positions I am particularly interested in looking at. I shall continue to list what I want to look at tomorrow. I got to 500 today, 500 more to go and scroll through, and then we open the files. I am noting down the folders I wanna see, and marking the essential ones orange, and the less important ones (for now) just black. I also want to look at all this stuff to get a better feeling for how this couple did things. And there are plenty of furniture designs. I am curious about that—also, some furniture design studies of Stanisław and some *Blaupausen* and furniture studies from books he liked.

I am curious to see it tomorrow. There is something incredibly intimate about scrolling and looking through these things of a person I don't have any personal connection to. I am digging into the lives of some people who really have existed, not only in a shiny exhibition catalogue. To witness the materiality of these things feels incredible.

Notes from the *Kwerenda* Day 2: Tuesday 22.07.25.

Today I looked at at least half a thousand pages. And took so many photos that my phone battery was almost used up. The day started with a visit to Mr. Wiesio, who administers the library, next door to Dorota's office. It is a small, antiquary-style interior. A man, possibly in his 60s, who knows by heart which book he has on the shelves he is guarding. I sat down with the archival material of Helena Syrkus that he had there—five carton cases, each holding various folders. I have made pictures of the folders bit by bit and looked into each of the folders in the end—lots of typewritten materials. Most of them are notes, chapter drafts and annotations to her second book: “*Cele urbanizacji społecznej*”. She also had many copies of protocols of the CIAM meetings, an exhibition catalogue and a few documents on the WSM in Rakowiec, but not much. I spent around two hours looking at everything and taking an

unnecessary amount of pictures - just in case. It's funny, It's as if I am copying the inventory into my own head, or phone it seems. It really must be experience, a significant portion of intuition, and possibly even some talent, to know what is really relevant right then and there. But even if I won't use any of it for my writing, I do appreciate having been given time to go through these pages, and know that, and where they are. The materiality and haptic experience bring me closer to the material itself, I feel. Now I am not sure if I should leave Helena out of my thesis for another time, also because there are quite a few things already written about her, especially as there are some really engaged women researchers trying to give her a more rounded image, not just the communist who betrayed the avant-garde.

And then around 11:00, I start again with the Brukalski/a list. The other half, or a bit more, of the list, I was able to browse through fast. Some numbers had lots of photos grouped, which I wanna see anyway, so that's that. After an hour or two, I've finished reviewing the list, and I can start opening the cardboard boxes.

Although there are not too many project plans conserved, there are quite a few studies from Stanisław, rural projects, a mill, all very romantic designs. The impression I am getting, also from knowing a bit what's ahead from the list already, is that modernism is really just a chapter of their work, or rather one phase of many. In the beginning, there were some beautiful, colourful sketches and shop front designs, modern interiors for shops and the like, and Stanisław also had some beautiful interiors for the first class of some Atlantic ocean liners—lots of furniture there. There are even some pictures of these, which have some corners eaten up by humidity, but otherwise intact. There was also one *chiaroscuro* of a single-family home by the beach, which is beautifully made. The building drawing, though, has an odd-looking tower, which exceeds the roof of the house by one floor. It looks at first glance like an odd swimming pool on the roof, but then I realise it is like an observatory tower.

There are also diplomas, awards, designs, and more of Stanisław, but I really wanted to get to know him a bit better, too. And then there were some not-so-good aquarells by Barbara as well. I also looked at one of her church designs. I think the church angle might be an interesting one, actually, to apply to her. I have made some handwritten notes earlier, but I need to get some air now. I also need to select the materials I might use, because there are a lot, and I need to get permission to use them in time from the heir Maria.

Notes from the *Kwerenda* Day 3: Wednesday 23.07.25

Today I feel that less stuck with me than yesterday. The massive amount of information is indeed tiring. Although I went through material that is more interesting to me than yesterday. The day started off with me looking through multiple furniture designs, sketches and studies. Some of the large drawings on tracing paper were in a really desolate condition. There was lots of country house wooden furniture, ship interiors, and chairs, and of course some, however few of them, modernist ones. I was able to help identify and time some of Stanisław's drawings that he must have sent to Barbara during his time as prisoner in the German Oflag camp in Woldenberg during the Second World War. There were quite a bunch. I saw, that on the backside, Barbara was marked as "Empf.:", so "Empfänger", with their address on Niegolewski Street 8, so she must have received it from there.

