

Zbyszko Siemaszko, Courtyard view, 1960s, "Architektura" Magazine 1962, SARP

Title

"Stately, the Greatest, and One of a Kind": The Peasant's Home in Warsaw Dom Chłopa w Warszawie

Author

Adam Parol Anna Helena Przybyła

Source

MIEJSCE 5/2019

DOI

<https://www.doi.org/10.48285/8kaeszco3p>

URL

<http://miejsce.asp.waw.pl/en/okazaly-najwiekszy-i-jedyny-w-swoim-rodzaju/>

Abstract

The Peasant's Home [Dom Chłopa] is a building that has retained its presence in vivid memories, texts from the past, and pop-cultural references. Despite being an almost-iconic structure, it has never been described in a monographic study. In the article, the authors seek to outline its history in a wider perspective, from the first mentions of the need to construct a central people's house in Warsaw at the beginning of the 20th century, to the political changes after World War II which allowed for a fundraising campaign and implementation of the project. The building responded to the socio-cultural needs of the rural community, as well as meeting the propaganda objectives of the authorities. Its privatization in the 1990s entailed numerous changes – the emancipatory activity of public institutions was replaced with private business operations. Extension, reconstruction of the interiors, and destruction of decorations took place. Thus, the Peasant's Home is no longer a symbol of the Polish political "thaw" of the 1950s, but a symbol of the country's capitalist transformation.

The article¹ outlines the history of the Peasant's Home [Dom Chłopa] in Warsaw – from the first voices concerning the need to build it at the beginning of the 20th century, to subsequent attempts

at construction, and to the current shape of the building adopted in the aftermath of the transformation of the Polish political regime in 1989. The account of the activity of generations of people's activists, which contributed to the construction of the Peasant's Home, seeks to depict the longevity of an idea that materialized owing to the favorable atmosphere of the political "thaw" in the second half of the 1950s. For more than thirty years, the building responded to the social needs of rural communities and the political needs of the authorities, while its privatization and redevelopment not only effaced the architectural appeal of the building, but also put an end to its institutional operation.

The idea

In 1911, the people's movement activist Tomasz Nocznicki postulated in the *Zaranie* weekly the need to build people's houses across the country. Those institutions were supposed to maintain a primarily educational and cultural profile, operating in villages and cities alike.² A year later, the same magazine published a short text by Zygmunt Borkowski, a peasant, devoted to the necessity of building a people's house in Warsaw. He argued for the idea, quoting his own and his neighbors' experience of the lack of available information concerning good and cheap accommodation for the rural population visiting Warsaw. The house was also supposed to function as a place for farmers from various corners of the country to socialize and exchange knowledge.³

In 1913, the topic of building the central people's house was broadly debated at a congress of agricultural circles,⁴ and *Zaranie* published a text by a countryside teacher named Józef, who added new arguments to the debate, this time striking political chords.⁵ The author evoked the statement by Stanisław Leszczyński: "I recommend that the expression 'master from masters' be replaced with 'master from peasants,' as the more eminent and richer the master, the more of the peasants' work he has profited from."⁶ He proposed the necessity of understanding how many enormous fortunes – and therefore palaces and castles – had resulted from the slave labor of himself and his predecessors. He wanted readers to understand that the cost of building a people's house in Warsaw was insignificant when compared with the losses incurred by peasants, exploited for years. The Peasant's Home, as opposed to the riches of those whom Leszczyński called "masters from masters," would be the collective property of peasants. The author attached great importance to the progressing emancipation of the rural population, which resulted in their frequently traveling to Warsaw.

A similar perspective was expressed several decades later in the brochure *Budujemy Dom Chłopa* [*We Are Building the Peasant's Home*]: "Gymnasia and schools for masters' children were built in Warsaw, grand palaces of the masters were raised. [...] Was anything built for peasants, whose work fed the country?"⁷ This propaganda text offers a surprisingly apt description of the conditions

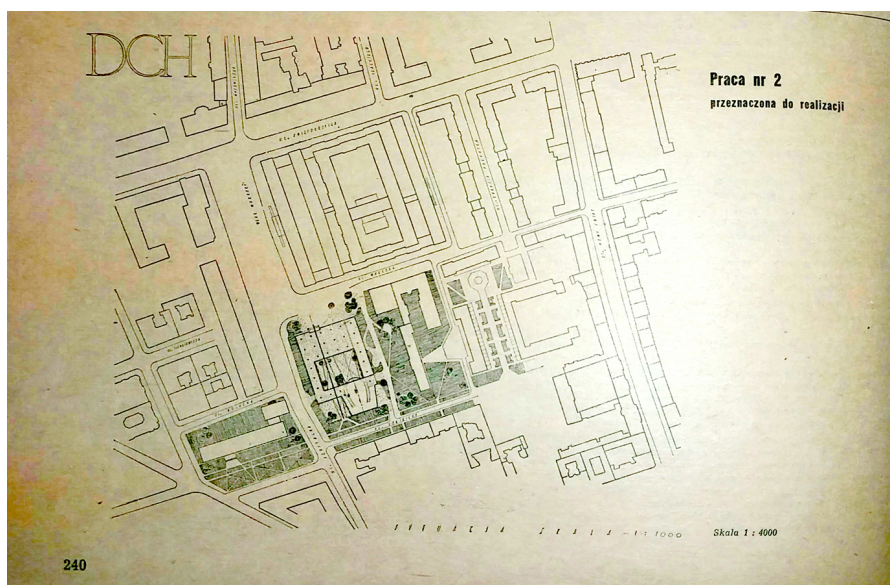
in which peasants had to stay for the night in the capital: "Hotels were too expensive for peasants to pay, so they slept in dirty inns or sat throughout the night on a hard bench at the railway station amid constant hustle and bustle. When a peasants' congress was held, many slept on the floor, but there were also those who could not find a place even there and sat at night on the stairs or in a gateway (often risking being mocked and ridiculed)."⁸ The question of building a peasants' house⁹ in Warsaw was raised on multiple occasions, yet favorable political and economic conditions failed to occur. After the war, this was recognized as a symptom of fear: "Such a peasants' house in the capital city could become a meeting place for peasants and workers, a place where they could communicate with each other, and, after all, the politics of the bourgeois rule consisted of stoking a conflict between the peasant and the worker, in deceiving the peasant that his interests ran counter to the interests of the worker – in shattering the unity of the working people. Because such unity filled the pre-war rulers of Poland with the greatest fear."¹⁰

The political changes following World War II led to renewed interest in the matter. As early as in 1946, the United People's Party (ZSL), the Peasant Self-Help Union (ZSCh), the "Wici" Union of Rural Youth of the Polish Republic, and the Supreme Council for the Reconstruction of Warsaw (NROW) undertook the first organizational activities and launched a new fundraising campaign.¹¹ The proposed program of the Peasant's Home combined the function of a social-cultural-educational center for the rural population with the headquarters of people's organizations, including the ZSCh and its sectoral unions.¹² The building was supposed to house a hotel, cafeteria, congress hall, offices, library with a reading room,¹³ first aid station, institutes, youth organizations, cultural associations, exhibitions, and even a printing house. The ZSCh deemed necessary a large open space fit for organizing mass congresses¹⁴ and agricultural exhibitions, as well as the establishment of a sports ground, proving grounds and laboratories for institutes, and even an ethnographic museum.¹⁵

