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ICONIC ARCHITECTURE AND ITS CONTEXT – CHANGE OF CONSTANT IMAGE. NEW DIMENSION OF THE BATTERSEA POWER STATION IN LONDON

IKONA ARCHITEKTURY I JEJ KONTEKST – ZMIANA UTRWALONEGO OBRAZU. NOWY WYMIAR ELEKTROWNI BATTERSEA W LONDYNIE

Abstract

The Battersea Power Station is object that over time has become an icon of culture and architecture. For long time, constant image, set in tradition and in unchanged spatial context, which is background for various artistic undertakings, is currently undergoing a difficult spatial metamorphosis. The transformation of this area is associated with many unsuccessful attempts of new urban development. The assessment in favour or disadvantage of the current form of the transformation concerns a very enigmatic, difficult to grasp aspect of shaping space – *genius loci*. The above example illustrates well issues of: memory, constitution of tradition, and on the other hand aspects related to change, intentionally meaning progress.

The article presents a biography of the area and reference to contemporary cultural concepts concerning heritage and architecture and new concepts of shaping urban areas.

Keywords: architectural heritage, urban redevelopment, transformation of urban area, regeneration

Streszczenie

Elektrownia Battersea jest obiektem, który z czasem stał się ikoną kultury, architektury. Utrwalony obraz, osadzony do pewnego momentu w niezmiennym kontekście przestrzennym, będący wielokrotnie tłem dla różnych przedsięwzięć artystycznych, przechodzi aktualnie trudną metamorfozę. Przekształcenie tegoż obszaru wiąże się z wieloma, nieudanymi próbami nowego zagospodarowania. Rozstrzygnięcie na korzyść lub na niekorzyść obecnej formy przekształcenia obszaru dotyczy bardzo enigmatycznego, trudnego do uchwycenia aspektu kształtowania przestrzeni – *genius loci*. Powyższy przykład dobrze obrazuje zagadnienia: pamięci, konstytuowania się tradycji, a z drugiej strony aspekty związane ze zmianą, intencjonalnie oznaczającą postęp.

W artykule przedstawiono biografię obszaru i odniesienie do współczesnych koncepcji kulturowych dotyczących dziedzictwa i architektury oraz nowych koncepcji kształtowania obszarów miejskich.

Słowa kluczowe: dziedzictwo architektury, przekształcenie obszaru urbanistycznego, transformacja obszaru miejskiego, rewitalizacja

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1. INTRODUCTION

Architecture can be part of cultural heritage. Then it gains an additional commemorative value. In this context, it is based on an established, constant image – it is closer to tradition than to modernity. When its context changes, its genius loci changes also. It is very easy to lose what it was. This was the fate of the Battersea Power Station in London. The present, new life is a testimony of something else, a completely different and new story.

2. SHORT LIVE OF THE POWER STATION

Battersea Power Station, exactly its external part, was designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott[2] in 1930, the author of yet other power plant, Bankside Power Station, where currently, after modernization is located Tate Modern Gallery – grandson of the author of the famous London St. Pancras Station – George Gilbert Scott. Sir Giles Scott was asked to join the design work when social protests against the ugliness of the planned architectural form appeared[3]. He made the power station as a strong, expressive and to some extent majestic object. Therefore, the concept did not only apply a functional approach, but the form became important for the riverside landscape of London[4]. This architecture is rooted in the tradition of British brick construction, in this case without of excess ornaments, as if next to the then-developing modernist movement, for which steel and glass became the leading materials. It is close to sacral form, monumentalism, scale, axiality, etc., which refers to earlier architect's realizations – e.g. the new Liverpool Anglican Cathedral. The power station was commonly called 'the temple of power'. The structure is steel, reinforced concrete roof, Crittall windows with black steel frames.

Although the power station architecture is currently being analyzed in the context of place and time, Sir Scott claimed: 'I believe in a middle line in architecture. I hold no brief either for the diehard traditionalist or the extreme modernist. It seems idle to me to compare styles and say that one is better than the other'[5]. When general recognition was attributed to Scott, he wrote in a letter to The Times: 'The general public only see the exterior and consequently the interior and its wonderful engineering, with its terrifying machinery, hardly gets the notice it deserves'[6].