I also saw some great typographies of some lectures, letters, some of them relevant to the WSM and a brief correspondence with the women's league, where Barbara reflects on women's rights and their position in society. All of that from after the war of course. I also saw a bunch of versions of her CV. And I also saw the photo series she made of scarecrows in Truskawy, where she would often go to touch some grass on weekends. She even published them in a newspaper. There were also some pictures signed by Jan Minorski on the back, but many of those had that visibly erased. He was the one whose review on her book got the book censored as not compliant with the socialist agenda. I went through a copy of the book, it is surprisingly smaller in format than I thought. And it had a beautiful dedication of Barbara to her son Baltazar, she writes something like, to my talented beloved son (*synek*).

There were many notes with her sometimes quite messy writing. To be honest, I have a hard time deciphering her notes. But Maria Brukalska has transcribed some of them and made an outline of them. I also saw an amazing WSM crest and dedication. With a huge wax seal. It is a bit broken, but still very impressive. I stopped before an album with all their furniture drawings. I was wiped. I think I need to digest a bit more and tomorrow I shall pick after the next session what is actually important to me and make a list of my own.

But it was incredibly valuable to go through all those things to get a more accurate picture of them and their work. Ah, and there were some beautiful plans of Barbaras plan for the *Dom Rencistów, w im. Matysiaków*, a house for retired people, was also there. Beautifully crafted drawings. Ah, and also amazingly preserved drawings on tracking paper of the *Dom pod Orłami*, the House under the Eagles, for the reconstruction after the war, all by hand. And before I left, the director of the Museum stepped by and I had a chance to track him down and try to talk to him, I shall go interview him tomorrow, so I will prepare that in the morning I think. I don't really have the patience anymore to do that today after seeing all these drawings.

Last but not least, the biggest discovery of the day though was, I realised that both my great-grandfathers, from my fathers and my mothers side, have been in the same prisoner camp, as Brukalski at the time. So, there is a possibility that they knew each other. The possibility is slight, as they were all different kinds of military, great-grandfather Antoni Raczykowski was in the infantry, the other one, Franciszek Tarczyński was a pilot, and Stanisław Brukalski was in the cavalry. Dorota and I shared a little moment of astonishment, and pondered if they might have been interacting with each other or not, since the camp had around 5000 prisoners. Though not very likely, still not impossible that they have crossed paths. Apart from that Dorota expressed her impression with my ambitions with my thesis, as there is still no comprehensive monograph about the Brukalskis, that I could draw from. Maybe this is also the challenge.

One finding, that I see now very clearly: Modernism really was only one chapter in their lives, and the archive reveals a much bigger oeuvre, but most importantly, a very deeply engaged architecture. Brukalska has had many reflections on the societal role of her profession. So her depiction as the modernist tomboy, is really only one image of many. Actually, in the process of going through the material so far, her involvement in sacral architecture has to be yet written about entirely. As well as the couple's naval interior designs. But overall, Barbara had a modern haircut and a modern dress at some point, but that does not

necessarily depict her whole picture, especially not the more traditional attire she retired to in the pictures from after the war.

Notes from the Kwerenda Day 4: Thursday 24.07.25

So I actually got done with it all today. I feel drained, yet happy, that I don't have to actively sit with these piles of files anymore. My back aches for a break. But the real work starts just now. It'll need to simmer down for some weeks, in order to make sense of what will go into the text. However, the day started by looking at photographs of furnitures for an exhibition in New York (World Exhibition in the 30's.) It was an album made and selected by Barbara herself. And there were afterwards many many more pictures from different phases of her life. from childhood, youth, some with her family, her sisters, and some later after war in her workshop for the WSM showing her reading the *Akt Erekcynjny*, the Foundation Act of the WSM to her colleagues and employees in her workshop.