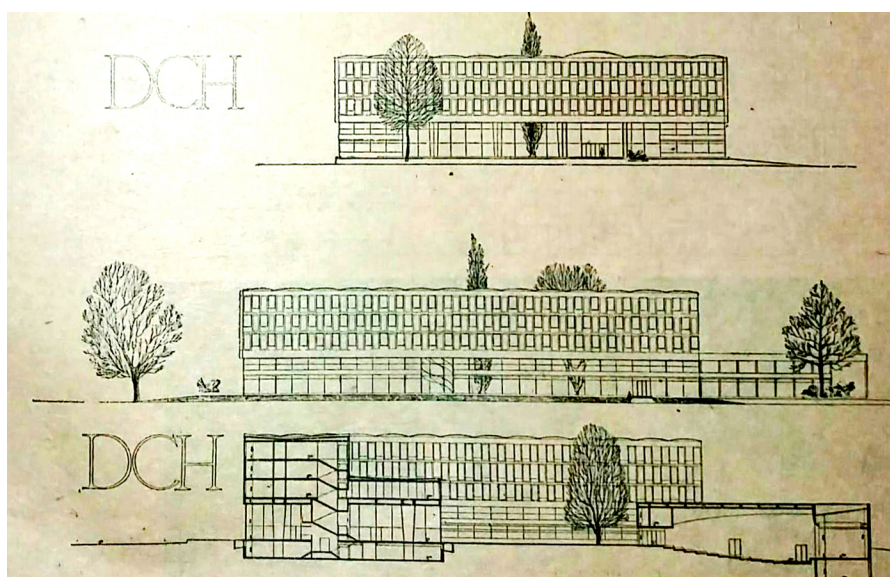
The construction plan was devised in three stages. The first was to involve raising the main building with three conference halls,¹⁶ a hotel, and a dormitory for countryside youth with 250 beds, as well as part of the offices of the ZSCh and its sectoral unions. The following stage was to embrace further offices for 1,500 people, and the final phase – offices of other organizations and the remaining facilities.¹⁷ The Committee for the Construction was already consulting organizations whose activities bore relation to the Peasants' Home mission about their office space needs.¹⁸

In 1947, it was decided to situate the Peasant's Home in the widened Marszałkowska Street (between Zielna, Złota, and Sienna Streets – on the site of today's Parade Square). The construction of the seat of the Central Council of Trade Unions (CRZZ) was planned next door.

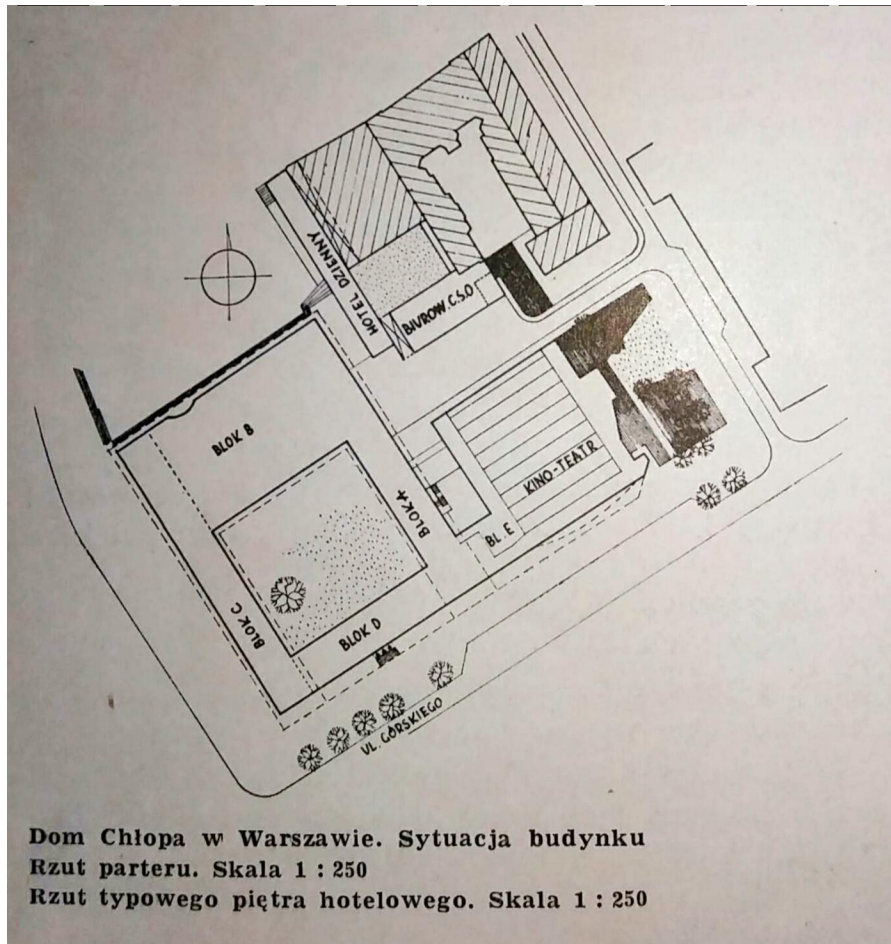
Debris was removed from the area on the day of the People's Holiday during community action work, with the use of peasants' carts from around Warsaw.¹⁹ The same year saw a limited architectural competition, which was not resolved.²⁰



M. Handzelewicz-Waławek, B. Pniewski, Competition Project of The Peasant's Home, Site plan, "Architektura" Magazine 1957, The Association of Polish Architects (SARP)



M. Handzelewicz-Waławek, B. Pniewski, Elevations and sections, "Architektura" Magazine 1957, SARP



M. Handzelewicz-Waławek, B. Pniewski, Site plan, "Architektura" Magazine 1962, SARP

ZSL, and the Main Board of the ZSch.²¹ Established alongside were committees at the territorial administrative levels of voivodeship, *powiat*, borough, and *gromada*, which functioned on the basis of the ZSch's structure.

