Modernism in the Architecture of East Prussia Introductory Studies

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Little attention has been given so far to Modern Architecture in the former Province of East Prussia, and so scientific studies do not include the most outstanding constructions in this area, not to mention other valuable examples of buildings erected in the first three decades of the 20th century. The architects working in those years in Königsberg (Królewiec, now Kaliningrad), Elbing (Elbląg), Allenstein (Olsztyn), Insterburg (Wystruć, now Chernyakhovsk,), Tilsit (now Sovetsk) and Gumbinnen (Gąbin, now Gusev,) are hardly recognised. The picture of provincial architecture is even less clear in this respect.

Therefore, East Prussian Modernism requires rudimentary studies. However, it is necessary to realise the difficulties. Because of very scarce literature, lack of archival sources and the destruction of historical urban buildings, in the central parts of Königsberg¹ in particular, many aspects of architecture and urban planning of this historical land are difficult to review thoroughly. This refers both to Modernism and other, more easily definable styles to be found in *Ostpreussen* in the 20th century.

Before World War I, the architecture of this most eastbound German province was hardly a subject of interest. The situation slightly improved during and after World War I, when post-war reconstruction (1915-1924) was more widely discussed. The process of rebuilding, being a large-scale propaganda undertaking, was reported by professional periodicals and

The first researcher who made an

independent publications up till the mid 1920s². At the same time, there are no attempts to summarise architectural achievements other than those directly related to the rebuilding process, made at the same time or a little later, but still before the Nazis came to power in Germany³. It must be said, too, that the last years in the history of East Prussia (1933-1945) have only recently become the subject of professional historical studies⁴. As far as architecture is concerned, this period of time needs a separate analysis, as at least several interesting buildings were then constructed⁵.

^{2.} The main points of the rebuilding process are included in a joint publication edited by Erich Göttgen *Der Wiederaufbau Ost-preußens. Eine kulturelle, verwaltungstechnische und baukünstlerische Leistung*, Königsberg 1928. See also: Jan Salm, *Odbudowa miast wschodnio-pruskich po I wojnie światowej. Zagadnienia architektoniczno-urbanistyczne*, Olsztyn 2006, pp. 15-18, 29-34.

^{3.} Kurt Frick, *Vom neuen Bauen in Ostpressen* [in:] *Ostpreussen – 700 Jahre Deutsches Land.* Im Auftrage der Königsberger Hartungschen Zeitung und Verlagsdruckerei, hrsg. Von Dr. Ludwig Goldstein, Königsberg 1930, pp. 74-76. In the late 1920s, some illustrated publications came out, presenting individual achievements of three architects working in East Prussia: Hans Hopp, Kurt Frick and August Feddersen.

^{4.} *Vorposten des Reichs? Ostpreußen 1933-1945*, Hg. Christian Plotzig, Lübeck-Travemünde 2006.

^{5.} Unique architectural achievements in East Prussia during the Nazi times are discussed in a separate paper. It must be noted, however, that a number of buildings were erected at that time, e.g. a town hall in Ortelsburg (now: Szczytno), unfinished forum in Heiligenbeil (now: Mamonowo), thing squares (e.g. in Tilsit/Sovetsk and Insterburg/Chernyakhovsk), or several office buildings and spatial layouts in Königsberg (e.g. Erich Koch's forum). Moreover, many other projects were completed, e.g. numerous housing estates, new schools and Hitlerjugend hostels, or engineering constructions (bridges and motorway flyovers) and military buildings (e.g. barracks in Ortelsburg/Szczytno), not to mention ideas which were never carried out, e.g. phantasmagoric plans of the total growth of Königsberg, or the ideas of the extension of Marienburg (now: Malbork) Castle which need a separate study.

^{1.} The most extensive inventory of the buildings constructed before 1945 and preserved in Kaliningrad is included in Baldur Köster's *Königsberg, Architektur ous deutscher Zeit*, Husum 2000.