There were some more materials of Stanisław, one particularly interesting detail was his prisoner photograph from Woldenberg, and his soldier's plate, which astonishingly is still intact. Then there were more pictures of furniture and lots of interiors from their own house, dia slides and prints. One particular photograph seemed funny, the perspective from the terrace down, so one can see Barbara on the street-facing balcony on the first floor and Stanisław standing outside the door on ground level, smoking his pipe. The funny part is that Barbara is sitting on the balcony with her naked baby son, possibly the first, who passed away, and it seems as if there are wet spots on the floor of the balcony, looking as if the naked baby lying on the lap of Barbara, has just peed on the floor of the balcony.

One beautiful thing was the album from the Warsaw University of Technology Barbara received for her 70th birthday and her automatic retirement as professor. After that, there were mostly golders with correspondences. And lots of them. In regard to different projects, among them the WSM, but all of them about post-war re-building issues and contracts, plan exchanges and everyday practice correspondence.

There were some interesting letters to the women's league again, if I remember correctly. And then many different memories, by her sisters, but also of Brukalska about her sister Zofia, the nun, and some letters. I skipped taking pictures of some of the correspondences at the end, as they were mostly technical and financial details about other projects.

One correspondence was interesting though, showing her maybe in a bit of a pedantic, or unpleasant light. It was the correspondence with a furniture manufacturer, who allegedly had plagiarised one of her children stool designs, and the exchange of letters reads like a tedious back and forth about whether or not they should publish a declaration together that his later design was ignorant towards her earlier design, and so on and so forth. It ends with the manufacturer cutting the conversation off, visibly irritated and unwilling to publish any statement whatsoever. Well, now I shall progress into making a preliminary list of what I wanna use. Tomorrow I speak to the director of the museum and also will grab Dorota on the record of what she has to say about her work with the archival repository.

Notes from the Kwerenda Day 5: Friday 25.07.2025:

An intense week is now behind me. Five whole days of sitting, or bending over plans, folders, letters, pictures, and - taking pictures. Hundreds of them. The morning started with an interesting and concise conversation with the museum director, Michał Duda, who has shared his thoughts on women in Polish architecture and why it matters to write about them, reflecting back at his work about Wrocławian architect Jadwiga Grabowska-Hawrylak who is maybe most known for the infamous *sedesowce* housing complex, or “toilet seats”, as the locals lovingly call it. We had a good talk and he has shared some interesting input and his encouragement to continue investigating these women.

After I already finished with the Brukalska repository yesterday, I had the chance to look into more of the Helena Syrkus collection, which is not digitalised and available in the collection of the museum, as they are not fully processed and catalogued yet. This query took me to the attic of the museum, an eerie place, to say the least, which is entered through an old door, behind which a hand painted sign lingers: “do not smoke”. That must have been hanging there redundantly for a long time now. Dorota and I giggle about it. Around the corner, there is a gate, that she opens, and then a long rentagulas room opens up to the right, the end of which cannot be seen, as the lights are only on in the section, where we stand. The long room is filled with shelves and cabinets that hold pieces of facades, and different kind of architectural objects, that I cannot identify in the dim light. The old cabinet with the unsorted Syrkus files is just in the front of the gate, some old chairs stand around. We take out what I had requested and leave the dusty space, headed back to Dorotas office.

I sit back down and look at yet again, many pages of correspondence in the scope of CIAM, many of which written in French, and in relation to her book. Maybe it is the oversaturation of my mind, but they do not offer any urgent information for now. But, at this point I decide to keep Helena out as a second case study of the thesis, as my mind already worries not to be able to do justice to the already abundant legacy of Brukalska. Still they are connected, however I decide it would maybe complicate the scope of the thesis too much.

After I finished with the files I talk to Dorota, who is a surprisingly ready-for-print kind of speaker. She shares again the way in which the repository of the Brukalski archive came to the museum, how they have processed it so far and shared her hopes for a permanent stay of the repository at the museum. I pass over my gift of cherries and a potted succulent, fitting to the plants in her office, I leave giving her many thanks, and depart from the museum with dusty hands and a full brain storage with an Brukalski archive of my own.

2. Interview Guide for Semi-Structured Interviews

(This guide was prepared in three versions: English, Polish, and German)

English Version:

Verbal consent form:

1. Do you agree to this conversation being recorded for the purpose of data collection for my master's thesis?
 2. This recording and its transcript will not be published in any way outside of the master's thesis without your explicit consent. Do you consent that I keep this recording and transcript with your name and institutional affiliation/profession/title?
 3. (I can also use an anonymised form of data collection. Please also let me know if you would like to say something unofficially at any point, as this will not be included in the transcript, processed, or used for the thesis.)
- I see this as a semi-structured interview, so I would like to ask you my questions, and we will see in which direction our conversation develops.