In the years 1929–35, the first stage of construction was in progress – block A was built, which included a hall of steam turbines and two chimneys. The rest (block B) was built after the Second World War. The start took place in the years 1937–41, and completion was in

[2] Architectural cooperation of CS Allott & Son Engineers: James Theodore Halliday (Halliday and Agate) and Giles Gilberst Scott. Cooperation in power station engineering: Sir Standen Leonard Pearce – chief engineer at the London Power Company.

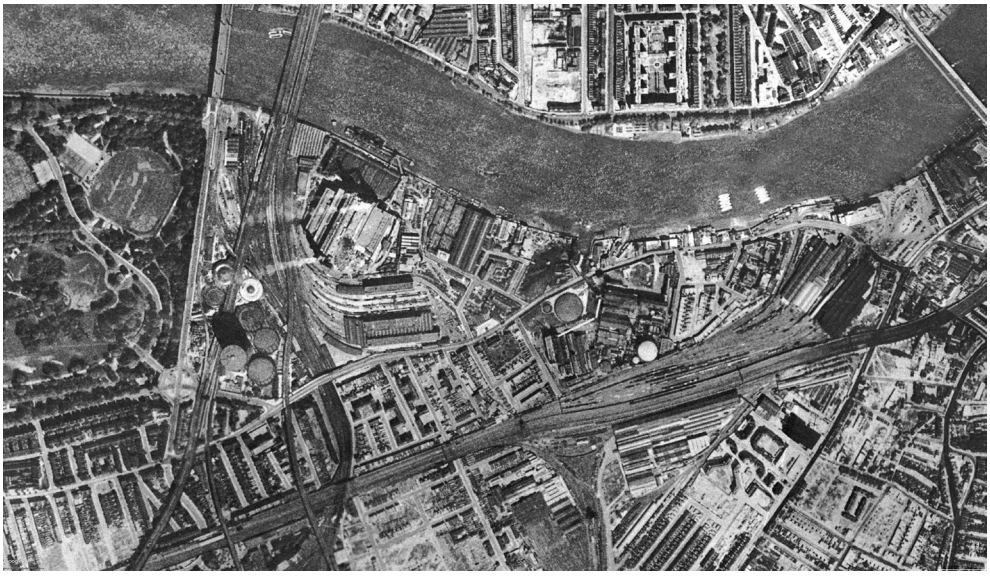
[3] Darlington J., *The rise, fall, and rise of Battersea Power Station*, Apollo Magazine, 9.11.2016, https://www.apollo-magazine.com/rise-fall-rise-battersea-power-station/ (access: 20.06.2019).

[4] The lump of power station was already defined in the James Theodore Halliday concept before Scott joined to the team.

[5] Sir Giles Scott spoke these words in his inaugural address during the opening of the Bankside Power Station. Stamp G., *Giles Gilbert Scott and Bankside Power Station* [in:] R. Moore, R. Ryan (eds.), *Building Tate Modern: Herzog & De Meuron transforming Giles Gilbert Scott*, Tate Gallery, London 2000, p. 179.

[6] Battersea Power Station, Architecturally London, http://architecturally.london/buildings/battersea-power-station (access. 20.06.2019).

1955[7] (Ill. 1). The end of the A block operation occurred in 1975, and the total decommission in 1983. Before the closing of the power station, in 1980, was given Grade II listed status, which prevented the then-first attempt to sell it. The status was upgraded to Grade II* in 2007[8].



Ill. 1. Industrial type of development in 1945. Source: GoogleEarth 2019

The operation of the power station in its original function did not last long, an equally long period was unused, but it was composed in the city landscape, its riverside panorama and cultural life, especially in the mass 'pop' edition. Images of a characteristic brick building with four reinforced concrete chimney towers (101 m) have been used many times as a background for film actions. The album cover 'Animals' by Pink Floyd from 1977 is also widely known, where Battersea and a pumped, big, pink pig play the main role. Perhaps if it were not for this fact, the cultural experience that the building of the power plant made possible, this place would have long disappeared from the surface. As Deyan Sudjic writes: 'The album turned a piece of industrial archaeology – with a spectacular Art Deco interior – into a popular landmark'[9]. The famous power station in 2014, as part of the investment promotion, became the venue for the spectacular concert of Sir Elton John. Undoubtedly, he has a *genius loci*. These various references of the object in a massive dimension created its symbolic meaning, which later influenced further development.

Many proposals for a new development of the area around the power station and attempts to give it meaning were always in the center of interest of the people of London. Among them is also radical suggestion of Sir Terry Farrel from 2012[10], to leave the object as a ruin or previous idea for the construction of the Chelsea stadium for over 60,000 spectators.

