Introduction

The study is an attempt to analyse the influence of urban voids on a low level of public awareness of Lodz nineteenth century heritage, which has little cognizance even among the residents of the city. Apparently, the problem lies in post war clichés and in the present bad opinion of the neglected city. Semiotic research apparatus\(^1\) is used to describe and explain communication difficulties in recognising the architectural heritage (sign) by the inhabitants (interpreter).

Lodz urban heritage – 19th century multicultural industrial cityscape

Recently, some chosen parts of Lodz, representing 19th century multicultural industrial cityscape, have been awarded the title of the Monument of History appreciating its national heritage.\(^2\) On the other hand, the surveys conducted for the City Hall show that the citizens do not identify themselves with the city and they have a negative attitude towards Lodz. In consequence, they do not feel responsible not only for their heritage but also for their urban space.\(^3\)

The negative approach seems to be a consequence of 45 years lasting communistic policy and propaganda. Additionally, for fifty years, from 1939 to 1989, there was no investment in public housing\(^4\), no renovation or technical modernisation. Before the war Lodz was designed in accordance with the 19\(^{th}\) century European architectural standards of a big city. Private investors made it a well-formed industrial city with numerous cherished parks, beautifully ornamented tenement houses and residential palaces. Although it was not ruined during the war, the communists managed to convince the newcomers that Lodz has nothing to offer since it is a grey, polluted city with many factory chimneys\(^5\).

\(^3\) Lodz City Council Resolution no LV/1146/13 – appendix: \textit{Strategia przestrzennego Rozwoju Łodzi 2020+}, p. 3.
\(^4\) After the nationalisation private tenement houses functioned as cheap, overexploited, communal houses.
\(^5\) Lodz City Council Resolution, op. cit., p. 38.
being the most characteristic feature of the cityscape. Capitalism was condemned and so was its cultural heritage. Such a process of negation and deterioration of the past achievements is described by practitioners of cultural studies: “Space is not only the current message, but the lasting memory of society. [...] One of the forms of struggle in the sphere of culture, i.e. in the space of a symbolic nature, is a mandatory request of forgetting certain spatial elements and forms”.

Twenty four years after the collapse of textile industry Polish visitors and students who come to Lodz have in mind the stereotype of the neglected city without any heritage worth seeing. During the transition period Lodz has lost 120 000 inhabitants and is the only big city in Poland suffering from depopulation.

The conducted analysis tries to find an answer to the question why the inhabitants can see all the ugly elements in the streets and are not able to notice the previous beauty of the city, its streetscapes, magnificent textile industry complexes, and residences.

On the basis of my teaching experience it is assumed that the students and new residents coming from small towns and villages do not understand their urban surrounding, because they do not know the language in which it has been “written”. They do not understand modular organisation, street patterns, materials and tools for design. The task then is to provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills used for making meanings.

**Streetscape as a message**

*Architectural approach to the cityscape*

The field of architecture was defined two thousand years ago by Marcus Vitruvius’ Triad of Architecture i.e.: *firmitas* (durability), *utilitas* (usefulness) and *venustas* (beauty). This Triad can be extended to the art of building cities in three corresponding categories: form, function and quality.

The classical architectural approach to the city is visually oriented. Since majority of our cognition comes from the sense of sight, therefore the landscape – a visual image of the city – is dominant in architectural consideration. Other sensory scapes of the city: soundscape, smellscape, touchscape, tastescape are deliberately omitted in the study.

The domain of architectural design are buildings and building complexes. As for the urban design, it is assumed that, the basic unit and the smallest object is the urban interior – e.g. a square, an alley, a street. Consequently, the landscape of the city is treated in this study as an assemblage of streetscapes.

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The streetscape is constituted by all visual elements of a street and is defined as the open space bounded by walls of adjoining buildings, by its flooring i.e. roads, sidewalks, lawns and finally, by its ceiling, i.e. a visible part of the sky. The interior of the open space may be equipped with various street objects, e.g. street furniture, trees, ads. All forms that constitute the street character are public good. In other word, public realm contains all outdoor places and built form elements visually accessible from the street regardless of the ownership. As a result, the streetscape is created by many authors.