(Short introduction to my research design and research questions, positionality, and a brief overview of my research process):

The Design of this work covers three main areas:

1. Forgotten (?) female architects (Polish avant-garde of the interwar period), particularly Barbara Brukalska and Helena Syrkus.
2. Design and theory analysis of their work.
3. The interdisciplinary dialogue between architectural history and urban planning (two separate disciplines, or rather a debate for the field of urban planning?).

Positionality/ Situating my process:

- I am Polish-German, educated in Germany, and most recently, within the 4 Cities program. Since my BA, I have been looking for examples from (Central) Eastern Europe, and trying to engage that way with my own history. I have perceived, and this is my hypothesis here, that there is, to a certain degree, an erasure of Central-Eastern and Eastern perspectives in the canons of (European) Urban Studies in teaching, but also in Scholarship. This observation is coupled with my questions regarding the same erasure concerning the dimension of gender.
- I have encountered Barbara Brukalska and her contemporaries early in my studies and am interested in different dimensions of “Invisibilities” regarding class, gender, and geography. I am particularly studying her kitchen design in relation to the WSM and City planning. But I am also investigating her life, and how scholars are currently and have been recently writing histories of

architecture in relation to biographies, designs, and urban history in recent research developments.

- Any more questions about what I am doing/ what this thesis is about before we start?

Question guide:

1. What was your research/work process behind your (Paper, publication, project, work) (in relation to respective figures, places, questions)
 - a. How did you encounter this topic/ these figures (Helena Syrkus, Barbara Brukalska?)
 - b. What surprised you during your research/ work (process)?
 - c. What challenges did you encounter during your research/ work?
2. How do you perceive the State of the Art of Historiography of Architecture/ Urbanism/ of the Polish Avantgarde?
 - a. Which methodologies are you particularly interested in?
 - b. Where do you personally think more research is needed?
3. Does “historiographical justice” in relation to geographical positionality and gender play a role in your research/ work? (elaborate)
 - a. In relation to Brukalska (& Syrkus), would you say these figures are invisible in history? (elaborate)
 - b. Some researchers in the field have brought up the question of challenges within marital collaboration in relation to the history of female architects/ planners. Would you say Brukalska (& Syrkus) were limited or disadvantaged by the collaboration with their husbands? (elaborate)
4. I am building my argument, trying to connect the domestic sphere with the urban sphere by looking at Brukalska (& Syrkus). Would you say there is a connection there?
5. Connected to my research, would you say that the History of Architecture and Urban Studies connect? Or do you see them as separate disciplines? Why?
6. How do you understand the intersection between your publication/ research/work and teaching? / or more specific towards non-teachers: How do you understand the intersection between your research and your curatorial practice?
7. To what degree does storytelling, or a critical approach to that, play a role in that? (I am drawing from authors and practitioners, like Lori Brown, and the reflection about a critical writing of history within architecture – how does that resonate with your work?)

Any advice on archival work? / Any recommendations, whom I could talk to?

3. Notes from Walking

August 19th 2025, first Day in Warsaw, walking around Old Żoliborz.