The first sitting of the Central Committee was held on December 16, 1950. The meeting involved a debate concerning the ratio of the services section to the social-cultural spaces, the presence of institutions with a state profile,²² and the problem of the growing discontent of rural milieus caused by the stalled decision to begin construction. It was resolved that the Peasant's Home should be raised in the center of Warsaw and maintain a social-cultural profile with a dominant section housing services. 1,000 hotel beds were planned, half of which were to fill a large hall for mass accommodation and day rest.²³

A fundraising campaign was launched once again and pursued according to a predetermined program of selling 5.4 million donation certificates for a total sum of 20 million zlotys.²⁴ February 1951 was declared the month of the construction of the Peasant's Home, and action intensified during the celebrations and holidays of the rural community, particularly around the People's Holiday and harvest festivals. The role of the engagement of local committees and their mutual competition was emphasized. Within the efforts to promote the fundraising campaign, a brochure was published devoted to the idea of building a "grand, stately, and monumental"²⁵ Peasant's Home, where "every peasant coming to Warsaw will find hospitality, accommodation, care, help with the matters that they came to solve,"²⁶ and which also described the momentous role of the workers' and peasants' alliance in the struggle towards throwing off the masters' yoke and implementing the six-year plan.

The fundraising campaign continued, with long intervals, until 1953. What came under criticism from the very beginning was the course of the propaganda campaign at state and local levels, the lack of communication and the sluggishness of the committees, as well as the difficult collaboration between the organizations that formed the Central Committee. As a result, the majority of activities were pursued in the structures of the ZSch. Despite the difficulties, more than half of the planned sum was raised: 10,034,000 zlotys.²⁷

The debate concerning the location of the Peasant's Home continued, as the area in Marszałkowska Street initially chosen for the purpose in the 1940s was earmarked for the planned Parade Square. A lot at 67/77 Jerusalem Avenue (opposite today's Warsaw Centralna railway station) was considered at the beginning, but a new site was obtained later at 62 Krakowskie Przedmieści Street, on the premises of the former Kazanowski Palace. It was criticized for the considerable construction difficulties posed by the "historic character of the building, the necessity to close or relocate the institutions that existed and prospered there,"²⁸ and the impossibility of the

unconstrained shaping of the building's shell and functional program, as well as its inappropriate location.

In 1953, the Secretariat of the Central Committee deemed the construction of the Peasant's Home wrongful.²⁹ The Central Committee and the local committees suspended their activities, prompting rural communities to ask: "what happened to the money, why is it not being built?"³⁰ Spaces for institutions that were supposed to be seated in the Peasant's Home were planned in Kazanowski Palace, earmarked for reconstruction.³¹

Construction

The problems with choosing the location, and the lack of sufficient funds, as well as the resulting failure to start building, worried everyone who donated funds, and were widely discussed by the ZSL and ZSCh, which continued to invest efforts toward the construction project. Yet, a chance to make those plans materialize came only with the political changes initiated in 1955.

New locations for the building began to be considered: Teatralny Square, the corner of Miodowa and Długa Streets, the Eastern Wall of Parade Square, and Wareckiego Square (renamed Powstańców Warszawy Square in 1957).³² In 1955, the Central Executive Committee of the ZSL issued a positive opinion concerning the site in Wareckiego Square. The reasons behind the decision included the most favorable conditions for the program of the Peasant's Home, the proximity of the then-Stalin Square, and the availability of services and means of transport. The building was also supposed to introduce a certain order to the area and stimulate its development.³³

By virtue of the decision of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the PZPR and the Presidium of the Supreme Executive Committee of the ZSL, the location in Wareckiego Square was ultimately confirmed in 1956, and the activity of the Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home resumed, with a range of organizations added to its structure.³⁴ Its head was Stefan Ignar – President of the Supreme Executive Committee of the ZSL, and the deputy head was Edmund Pszczółkowski – Director of the Agricultural Department of the Central Committee of the PZPR.³⁵ Social Committees for the Construction of the Peasant's Home were re-established at the territorial administrative levels of voivodeship, *powiat*, borough, and *gromada*, which became involved in fundraising and promoting the project.

A resolution of the Presidium of the Government from December 1956 confirmed the location and stipulated the conditions of construction that had been commissioned by the Ministry of Municipal Economy. The Management Board of the Construction of the Peasant's Home was established,

which thenceforth collaborated with the Central Committee.³⁶ By virtue of the decision of the Economic Committee of the Council of Ministers, half of the cost of building the Peasant's Home was supposed to be covered by funds raised by the Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home, and the other half from the state budget.³⁷

In 1957, on the commission of the Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home in Warsaw, the Board of the Warsaw Branch of the Association of Polish Architects (OW SARP) launched a limited competition for the design of the Peasant's Home.³⁸

The competition jury comprised the Head Zygmunt Karpiński, the Reporting Judge Waclaw Kłyszewski, Jerzy Kowarski and Stanisław Płoski, Deputy General Architect of Warsaw Jan Klewin, and Organizational Secretary Olgierd Kaczyński. Furthermore, the project developer was represented in the jury by Under Secretary of State of the Ministry of Construction and Building Materials Industry Wojciech Piróg, Deputy Head of the Committee for Urban Design and Architecture Marian Benko, and Julian Rataj, Secretary of the Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home.³⁹

The following professionals were invited to participate in the competition: Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski, Romuald Gutt, Bohdan Pniewski, Franciszek Piaścik, Stefan Putowski, Hipolit Rutkowski, and the team of Tadeusz Iskierka.⁴⁰ Six designs were ultimately submitted, as Romuald Gutt withdrew from the competition due to his involvement in other projects and not having enough time. The competition jury sat from July 23–27, 1957. Envelopes were opened on August 3, 1957, and a post-competition exhibition began on August 27. The winning design was that submitted by Bohdan Pniewski and Małgorzata Handzelewicz-Waclawek.⁴¹

Urban conditions at the site of the planned Peasant's Home required the designers to coordinate various buildings that already existed or had been approved for construction. Powstańców Warszawy Square was defined in spatial terms by three elements: the tall facade of the National Bank building and two high-rise buildings – the Warsaw Hotel (Prudential) and the planned office tower of the Polish Mutual Insurance Company. The design proposed by the team of Pniewski and Handzelewicz-Waclawek⁴² was the only one to preserve the shape of the former square, and involved a low-rise building of up to seventeen meters. The other architects proposed to enlarge the square and erect a high-rise building of up to 51 meters, but the jury did not deem that a satisfactory solution in response to the competition task.⁴³

While examining the submissions, jurors looked for architecture with an individual character, and a shell that would be as freestanding and compact as possible. They did not want the hotel function to dominate the social function. It was important to lend prominence to general-use halls,

such as the auditorium and the cultural-educational spaces. Emphasis was placed on a legible and clear concept of the interior, which would facilitate orientation inside the building for groups arriving at the Peasant's Home. The design by Handzelewicz-Waławek and Pniewski was praised for its scale,⁴⁴ the preservation of the pre-war outline of the square, correctly resolved communication solutions, its simple, functional layout, and the mutual permeation between the interior of the glass hall with the square and the patio.⁴⁵ The jury's verdict was unanimous.