1. Ozyorsk (Darkehmen), the Wiechert House, before 1922, designed by E. Lindenburger (?). Photo by the author

attempt to describe the picture of East Prussian architecture between the late 19th century and the 1930s was Nils Aschenbeck⁶. He based his work entirely on archival publications available to him, so a number of buildings given little or no prominence in literature, yet important for the appearance of East Prussia countryside, escaped his attention. The architecture of that time was also described for the general public in the *Borussia* magazine⁷. Other publications, rare in fact, are of monographic character, devoted to individual architects, towns or cities⁸. Usually they cannot be regarded as fully exhaustive as far as the 20th-century architecture and urban planning are concerned.

6. Nils Aschenbeck, *Moderne Architektur in Ostpreußen*, Hamburg 1991.

All this means that we are far from full recognition of architectural landscape of East Prussia in 1900-19459. It is also difficult to determine the exact dates of the beginning of Modernism and its stages in this peripheral region of Germany of the time. We can only hazard a hypothesis that the first symptoms of new concepts in architecture can be noticed in the early years of the 20th century in big East Prussian cities, growing dynamically at that time. It is equally difficult to establish which building was pioneering; according to N. Aschenbeck, it may have been a Jewish poorhouse in Königsberg, completed in 1904¹⁰, and A. Rzempołuch considers the Deutsches Haus Hotel constructed in 1909/1910 to be the first Modernist building in Olsztyn¹¹. In the first decade of the new century there were probably very few of them against the background of still dominating Historicism.

Modernistic trends settled for good in the designs for the reconstruction of provincial towns after World War I destruction. A young generation of German architects had their significant share in this undertaking, and they were strongly influenced by reformatory

^{7.} Jan Salm, Kurt Frick i inni, czyli zapomniana architektura Prus Wschodnich, [in:] Borussia 2001, 24/25, Olsztyn, pp. 89-100. 8. E.g. Jerzy Domino, Rozwój przestrzenny, architektura i sztuka w latach 1918-1945, [in:] Historia Elbląga, Volume IV (1918-1945), edited by M. Andrzejewski, Gdańsk 2002, pp. 208-262; Andrzej Rzempołuch, Architektura i urbanistyka Olsztyna 1353-1953, Od założenia miasta po odbudowę ze zniszczeń wojennych, Olsztyn 2005. See also: Johann Friedrich Geist, Klaus Kürvers, Dieter Rausch, Hans Scharoun. Chronik zu Leben und Werk, Berlin 1994, pp. 22-56, 148; Matthias Schirren, Hugo Häring. Architekt des Neuen Bauens 1882-1958. Mit einem kritischen Werkkatalog von Sylvia Claus und Matthias Schirren, ausgewählten Texten von Hugo Häring sowie einem Geleitwort vom Vladimir Šlapeta, Osterfildern-Ruit 2001; G. Wiesemann, Hanns Hopp 1890-1971, Königsberg, Dresden, Halle, Ost-Berlin. Eine biographische Studie zu moderner Architektur. Schwerin 2001; Jan Salm, Der Architekt Kurt Frick (1884-1963). Eine Porträtskizze, [in:] Jahrbuch des Bundesinstituts für Kultur und Geschichte der deutschen im östlichen Europa. Berichte und Forschungen, Band 14, 2006, pp. 159-186.

^{9.} The most recent synthesis of the history of Pomerania outlines the issues of the transformation of East Prussian architecture only in a general way. See: B. Mansfield, *Sztuka na Pomorzu*, [in:] Historia Pomorza, Volume IV (1850-1918), Part II Polityka i kultura, edited by S. Salmonowicz, Toruń 2002, pp. 421-429, 450-459

^{10.} Nils Aschenbeck, op.cit., pp. 10, 11.

^{11.} Andrzej Rzempołuch, op.cit. p. 129.