After I got to the city yesterday, I am leaving my accommodation in Bielany early today, not to be late to my appointment at the archive of the museum of the Warsaw University of Technology. Arriving at Nowowiecka tram station, which is one block away from the main square of the old building of the university, I enter the grounds through a big gate. The museum is placed in an old building, with an inconspicuous entrance. The plastic door with mirrored glass elements makes me look back at myself as I try to open it. It is closed, and I notice I am ten minutes early. I decide to wait outside, but then the door opens, and a man in his mid-thirties to forties opens the door. He turns out to be the museum director, Krzysztof Czajka-Kalinowski. He welcomes me inside, into a room filled with piles of boxes. I remember now he mentioned in his e-mail that the museum is about to move places. The director points me towards a room in the back, which looks like a collective office, filled with little desks with desktops and printers on them. He invites me to sit at a table where he prepared the two folders in question. One on Barbara Brukalska, and one on Helena Syrkus. It doesn't look like much, I should be done with it quickly. I ask him whom I should contact for use-permission for my master's thesis, but he says that would be him and adds that for the purposes of the scientific piece, like a thesis, it is absolutely okay to use the material and just reference the archive. Only a few materials don't have a clear provenance and therefore unestablished ownership, he says, but in that case, he would tell me. I decide to start with Brukalska. There are mostly student materials, her CV, her school diploma and her application for the University of Technology. Then there are also some pictures, post-war, with some other stuff from the faculty. The Syrkus folder is a bit thicker, I go through different pictures of her at a party at the faculty, Barbara is also on them, and there is also the student book of Helena, which suggests, that she indeed never concluded her studies of architecture with a diploma, though she seems to have completed all the other semesters (I-VIII), the last page of the booklet, where the topic and the grade of the diploma thesis would be, is not filled in. She started her studies in 1918. Then there are a bunch of honours, titles and recognitions. I don't think they are explicitly relevant for this work, but at least now I know where they are.

After 40 minutes, I manage to be done with the folders and I thank the director for having me. As I leave the museum, I decide to go up the block to see the main building of the University. It is indeed impressive. The atrium with the marble floor feels massive, and quite panoptically claustrophobic, to be honest.

As I leave the University grounds, I decide to walk towards the center and see the House under the Eagles, as it is on the way in the direction of Żoliborz. The building is originally from the beginning of the 20th century whose reconstruction Brukalska oversaw. Making my way through the busy center, I arrive at the building, which was originally the Cooperative Societies Bank (Bank Towarzystw Spółdzielczych). I find it ironic that it is surrounded by a massive construction site, resembling the state of the reconstruction at the end of the 1940s, which I saw in the photographs at the Brukalski archive in Wrocław.

After that, I decide to take the metro and go to Wilsona Square, the square in which the tip of the triangular shape of the WSM estate points towards. As I ascend from the metro onto the square, the first glimpses of facades welcome me. A muted white-grey colour on both sides of Krasińskiego Street. I take a look around and decide to walk down that street, knowing that it is one of the borders of the WSM block to my right. I walk past the corner with Teodora Toeplitza Street and decide to cross the street opposite the church. Taking a turn onto Felińskiego Street around the housing building take a turn to the right into Pogonowskiego street, which opens a view of older, individual houses - old officers building among them. As I walk down the street, there is no one there besides me, but a lot of very expensive cars. Reaching the end of the street, there is a military facility to my right. So far I notice, that there are lots of trees and greenery around the area. The plots of the individual houses seem to have an extensive back garden, and greenery ascends from behind the diverse houses. Some look old, some newly renovated. All have security installments and display visible cameras. Almost every house has a little gate in front, with a pin pad. There is a sense of reclusiveness, yet also serenity and quiet to the area, completely opposite to the busy traffic just on the other side of the block at Wilson Square. I feel a bit out of place taking pictures.

Reaching the corner, I see a small square building down the street to my right, and decide to approach. It is a specialty coffee place and a concept store, so it seems. They sell oddly shaped candles (one of them is somehow dipped in a velour-feel kind of paint, I wonder how that'll burn), little trays and thin glassed coffee mugs in all types of scandi-chique colours. And they also sell urban themed books with fabulous graphic designed covers. They have a couple of copies of Matysek-Imielińskas Book about the WSM "City in Action" in the Polish edition. I decide to get a copy to have something to look at besides my Zotero tab, and a coffee at an almost Copenhagen standard price. The coffee is handed to me in a paper cup even though I am drinking it at the spot. The young man handing it to me says that some drinks they serve in paper, so its' temperature doesn't harm the surface of the tables. I laugh, but it isn't a joke. And on top of that he calls me "Pani" (even though he is probably even a bit older than me), so at this point I am gagging. I settle at one of the fancy multiplex wood surface tables and observe as some asics sneaker wearing individuals dressed in muted colours and a splash of metallic enter the cafe to take a picture of the interior and leave. I get a sense that they must have opened only recently, as the place isn't even noted on Google Maps yet and people walk in kind of examining the place and congratulating the guys that hang around the counter. One guy comes in and starts talking to the barista about a festival he just came back from, and his restaurant where they make small plate foods. He talks about the difference between the labels "chef the cuisine" and a "maitre chef". The witnessed conversation in that space makes me think of the history of the district a hundred years ago. The upper middle-class intelligentsia then, the hipsters with a concept to their coffee and small plated cuisine now. The coffee actually tastes great by the way. After my well deserved rest from walking and taking some notes, I continue my way down the street away from Wilsona square deeper into the villa part of Old Żoliborz. I have just taken a look at the map, and realised that Niegolewskiego Street 8, the address of the Brukalski Villa, is just 300 meters away. I walk slowly, and take many pictures on that street, where the houses all kind of look very different from each other, until I see *it* in the distance. At that moment I begin to

