INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE REVITALISATION AS A WORDPLAY

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Introduction

According to the introductory article of the Venice Charter of 1964 the concept of a historic monument embraces:

(…) not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilization, a significant development or a historic event. This applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time1.

On the other hand, a Polish language dictionary defines the monument as an “old and valuable object or a building of a high historical and scientific value”; the common meaning of the term is however “what is old-fashioned”2. The same dictionary explains heritage as “the assets taken over as a bequest” but also “culture, science and art left by previous generations”3. According to another definition heritage is “something that we took over from the past and what influences our present life, for example tradition”4. From the above-listed definitions it can be deduced that the essence of the monument is the link to the past and specific values, and in the case of heritage the most important issue is its acquisition from previous generations. So, it is possible to indicate that the professionals decide whether an object has some characteristics that predispose it to be recognized as a monument, while it is people/society who decide whether adopt it as their heritage.

Such an interpretation of the difference between two fundamental concepts for the conservation domain was underpinned by Professor Andrzej Tomaszewski, who distinguished a cultural property which is “apolitical and non-ideological; it covers all goods produced by the human talent, having an objective historical and artistic

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3 ibidem, Vol. 1, p. 146.
value” and cultural heritage, which is “not everything in the artistic and cultural inheritance left by past generations, but only those objects which contemporary society is willing to accept as their own”. The latter thesis was supported with a suggestive examples of buildings in the North West of Poland, originating in German culture and Lemko Orthodox churches in the South East of the country. These buildings are of unquestionable objective historical and artistic values to be considered as monuments, but people who settled in these regions after World War II, for decades had not been identifying with them, which in consequence led to their degradation and – in some cases – destruction.

The debate about monuments and their role in the society is rooted in the shift which has occurred since the 1970s. It was then, when on the wave of general changes taking place in the Western culture, the inseparable connection between the monuments and local communities was being emphasized. Their protection was linked to the identity based on tradition, understood as a vehicle of social values, which existed in the consciousness as long as they had current importance for a society.

Some of the ideas represented by contemporary scholars go even further. According to them, the heritage is not an object itself, but it is a message directed to the audience. The same object may be a vehicle for various messages. What is more, people can perceive them at different levels matching their own knowledge and a cultural background. As a consequence, a heritage status may change along with the views of citizens. Thus, the essence of heritage is a process of communication. According to this concept, a personal experience is more important than a historical object itself. In other words, the authenticity of the monuments depends on their state of preservation, while heritage authenticity relies on the users sensations. In this perspective, the term “heritage” embraces everything chosen by the contemporaries from the past, created by themselves for present use or transmission to posterity. Therefore, heritage related activities should be focused not on consolidating the past, but on the implementation of various objectives such as economic, political and social issues that are associated with the present, not the past. In the light of the above, heritage is classified as a process rather than a form or type of resource, and should not be treated in physical terms only since this would narrow its importance and potential.

These, often somewhat provocatively formulated views, cannot be interpreted as a simple replacement of one method with another. There should be no competition or contradiction between the concept of the historic monument and heritage. The aim ought to be to combine concepts and attitudes instead of “antagonizing” them as it was forced by some of the above-cited authors. In fact, these ideas should

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be seen as complementary. While preservation focuses on the transfer of knowledge about the past through the least transformed objects, a heritage management focuses on meeting the needs of a society in terms of quality and perception of historically shaped cultural environment. On the one hand, maintenance loses its raison d’être if it does not meet with a social interest. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine a heritage management in the absence of well-preserved historic buildings. Authenticity of a well preserved Italian town offers its visitors an authentic experience. It is, therefore, possible to obtain a synergistic effect when protection (focused on the past and object) and management (focused on future and experience) will become components of a new coherent and comprehensive approach to cultural heritage.

In this perspective, it is worth to recall the statement of Zbigniew Kobyliński that cultural heritage “is entrusted wealth, which has to be skilfully managed for the public benefit”\(^7\), while according to Jacek Purchla “heritage is not just the sum of preserved historic buildings in a given area. It is the symbolic layer, related to the interpretation of heritage as sacrum, but also a market product”\(^8\).