2. Kaliningrad (Königsberg). House of Technology, 1924-25, designed by H. Hopp. The author's collection.

associations like Der Deutsche Werkbund and such eminent personalities as Theodor Fischer, Georg Steinmetz and Hermann Muthesius. Heinz Stoffregen's project in Gerdauen (now: Zheleznodorozhny) or Fritz Schopohl's in Goldap¹² are valuable examples. Other excellent works of stylised regionalism are: the church in Eckersberg/Okartowo (1922-24, designed by Henry, paintings by Günther) and the Wiechert House in Darkehmen (now: Ozyorsk), probably designed by E. Lindenburger (Fig. 1). After 1918, architects also made designs not only related to the removal of the traces of war. Some of them, like Hans Scharoun for example, apart from designs in simplified Classicism, made more avant-garde projects in this area. These features can be found in *Germaniagarten* residential buildings in Parkring, Insterburg (Chernyakhovsk), erected in 1923-24. This design can be confronted with Scharoun's housing estate in Kamswykerweg (now: Elevatornaia street) called Bunte Reihe, built a little earlier (1920-21)13.

In the 1920s, the development of East Prussian architecture was most dynamic and multifaceted. The designs implemented then showed various paths of experiments of German architecture – from late Historicism, through Expressionism and early Modernism with its strong reference to the past, to individually interpreted regional trend (*Heimatstil*) and the "around 1800" style. These trends, however, were mostly conservative. Distinctive *Bauhaus* influences were late to appear here and did not

There is no doubt, however, that only few buildings were widely known in Germany. As far as East Prussia is concerned, one of such structures (apart from the rebuilding after WWI) was certainly the Tannenberg Monument (1927, designed by brothers J. and W. Krüger)¹⁵. Its context and significance were, naturally, clearly national and political. Königsberg Devau Airport became famous for its civilian passengers' handling pavilion, first of the type in Germany (1921)¹⁶. The buildings of the Eastern Trade Fair (Ostmesse), with their monumental Haus der Technik erected in 1924-25, were meant to demonstrate the growth of the region, despite its disjunction from the rest of Germany (Fig. 2)17. The above-mentioned buildings were designed by 'the up-and-coming star' of East Prussian architecture - Hanns Hopp. The structure of the fair buildings was reinforced concrete, which

have many followers¹⁴. It would be interesting to know the answer to the question how individual trends influenced the picture of architecture and town planning of German's eastern frontiers. Were they widely spread, or were they just imported ephemera with no greater impact? The question may also refer to a wider area of Posen-West Prussia, the Free City of Gdańsk or Western Pomerania. However, the review of such a vast architectural landscape would exceed the scope of this paper.

^{12.} Jan Salm, op. cit. pp. 163-177, 179-196.

^{13.} The housing estate in Kamswykerweg (now: Elevatornaia Street) survived almost intact till today. It is worth mentioning that the original, vivid colors of plasterwork, woodwork and details (from which the group derived its name) can be seen here and there.

^{14.} A. Rzempołuch aptly comments on this phenomenon, recalling a sentence said in the 1920s about August Feddersen's (a sought-after East Prussian architect) views: "... he knew that the Dessau Bauhaus-style buildings will have quite an inappropriate effect in the lanscape of the suthern part of East Prussia". See: A. Rzempołuch, op. cit. p. 133.

^{15.} Jürgen Tietz, Das Tannenberg – Nationaldenkmal. Architektur. Geschichte, Berlin 1999.

^{16.} Gabrielle Wiesemann, op. cit., pp. 65, 66.

^{17.} Gabrielle Wiesemann, op. cit., pp. 69-77.

ensured large spans, while heavy clinker facades were decorated with sculptured details¹⁸. At that time Hanns Hopp was under the influence of Expressionism, which can be clearly seen in the design of the airport building.

