

ARCHITECTURE BEYOND TIME

ARCHITEKTURA POZA CZASEM

Abstract

In the course passing time, facilities which no longer serve any useful purpose lose their visibility in the urban landscape. Their form is no longer sensed. If used again, if minimally changed, they stand a chance of revival. Can such activities be called art? To some extent, they can. To the extent grasping the potential of an inert structure and allocating new meaning to it can be called art. Thus, architecture can exist beyond the past time.

Based on the examples of some of the revitalised locations, which, for various reasons, have ceased to perform their basic functions, this article shows how such facilities can be reused for educational activities on unusual artistic achievements accomplished through the increase of social awareness and popularisation of the role of a given place, its context, history, heritage, culture and ecology.

Keywords: right to the city, urban activism, place, to-social space, education, the art of using limited resources

Streszczenie

Obiekty, których znaczenie zamiera, z czasem stają się niewidzialne. Forma przestaje być doświadczana. Wykorzystywana po raz kolejny, minimalnie zmieniana – odradza się. Czy działanie takie można nazwać sztuką? W pewnym sensie tak. W takim, w jakim sztuką jest dostrzeżenie potencjału tkwiącego w uspionej strukturze i nadanie jej nowego znaczenia. Architektura może więc istnieć poza przeszłością.

W artykule, na przykładach działań przywracających do życia obiekty, które z różnych przyczyn nie mogą pełnić swojej podstawowej funkcji, przedstawiono możliwość wykorzystania ich dla działań związanych z edukacją odnoszącą się do sztuki nieoczywistej, tworzoną w ramach działań upowszechniających świadomość i znaczenie miejsca, kontekstu, historii, dziedzictwa, kultury, ekologii.

Słowa kluczowe: prawo do miasta, aktywizm miejski, miejsce, przestrzeń społeczna, edukacja, szuka korzystanie z ograniczonych zasobów

1. INTRODUCTION

Any activity not related with the presently widespread commercialisation goes beyond the aspired and accepted rules of market economy, which assume that any activity is supposed to generate maximum income at the lowest consumption of resources and energy. With the financial aspect in mind, we tend to think that we benefit from using the resources that are quickly and easily available, and thus, cheap. Global ecological costs are most often disregarded. As a result, we keep using newer and newer sources, irrespectively of

¹ Ph.D. Arch. Agnieszka Janowska, Division of Public Architecture and Housing, the Institute of Architecture, Urbanism and Heritage Protection, Faculty of Architecture, Poznan University of Technology, agnieszka.janowska@put.poznan.pl; ORCID 0000-0001-8762-9810

how high the indirect costs may be e.g. transportation of materials or services to the actual place of their usage. We appreciate the time efficiency which directly translates into quick earnings.

For years the ecologists have been warning us against the adverse effects of such policies which entail degradation of natural environment, bringing us closer and closer to a natural disaster. They have, furthermore, been stressing the need to reduce the use of the newer and newer sources, underlining the importance of renewable resources and the use of limited resources in our daily practice.

Due to the above referred to short-sighted policy, we are facing a global climate change as well as an ecological and socio-economic crisis. Overproduction and the artificially boosted consumption as a result thereof lead to gentrification due to the increased social disproportions and disastrous climate changes – just to name a few of the consequences of thoughtless market economy.

We can find out similarities to the above-mentioned adverse economic phenomena and their effects analysing the condition of urban structures and the relationships between their parts.

Dynamically developing cities are becoming more and more complex structures. Among the adverse effects of their increased modernisation and prosperity, we can name the phenomenon called *sprawl*, or in other words uncoordinated growth of urban structures on undeveloped land near a city or into what used to be countryside resulting from newer and newer investments. Urban sprawl is a common phenomenon in the majority of the developed countries. *The city has sprawled over the walls of common life (...) without any difficult to comprehend limitations*².

Lack of reasonable policy at the planning stage and later at the stage of urban structure management directly translates into deprivation of further and further quarters of the streets in the city centres and public, semi-public and private spaces that accompany them of their functions. In the lapse of time they continue to degrade and eventually become invisible. Whoever contributes to the aforementioned state of affairs, seems to accept it despite the fact that historical parts of the city offer a high spatial, compositional, functional and infrastructural potential³.