[7] Based on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. *Historic England. Battersea Power Station*, https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1357620 (access: 20.06.2019).

[8] This category means special objects of special importance.

[9] Sudjic D., *The Language of Things*, Penguin, London 2009, p. 156.

[10] Terry Farrell presented proposal of leaving the power sttaion and arrange the surroundings as a city park. Later, it would be created housing program.

These plans show dreams, aspirations, different motivations and sometimes failures with huge sums in the background. For this reason, the investment was sometimes described as 'poisoned chalice'[11]. After more than 30 years, the power station became a marketing sign, losing its original role – the ability to tell stories. Surrounded by new, fancy forms, it has become one of the elements of contemporary spatial policy – or rather 'playing in the city'. This is another proof of the commercialization of heritage. Peter Watts points out that the power plant in this sense does not offer London in addition to expensive new homes, exclusive stores and offices[12]. But on the other hand, nothing happens without a reason. This is the result of a combination of many circumstances that the history of the object captures after 1983.

3. BATTERSEA POWER STATION DEVELOPMENT COMPETITION 1983

For economic reasons, just before entering the power station on the heritage list, a complete demolition and sale of about 15 acres surrounding the power station was considered. The entry on the Grade Listed Buildings, prepared by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, saved the object, and imposed restrictions in the form of the need to thoroughly check the possibility of land development. Architectural competition gave such opportunities. The Electricity Board announced it in The Times in October 1983 describing goal as 're-use and rehabilitation of Battersea Power Station'. At the same time, it was another attempt to reduce the maintenance costs of the facility. The £ 100,000 prize was funded by Taylor Woodrow Construction Ltd. – a real estate tycoon[13]. The competition had interesting idea – in addition to the project companies, experts were invited in parallel, by organizing a special expert panel chaired by Sir Hugh Casson. From this section emerged the idea of a theme park whose main subject could be the British industry. Among 7 submitted works there were also ideas to transform the place into: waste incineration plant (seriously considered), sports complex, theater, shopping center, shops and apartments[14].

Social participation was very important at that time[15]. After the closure of the power station, many people lost their jobs. Inclusion of citizens seemed to be justified, but the proposed method turned out to be marginal. Only small part of the competition was devoted to studies for schools and organizations.

The main competition was won by corporation of Sir David Roche associated with Alton Towers owned by John Broome, who quickly took control of the investment. Then there

[11] Kollewe J., *Battersea Power Station pushes another developer into administration*, Guardian 12.12.2011, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/dec/12/battersea-power-station-administration (access: 21.07.2018).

[12] Watts P., *Up in Smoke. The Failed Dreams of Battersea Power Station*, Paradise Road, London 2016.

[13] *Battersea Power Station Development Competition* [advertisement], The Times 19.10.1983.

[14] Sim N., *Tales from the Towers: The Unofficial Story Behind Alton Towers, Britain's Most Popular Theme Park*, Theme Park Tourist, 2014.

[15] In 1983, a group of citizens united around the issue of the power station as Battersea Power Station Community Group and in 2002 became a non-profit company Battersea Power Station Company, whose aim is to actively engage in the development of the power station.

was a change in the way of development, assuming activities going in the direction of the theme park[16]. The inspiration was Walt Disney World's Epcot, which was opened in USA. It was assumed that a contribution of 35 million pounds and 2 million visitors per year would suffice to make the investment profitable[17]. Such a direction was supported by the city council, especially because employment was promised for about 4,000 people. In 1985, the consortium was transformed into Battersea Leisure. The Wandsworth Council granted a building permit. In 1987, Broome became the owner of the facility for 1.5 million pounds. The investment cost has increased many times – it was calculated at 230 million pounds. The reason was detection of large amounts of asbestos and sulfur in brick. This resulted in stopping of carrying out of the theme park idea. In the meantime, the area surrounding the power plant was completely cleaned, and the roof of the power plant was removed, which had a disastrous effect on the facility and made it difficult to maintain the technical condition of the building (Ill. 2).

Ill. 2. Power station plot after activity of John Broome (1999). Source: GoogleEarth 2019

In 1990, the idea of 'London's Tivoli gardens'[18] was withdrawn and commercial functions were proposed (by architects RHWL): approximately 140,000 sq m of office space, a hotel for 1000 people, stores with a retail area of over 9,000 sq m. The project was granted a building permit to be financed partly from the sale of shares in Alton Towers[19]. This form of development of the power station met with the protest of organizations related to the place and heritage – including English Heritage.