After World War I, spectacular buildings, meant to confirm and strengthen symbolically the historical power of Germany, were erected outside East Prussia as well. Such structures can be found in Schneidemühl (Piła): the monumental office building of the authorities of the 'rump' province (1926-28, designed by Lehmann and Cossäth)¹⁹, and the multi-purpose edifice *Reichsdankhaus* (1926-28, designed by P. Bonatz and F. Scholer)²⁰. Similar structures were erected in the years to follow. Thus Schneidemühl, up till then a peripheral town, became a symbolic, artificially created capital of the provinces Germany had lost, i.e. the Province of Posen and the Province of West Prussia.

But let us come back to the eastern bank of the Vistula River. In the political context of the 1920s, it is necessary to mention the 1927 competition for the design of a new town hall in Marienburg (Malbork), won by a Deutsch-Krone (Wałcz) architect K. Höppner, whose design was implemented in the following years²¹, and a "plebiscite" theatre in Allenstein (Olsztyn), i.e. Landestheater Treudank (1925, designed by A. Feddersen)²². These buildings demonstrated a conservative form of Modernism which still made use of transformed historical motifs. However, there were some exceptions in this otherwise conservative landscape, e.g. the Lodge of Three Patriarchs in Tilsit (1926-27, designed by E. Mendelsohn)²³ characterised by daring divisions of clinker façade. However, it is no use trying to find the latter in official documentary evidence of the architecture of the time.

The most eminent buildings in the area designed in the spirit of international, Bauhaus-originated Modernism were not created until the late 1920s and early 1930s. They are to be found mainly in big and medium-sized cities, as smaller towns were obviously not willing to accept avant-garde architecture easily, or did not accept it at

all. Apart from the capital of the Province, rare examples of such buildings are in Gąbin (now Gusev, formerly Gumbinnen), Elbląg (Elbing), Kętrzyn (Rastenburg), Lidzbark Warmiński (Heilsberg), Olsztyn (Allenstein), Sovetsk (Tilsit) and above-mentioned Chernyakhovsk (Insterburg).

Of all the architects working in East Prussia after WW1, Hanns Hopp was the most outstanding and consistent representative of Modernism. He designed (together with his business partner Georg Lucas) numerous buildings in Königsberg, e.g. the house for women pensioners in Maraunenhof (1927-28), the Prisma cinema (1928), Park Hotel (1929-30)24 and East Prussian Crafts School for Girls (1928-30)²⁵. Some time later, Ostmarkenrundfunk, an office building of the broadcasting station, was constructed (1932-33)²⁶ (Figures 3, 4, 5). His studio designed also many villas and tenements, both in the 1920s and in the days of the Third Reich. Two buildings are considered most outstanding: a luxurious, precisely designed hotel with elegant facade and interior, and a crafts school with sophisticated formal solutions of the exteriors and interiors, for which individual furniture and colour scheme were designed; this was completed with sculptures by H. Brachert and E. Filitz. A modern, "light" shape of the school

24. Architekten Hopp und Lucas, Königsberg i. Pr., [in:] Bauwelt XXII Jg., 1931, H. 20, pp. 1-16.

25. W.C. Behrendt, Ostpreussische Mädchengewerbeschule Königsberg i. Pr., [in:] ZdB, 50 Jh., 1930, No 47, pp. 809-813; Gabrielle Wiesemann, op. cit. pp. 81-87, 258, 259.

26. Gabrielle Wiesemann, op. cit. pp. 91, 92.

3. Kaliningrad (Königsberg). Prisma cinema, 1928, by H. Hopp and G. Lucas. The author's collection.



^{18.} Haus der Technik burnt down during WWII, and remained a ruin, albeit partly used, till the end of the 20th century, Recently, reconstruction works started, but unfortunately they will not restore the building, so important for the city's history, to its original shape.

19. Regierungsdienstgebäude in Schneidemühl, (in:) Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung, (ZdB) 49 Jhg 1929, No 1, pp. 1-7.