Moreover, the notion that cultural heritage belongs to people, implies the need to ensure their access to heritage. The consequence of such an approach is the necessity to ensure the socially useful function of monuments and their economic use, which indicates growing importance of modernization and adaptation. As a result, heritage is a product of modern times, formed by contemporary needs and useful in modern societies. It is an outcome of social interpretations of the past and the present, and – as was previously highlighted – is the basis for the projection into the future. Our heritage will also be a testament to our relation to it.

**Broadening the scope: Industrial Heritage**

The evolution of the heritage protection concept continued in the past 50 years in parallel with the evolution of views on the protection subject itself. In the 19\(^{th}\) century conservators focused on individual objects, trying to stop the process of change resulting from the passage of time, the impact of natural phenomena, as well as modernization processes. During this period, the scope of protection was narrow, focusing on works of art and rare objects from the distant past, beautiful in the ordinary sense of the word or closely related to important historical events. Therefore, the idea of considering the 19\(^{th}\) century industrial buildings as parts of the heritage seems to be relatively new.

The above-mentioned debate about monuments and their role in the society brought also discussion on protecting other types of buildings from more recent past. Britain was the first European country where industrial archaeology grew rapidly. This took place in the 1960s with the formation of local societies organised


\(^8\) Purchla J. *Dziedzictwo a transformacja*, Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2005, p. 22.
by interested and enthusiastic individuals. What is more, the UK and the USA were the first countries, where professional studies of processes characteristic at areas of declining industries had been initiated. In the 1970s also other European countries were becoming more conscious of its industrial heritage. In the 1980s there was a wave of enthusiasm for industrial archaeology in Europe. Industrial buildings have been the subject of outstanding regeneration schemes throughout Europe since then.

However, even today the remains of our industrial past are not everyone’s idea of heritage. According to Brett, “heritage is part of a process of self-definition through historicised self-presentation”9. This probably also explains, at least partially, the general indifference towards the industrial past. What is more, the artistic quality ceased to be the only reason for conservation, yet there is still a tendency to favour aesthetic justification. The emotional and cultural values that normally help to create a consensus in favour of conservation can sometimes work in the opposite direction. Thus, while cathedrals, great country houses, or even elegant tenement houses are well-appreciated parts of heritage, factories may still be seen as symbols of the exploitation of both workers and environment. What is more, many still feel that they are best done away with and converted into green-field sites. The demolition of such structures is still often seen as the simplest way of making a break with the “bad old days”10.

In the light of the above, it appears that the key to success is the local community attitude towards all aspects of heritage – how much it is appreciated and how it is used throughout the local development process. The experience of many European cities indicates that restoration is possible only when the local community is at certain level of cultural awareness, rising above basic consumer needs.

Considering the evolution of the perception of the legacy of the past and its importance for the present generations, there must also be emphasized that the assumption saying that only these objects are being protected nowadays which are important for a contemporary society, brings a number of serious threats. In this context, one must recall the situation from the 1960s and 1970s, when the 19th-century buildings were widely regarded as worthless. They were neither listed and designated for protection by decision-makers, or considered by a society as their heritage. This condition created potential opportunities for new investments, which actually occurred on a large scale. The effects – usually negating traditional spatial solutions – can be observed in many European cities, for example Glasgow and Łódź11. At present, these interventions shall be deemed a mistake and irreversible loss of historical substance. Simplification and unification of urban spaces and architectural forms may be compared with a mass culture, which is addressed to

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a mass audience and is characterized by a high degree of standardization. Moreover, it is believed that mass culture is characterized by a low value, lack of originality, anti-intellectualism, strong commercialization, and the mindset to satisfy the simplest needs. As a result, pandering to low tastes of the general public leads to a reduction in the quality of culture, and to the hegemony of mediocrity\(^{12}\).

However, in the contrary to heritage, a culture can be reborn. Historical objects – as the non-renewable goods – are under threat since they might easily be irretrievably lost as a result of transformations, corresponding to trivialized demand for heritage or as a result of a total lack of acceptance. To conclude, a heritage management must take into account the above issues and cultural policy of the public sector should aim at a situation where monuments become a source of satisfaction and harmony but not a conflict.