On August 2, the OW SARP hosted a debate concerning the competition submissions. The decision of the jury was not met with wholehearted approval. Discussion participants highlighted the fact that "we are suffering in Warsaw from a lack of projects with a program that would favor high-rise construction," and considered a low-rise Peasant's Home a wasted opportunity. Lech Tomaszewski believed that the urban conditions, and not the use of the building by the rural population, should determine its height: "[...] a lying building [...] does not seem to be an appropriate solution. In this situation, a high-rise building should rather be erected." Summarizing the debate, the head Bolesław Szmidt stated that the preservation of the square's outline required that a low-rise building be erected, but had the square been enlarged, it would be right to close it off with a taller building. He ultimately expressed a favorable opinion about the jury's verdict.⁴⁶ The working design was drawn up at the "Obrys" cooperative, and the architects were joined by Wojciech Świątkowski. The design did not undergo major changes after the competition; the entire structure was shifted southwards, the daytime hotel was separated, and the cinema and performance auditorium were located in the eastern section of the lot.⁴⁷

Wojciech Świątkowski underlines that Bohdan Pniewski carefully chose his collaborators and contractors; care was also taken to ensure the appropriate management and organization of work. The construction was executed by the "Stolica" Urban Construction Company and headed by engineers Józef Sadłowski and Wł. Zaczyński, and the head engineer on behalf of the project developer was W. Galik.⁴⁸ Świątkowski remembers work on the project as follows: "The technical design of the Peasant's Home was developed throughout the duration of the construction because something kept happening all the time, which was why meetings were very often held on the Scarp [at Bohdan Pniewski's house and studio – authors' note] – gatherings of the representatives of the Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home and the Project Management Board. Functional solutions were discussed and changes could be introduced to the design."⁴⁹

The construction was not without problems. On July 26, 1960, Stefan Ignar commissioned the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) to audit the financial and construction activity conducted by the Peasant's Home project until then. The audit lasted until April 1961.⁵⁰ It revealed that the costs had twice exceeded the planned budget. The rising prices of construction materials and

construction-installation works were quoted in justification, but the auditors above all pointed out that the building volume had been increased by 15,000 m³ and the costs of interior furnishing had risen three times compared with those stipulated in the resolution of the Presidium of the Government,⁵¹ and also that expensive structures and abundant visual decoration had been used, "[...] often with a detrimental effect to the utilitarian function [...]."⁵²

The delay in construction works was explained by numerous changes in the design, "for which the architects are mainly to blame." A warning was also issued that the amortization of the high costs of the project may lead to increased prices of services in the future, which was not recommended for this kind of facility. In 1961, the President of the NIK addressed the Ministry of Municipal Economy to claim contractual penalties from the "Obrys" Design and Cost Estimation Cooperative, yet the claim was abandoned. As the result of a disagreement between the project developers and the Cooperative, documentation of the works was transferred to the "Projekt" State Design and Cost Estimation Office.⁵³



Zbyszko Siemaszko, View from Powstańców Warszawy Square, 1960s, "Architektura" Magazine 1962, SARP



Zbyszko Siemaszko, Hotel lobby (view of the reception desk and the mezzanine), 1960s, "Architektura" Magazine 1962, SARP



Zbyszko Siemaszko, Main staircase, 1960s, "Architektura" Magazine 1962, SARP



Zbyszko Siemaszko, Mosaic in restaurant interior, 1960s, "Architektura" Magazine 1962, SARP

Laying the foundations began in May 1958, and the cornerstone was ceremonially set on July 20.⁵⁴ The building was placed in service on September 8, 1961, on the eve of the harvest festival. The service spaces were furnished until Christmas.⁵⁵ The completed structure comprised two interconnected buildings with a total volume of 63,000 m³ – the main building and the daytime hotel. The services and social spaces occupied 1,857 m² of the total 8,264 m² of the main building's surface. 320 hotel rooms were designed in that section. The seven-story daytime hotel with a total surface of 2,052 m² comprised 85 rooms.⁵⁶

Not only could members of the rural communities visiting Warsaw count on accommodation, but also information about the cultural life of the capital and its history. A legal aid office and an information point were planned in the vicinity of the Peasant's Home, and the building's functional program was also set to include shops and services. Apart from the regular hotel, the daytime hotel was also designed – a novelty in the city – open from morning until evening and available for guests who did not plan on staying overnight but still needed a place to rest. A children's hotel was also established in order to cater for travelers with children.⁵⁷ The program of the cinema and performance hall was to embrace not only film screenings, but also to "demonstrate to society the achievements of folk groups."⁵⁸ Shows and concerts were meant to be open to hotel guests and the people of Warsaw.

The combination of so many functions in one place required special architectural and structural solutions. The designers sought to create a universal interior in which various functions would permeate each other and produce the impression that the ground floor was a single vast space.

This was made possible owing to the horizontal division into the services and hotel sections.

Housing services, the first story was built on a reinforced concrete structure designed by Bronisław Kędzierski. Twelve columns of 1.2 m × 2.4 m, with 20-cm-thick walls and axial spacing of 10 m were used to support a table – a cantilever beam structure with two slabs, a lower and an upper, set 1 m apart. Widening toward the top, the considerably-sized columns contained risers which branched in the space between the slabs into shafts leading to the hotel rooms.⁵⁹ The architect introduced a “bridge structure,”⁶⁰ which had never been used in hotel architecture before. Imposed on the main ceiling was the steel structure of the hotel section, designed by Wiktor Humięcki with a prefabricated ceiling and roof beams. The ground floor and the hotel stories were connected by means of three open staircases.

The designers fully tapped into the technological achievements of the era, and the innovative architectural, technological, and structural solutions not only made an impression on the users of the building, but also considerably facilitated later operations. Suffice it to mention that planning such a universal space allowed for changes in the distribution of functions and the layout of rooms, and were introduced in this case up until the very end of construction works.⁶¹

The Peasant's Home formed part of the larger urban design of the eastern side of Powstańców Warszawy Square, alongside the National Bank building (also by Bohdan Pniewski). An important role was played by the now-almost-indiscernible square in front of the entrance to the Peasant's Home, delimited from the south by the bank building and from the west by the daytime hotel. That space offered the possibility of viewing the building from a certain distance, and could be used to organize gatherings. A major compositional element of Powstańców Warszawy Square was a mosaic planned by Pniewski on the western facade of the bank, which was supposed to be echoed by a mosaic adorning the entrance to the Peasant's Home. According to Małgorzata Handzelewicz-Waławek, the decoration was inspired by the architect's stay in Venice.⁶² Only the entrance mosaic of the Peasant's Home was ultimately executed, while the National Bank building was finished with aluminum cladding after Pniewski's death.