[16] Sim N., *op. cit.*

[17] *History of Battersea Power Station*, http://www.batterseapowerstation.org.uk/hist.html (access: 20.06.2019).

[18] It was description of John Broome in one of interview.

[19] Sim N., *op. cit.*

4. AFTER DECADE – PARKVIEW INTERNATIONAL CONCEPT

In 1993, after a contribution of over 10 million pounds, the controlling and investment package (power station building and 36 acres of land around) was taken over by Hwang Familly, a Hong Kong-based development company Parkview International. Investment decision was determined by iconic character of the building and personal childhood memory of Victor Hwang[20].

In this time the first concept came out of the Grimshaw Architects office and assumed the creating of a huge complex of entertainment, recreational and sports facilities, as well as shopping centers and restaurants. During this time, Warner Bros. was negotiating the creating of a cinema complex with at least 16 screens for 8,000 spectators, which could have become a competitior for London Millennium Dome – designed by Richard Rogers. The power station has become background for such film productions as Superman, Monty Python's Flying Circus and Ian McKellan's Richard III.

In 2005, a permit was filed for the land development of a 36-acre site around the power station, which was to be multi-functional. The urban plan was prepared by Cecil Balmond (head of the Arup company), and the main architect was Sir Nicolas Grimshaw from Eden Center in Cornwall. According to these plans, the power station was to be reconstructed into a place associated with art and exhibitions. Complement to the main function was to be a spectacular roof hotel designed by Ron Arad[21].

The area was supposed to be car-free thanks to underground car parks for 2,700 cars. Additionally, it was promised to connect the power station with the modernized Battersea Park railway station. Around the power station building, offices, hotels and apartments were planned, which, as it was explained, were supposed to reduce wind power[22]. Due to technical reasons, it was planned to demolish the chimney towers. Thus, the place identity and heritage potential were not important. Investors were looking new forms. The owner of the company – Victor Hwang – bought the Serpentine Gallery pavilion designed by Toyo Ito and Cecil Balmond – it was supposed to signal new changes. The construction of a footbridge connecting the area with the Pimlico metro station was planned to increase access. It was assumed that the plans could be implemented until the Olympic Games in London in 2012.

In 2005, the issue of the technical condition of chimney towers became the subject of public dispute. The investor, even English Heritage and London Borough claimed that due to the corrosion of reinforcement they should be dismantled and rebuilt. This also obtained formal permission. Local and heritage organizations have commissioned separate expert reports that have proven that they can be repaired.

5. PERIOD OF REAL ESTATE OPPORTUNITIES

A year later, in 2006, land with the power station building were purchased by the Irish Real Estate Opportunities (REO) company for around 400 million pounds, headed by Richard Barrett and Johnny Ronan and controlled by Treasury Holdings, specializing in urban area regen-

[20] *Regenerating Battersea*, The Telegraph 10.09.2000, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/comment/4464770/Regenerating-Battersea.html (access: 20.06.2019).
[21] Glancey J., *The power and glory*, Guardian, 11.07.2005, p. 14.
[22] *Ibidem.*

eration. The previous plans were rejected and a new project was presented by Rafael Viñoly. The main element of the new urban layout was a tall, 'eco-tower' skyscraper competing with the power station, which aroused protests and criticism of the city authorities. Boris Johnson called this proposal 'inverted toilet-roll holder'. In the marketing strategy this proposal was described as 'eco-chimney'. One of the London investors, Dan Steward, suspected that the proposal to build a 300-meter tower was just a marketing strategy to get the media interested. In the next version of the plan, such forms of high-rise buildings were no longer used.

Proposals from that period included several strategic actions. First of all, it became clear that the area should have better transport connections. For this purpose, metro Northern Line extension from Kennington to Nine Elms and Battersea (about 2 additional miles – over 30 km), was planned for implementation by 2020[23].

In the concept, the power station would act as a generator of energy coming from biomass. Water vapor would be discharged through regenerated chimneys. The turbine hall would be intended for commercial purposes and the boiler room without a roof for the park.

In the eastern part of area, it was proposed to build eco-dome with offices, which originally was to have a 300-meter tower. Its shape has been redesigned for a few lower towers that would absorb cool air, and reduce energy consumption by 67%[24]. This program was a supplement to residential buildings with 3,200 apartments for 7,000 people.