**The post-industrial regeneration in Łódź**

Łódź, already mentioned above, is a good example illustrating the shift which has occurred in heritage protection. The city developed in the 19th century as an important textile production centre. Like many other places of industrial origin, Łódź has had a bold image. The problem raised, when local community was replaced with new inhabitants during the post-war times. As a result most residents had no established links with the city. Until the 1970s old industrial buildings were regarded merely as useful structures. Since then, some of them have been protected and still continued to serve production purposes. With the collapse of communist system, a deep economical crisis badly affected Łódź. The textile production came to an end rapidly. The need for protecting industrial heritage became urgent but not obvious. Most of people who had lost their jobs and had no roots it the city, considered this legacy as a burden – not as an asset.

The Western European cases as well as the first attempts in Łódź reveal that old industrial buildings are not simply interesting survivals of past times but, on the contrary, with no loss can serve as usable, functional and modern buildings. It is a great shift in the heritage perception observed, because if the building is ‘used’ instead of merely ‘looked at’, one gets a deeper appreciation of old architecture by being ‘in’ it, in intimate, daily contact. On the one hand, the inner city area of Łódź is characterised by poor quality housing. On the other hand, former industrial premises occupy some 20 per cent of the Łódź city centre. Due to the urban, central location many mills in Łódź can offer a good accommodation for culture, entertainment, gastronomy, leisure, shopping, education, personal direct services, indirect customer services (e.g. head offices), housing. The above mentioned new uses may play a role of attractive options in solving local community problems.

There are, however, two faces of post-industrial regeneration in Łódź. First, old factories, which once laid foundations for the city growth, and later symbolised its decline are being brought to life. These buildings, yesterday useless

and derelict, today play an important role in a revival of Łódź. The process is, however, extremely chaotic. There is little public control and the initiative remains with the private developers. Regeneration is, therefore, driven by their particular interests, not necessarily in line with public needs. This may be exemplified by fast growing upmarket housing, mostly addressed to foreign clients – not to a local community (Fig. 1). Heritage, in this respect, is just an attractive scenery used for purely commercial purposes. Mills are often reduced to the shells with entirely new structures inside. The conservation is reduced to a necessary minimum allowing marketing and branding of the project.

In case of the Gampe and Albrecht factory complex this reduction has been applied even further. The preservation was limited to playing with an idea of industrial heritage and its image.

**The case of “Sukcesja” in Łódź**

The company was established in 1878 by two master weavers Juliusz Albrecht and Józef Gampe. At the beginning, a factory developed at Piotrkowska Street. The layout of a plot – its narrowness and considerable depth, typical for this part of the city was, however, one of the most important obstacles limiting the company development. Therefore, a new cotton mill was built on a site situated

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at the city outskirts at the junction of Pańska (Żeromskiego) and Nowo-Radwańska (Rembielińskiego) streets (Fig. 2). The factory started operating in 1894. The building was three storeys high with two towers serving as staircases with water tanks on the top. There were nearly 20,000 spindles and over 500 power looms installed. The mill was equipped with six steam engines with a total capacity of 1115HP. The company was flourishing and the building was being enlarged in a short period of time – in 1898 and 1911.

When the founders ceased in 1907 and 1912, their successors transformed the business into a joint-stock company. The well-established position of the factory was reflected by four warehouses in Petersburg, Moscow, Odessa and Rostow. The factory survived difficult time of the World War I and a subsequent economical depression. The business was in a good condition, though the loss of access to the Russian market slowed down its development.

After the World War II, in the new political circumstances, the company was under a compulsory state control and subsequently nationalised. It was joint with other textile factories as the Cotton Industry Combine No. 6, which was given a name after Stanislaw Kunicki – a Polish workers activist and revolutionary of the late 19th century.

In the post-communist times the company was privatised. Industrial buildings served as wholesale warehouses and were used for other temporary purposes. Finally, the mill was demolished in September 2008. Soon afterwards the owners announced their plans to build a new shopping mall.