The compact shell and the separation between the hotel and the cultural services section were supposed to offer guests a sense of privacy and the possibility of enjoying the view of the city at the same time. The use of narrow portes-fenêtres was justified in the same way. The repetitive rhythm created a characteristic geometric pattern and enhanced the building's modern appeal. The undulating roof line was a consequence of the planned shell vault.⁶³ The rich and impressive architecture was meant to impress guests from the countryside. Symptomatically, the form of the attic wall was explained with reference to the metaphor of “waving cornfields,”⁶⁴ which sparked malicious comments in the press, mocking the “house with a camel,” “tempting curves,” and

"Matron House."⁶⁵ Pniewski later explained that their intention was to "use cheap, easily manufactured prefab shells that would determine the form of the roof. Żerań produced them a bit at odds with our design..."⁶⁶ Large glass wall surfaces were used on the ground floor, unprecedented in Warsaw.⁶⁷ The plinth part was finished with Zygmuntówka stone, and the hotel stories with Karsy limestone.⁶⁸

The facade of the daytime hotel was shaped with the rhythm of small-scale windows and the use of double-color stone. The abstract, ahistorical composition was created using Karsy limestone and brown-red Zygmuntówka stone.⁶⁹ Pniewski also used double-color stone⁷⁰ in a geometrical pattern in his design of the Ballet School at 2 Moliera Street in Warsaw in 1952.⁷¹

Designed mainly by Małgorzata Handzelewicz-Waławek, the interiors were primarily intended to be modern in style. The most important section for the architects was the entrance hall. Handzelewicz-Waławek wrote in *Architektura* in 1962:

The hotel lobby with the reception designed to receive mass tourist groups, and the restaurants, self-service bar, café, club rooms, and library are connected directly with each other or separated only by glass walls, thus producing the effect of a vast single space. Made entirely of glass, the inner walls of the ground floor enhance the intended impression of a single space, incorporating in the spatial layout the "patio" and the residential building in Górskiego Street, in which the lobbies of the cinema and performance halls are provided. The cafés and clubs on the mezzanine floor offer a view of the entire hall, restaurant, and bar, while the spectacle of metropolitan traffic in Szpitalna Street and Powstańców Warszawy Square is visible behind the windows. The visual connection between all interiors is additionally enhanced by means of the joint and entirely visible ceiling surface.⁷²

The architects offered hotel guests the possibility of participation in urban life and the opportunity to take rest. The former was supposed to create a "tempting moment"⁷³ for visitors from the countryside; that was why the designers established conditions for spending time together, socializing, observing, and being observed. Owing to the accumulation of a plethora of functions in a single space, the entrance hall became something of a city within the city.

Handzelewicz-Waławek combined various materials and used plastics on a large scale. The services section was finished with different types of stone of domestic origin, which Pniewski very often utilized in his designs. The staircase was clad with Zielona Marianna and Sławniowice marble.⁷⁴ A major decorative role was played by mosaics. The main entrance was marked with a composition by Władysław Zych, and the centerpiece of interior decoration was a monumental work by Hanna and Gabriel Rechowicz as well as Barbara Pniewska-Kraśnińska.⁷⁵ Recognized as

the largest mosaic in Poland, it stretches along the wall throughout the entire prestigious part of the building and patio, thus contributing to the impression of a single space. During the development of the project, the artists were asked to include realistic elements – plant and animal motifs – in their work, which would make it more comprehensible for viewers. The mosaic is not typical – instead of regular tesserae it consists of glass pieces, river boulders, fragments of Chinese porcelain, ceramic tiles, and pieces of copper sheeting, combined with a fresco.⁷⁶

The decoration of the interiors and the courtyard was complemented by the gilded corners of the building. Apart from classic finishing materials in the interior, the columns were decorated with terrazzo with chips of broken glass.⁷⁷ Lamps provided a major element of the hall interior – ornate, hand-made globes hanging at different heights.⁷⁸

Tadeusz Nyczek wrote in *Budownictwo Wiejskie* magazine that “The Peasant’s Home should facilitate contact between the rural population and the capital city: with the central authorities of social, cooperative, and state organizations and institutions, as well as the cultural life of Warsaw.”⁷⁹ The modern architecture of the building provided the setting for various cultural, educational, and economic events, also organized for the residents of Warsaw. Folk art exhibitions were held, and the latest agricultural achievements were presented during fairs, talks, and lectures.

Transformation

Both the ideas behind it and the construction history of the Peasant’s Home offer a perfect illustration of the turbulent early days of the people’s authorities in Poland. The execution of the building during a period of political change, along with its program, set it as a symbol of the political “thaw.” Its initial character was emancipatory and democratic, while the propaganda function was added over time. The Peasant’s Home offered the rural population a connection with the capital city, thus contributing “in its scope to the strengthening of the alliance between workers and peasants.”⁸⁰ It gave the countryside communities an opportunity to explore culture and the city. Its monumental architecture was meant to remind the peasant masses of their momentous role in building socialism, and its modern appeal was supposed to set the direction for the Polish countryside to follow.

After 1989, the former Peasant’s Home became the property of the Gromada hotel chain and underwent major redevelopment. The building began to be altered from the very beginning of its acquisition. Changes in the user profile, construction law, as well as other needs and challenges, required new architecture.⁸¹



View of Hotel Gromada, 2019, authors' photography



Fragment of mosaic in conference room, 2019, authors' photography



Mural in hotel lobby, 2019, authors photography

The 1990s witnessed a series of small-scale transformations due to the changing owners of the commercial premises. New signboards, entrances, stairs, and advertisements appeared on the facade. Planned in 1990, the extension from the side of Górskiego Street executed by the German company HODAK-BAU⁸² according to a design by Yugoslav architects resulted in the renovation of the facade – the wooden portes-fenêtres were replaced with PVC windows with a heavy profile that separates the movable and the immovable part. In 1994, Małgorzata Handzelewicz-Waławek and her son Jakub Waławek created a design for the modernization of the facade. It was implemented only in 1996 on the occasion of replacing the woodwork⁸³ and incorporating the arcade on the corner of Górskiego and Szpitalna Streets.⁸⁴ In 1997, a design by Agencja Projektowa A-4⁸⁵ was implemented, with a Congress Center situated on the ground floor. The interior was thoroughly redeveloped: three conference halls were separated from the hall, while the kitchen, storage facilities, and the restaurant hall were moved to the basement. The level of the existing basements was lowered; Nida Gips and Thermatex system suspended ceilings were installed, complete with lighting and smoke detectors; the flooring was replaced and floor lining was installed in the conference halls. The main reason behind the changes were the fire-safety requirements and the necessity of using flame-retardant and fire-resistant materials – the building had failed to meet legal requirements in this respect for several years⁸⁶ – but the opinion concerning the redevelopment also mentioned “improving the aesthetic appeal of the interiors.”⁸⁷ As a result, the impression of a single space and the mutual permeation of the interior and the exterior were completely lost. The mosaic by Hanna and Gabriel Rechowicz and Barbara Pniewska became divided between smaller rooms, which significantly changed its perception. The technique used by the artists and the lack of preservation led to oxidation of the finishing materials and depigmentation; the mosaic was removed from the entrance portal a few years later.