Public exhibition presenting the proposals was opened in June 2008. About 1,400 people visited it. The draft plan in 2008 was put to the vote as part of the consultation. 66% of respondents (3,700 people) agreed to the changes, 81% supported the general plan, and 87% accepted the extension of the metro line[25]. In 2010, the development plan was granted planning permission by Wandsworth Council.

6. 'ICONIC LIVING'

'Iconic living' term advertising the investment in Internet best illustrates marketing narrative of the development of the Battersea Power Station. Iconic living – is a kind of expression referring to fixed images, memory, respect and binding the potential user of the apartment with promise of communing with this history in everyday life.

New version of the next vision of the power station and its surroundings begins in 2012 and is connected with the investment leading by a Malaysian capital developer – SP Setia and Sime Darby, which solved problems of existing debts, purchased power station (500 million pounds), as well as ensured payment of 100 million pounds to expand the Northern Underground Line. Since 1983, the cost of investment has systematically and dynamically increased.

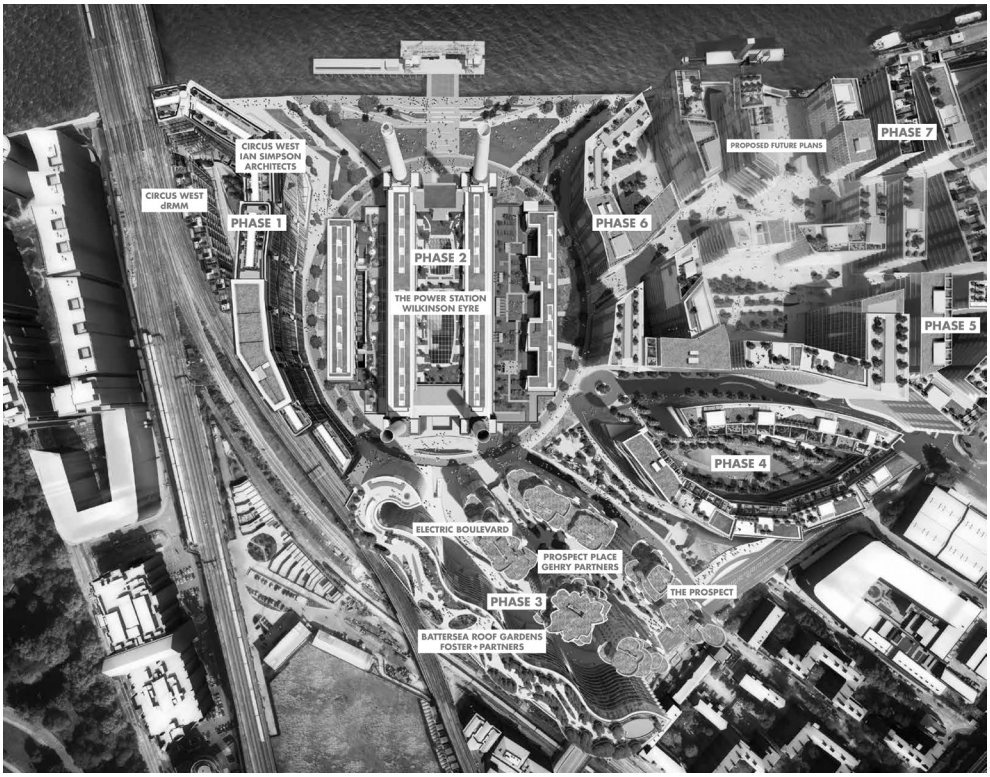
It was decided that further spatial development of 40 acres of land would take place on the basis of the existing urban plan proposed by Rafael Viñoly (Ill. 3). The plans involved a mixed

[23] Transport for London. Northern line extension, WWW, https://tfl.gov.uk/travel-information/improvements-and-projects/northern-line-extension (access: 21.07.2018).

[24] Fairs M., *Battersea Power Station redevelopment by Rafael Viñoly Architects*, Dezeen, 22.07.2008, https://www.dezeen.com/2008/06/22/battersea-power-station-redevelopment-by-rafael-vinoly-architects/ (access: 21.07.2018).

