NEW IMAGE OF POST-FACTORY BUILDINGS IN LODZ IN KOPERNIKA STREET

Krystyna Strumillo

Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning, Lodz University of Technology, Lodz, Poland

Introduction

Space, regardless of what perspective we view it from, creates an environment for mankind to inhabit. This space is constantly changing under the influence of people and their behaviour that is visible in economic and social activity forms. Łódź is a particular example of such changes resulting from the efforts to redevelop abandoned factories. The present appearance of the city is connected with the possibility of preserving and transforming many historical, post-industrial estates.

As a 19th-century city, Łódź was created mostly for industrial purposes, but it is also a peculiar sensation among cities of this kind, because the industrial part is not clearly separated from the residential part. As a result, we now have a mosaic of factories, manufacturers’ villas and tenement houses. All these types of buildings create a unified urban fabric that constitutes the character and the beauty of the city. As in Europe, today’s use of factory buildings is related to the change of the functions they play.

An important issue for the factory buildings is to maintain their historical character and values. To keep their industrial heritage, rather than changed, these buildings should be preserved. Keeping these buildings alive plays an important role, as this shall be considered valuable and vital to the cultural identity and the image of the city.

Historical context

Łódź is not so old a city. The first mention of the modest settlement named Łodka dates back to 1332, and 91 years later, in 1423, under the privilege of King Władysław Jagniątto a Wroclaw-based Bishop Jan Pella received incorporation charter for the city of Łódź. Despite having the status of the city, until the end of 18th century the buildings in the city had no urban character. The beginnings

\[1\] The authors (Kusiński J., Bonisławski R., Janik M.) of Księga Fabryk Łodzi (The Book of Łódź Factories) have listed nearly two hundred buildings destined for production.
of large-industry Łódź are connected with the development of Kalisz-Mazowieckie industrial zone, as this is when the great manufactories in Łódź were constructed.

Kopernika Street was constructed around 1873 as a secondary, peripheral road leading from the center of Łódź to the town forest. Initially, it was named Milsza (Milscha) Street (Route) after industrialist Theodore Milscha, who built a brewery and his villa nearby. In 1923, to celebrate the 450th anniversary of Nicolaus Copernicus’ birth, the street received its present name. In 1900, a tram line was constructed along the street and then, both, the street and the line were extended to a newly created Łódź Kaliska railway station. This prompted the development of the street as well as the parcelling of surrounding areas into building plots. The development of Kopernika Street was as rapid as the development of the city at that time. And so, at the very beginning of the street, at the intersection with Wolczanska Street, Ernest Wever’s industrial complex was built. The factory produced haberdashery. There were also several other factories located in Kopernika Street like Frederick Alba’s mechanical weaving mill, and after 1920 also a weaving mill of silk goods, Aron Kreutzberg’s haberdashery factory, as well as Stanislaw Jaroszynski’s engine manufacturing plant “Elektrobudowa”, Karol Kretschmer’s wool and cotton products factory, and Otto Wever and Emil Reul’s carded wool spinning mill (Fig. 1).

Examples of revitalization

In recent years, there have been several significant revitalizations in Łódź, including the discussed area. The revitalizations conducted concern not only the buildings themselves, but also their surrounding areas.
The attention is drawn to objects that after transformation gained new features and regained their importance. These buildings not only represent a new architectural quality and signal a new era for post-industrial areas, but also they create a new image of Kopernika Street. One of the most successful revitalizations is Karol Kretschmer's wool and cotton products factory located at 62 Kopernika Street. This large plot includes a complex of post-industrial buildings. It is worth mentioning that before World War II the main gateway into the factory was crowned with an emblem, and Kopernika Street had a line of trees, thanks to which it could become a green alley.

The main building from Kopernika street side has been transformed into “Tobacco Hotel” (Fig. 2) with interior decoration based on the fifties, whereas the remaining post-industrial buildings have been converted into lofts. Since 1925 the building housed a cigarette factory that belonged to Public Tobacco Monopoly, the name of which refers to the name of the hotel (Tobacco Hotel) and the residential complex (Tobacco Park). In the post-industrial interiors of the main building, there are 115 3-star rooms.

The remaining areas, designed to be lofts, are characterized by red-brick walls – typical for factories in Łódź – that are complemented by modern architecture.