feel very nerdy. I am walking around taking pictures, like this was a commonplace tourist attraction, but to be honest, to an unaware eye, the house might look just very underwhelming.

As I reach number 8, I begin taking pictures of the Villa from various angles and distances. There is a dedication plate stating that this is a property under historic protection, designed by Stanisław and Barbara *Brukalscy*, and the first modernist house in Poland. The plants from the frontal garden reach very high, so the part of the house reaching into the depth of the plot isn't visible. I realise that some of the pictures I have seen at the archive, where the couple is posing in- and outside their house, are actually inverted prints. But most of them seem right in hindsight. The huge stone ball by the entrance, that is depicted in pictures of the house in the twenties, is not visible to me, or maybe it's gone entirely by now. After getting a good look at what I could see, I must say, it isn't a sight where "the shoes fly off of one's feet", as they say in Polish, but rather might even go unnoticed. I am alone on the street, and I wonder how often people come by and take a look at the house.

After getting some good shots, I continue and take a left into Wieniawskiego Street. Suddenly all the dimmed white facades of the older officers' houses compose a street long unity with each other, and there is one house in particular that looks quite romantic with some climbing branches on the wall. I walk until I reach Armii Krajowej Street and take a left back in the direction of Wilsona Square. There are many national flags in the flagholders on the facades, due to the commemoration month of the Warsaw Uprising. Having walked down one block, I decide to start taking videos as well and therefore take a lap back onto Niegolewskiego street to also take a video of the Brukalski Villa. I then realise that at this point, I have seen the third Porsche convertible in the last 45 minutes. But the area is not only fancy cars. For instance, in the driveway in the building right next to the Brukalski residence, there is an old Fiat Punto parked. I walk back down the entire street and decide to go to the Żeromskiego park, named after the neo-romantic author Stefan Żeromski, who was a popular read among my protagonists at the time of the new independent Poland (he was the one who wrote about the "Glass Houses" in *Przedwiośnie* as a metaphor for technological advancement and the promise of utopia though modernism).

After having a peak into the park, I take a full round around the Wilsona Square, and walk along the WSM back into Krasińskiego Street, aiming for "Colony IV" that starts a bit down the street at the corner with Suzina Street. Reaching that corner, I notice the particular, characteristic rounded balconies. I enter Suzina Street and after a couple of steps, the old *Kotłownia*, boiler plant, is fully visible. There is a historic sense to it, as it is here, where the first shots before the official beginning of the Warsaw Uprising are said to have been fired. I continue to walk around the Colony IV, and then take a break at bench in the park by the *Dom Kultury*, Centre of Culture. As I sit there and eat my *pasztecik*, I observe some of the people passing by. They are young and old, many walk their dogs. On the bench next to me sits an elderly man, who seems to be taking a break from his walk. However after a short while I see a woman approaching the bench with a book in her hand, she sits next him, they are a couple - around their seventies I would guess. After some moments I decide to ask them, if they live around the estate, to which they politely answer yes. I ask, how they like living here, and they express their great pleasure and enjoyment about living here. They share, that they actually live in Colony IV (where the kitchen used to be in!). When they bought the flat and moved in

ten years ago, everything was old, they say, even the kitchen. It is in a separate room though, they say. We chat a bit about the atmosphere around the estate, they share their horror over the housing prices these days in Warsaw. They recommend me to go to the Secret Life Café around the corner, which is apparently a quirky place as they say. They wish me best of luck with on my endeavours and depart in direction of Colony IV.