[25] *Notes on the Battersea Power Station Community Forum Meeting held on 7th October, 2008 at Battersea Power Station, Kirling Street, London SW8.* Jeremy Castle, Planning Director responsible for planning issues, community relations and consultation process (Treasury Holdings Ltd), London 2008.

commercial and housing program, power station renewal, the creation of a park in the coastal area, connection of Battersea Park with the power station area, creating a street connecting the metro station with the area, which would improve access. The whole investment was divided into 6 implementation stages.



Ill. 3. Battersea Power Station. The guiding principle of the development. Masterplan by Rafael Viñioly. Source: Battersea Power Station Development Company, www.batterseapowerstation.co.uk, access: 28.06.2019

Since 2013, the WilkinsonEyre office is involved in the conservation and modernization of the power station. The main task is to exposing the key values for the object – showing its scale and the characteristic chimneys and the appropriate presenting of the power station from surrounding places. In the center was proposed a great atrium, unveiling of the turbine hall, creation of a viewpoint. On area of 180,000 m^2, there will be commercial program – shops, restaurants, cafes, a small hotel and offices. 6 floors of the central Boiler House was rented by Apple to consolidate the London's dispersed offices in whole city. The intention of the authors is the Battersea Power Station to be a space that respects history prepared for new urban events[26]. Completion is planned for 2020.

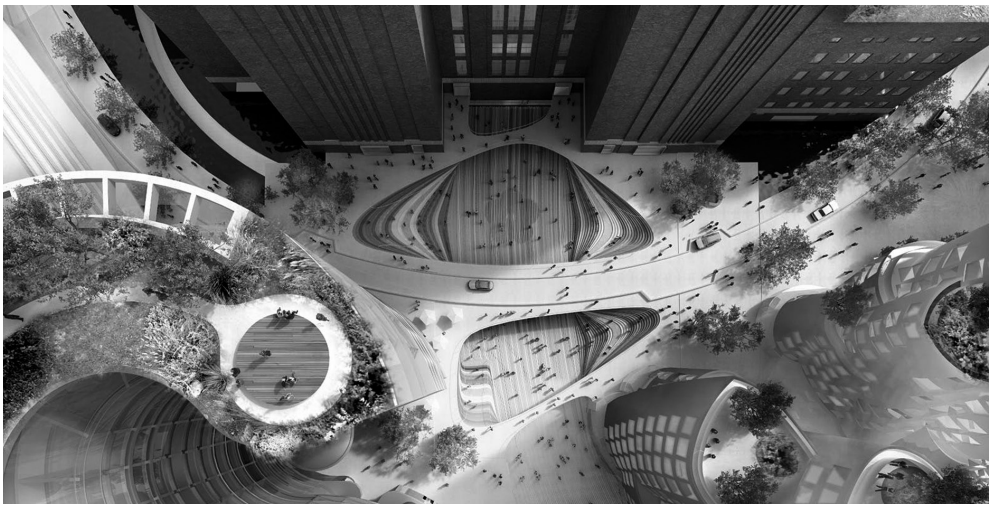
[26] *WilkinsonEyre. Battersea Power Station,* PDF, http://www.wilkinsoneyre.com/assets/pdf/00939_Battersea-Power-Station.pdf (access: 22.07.2018).

The first stage of works, the western part of the area – named Circus West – contains 2 buildings RS1-A and RS-2. Both, the first designed by SimpsonHaugh (formerly Ian Simpson Architects) and the second by de Rijke Marsh Morgan (dRMM) are residential buildings with 853 apartments, with complementary functions: theater, creative space (35,000 m^2), sports space recreational (16,000 m^2), services and retail. The building on the side of the power station (RS1-A) is a mirror ribbon that somehow entwine the power station, reflecting different images – the London skyline, the power plant building and shows the neighborhood that is just being created. Massive elevation surfaces compete with the power station itself.

The third stage includes the building in the entrance zone into the area on the southern side – it is kind of gate and place where this new narrative begins. The new Electric Boulevard with buildings on both sides is planned to create the axis of the system. Western part, according to the Ghery Partners project, is named Prospect Place. It is residential buildings (over 600 apartments), two-level commercial and service spaces, park and a social center). In the center is located the accent which will be a characteristic building in form of flower. The other side, according to the Foster + Partners design – The Skyline project, will accommodate a similar number of apartments (including more than 100 affordable apartments), a medical center, a hotel with 160 rooms, two-level service and commercial spaces and a green roof that allows admire the power station building, panorama of the northern bank of River Thames and its surroundings.