The architectural design has taken into account the need to preserve the characteristic features of the factory, such as a red bricks in the facade, but it also introduced new walls plastered in white, with transparent railings that fit in well with the existing walls. The last floor stands out with grey cladding panels (Fig. 3). As Danowski points out², there are basically two methods of restoring industrial facilities in Łódź. The first one is called “puristic” and it entails that a building is cleaned of all unnecessary imports in order to restore its original form, but with some acceptable changes (i.e. internal divisions) introduced, as the need for these might result from a change in the function of the building. This method is applied to the most valuable buildings or to those where the investor wants to conduct a faithful reconstruction in order the highlight the prestigious or historical character of the building.

The second method is the method of “active adaptation”, where the most valuable elements of the architecture are highlighted, but the dimensions of the building itself are enlarged by a construction that does not overwhelm the building (e.g. made of glass).

It is worth noting that in recent years (2013-2014) Kopernika Street was renovated. The street looks different than it used to. First of all, it has been narrowed to the width of 7 m, which allowed to increase the pavement area. The tram and bus stops have been elevated and, there, the street is 6.5 meters wide. The surface, track and traction poles have been replaced. The street has been equipped with elements such as stylized roofs and light fittings (Fig. 4). This helped to enrich the image of the street, and the section of Włókniarzy Avenue near the Tobaco hotel is the most representative part of it. Thanks to revitalization, this place has gained in prestige and significance. Unfortunately, this applies solely to a certain section of the street. When we walk towards the Eastern direction, we come across abandoned

Fig. 2. Transformation of the former Karol Kretschmer’s factory (1930, also before and after revitalization)
Source: http://refotografie.blogspot.com

Fig. 3. Architecture at the intersection of the new and the old. A residential building – lofts
Source: photo by author.
and neglected areas. These include even Aron Kreutzberg’s haberdashery factory and Stanislaw Jaroszyński’s engine manufacturing plant “Elektrobudowa”, which are located at 56 and 58 Kopernika Street – but also several other buildings. This is a stark contrast when we combine it with the aforementioned adapted spaces, and for an average person it may be a surprise.

Another example of revitalization of a former factory is Otto Wever and Emil Reul’s carded wool spinning mill at 38 Kopernika Street. It was built in 1894 and it employed 55 workers. During the II World War occupiers organized a resettlement camp for the residents of the city inside the factory. Currently, Medical Clinic Magnus is located there (Fig. 5). The adaptation of the building took place with full respect for the historical structures.

The post-factory building, which housed a mechanical cloth weaving mill, a spinning mill and Frederick Abel’s finish at 55a Kopernika Street, has also been restored and adapted to new functions. The factory operated since 1890 and it employed 367 workers. In 1920 Mozes Lipszyc opened a silk weaving mill in the building. During the occupation, from 1940 to 1944 to be precise, the factory was used as a resettlement camp for Poles. After the war, the building became the property of the University of Łódź. Currently, Prophylaxis and Rehabilitation Centre “Creator” is located there (Fig. 6).
In the vicinity of the Medical Clinic Magnus building (mentioned above) at 36 Kopernika Street in Łódź, there is a former residence of an industrialist Emil Wicke (Fig. 7), which is included in the modernization plan under the program “Mia100 kamienic” (“The city of 100 tenement houses”).
At the same address there was his factory producing rubber bands. In 2011, a part of this historic factory was demolished (the remaining part of the building needs revitalization) (Fig. 8). A new building was built and it alludes to the old architecture. Nevertheless, the original establishment was not retained. Currently, in the former factory there are offices and sewing rooms. The newly created space is designed for retail and offices.

In recent years, Ernst Wever’s villa has undergone revitalization (Fig. 9). Wever was the owner of the former lace, ribbons and tapes factory (located on the corner of Kopernika Street and Wólczańska Avenue). The villa is located at...
5 Kopernika Street. It should be noted that Ernest Wever’s villa was built around 1900, in the immediate vicinity of the factory, and Wever was its owner until 1925. This is a one-storey eclectic building equipped with windows of different shapes, one of which is closed with a full arch, and has a wreath in the decoration of the lintel. An interesting element of it is a dormer surrounded with a circle of plants placed at the top the building. The building survived the II World War and in the years 1951-1994 it served as the premises of “Lenora” industrial plants. In 2003 it was purchased by the “W. Lewandowski” company.