The economical and social contexts were, however, changing quickly. The “Manufaktura” – a commercial and leisure centre, appeared to be more than a successful regeneration project – one of the largest of this kind in Europe. What is more, it caused the change in attitude towards the local industrial heritage among the inhabitants of Łódź.

Fig. 2. The Gampe and Albrecht mill in its heyday.

Source: The company letterhead from the turn of 19th and 20th century.
It is not a surprise then, that the concept was followed by other developers. A number of other industrial premises was proposed to be converted in a similar manner. The re-use of textile mills has quickly become a Nation-wide recognisable specialty of Łódź. It does not mean, however, that there are only good examples to be proud of.

In the case of former Gampe and Albrecht mill the lack of actual building appeared not to be a problematic to call the new project a “post-industrial renewal”. The heritage conservation rhetoric was used for purely commercial purposes. The planned shopping centre was branded as “Sukcesja” (Inheritance). In a conjunction with the new name a calculating PR has helped to create a new, alternative image of the place. The new investment on a cleared site has been envisaged as transmitting local tradition14.

The outcomes of the “Sukcesja” may become confusing (Fig. 3) both in architectural and conceptual terms.

A massive block of a new commercial and entertainment centre occupies the whole plot, unlike the old factory building location. Facades are composed of stylistically different architectural motives making the overall impression of the eclectic mishmash. The most striking parts are fake industrial front elevation, a huge and dull side wall and a pseudo-parametric decoration. All in all, the building is a weird compilation of trendy motives and styles.

The problem, however, is much more severe. Since the project received the European union funding the general public may derive a false lesson that this is the proper way of revitalising and protecting the image of post-industrial city. What is more, not only passers-by but also citizens who are not familiar with the history of the place may interpret the front façade pretending the 19th century brick industrial style as true remains of the old factory. Due to other examples – good and spectacular examples of revitalisation in Łódź, where the term “revitalisation” was not abused, some may be even convinced of the similarity of “Sukcesja” case and may perceive the building as historically valuable since they have been already used to see post-industrial regeneration projects in Łódź in this way.

**Conclusions**

A narration based on the place and city past, with the absence of a historical building, becomes only a marketing using the fact that inhabitants of Łódź appreciated local industrial heritage. To strengthen the effect, a dominant part of the front façade has been given architectural forms typical for industrial buildings of the late 19th century (Fig. 4). They were, however, treated only as an ornament in public space – not as a reconstruction, since the original structure was situated elsewhere and had other dimensions.

One of the consequences of the rapid economic transformation in Poland is a dramatic social change. Generally, well-educated people lost their opinion-forming authority, and even more, cannot
afford a participative role in culture while many of the *nouveaux riches* have a very primitive and basic system of needs oriented towards material consumption of goods. These facts, together, dramatically changed the structure of the potential demand and expenditures for culture and arts\textsuperscript{15}.

Some degree of cultural consciousness at both national and local level is, however, crucial in the process of heritage protection and urban regeneration. The case of “Sukcesja” indicates that commercialisation of heritage may be hazardous. In fact, it is an ample example of fabricated, fake post-industrial image – addressed to the naïve taste of the general public and basing on the authenticity of sensations offered by other preserved factories. As such, it becomes a caricature of the new approach to the issue of cultural heritage. Moreover, it is particularly dangerous – since it badly affects the idea of contemporary heritage conservation.

Fortunately, a few statements have been published in the Internet indicating that not all residents of Łódź are satisfied with the “epidermal” preservation of industrial past proposed by the “Sukcesja” owners:

This is the facade as a reminder to wipe the tears after the 19th-century factory […] demolished without batting an eye? Is this what has been given the 8 million EU grant for “revitalization”? It would make a cat laugh\textsuperscript{16}.

The project, described widely in this paper, has revealed unintentionally the risks of unavoidable commercialisation of built heritage. It also proves that demolition of local industrial heritage may be transformed into cynical business strategy. A positive image of the investment has been created with superficial reference to the memory of an authentic textile factory, and in a broader sense – to the post-industrial image of the city. In the light of the above, the Author concludes with the question about the limits of heritage transformations and their justification by misleading wordplays typical for contemporary PR.