**Reading the cityscape**

Recently, the cityscape, has been treated as a cultural text that can be recognised and “read”. This approach is based on the assumption that language is the semiotic model revealing principles that can be applied to other sign systems. Reading the city is like reading a palimpsest\(^\text{10}\). Each generation imposes another layer of text on a scraped place. The city becomes a message informing not only about form and function of the material objects, but also about factors determining them, specifically: time, phenomena, forces. In other words, it is possible to “read” about past and present processes such as industrialisation, deterioration, depopulation, social and economic development etc. Thus, the metaphor of the palimpsest combines in the description of the city current and historical contexts of its development.

To “read the city” we have to assume that the cityscape is a formal system of conventional architectural signs. Additionally, we can distinguish three readable subsystems of urban space (streetscape) namely: space physiognomy, architectural costume and information vesture of the city.

**Space physiognomy** is designed of surfaces, openings, lines, points. It is an urban composition built with elements such as facade walls, fences, street furniture, flooring, trees, etc.\(^\text{11}\), which define space character. It may be, for instance metropolitan, provincial, suburban, or rural.

**Architectural costume** consists of layout and detailed shape of solids, tectonics and elements of its façade, architectural style, colours, materials, and technical condition. Through these components architectural form transmits its purpose and function, symbols and archetypes, hierarchies and prestige\(^\text{12}\).

The term **information vesture of the city** is used to cover formal administrative and road markings, informal and non-formal captions and images. Name plaques, signs, pylons, showcases, maps, advertising poles, storefronts, billboards, graffiti, and many others constitute information vesture. Their function is to notify and to regulate.

These three subsystems precisely define Lodz cityscape as metropolitan, multicultural, industrial in the past, and presently post-industrial.

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Community oriented urban researchers suggest that an additional subsystem of “reading” the city is its life\textsuperscript{13}. Elements such as crowd, movement, interactions, strollers and other urban figures, their fashion and vehicles – do not meet the Vitruvian principles of durability. Thus, this category goes beyond classical architectural approach and it will not be developed in this study.

**Semiotic approach to the cityscape**

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), an American philosopher and logician used a term, “semiosis” to refer to the process of making meaning through the formation of signs and symbols. For Peirce, the process of semiosis had three indispensable elements: the sign, which stood for an object; the object that the sign stood for; and the interpretant, understood as the cognitive connection between the sign and its object\textsuperscript{14}.

His follower, Charles W. Morris claimed that symbols have three types of relations: syntactic relation sign–sign, semantic sign–and the object it refers to, pragmatic sign–and the interpreter. Hence, semiotic analyses are conducted in three branches, namely Syntactics, Semantics, and Pragmatics\textsuperscript{15}.

It can be assumed that cityscape is a complex, multilayer system of physical signs by means of which people communicate and interact with their environment. Consequently, from architectural point of view syntactics is the branch of semiotics that concerns itself with the relationship between signs as they co-exist and interact within a formal structure, such as a language or a city. Thus, it is presumed that urban syntactics deals with a coherent sequence of signs of the build environment and describes the pattern of the street and relations between the elements of a given pattern. Semantics associates a building and its function by adopting Ludwig Wittgenstein’s definition that “the meaning of a word is its use”\textsuperscript{16}. Therefore, a revitalised factory building may have two meanings: past cotton mill and present hotel. Pragmatics deals with the relation between the build environment and its user. Architects and urban planners design information in a format allowing the users to decode it, so that a spatial continuum becomes obvious. This relation can be rewritten as sender/designer → sign → receiver/interpreter. To avoid misunderstanding and difficulties in defining the concept of sign the term “semantic entity” proposed by S. Ossowski may be applied in this analysis. By “semantic entities” Ossowski means “material objects which have a semantic function: denoting, representing, or meaning. Each of these functions may be an attribute of an object only with respect to someone’s intention”\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{13} Gehl, Jan op.cit., p. 198.
\textsuperscript{15} ibidem, p. 318.
\textsuperscript{17} Ossowski, Stanisław. „An analysis of the concept of sign”, in: Pelc, Jerzy (ed.), *Semiotics in Poland*. Warszawa, PWN, 1979, p. 164.
Cityscape pragmatics