Following adaptation, both the interior and the exterior of the villa look delightful. The interior is characterized by a proper selection and fine tune of the smallest details, and the building itself (together with its eclectic style and its surrounding) is well-suited to the industrial character of Łódź. It is worth noting that the current owner has conducted a careful revitalization of the building, restoring its prewar character and taking care of every detail. These efforts have been appreciated, because this office building was awarded first place in the national competition “Modernization of the Year 2004” (category “Residential Buildings”) and third place in the competition held by Piotrkowska Street Foundation under the patronage of the Mayor of Łódź (in the category “Interiors building the identity of Łódź”)3.

Unfortunately, the old factory located by this villa is still abandoned. Currently, only the ground floor is used. The factory was built in 1882 in the modernist style with elements of Gothic architecture. The building was expanded in 1900. Both

buildings, designed by two different architects (Edward Creutzburg and, most probably, Fryderyk Miksa), were merged with a tower. In 1930, after the death of the owner, the building was taken over by one of the directors, who established there the “E. Wever, tenant Gustav Patberg and Company”. After the war, Zjednoczone Fabryki Tasiem i Wstążek Patberg i Triebe (plant producing ribbons) and Państwowe Zakłady Przemysłu Pasmanteryjnego Łódź-Południe (a heberdashery plant) had their premises there. By the end of the twentieth century, the building belonged to the “Lenora” company (again, a heberdashery plant). Now the building is privately owned and the new investor was supposed to change the factory halls into offices. It is a shame that is has not happened yet. As Hollier⁴ rightfully points out, the things we build shape the identity of our cities, but any piece of architecture lies in the hands of the designer for a brief period in relation to the time it lies in the hands of its owners and users.

The identity of our built environment is surely influenced by the objects we place in it, but that identity is also built by the way users handle those objects over time.

The importance of transformation

The architecture of Łódź entails the city’s cultural values and its role seems to be clear – to channel proper ideas that are very important for recipients. The revitalizations, which are meant to respect the existing structure, at the same time relate to the presence. Their aim is to enrich the city. Peter Zumthor who writes about architecture points out that construction works in the modern cultural landscape often do not have their own value and are not related to the landscape⁵. That is why objects that have merged with the landscape through good relations with surroundings seem to be so valuable.

Nowadays, old factories that were once the main driving force of industrial Łódź no longer serve their original purpose. The buildings have been transformed to provide different functions but they still symbolise the old city – the city of factories (built of red brick) and chimneys, the city with an interesting architecture and a rich history. These objects remind us of the glory of Łódź and the potential that can still be used. As Bataille points out, “Architecture is the expression of every society’s very being”⁶.

It should be noted that revitalizations protect the value of the space in conjunction with the historical and cultural record. Revitalizations create a new image of the spaces and influence their quality. Łódź needs such “new” sites, considering the fact that the scale of the issue is significant. There are a lot more factories that are waiting to be redeveloped. The city can gain spaces that will live their own lives. Kopernika Street was conducted on the sidelines and developed quite

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late in relation to other streets in Łódź, but because of its history and its distinctive elements it has played a significant part in building the identity of our city.

The examples of successful revitalization of factory buildings (in the opinion of the author) discussed in this article through positive connotations play an important role in the perception of the city and have an impact on the image of urban spaces. It is worth adding that further comprehensive revitalization of Kopernika Street may be crucial to obtaining genius loci.

Conclusions

The adaptations of old factory buildings at Kopernika Street described above serve as a positive example of the processes of revitalizations. They also serve as proofs of the city’s potential and are a testament to its cultural heritage. The vast majority of buildings retained their original character, and new buildings fit in well with the existing ones. They have been brought back to life with changes in their function, as they have been transformed into office spaces, residential spaces – lofts, hotels, healthcare facilities, etc. Buildings gain new features, new life, and a new image. They also shape a new image of the street and the city.

The revitalizations discussed show how much change is needed to improve the quality of post-industrial areas. Despite the passage of times and transformation, the city still needs concrete action to improve the environment and its aesthetics. Kopernika Street is but a small part of the city, which has, both, attractive places and places that reveal the existing contrasts. What is needed is to achieve consistency by conductive successive adaptations of factory buildings (former Aron Kreutzberg and Stanisław Jaroszyński’s factory and the old factory of Ernest Wever) and the adjacent residential tenement houses.

In a broader perspective, there are many areas in Łódź which are in a critical condition – and which require revitalization. The scale of the challenge signals the need for, both, action points and a broad perspective on the direction of the revitalization of the entire city. This process might not only affect the image of the city, but it also has the potential to improve the social and economic conditions of its inhabitants.