Activities undertaken by the municipal authorities to revitalise historical buildings do not meet the requirements of sustainable development. There are too many of them and they are often too spectacular or expressive and propagated through expensive marketing campaigns. In real life they actually fail to offer friendly public space/ attractive *places* for the users. Such a situation stems from imposing solutions and ideas that excessively stress the importance of the image the public space creates deemed as the business card of the decision makers, whereas little attention is paid to the form that is to be a user friendly *place*.

Monoculture is one of the reasons why new or revitalised urban spaces are of low attractiveness or are only apparently attractive. One family or multi-family buildings as well as office and commercial building districts are rarely accompanied with attractive and user-friendly public and semi-public space, whereas revitalised historical urban areas in reality fail to

² Staniszkis M. *Przedmieście nie*, Autoportret. Pismo o dobrej przestrzeni, 2010, no. 2 [31], pp. 44–49. Quotation translator's own translation.

³ Areas located within the city centres are most often provided with an extensive utilities network and characterised with coherent and legible layout of space, which allows access to main administrative or cultural centres by roads, pedestrian paths, public means of transport or bikes.

account for any options of leisure activities. Such structures will indeed serve their pure functions. Provided only with indispensable circulation paths or visually attractive zones, they will exclusively focus on yield from the lease or sale of respective premises.

Even if the municipal authorities launch participatory budgeting programs to involve the inhabitants in the decision making processes, not all the projects listed therein can be implemented for the reason of limited financial resources⁴. Should not participatory budgeting programs, as tools facilitating the improvement of public space quality and tools realising the *right to the city*⁵ of all the inhabitants without any exceptions, be rather implemented through the process of continuation of spatial changes that will eventually contribute to our common welfare than through competition?⁶

2. URBAN ACTIVISM_PLACE IN AN URBAN STRUCTURE

Such issues as sustainable development, respect for natural as well as man-made environment and people living therein constitute programs of many social and non-profit organisations or NGO-s⁷. Their core activities, in compliance with the *right to the city* principle, among others include popularisation of education in its broad meaning, focusing on the development of awareness of citizenship, financial support and organisation of cultural and artistic events going beyond the mainstream urban life.

As Henri Lefebvre, a sociologist maintains that the *right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life*⁸.

Generating profits is not a priority in the activities undertaken by social organisations. Their main aim is to create *to-social space* where everyone can exercise their *right to urban life*. For financial reasons such places come to life reclaiming abandoned premises, buildings or entire complexes covering areas of entire blocks of streets that already exist in the urban structure⁹. It is, however, clear that such activities are related with the core idea included in the statutes of these organisations to use, if possible or necessary, the limited resources and to reclaim and reuse the existing structures, thus giving them a second life.

⁴ Miessen M., *Koszmar partycypacji*, bęc zmiana, Warszawa 2013.

⁵ The term the *right to the city* refers to the title of the essay of 1967 written by Henri Lefebvre. In his essay the author stresses the importance of alternative urban life which goes on alongside the mainstream events. What is most beneficial here is the fact that primary and secondary urban life trends mutually supplement one another and draw inspiration from one another to make sure that no individual living in the so-organised urban structure feels alienated.

⁶ Harvey D., *Bunt miast. Prawo do miasta i miejska rewolucja*, bęc zmiana, Warszawa 2012, p. 123.

⁷ Main activities of an NGO – a non-government organization – focus on improvement of community life and promotion of citizen participation, unlike activities of private investors, activities of an NGO are non-profit.

⁸ Montgomery Ch., *Miasto szczęśliwe. Jak zmienić nasze życie, zmieniając nasze miasta*, Wysoki Zamek, Kraków 2015, p. 315.

⁹ Charles Jencks wrote that the genesis of adaptation of the already existing structures can be traced back to arbitrary settlement (squatting) after the 2nd World War. The trend developed due to the war destruction of residential units but, to a much larger extent, due to the dynamic growth of the cities attracting rural population to move in. They would then adapt any available, empty buildings to their residential needs.