The ability to read the cityscape as a “written text” is associated with the notion of **semiosis**, i.e. the process of signification. An identical understanding of symbols by a social group is called **monosemy**. An opposite concept is **polysemy**, i.e. a variety of diverse understanding of symbols by different social groups. “An example is the reverse «reading» and understanding of anthropogenic and natural space by the inhabitants of towns and villages. For the previous ones a town is full of meanings and senses, as opposed to semantically empty forest. For the latter a forest is full of meanings and in a semantically empty city «there is nothing»”\(^{18}\).

To understand the surveys conducted for the City Council, the analysis should focus on the streetscape. It seems that Lodz inhabitants do not identify themselves with the city due to numerous urban voids in the build environment even in the very centre of the city. They are areas converted into uninhabited, insecure, unproductive, ugly places, unchanged for the decades. Two groups of residents can by distinguished. The first group consist of individuals being the \(n\)-generation of the city residents, for whom the technical functionality, social and cultural quality of the city and its heritage is of great significance. However, they seemed to be frustrated by the frequent ugly urban voids in the streetscape. The second group are the newcomers from small towns and villages, for whom the cityscape is not homely and sometimes it is even hostile. Therefore, in their opinion, tenement houses are hovels to be demolished.

Wasteland typology

Landscape architects enumerate greenfields waiting for urbanization, brownfields and greyfields vacant to reurbanisation, and roofs in properly built-up areas as the wastelands. Roofs located above eye-level, invisible from street level do not constitute the streetscape. The greenfield in the depopulating city, like Lodz, should be protected against destructive development mainly by peri-urban agriculture. The subject of this study, however, is the built environment. The quest for “reading” the cultural heritage should be focused on gaps in urban fabric, belonging to the city but lacking the physical and mental content, called **urban voids**.

Reading the urban void

“The voids of the city are spaces which disrupt the urban tissue, leaving it incomplete and throw into question the use of those spaces. Sometimes called urban ruins, they are at the limit between private and public space, without belonging either to the one or to the other”\(^{19}\).

Typical causes of urban voids are as follows: **phenomenological** (wars, acts of terrorism, natural disasters), **functional** (change of use, abandonment, de-industrialization), **geographic** (physical obstacles in the land forms and land

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Some urban planners add to the list faulty planning voids which are the results of design errors, or defective planning process. I would add to this category abandoned construction sites, unfinished projects, undervalued, without idea for investment nor maintenance financing.

If we assume that a streetscape in a city landscape is an equivalent of a sentence in a language, urban voids – interior islands without activity – are like missing words in a sentence or utterance. For instance, sentence [1] may be interpreted as [2] or [3].

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

1. *John is ea... (cough) to please.*
2. *John is eager to please.*
3. *John is easy to please.*

Superficially, it seems that the hearer does not know the meaning of [1], but he/she knows the structure of it. Nevertheless, it is only the first impression because his/her linguistic competence assigns two different syntactic descriptions to [2] and [3]. Their internalised grammar tells them that [2] is active but [3] is passive, its structure is much more complicated and it is rewritten as *It is easy for X to please John.*

Thus, a strange, ugly place in the structure that should be organised, i.e. the disrupted urban continuum along the street cannot be decoded. An interpreter has trouble in finding a proper element fitting the gap, and in imaging space physiognomy and/or architectural costume. The gap itself, i.e. an urban void, is interpreted as a sign of a decay, deterioration, and abandonment. Pragmatic relation, which in case of streetscape should be evoking positive aesthetic feelings (Vitruvius’ *venustas*) is disturbed and the evoked feelings are negative.