A few minutes pass and two elderly ladies approach the same bench. One seems to help the other on her walk, who takes a break sitting down on the rolling walker. I also ask them, if they live nearby, and they affirm. The lady sitting on her rollator says the residential complex has its advantages and disadvantages. Since the buildings are listed under historic protection, there are no lifts and no balconies. But she wages it against the positive aspect that there is a lots of green space. They continue their cosily paced journey across the park.

People walk through here, some sit on the benches, walk their dogs, ride their bikes, lots of people with children, and also younger alternative types can be seen around.

August 20th 2025, second day of walking around Old Żoliborz, and the WSM.

This later morning, I make my way for a second walk around the WSM housing estate. The bus drops me off at a stop that was precisely opposite Colony IV, and so I start my way there, taking pictures and videos.

I cross the street (Kraśńskiego) to be on the side of the street of Colony IV, and I start walking down the street in the direction of Kraśńskiego, cornering Suzina, as I notice someone leaving the courtyard of the Colony at the gate between units IV and IVb. I decide to take my chance, hold the door and get inside. A serene and pleasant view of multiple trees welcomes me, among them a little playground with some ready-made plastic structures, multiple benches painted in a heavy oil brown tone, and open corridor balconies with meshed balustrades. Some older residents are chilling on them, and there are little plots of carefully kept flower beds. I take a full lap around the yard, a rectangular shape, with old trees and lots of plants. The building IVa (the L shape unit facing Próchnika cornering Suzina Street), which historically harboured the Contemporary Kitchen in 2-3-room apartments, still has a glimpse of old reminiscence, as it is quite similar to the old photos of the WSM Colonies, when the trees there were barely just planted and tiny. I am happy. Building IVb, which faces Krasieńskiego, looks a bit newer. As I look around, I notice that the three units, IV, IVa, and IVb, all have different shades of facade painting now, so they don't really fit together at first glance; however, inside the courtyard, they compose a unity of peace, greenery and quiet, despite the colour mismatch.

I feel hugged by the trees that reach over me, and they also quite gracefully block the view in between the buildings, so that the opposite units can't look directly into each other's windows. Some families are at the playground, the atmosphere is calm and quiet, a few children play, but surprisingly, the sound of the busy Kraśńskiego street does not overly dominate the soundscape within the yard. On some of the benches, people sit. For example, I see a middle-aged woman with a bag from the pharmacy, on another bench, a guy, mid-thirties approximately, sipping his cappuccino, and on yet another one there is an old gentleman, seemingly taking a break on his walk. At some point, he gets up and leaves the courtyard

through the gate towards Próchnika Street, and I see him buzzing a gate opener, so here I have my way out. But before I leave, I place myself in the centre of the yard and look around. The sun shines through the crowns of the beautiful trees. I notice they give the perfect amount of shade on a hot day like this. A curiosity I noticed in building IVa, there are little balconies for apartments on the ground floor. They are tiny, barely a square meter or so. This one lady, who sits there in the shade, has a full load of flowers and plants on it. She is enjoying a cigarette in her shaded micro garden. Beautiful. I try to sneak pictures; people are sitting on the balconies/hallways, having vivid conversations. On the first floor, there is a middle-aged pair, approximately in their fifties, sitting there under a umbrella, enjoying beer and having a smoke. They sit on little stools and lean against the white facade, resting one of each of their legs against the balustrade. They put down their beverages on the floor. I try not to be intrusive with my picture taking.

So I take more pictures of other parts of the building, where you can see some bikes leaning against the railing of the corridor balconies on the first floor. I also take a 360 video from the middle of the yard and decide to leave the place in the direction of Próchnika Street. I then take a shortcut through an open pedestrian passage between units IXb and IXa, which spat me out on the eastern side of the comedy theatre. I decide to walk around it to get to the reading room of the communal public library, where I asked to see a copy of photographer Andrzej Jestrzembowski's book about Żoliborz and the photographs he took around the district. It took a while, and three people, to find it, but it's quite a beautiful publication.