20. Robert Dawidowski, Ryszard Długopolski, Adam M. Szymski, Architektura modernistyczna lat 1928-1940 na obszarze Pomorza Zachodniego, Szczecin 2001, p. 89.

21. Bernhard Schmid, Der Rathauswettbewerb für Marienburg in Westpreußen, [in:] ZdB, 45 Jh., No 24, 1925, pp. 290-293.

22. H. Mankowski, *Landestheater Allenstein*, (in:) Ostdeutsche Bau-Zeitung, 25 Jh., No 14, 1927, p. 87. See also: Andrzej Rzempołuch, op. cit. pp. 134, 135.

23. Nils Aschenbeck, op. cit. pp. 69, 70.

was perfectly integrated into the landscape of the suburbs of Vorderhufen, although it was an unusual element there.

As has been mentioned before, developed Modernism was present mainly in Königsberg. Several other architects worked in the capital of the Province: Robert Liebenthal (the building of Prussian National Archives), Hans Manteuffel and Kurt Frick (a Lutheran church in Ratshof District, the Haas shop). The latter designed the interior of Alhambra cinema, located in one of the most distinctive modernistic buildings in Königsberg, i.e. an imposing tenement house in Steindamm designed by H. Manteuffel in 1931. One of these buildings, the National Archives²⁷, is worth a closer look (Fig. 6). It was erected in 1929-30, because it was necessary to gather all the scattered archive documents in one, modern place. A distinctive feature of this two-winged building is its glass corner, into which a spiral staircase was fitted. Liebenthal's work survived the war and now, besides the Park Hotel and the crafts school, is one of the few remnants of the pre-war Königsberg and its most Bauhaus-style building²⁸.

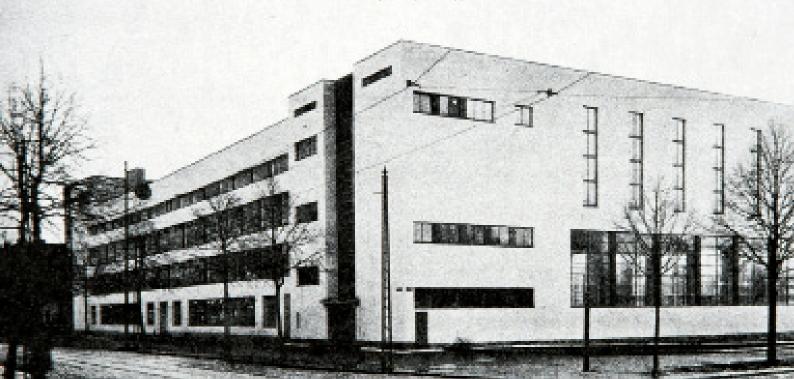
One of the late Modernist buildings is also a four-winged complex of Trade College, erected in 1934 and designed by the national building service²⁹. Compared with sophisticated works by Hopp & Lucas, it is marked by rigorous austerity



4. Kaliningrad (Königsberg). Park Hotel, 1929-30, designed by H. Hopp and G. Lucas. The author's collection.

and certain monotony. Its interior was similarly cool and uniform; only Auditorium Maximum was decorated with a painting called *Young Germany* by a Königsberg artist E. Bischoff.

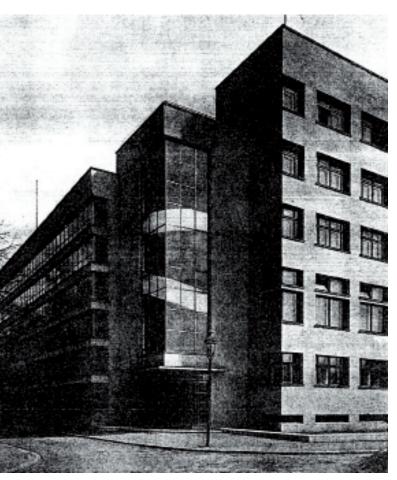
Housing estates, individual tenements and villas constitute a separate, yet diversified, group. In spite of severe damages, many of them survived in most of the cities and towns of the region, as housing developed rapidly between WWI and WWII. Besides H. Hopp's and K. Frick's constructions in Königsberg, also those by E. Arndt, F. Lahrs or F. Bleyer are worth mentioning here. Similar, though less elaborate complexes were erected in large numbers in smaller towns as planned spatial layouts for the development