Between 2001 and 2003, a new hotel building⁸⁸ designed by Autorskie Biuro Projektowe A-4⁸⁹ was raised in the square in front of the entrance. The architects describe their work as follows:

The newly designed building is functionally linked with the existing hotel by a glass connector, which embraces the main entrance to the existing hotel and the entrance to the newly designed bank section. The transparent, invisible partitions are supposed to ensure comfortable and free movement between the two buildings while remaining almost imperceptible for the user. The ground floor connector from the side of Warecka Street with a half-circular form accentuates the entrance on the stairs leading to the existing building. The form of the shell-shaped roof of the passage and the technical story bear reference to the undulating roof of the existing building, in an attempt to highlight the uniform function of the two structures.⁹⁰

The design aroused considerable doubts. Jakub Waclawek, son of the late Małgorzata Handzelewicz-Waclawek, raised the matter in a letter to Jerzy S. Majewski, author of the text "Pułdem w Pniewskiego!,"⁹¹ which he forwarded to the Architecture Department of Centrum Borough in the Śródmieście District of Warsaw. Waclawek criticized the extension for its scale – incompatible with the surroundings – covering a vast part of Powstańców Warszawy Square and veiling the main facade of the Peasant's Home, which changed the perception of the building's shell, and for "the use of a pretentious glass building with a shell-like form" as a connector between the two buildings.⁹² The extension of the Peasant's Home failed to stir broader interest at the time among architects and historians, which was probably due to the lack of appreciation of post-war architecture.

The operation of the Peasant's Home, which conformed to a considerable degree to the idea adopted at the beginning of the 20th century, was brought to a halt. The building, which had functioned not only as a hotel, but also as an institution that modernized the Polish countryside, was privatized without any compensation for the organizations that had initiated its construction and raised funds for that purpose several decades earlier. It also received the most brutal treatment imaginable in the realm of economic transformation and the neoliberal free-market economy. Yet, the current owner has not completely abandoned the century-old heritage of ideas behind the building – the main decorative element of the reduced entrance hall is a merry painting with a scene of rural celebrations, complemented with smaller-scale images inspired by quasi-folk cut-outs. The furnishing of the restaurant borrows inspiration from the highland region of Podhale, referring to the style of roadside inns. The institution whose goal was to modernize the Polish countryside yielded to the Gromada Hotel, which seeks to establish its peasant identity through decorations halfway between kitsch and an open-air ethnographic museum.⁹³

Bibliography

Borkowski, Zygmunt. "O dom ludowy." *Zaranie*, no. 36, 1912.

Budujemy Dom Chłopa." Warsaw: Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home, 1951.

Chłopski Dom w Warszawie. Informator." Warsaw: Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home, 1960.

Czapelski, Marek. *Bohdan Pniewski – warszawski architekt XX wieku*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2008.

Czerwiński, Aleksy. "Dom Chłopa." *Stolica*, no. 40, October 1, 1961.

Giergoń, Paweł. *Mozaika warszawska. Przewodnik po plastyce w architekturze stolicy 1945–1989*. Warsaw: Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego, 2014.

Grabowski, Jerzy. "Pałace czy budynki mieszkalne. Dyskusja wokół Domu Chłopa i Domu Robotnika." *Stolica*, no. 2, 1946.

Handzelewicz-Waławek, Małgorzata. "Dom Chłopa w Warszawie." *Architektura*, no. 1, 1962.

Hotel Gromada w Warszawie." Accessed September 20, 2019, <http://www.gromada.pl/hotel-Warsaw-centrum>.

Hotele Gromady." *Architektura & Biznes*, no. 5, 2000.

Józef, countryside teacher. "Sprawa domu ludowego w Warszawie." *Zaranie*, no. 1, 1913.

Kaczyński, Olgierd. "Konkurs na 'Dom Chłopa' w Warszawie." *Architektura*, no. 6, 1958.

Leśniakowska, Marta. *Architektura w Warszawie. Lata 1945–1965*. Warsaw: Arkady, 2003.

Majewski, Jerzy S. "Pudłem w Pniewskiego!" *Gazeta Wyborcza – Gazeta Stołeczna*, May 11, 2000.

Nocznicki, Tomasz. "Domy Ludowe," *Zaranie*, no. 50, 1911.

Nyczek, Tadeusz. "Dom Chłopa w Warszawie." *Budownictwo Wiejskie*, no. 11, 1960.

Rostropowicz, Bohdan. "Chłopi będą mieli swój dom w Warszawie," *Stolica*, no. 22, May 31, 1959.

Rottermund, Andrzej. *Bohdan Pniewski 1897–1965*. Warsaw: Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie,

1967.

Archival Materials

Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw. Peasant Self-Help Union. Main Board in Warsaw: 2/160/0/2/137, 2/160/0/2/825, 2/160/0/2/826, 2/160/0/2/827.

Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw. Office of the Supreme Council of the Reconstruction of Warsaw and the Main Council of the Social Fund for the Rebuilding of the Capital City and the Country in Warsaw: 2/392/0/3/326.

Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw. "Dom Chłopa" Association in Warsaw: 2/1136/0/1/1, 2/1136/0/1/2.

Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw. Supreme Audit Office in Warsaw: 2/1154/0/5/22_176, 2/1154/0/16/34_223, 2/1154/0/16/34_410.

Archive of Jakub Waclawek. Typescript of the memoirs of M. Handzelewicz-Waclawek.

National Museum in Warsaw. Polish Drawing Department: design and competition drawings of the Peasant's Home.

District Office of Warsaw (Architecture and Construction Department). Set of files concerning the Peasant's Home: 2772, 2773, 2774, 5154, 5371, 5857.

1. The text is an extended version of a paper delivered by the authors at the conference *To Recognize the Past in the Present – Heritage Protection in the 21st Century*, organized by the Students' Scientific Society of Preservation of Cultural Heritage at the Jagiellonian University on April 12 and 13, 2019 in Krakow. We would like to cordially thank Prof. Waldemar Baraniewski for valuable advice and support, as well as Łucja and Wojciech Świątkowski and Jakub Waclawek for conversation and the opportunity to view their home archives. ↩
2. Tomasz Nocznicki, "Domy Ludowe," *Zaranie* no. 50 (1911), 1181. ↩
3. Zygmunt Borkowski, "O dom ludowy," *Zaranie* no. 36 (1912), 894. ↩
4. Report on the Activity of the Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home in Warsaw from March 18, 1964, Central Archives of Modern Records (AAN), 2/392/0/3/326. ↩
5. Józef, countryside teacher, "Sprawa domu ludowego w Warszawie," *Zaranie* no. 1 (1913), 16. ↩