Then I also ask for a book called "*Żoliborski Kaleidoskop*", edited by Ewa Chałasińska, which has a little poetic text written by the late Baltazar Brukowski, Barbara's youngest son. And then I also managed to reveal the mystery of Tomasz Pawłowski, whom the Pańków sisters cite in "*Kreatorki*" - turns out he is a local author, and one of the organisers of the "WSM Friends" meetings, at the Centre of Culture, located in the entrance next to the library. I go there to ask for the historical unit at the WSM office, but, as suspected, it is vacation time, so nobody can be reached. However I know now, who it is that supposedly has an impressive personal archive of the WSM history, and among it, some objects concerning Barbara and Stanisław Brukowski.

The lady at the Centre of Culture reception and I are caught in conversation for a while, after I tell her about my research and my investigations. She tells me that her father was part of the Uprising, and that he was shot in a mass execution at some specific corner in Mokotów district. She remembers, when she was young, there used to be an inscription with all the names of the killed around that mysterious building, she describes. But she says, the inscription plate has been lost, and now, nobody knows for sure, how many have been killed in that place. She is asking me, if I have a tip for her, how and where to start to investigate about this, but I tell her, that I am unfortunately not from Warsaw, and am just beginning to familiarise myself with the city. I feel a bit bad for her, because I didn't know any of the street names she just recited to me, as if it was commonplace knowledge, so I can't help her. I was also a bit confused, because I was not sure in the beginning whether she was talking about Żoliborz still, or some place else.

I thank her for her time and continue my way out of the house of culture and settle for a while at the Secret Life Cafe at the corner of Sierpiecka and Krechowiecka Street. It is another very hip specialty coffee place with rather high prices and a young clientele - the alternative kind, who definitely buy vinyl records and know which soul artists their favourite east coast rappers of the 90s have sampled. They and I sit there, sipping oatmilk cappuccinos and matcha lattes, but we are not the only ones. They are some members of older generations too, though I overhear two ladies being confused about why no sugar pot is being served with their coffee. After having an overpriced beverage there, I follow my route from yesterday back into the comedy theatre park. I couldn't even count how many people, of different ages, I see walking their dogs. That reminds me of the couple of yesterday, I was talking to. They also joked, these days there are more dogs than children around the neighbourhood. And while we were talking, there was this mother in the back of the park, calling her son "Stasiu", who was riding off on a trolley bike - he was not listening to his his mother demanding he would stop and wait for her. The lady of the couple noted something along the lines of: "These dog names even sound human these days". I pointed out to her that this in fact was a human the mother was calling for, and we all had a great laugh.

Back to the day forward, I am walking towards the Lighttower house again on the Hacerska path, which used to be the singles house (*Dom dla Samotnych*), designed by Brukalska. I have an interesting glimpse of the old lighttower-reminiscing staircase through one of the windows. Then I continue my way through the greenery between the housing units, southwards. There is a little playground, and I stop to take more pictures of Colony XII. Next to it, where on the historical map the Colony XI is placed, now opens up a part of the park that is dedicated to the Warsaw Uprising. It is a big, potato-shaped stone on a trapezoidal socket. In big bold letters, it writes: "1 VIII - 30 IX 1944". The plate has inscribed: "To the Soldiers of the Provider. To the memory of the insurgents of the XXII. division of the Armia Krajowa fighting in Żoliborz, Marymont, Bielany and Kampinos under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Mieczysław Niedzielski.. (...) The division counted around 2500 soldiers, of whom over 1000 have fallen."²⁵ It leaves an impression of severity and pain. What a collective trauma. Next to the stone is a tilted flowerbed, arranged to form the symbol of the Warsaw Uprising: a "P", which extends into a "W", as if the "P" has an anchor.

I continue to wander in front of the gate of the unit on Sorbowskiego street 2, the gate does not have the emblem of the WSM, like Colony IV, but it is quite decorative as well. Then I decide to walk back north the bigger street Księża Jerzego Popiełuszki, taking a right on Hanki Czaki Street, which leads me to the northern border street of the WSM, Słowackiego. I walk all the way down, until I reach the Metro entrance. I leave with an impression of the whole block, and a mental map of it in my mind.

²⁵ "The Provider" (*Żywiciel*), refers to Lieutenant Colonel Niedzielski, which was his given pseudonym during the Uprising. Source: <https://www.1944.pl/powstancze-biogramy/mieczyslaw-niedzielski,835.html>, (last seen: 21.08.2025).