**Restoring readable articulation of the streetscape.**

**The limits of long term development and necessity of interim landscaping**

**Lodz revitalisation project and its limits**

Local administration strategy for a further urban development assumes that Lodz should grow according to the rules of sustainable development i.e. within the city to achieve a compact city structure and to restore the balance between the centre and the peripheries belt located in the present city proper.


23 City council resolution, p. 6.

24 City council resolution, p. 14.57% of Lodz population lives in the historical urban centre and the contemporary urban centre, which constitutes only 1/5 of the city proper area.
middle – contemporary urban centre within the ring of city railway, and outer-
peripheral urban area. An organised inner zone restoration is planned for the next
EU perspective and is supposed to prevent further decay of the 19th century urban
fabric. It seems, however, that Lodz has too few investors and little money to
restore its heritage completely and to build quickly all the necessary infill which is
promoted as an economical use of existing infrastructure and a successful remedy
for urban sprawl.

Re-urbanization, and revitalization is proposed only for the downtown in the
northern part of the city centre. Unfortunately, it is not enough to solve a problem
of underinvestment and numerous voids since the project will not be able to cover
all the needs.

**Legal basis for temporary land use and interim landscape**

The study proposes interim streetscapes and temporary land use to solve the
problem of underinvestment, urban voids, a lack of identification with the city
resulting in depopulation and inability to attract newcomers.

According to the Polish Construction Law and Planning Law three main types
of temporary landscaping can be distinguish. Firstly, temporary fences, construction
works and buildings. Temporary construction is defined as intended for use in
a shorter period then its technical lifetime. Secondly, the temporary land use, defined
by zoning which specify the manner and timing of interim land use other than target
one. Thirdly, continuation of existing land use where the zoning changes the type
of use. Nevertheless, the area can be used in a previous way until the implementation
of the target land use or till the technological downfall. Other two types of temporary
landscaping can be distinguish, namely, the abandoned land waiting for investment
and also abandoned, started in the past, and unfinished projects.

Temporary fences and construction buildings are getting to look better but the
last two types of vacant land are not controlled and the most harmful for the quality
of the cityscape. Therefore, investment in cheap, quickly achievable green infill for
urban voids to improve the streetscape, seems to be inevitable, if the City Council
wants to change the damaging stereotype.

The pictures [Fig. 1-3] may serve as a precise illustration of numerous urban
voids suitable for temporary renovation by means of provisional urban infill e.g.
any type of urban horticulture. It would be enough to grow any kind of green cover
for walls or/and fences to arrange in public open empty space tiny vegetable or
flower gardens and mini playgrounds for the children. May be on a smaller scale
than in Lodz, but the problem of urban voids pertains to many European cities.
Recently, a kind of residents movement to do something with disused plots of land
is visible. In my opinion, the best example of good practices in temporary land use
is Glasgow Stalled Spaces Programme25. It gets the whole community involved in
generating new urban uses for temporarily vacant plots of land, the number of which
has increased due to the economic crisis. Filling the gap Stalled Spaces encourages

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community groups to identify plots of land in their neighbourhood which could be temporarily turned to new urban uses. The city supports the community groups in ‘borrowing’ the plots from the landowners and creating projects ranging from children’s play areas to communal gardens.

**Conclusions**

To sum up, it seems that many European cities, like Lodz still struggle with economic decline, lack of investment, surplus of post – industrial vacant land, and depopulating neighbourhood. The presented proposals of redevelopment alternatives i.e. green infill for urban voids seem to be an interesting solution ready to apply in different contexts, so that the urban continuum and national heritage become readable and, in consequence, appreciated. Other types of interim landscape are also needed to make the urban voids invisible and the cityscape attractive.
Fig. 3. Lodz, 250th Piotrkowska str. Termination of functions for economic reasons. Post-industrial urban void being a part of the Monument of History.

Fig. 4. Lodz, Fabryczna 12 and 17. Termination of functions for economic reasons. The urban void adjacent to the Źródliska Park and Księży Młyn estate, which are significant parts of the Monument of History. Two former cotton warehouses standing gate to gate, one adapted for the new function and other still vacant
*Source: Wiktor Wróblewski, 2004 (top), 2014 (bottom).*