5. The East Prussian Crafts School for Girls, 1928-30, designed by H. Hopp and G. Lucas. The author's collection.

^{27.} Preussisches Staatsarchiv Königsberg i. Pr., [in:] Zentrallblatt der Bauverwaltung vereinigt mit Zeitschrift für Bauwesen (hereinafter: ZdBvmZfB), 51 Jg., No 22, 1931, pp. 313-318. 28. B. Köster, op. cit., pp. 138, 139.

^{29.} Malwitz, Handels-Hochschule Königsberg i. Pr., (in:) ZdB-vmZfB, 55 Jh., H. 1, 1935, pp. 1-10.



6. Kaliningrad (Königsberg). The National Archives, 1929-30, designed by R. Liebenthal. The author's collection.

of suburban areas. In this respect, buildings in Mrągowo (Sensburg) look splendid (e.g. square Grunwaldzki, elliptic in shape). All these works are still poorly studied, and usually cannot be attributed with absolute certainty.

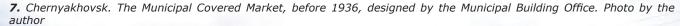
In the 1930s, the activities of architects Brasch, Jess and Höppken in Insterburg (Chernyakhovsk) were equally interesting (a new town hall, housing estates, a market hall, a vocational school for girls, the Pestalozzi School with houses for its teachers). Some of these buildings still exist, maintaining their original functions. Most outstanding buildings are certainly the above-mentioned school for girls and the reinforced-concrete and functionalistic market located in New Market Square (now: Teatralnaia Ploshtshad' - Theatre square). The construction,

with its distinctive loggia supported by slender pillars, can be compared to its contemporary buildings of Italian Functionalism³⁰. (Fig. 7)

In Elbing (Elblag), incorporated into East Prussia after WWI, there are at least three buildings worth mentioning³¹. One of them is a hostel located in the gatehouse that closes Pionierska street, probably designed by Heinz Bahr. This unusual building combines different features: a Modernistic shape, an Expressionistic gateway and a huge roof with distinct historicizing patterns. Another building is the Pedagogic Academy (1929-30) in what is today A. Komenskiego street. Its spatial layout is the only example of Prussian Functionalism in Elblag. A very individual building is still a former Jahnschule (now Lower Secondary School No 5) in Agrikola street, constructed in 1928-29 (Fig. 8). A perfectly shaped volume consists of several cuboid segments, the highest of which is located on the symmetry axis of the layout and highlighted (its main entrance in particular) with an imposing spire. The Elblag school building is one of the best examples of the 1920s and 1930s architecture in the whole area of East Prussia. It is also interesting how it blends in with its surroundings. The building was erected on top of a slope, and on its west side there are monumental stairs leading to the entrance; at their base, the stairs are flanked with two twin, two-storey houses with corner jetties. The houses resemble the stylistics used in East Prussia during the rebuilding after WWI, although we may assume that they were erected at the time the school was built.

There are more buildings with educational functions which are interesting from the formal point of view, and which at the same time are outstanding in terms of simplicity of solutions. Such buildings are to be found, for example, in Giżycko (Lötzen) and Lidzbark Warmiński (Heilsberg) – both of them dating back to the

^{31.} J. Domino, op. cit., pp. 249, 250; photos 31, 32, 52.