Next, the construction of the building designed by Patel Tayor Architects was planned based on the prize-winning competition from 2014. As part of this area, 386 apartments will be created, which refer to the classic British living habitation; the NHS medical center and 10,000 m2 for the so-called start-ups. The inner courtyard will be a space binding residents of the designed buildings, but it is also connected with the whole layout.

In 2014, Battersea Power Station Development Company (BPSDC) organized competition, in which the aim was to design a square in front of a power station reflecting the richness and diversity of Malaysian culture. The first prize went to the Bjarke Ingels Group office for the work presenting the Malaysian square (Ill. 4).



Ill. 4. Malaysia Square by BIG – competition work. Source: Bjarke Ingels Group 2019

The presented urban design assumes creation of a square being the center of the place and shaping of space that will refer to the landscape of Malaysia – especially Malaysia topography as an element of identity. Inspired by caves in the Gunung Mulu National Park (UNESCO) in Sarawak – in eastern part of the country. This reference should also be readable by means of materials used to build the surface: limestone, marble, granite. In the center the place is to be accented by a hibiscus-shaped fountain – *bunga raya* national flower of Malaysia – placed in the coat of arms, and the five petals reflect the Five Principles of Nationhood.

It perfectly reflects the fact that cultural space does not necessarily belong to the geographical place where the given culture occurs. There are more and more "transfers" of cultures to other places. The competition results were presented in Kuala Lumpur with the department of the Prime Minister of Malaysia – Dato 'Sri Mohd Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak and the then mayor of London – Boris Johnson.

The head of Battersea Project Holding Company Ltd – Tan Sri Liew Kee Sin – said at the time: 'The innovative and thoughtful concepts underlying the creation of Malaysia Square honours the heritage and shared history of two nations to form a vibrant and exciting public space for residents and visitors to meet, mingle and shape the future together. It is the shareholders' fondest wish that this will become an enduring landmark which celebrates the best of global East-West collaborations whilst giving every Malaysian who visits this spot in Central London a true sense of belonging and reminder of home'[27].

Ill. 5. Battersea Power Station development in 2018. Photo by A. Jozwik 2018

[27] *Nine Elms. On the South Bank. Design unveiled for Malaysia Square at Battersea Power Station*, https://nineelmslondon.com/news/design-unveiled-for-malaysia-square-at-battersea-power-station (access: 22.07.2018).

Originally, as part of the housing program under a contract with the city authorities in 2011, 636 apartments were to be affordable homes[28]. In 2017, the investor reduced their number to 386, referring to "technical issues" and investment costs, which in 2011, according to the investor, were lower and different value of the British pound. Unfortunately, this is a standard scenario, while implementing areas with luxurious buildings. "Iconic living" is not for everyone. The first tranche of commercial apartments was sold out in only 4 days, due to the lack of housing on the market and investing in residential real estate. In this way, the architectural heritage that should be accessible is subject of gentrification process.

7. SUMMARY

The surroundings of the Battersea Power Station form part of a district that also includes the Vauxhall and Nine Elms areas, which are undergoing intense urban redevelopment. For many decades, the southern bank of London was held in disrepute or simply fulfilled market and commodity and warehouse / warehouse functions. Improved transport connections and the decision to move the US embassy from Grosvenor Square and the construction of a new headquarters in this area has raised the importance of the place. Halfway between the Chealsea bridge and the Vauxhall Bridge, Rogers Stirk Harbor & Partners have completed the luxurious Riverlight Quay housing complex, consisting of 6 smaller buildings perpendicular to the River Thames.

Analyzing the case of Battersea Power Station redevelopment in the aspect of tradition and modernity, the conclusion is that architectural heritage can be potential, and the subject of creative temptations, but very often becomes a difficult to process element in the scale of the place (Ill. 5).

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[2] Darlington J., *The rise, fall, and rise of Battersea Power Station*, Apollo Magazine, 9.11.2016, https://www.apollo-magazine.com/rise-fall-rise-battersea-power-station/ (access: 20.06.2019).

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[4] Glancey J., *The power and glory*, Guardian 11.07.2005, p. 14.

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[28] Currently, according to the housing policy in London, approximately 40% of housing should have 'affordable home' status.

[8] *Nine Elms. On the South Bank. Design unveiled for Malaysia Square at Battersea Power Station*, https://nineelmslondon.com/news/design-unveiled-for-malaysia-square-at-battersea-power-station (access: 22.07.2018).
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