6. Quoted from: *ibid.*, 16. ↵
7. "Budujemy Dom Chłopa," Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home, Warsaw, 1951, 1–2, AAN, 2/160/0/2/825. ↵
8. *Ibid.*, 2. ↵
9. The issue of the construction of people's houses in the inter-war period is related to the attempts to set up a network of people's universities based on Danish models. This phenomenon is discussed by Marta Leśniakowska in her book *Architekt Jan Koszczyc Witkiewicz i budowanie w jego czasach* (Warsaw: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 1998). ↵
10. *Ibid.*, 2–3. ↵
11. Report on the Activity of the Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home in Warsaw from March 18, 1964, AAN, 2/392/0/3/326. ↵
12. Theses of the Peasant Self-Help Union (ZSCh) to the program of the Peasant's Home from February 15, 1947, AAN, 2/392/0/3/326. ↵
13. The ZSCh guidelines from June 6, 1951 offer the grounds to conclude that the plans embraced a library (with a collection of publications devoted to the professional-agricultural and socio-cultural problems of the countryside) and a center for the planning, methodology, and supply of libraries at the territorial administration level of the *gromada*. The scope of activities was to include the possibility of using the resources on site, and the dispatch of books to training centers, cultural and educational entities, and social activists in the countryside. The elaborate program should be considered as part of the broader plan of modernizing Polish rural areas, including the pursuit of combatting illiteracy. One of the members of the Main Social Committee for Combatting Illiteracy was President of the ZSCh Józef Ozga-Michalski; see: AAN, 2/160/0/2/137. ↵
14. Minutes from the sitting of the Technical Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home from December 21, 1946, AAN, 2/392/0/3/326. The basic number of congress guests was estimated at 1,000, but catering capacity was expected to reach 1,500 guests. ↵
15. Theses of the Peasant Self-Help Union to the program of the Peasant's Home from February 15, 1947, AAN, 2/392/0/3/326. ↵
16. The largest hall with 250 seats, and two halls with 80 seats each. ↵
17. Theses of the Peasant Self-Help Union to the program of the Peasant's Home from February 15, 1947, AAN, 2/392/0/3/326. ↵
18. *Ibid.* Enquiries were sent out to the People's Cultural Institute, the People's Universities Society, the Dormitories and Scholarships Society, and the Rural Cinematographic Cooperative. ↵
19. Report on the activity of the Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home in Warsaw from March 18, 1964, AAN, 2/392/0/3/326. ↵

20. For materials concerning the competition, see: *ibid.* The following architects were invited to participate: Wojciech Onitzch, Franciszek Piaścik, Stanisław Serafin, Tadeusz Ptaszycki, Janusz Szablowski, Stanisław Baran, and Stefan Tworkowski. The competition jury was comprised of President of the NROW Marian Spychalski, President of the Executive Committee of the NROW Jerzy Grabowski, two representatives of the Peasant's Home Committee (Stanisław Janusz and Feliks Bizowski), as well as collegial jurors selected by competition participants: Bohdan Pniewski, Stanisław Brukalski, Jerzy Hryniewiecki, and Zygmunt Skibniewski. ↵
21. Minutes no. 1 from the sitting of the Central Committee for the Construction of Peasant's Home from December 16, 1950, AAN, 2/160/0/2/827. ↵
22. *Ibid.* According to Stefan Ignar, a member of the NKW ZSL, their presence was detrimental to the perception of the project as socially oriented. ↵
23. *Ibid.* ↵
24. Program of the propaganda and fundraising campaign for 1951, *ibid.* ↵
25. "Budujemy Dom Chłopa," 1, AAN, 2/160/0/2/825. ↵
26. *Ibid.* ↵
27. Note attached to the Resolution of the Presidium of the Supreme Executive Committee of the United People's Party concerning the Peasant's Home in Warsaw from December 13, 1955. ↵
28. *Ibid.* ↵
29. Materials attached to the minutes of the Secretariat of the KC from February 13, 1953, State Archive in Warsaw (APW), Archive of Józef Sigalin, folder 387, from: Marek Czapelski, *Bohdan Pniewski – warszawski architekt XX wieku* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2008), 261. ↵
30. Note attached to the Resolution of the Presidium of the Supreme Executive Committee of the United People's Party concerning the Peasant's Home in Warsaw from December 13, 1955. ↵
31. Czapelski, *Bohdan Pniewski*, 261. ↵
32. Note attached to the Resolution of the Presidium of the Supreme Executive Committee of the United People's Party concerning the Peasant's Home in Warsaw from December 13, 1955. ↵
33. *Ibid.*; Report on the activity of the Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home in Warsaw from March 18, 1964, AAN, 2/392/0/3/326 ↵
34. *Ibid.* (Report on the activity of the Central Committee). ↵
35. *Ibid.* ↵
36. Resolution of the Presidium of the Government no. 789 from December 13, 1956, quoted

- from: Czapelski, *Bohdan Pniewski*, 261. ↩
37. Report on the activity of the Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home in Warsaw from March 18, AAN, 2/392/0/3/326. ↩
38. "Komunikat SARP" no. 8 (32) (1957), 20, from: *Fragmety stuletniej historii. 1899–1999* vol. 2, ed. Tadeusz Barucki (Warsaw: Oddział Warszawski SARP, 2001), 312. ↩
39. Minutes from the second sitting of the Jury of the Competition for the Peasant's Home building in Warsaw, AAN/2/160/0/2/827. The competition is discussed in more detail by Olgierd Kaczyński in his report "Konkurs na 'Dom Chłopa' w Warszawie," *Architektura* no. 6 (1958), 239. ↩
40. *Ibid.*, 239. ↩
41. Minutes from the second sitting of the Jury of the Competition for the Peasant's Home building in Warsaw, AAN, 2/160/0/2/827. ↩
42. Kaczyński, "Konkurs na 'Dom Chłopa' w Warszawie," 239. The competition design was created by Bohdan Pniewski and Małgorzata Handzelewicz-Wacławek in collaboration with Janina Podolecka, Piotr Girard, Jerzy Leszczyński, and Andrzej Szuch. Structures were designed by engineer Bronisław Kędzierski, and sanitary installations by engineer Jerzy Siwiński. ↩
43. *Ibid.* ↩
44. National Museum in Warsaw (MNW), inv. no. Rys. Pol. 20989, Rys. Pol. 20991. Concept sketches of the design in the MNW collection include some drawings indicating that Małgorzata Handzelewicz-Wacławek and Bohdan Pniewski also initially considered erecting a high-rise building. ↩
45. Kaczyński, "Konkurs na 'Dom Chłopa' w Warszawie," 239. ↩
46. Minutes from the discussion organized by the OW SARP concerning submissions to the competition for the Peasant's Home in Warsaw on August 2, 1957, AAN, 2/160/0/2/827. ↩
47. The design of the hall was earmarked for later implementation. Financial reports until 1964 feature a record concerning funds for implementation. The design "Dom Chłopa Kino-Estrada" was submitted to the Office of the General Architect of Warsaw, but ultimately never left paper. ↩
48. Małgorzata Handzelewicz-Wacławek, "Dom Chłopa w Warszawie," *Architektura* no. 1 (1962), 3. ↩
49. The authors' conversation with Wojciech Świątkowski. ↩
50. Materials concerning the audit of the construction and operation of the Peasant's Home, AAN, 2/1154/0/5/22_176, 2/1154/0/16/34_223, 2/1154/0/16/34_410. ↩
51. Resolution of the Presidium of the Government from December 12, 1965, quoted from: Report on the activity of the Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home