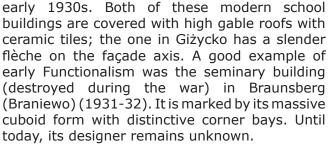




^{30.} L. Sautter, Insterburg. Bauten und Anlagen einer ostpreussischen Mittelstadt/Eindrucke einer Reise, (in:) Bauwelt, XXVII Jg, 1936, H. 5, pp. 1-8.



8. Elbląg. Former Jahnschule, 1928-29, designer unknown; Photo by the author



A group of buildings, which is a specific combination of historicizing solutions and modernistic elements, includes some of East Prussian temples. These are, e.g. churches in Giżycko (Lötzen) (by M. Weber), Piecki (by F. Lahrs) and Węgorzewo (Angerburg) (by P. Just), as well as the above-mentioned Frick's church in Ratshof and a chapel in Juwendt (Razino). As a matter of fact, religious architecture in East Prussia in the 1920s and 1930s is worth a separate, thorough study.

Another "modern" element that appeared in East Prussian landscape in the 1920s and 1930s was the monumental, cuboid water towers (sometimes functioning as youth hostels). They became inherent parts of cityscapes as did bergfrieds in the Middle Ages. Examples of such structures can be found in Dzierzgoń (Christburg), Braniewo (Braunsberg) (not preserved), Morąg (Mohrungen) (Fig. 9) and Mikołajki (Nikolaiken). Three of them were designed by K. Frick and H. Hopp. The designer of the Dzierzgoń water tower remains unknown.



9. Morąg. Water tower, ca. 1928, designed by K. Frick; Photo by the author

It is worth remembering, however, that besides the foregoing buildings in international stylistics, East Prussian architects, e.g. Frick or A. Kuhrke, kept designing buildings in the form of modified Heimatstil, often with distinct regional motifs (coarse plasterwork, windows subdivided into many small panels, traditional roofs covered with pantiles, sometimes timber framing). They were, first of all, tenement houses, suburban housing estates Bartoszyce/Bartenstein, Dobre Miasto/Guttstadt, Elbląg/Elbing, Königsberg, Olsztyn/Allenstein, Orneta/Warmditt) and school buildings in towns (e.g. Lidzbark Warmiński/Heilsberg, Morag/ Mohrungen, Pasym/Passenheim, Zalewo/ Saalfeld) and villages (e.g. Dźwierzuty/ Mensguth). Although modern functional and technological solutions were applied (e.g. spacious classrooms, big windows with newtechnology frames), inherent elements in most of them were steep ceramic roofs, triangular and crow-stepped gables, and clinker or (less frequently) terracotta details in door frames (Fig 10).

The first stage of East Prussian Modernism was the most intensive and versatile, although regional and local motifs prevailed. The cosmopolitan stage was short – only a few years – and, apart from Hopp and Lucas, did not have many eminent representatives. Late Modernism in East Prussia lasted for a long time and its



10. Lidzbark Warmiński, villa in Polna street, ca. 1930, designer unknown; Photo by the author



11. Szczytno. Town hall, 1936-37, designed by K. Frick; Photo by the author

conventional examples little by little acquired Nazi stylistics (Fig. 11). In the remote, conservative and rural rather than urban province of Germany, it was never robust enough to flourish. Even so, in its best period, it created a certain number of outstanding buildings and a larger number of 'hybrids', matching local conditions, ordinary (which does not mean bad) tastes, modest though rational needs and limited, in fact, possibilities. Therefore, uniform housing estates and villages built in the 1920s and 1930s were one of the most typical and permanent elements of local landscapes.

In her fundamental work on Hanns Hopp, Gabrielle Wiesenmann gave a symptomatic title to one of the chapters: *Cautious Practicality under Gable Roofs*³². A coarse symbiosis of imported modernity and strong local tradition was very typical of the pre-war East Prussia.

32. G. Wiesemann, op. cit., p. 92. The title of the chapter is: Behutsame Sachlichkeit unter Satteldächer: Wohnhäuser 1926-39.

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