- in Warsaw from March 18, 1964, AAN, 2/392/0/3/326. ↩
52. Materials concerning the audit of the construction and operation of the Peasant's Home, AAN, 2/1154/0/5/22_176. ↩
53. This occurred after the official inauguration of the building. ↩
54. "Biuletyn Informacyjny" no. 1, Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home in Warsaw, Warsaw, 1958, AAN, 2/1136/0/1/2. ↩
55. APW, Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home, folder 201, from: Czapelski, *Bohdan Pniewski*, 263. Numerous copies of various reports and press clippings enable verification of these dates. ↩
56. Handzelewicz-Waławek, "Dom Chłopa w Warszawie," 3. ↩
57. Ibid. ↩
58. Ibid. ↩
59. Ibid. ↩
60. During the conversation, Wojciech Świątkowski emphasized a number of times the innovativeness and lightness of the structure used by Kędzierski. ↩
61. Aleksy Czerwiński, "Dom Chłopa," *Stolica* no. 40, October 1, 1961, 2. ↩
62. Notes by Małgorzata Handzelewicz-Waławek in the private archive of Jakub Waławek. ↩
63. Czapelski, *Bohdan Pniewski*, 265. As for the composition of the facade, Czapelski sees inspiration from the Italian luxury architecture of the 1950s. ↩
64. "Chłopski Dom w Warszawie. Informator," Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home in Warsaw, Warsaw, 1960, 9. According to Czapelski, the idea must have originated from Bohdan Pniewski. The expression was repeated multiple times, while the inspiration from nature and the presence of the comparison are confirmed in family memoirs by Wojciech Świątkowski and Jakub Waławek. ↩
65. Władysław Kopaliński, "Pedagogika od święta," *Nowa Kultura* no. 2 (1961), 5, from: Czapelski, *Bohdan Pniewski*, 267. ↩
66. Ibid. Shell vaults were ultimately not used in the building, and the undulating roof line is merely a decorative element. ↩
67. Łucja and Wojciech Świątkowski remember that the use of large-scale glass surfaces (3 × 3 m window panes) was a bold move by Bohdan Pniewski. The glass surfaces impressed viewers, but the window panes began to break rather quickly due to technological mistakes, and had to be replaced with new ones. ↩
68. Handzelewicz-Waławek, "Dom Chłopa w Warszawie," 3. ↩
69. Czapelski, *Bohdan Pniewski*, 263–264. ↩
70. Małgorzata Handzelewicz-Waławek mentions in her notes that Pniewski struggled for years with the phenomenon of the depigmentation of the double-color facades of tenement houses,

- the so-called "crying" of the darker stone, which also occurred in the Peasant's Home. ↵
71. As mentioned by Jakub Waclawek. ↵
72. Handzelewicz-Waclawek, "Dom Chłopa w Warszawie," 3. ↵
73. Ibid. ↵
74. Ibid. ↵
75. Ibid. ↵
76. See: Paweł Giergoń, *Mozaika warszawska. Przewodnik po plastyce w architekturze stolicy 1945–1989* (Warsaw: Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego, 2014), 156. ↵
77. In later years, the columns in the restaurant section were also decorated with a mosaic. This happened against the will of the designers, who believed that structural elements should be devoid of decoration. As remarked by Jakub Waclawek. ↵
78. According to Łucja Świątkowska, Pniewski created the first copies himself. ↵
79. Tadeusz Nyczek, "Dom Chłopa w Warszawie," *Budownictwo Wiejskie* no. 11 (1960), 12. ↵
80. An expression of gratitude to the rural population, organizations, institutions, and activists – resolution of the Central Committee for the Construction of the Peasant's Home from March 18, 1964, AAN, 2/392/0/3/326. ↵
81. Office of the Śródmieście District of Warsaw, Architecture and Construction Department (UDŚ), 2773, 2774. Materials preserved by the Office of the Śródmieście District include numerous implemented and unimplemented designs. ↵
82. Dom International. Hotel Dom Chłopa – Warsaw, Berlin 1990, UDŚ, 2773. The design was consulted with Małgorzata Handzelewicz-Waclawek. ↵
83. Technical opinion concerning the state of the facade of the Peasant's Home, UDŚ, 2773. In June 1989, an opinion was issued concerning the technical state of the building's facade. The state of the Karsy stone was evaluated as good, but the Zygmuntówka stone cladding had been damaged by weather conditions. Major loosening of the slabs was detected, and an order was issued to safeguard all sites with human traffic. Further examinations were recommended. ↵
84. Design of the extension of the Peasant's Home, 1996, facade modernization design, 1994, UDŚ, 2774. ↵
85. Interior decoration design, UDŚ, 2774. ↵
86. In September 1994, the District Headquarters of the State Fire Service in Warsaw conducted an inspection and evaluation concerning compliance with fire-protection regulations. Numerous irregularities were detected and lodged with the Director of the Śródmieście District Board, UDŚ, 2774. ↵
87. UDŚ, 2774. The extension design contains an attached expert opinion concerning fire protection. ↵

88. Jakub Waclawek notes in the conversation that Małgorzata Handzelewicz-Waclawek made an offer to the owners of the Gromada Hotel concerning the design of the extension on the lot from the side of Górskiego Street. The A-4 architectural studio from Nowy Sącz and a different location for the new part were ultimately chosen. ↵
89. "Hotele Gromady," *Architektura & Biznes* no. 5 (2000), 46–47. ↵
90. Decision concerning the extension of the Peasant's Home, Decision concerning use, Construction Design, Working Design – variant 2, Architecture, UDŚ, 5877. ↵
91. Jerzy S. Majewski, "Pudłem w Pniewskiego!," *Gazeta Wyborcza –Gazeta Stołeczna*, May 11, 2000. ↵
92. Jakub Waclawek describes the subsequent redevelopments of the Peasant's Home in a letter. ↵
93. The former Peasant's Home was included in the Borough Register of Historic Monuments on July 24, 2012. It also appeared on the list of several dozen modernist structures that should be included in the Register of Historic Monuments, published on March 1, 2016 by Michał Krasucki, Heritage Preservation Officer of the Capital City of Warsaw. Piotr Bakalarski, "Te budynki mają być chronione. Długa lista Krasuckiego," March 1, 2016, <https://tvnwarszawa.tvn24.pl/informacje,news,te-budynki-maja-byc-chronione-dluga-lista-krasuckiego,195080.html> (accessed September 20, 2019). ↵

Adam Parol

ORCID

Art history student at the Faculty of Management of Visual Culture of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

Anna Helena Przybyła

ORCID

Eng. Arch. Anna Helena Przybyła – art history student at the Faculty of Management of Visual Culture of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, and architecture student at the Faculty of Architecture of Warsaw University of Technology. Przybyła's interests embrace the social and cultural aspects of the functioning of architecture of the 20th and 21st centuries. She actively participates in student organizations and initiatives.

ISSN 2450-1611