It must be noted here that despite sometimes arbitrary spatial policy of the local authorities, many revitalisation and adaptation activities initiated by social organisations meet the support of the decision-makers in the area of urban space quality. As an example we can refer to the premises of *Po-Dzielnia*¹⁰ (freeshop adhering to the idea of a givebox) at Głogowska 27 in Poznan, which were acquired from the city within the framework of the competition entitled *Otwarta Strefa Kultury Lazarz* (*Open Cultral Zone Lazarz*). The renovation and refurbishment of the premises were financed with funds raised within a crowdfunding campaign and obtained from sponsors attracted to the givebox idea of *Po-Dzielnia*¹¹.

Premises for running similar or other communal activities may be acquired in a number of different ways. *Kolektyw Kapielisko*, an Association in Poznan, leases a plot of an area of 1300 m² within the premises of Kapielisko Letnie (Summer Bathing Area) in Kasprowicz Park from municipal authorities¹². Similarly, in 2006 ZK/U in Berlin¹³ concluded a 40 year lease for an old train yard situated in Moabit¹⁴ ¹⁵.

The story of how the real estate located in Wedding, a district in Berlin, that formerly belonged to Rotaprint company, was acquired by *ExRotaprint* organisation is much more complex¹⁶ (Ill. 1). In 2004, Daniela Brahm and Les Schliesser, activist artists, developed a strategy of how the real estate can be acquired by artists, firms and NGOs that prior leased the premises in the Rotaprint complex of buildings. The main assumption of the strategy was to acquire a permanent workplace intended for artistic, pro-communal and educational activities. Eventually, ExRotaprint gGmbH, set up by the tenants to¹⁷ negotiate the take-over of the complex, successfully acquired the property in 2007¹⁸.

¹⁰ *Po-Dzielnia*, was set up upon the initiative of *Givebox Poznań*, activists acting in cooperation with *Pro Terra Foundation* which shares the premises with *Po-Dzielnia*. The premises at ul. Głogowska 27 accommodate a cultural and educational centre and a freeshop, *where everything is free* – from the Internet site https://www.facebook.com/pg/podzielnia/about/?ref=page_internal (access: 30.04.2019).

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/pg/podzielnia/about/> (access: 30.04.2019).

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/pg/kolektywkapielisko/about/> (access: 30.03.2019).

¹³ ZK/U: Centre of Art and Urban planning, Siemensstrasse 27, 10551 Berlin. The project was financed by the Senate Department for Culture and Europe in Berlin – from the Internet site <https://www.zku-berlin.org/location/> (access: 02.04.2019).

¹⁴ The real estate area of 15,000 sqm houses an old railway storage building of an area of 2,000 sqm The area around the building was dedicated to a municipal garden open to the general public – from the Internet site <https://www.zku-berlin.org/about/> (access: 02.04.2019).

¹⁵ <https://www.zku-berlin.org/location/> (access: 02.04.2019).

¹⁶ After the bankruptcy of Rotaprint, a German manufacturer of printing machines at the end of the 1980s, the buildings and the land around them, which belonged to the bankrupt, was taken over by the authorities of Berlin and went under the hammer. In 1991 Rotaprint complex and majority of its buildings were enlisted for conservator's protection, the remaining structures were demolished. Part of the area that belonged to Rotaprint was sold to a chain of supermarkets, which decreased the market value of the historical complex.

¹⁷ In the old production halls at Gottschedstrasse 4 i Bornemannstrasse 9–10 many artists set up their studios and small service and production firms as well as social organisations moved in. At the same time the administrative building at Wiesenstrasse 29 was adapted for residential apartments to be rented – from the Internet site <https://www.exrotaprint.de/en/arbeit-kunst-soziales/> (access: 14.03.2018).

¹⁸ Eventually the real estate was bought by two foundations: Stiftung Trias and Stiftung Edith Maryon. Signing the purchase agreement, the foundations concluded a 99 years lease with ExRotaprint gGmbH, which meant the organisation could develop its social projects on continuous basis – the Internet site <https://www.exrotaprint.de/en/die-uebernahme/> (access: 14.03.2018).



II. 1. *ExRotaprint*, Berlin, upcycling of the historic location. Author's photo; a) and b) a social place, using the acquired inactive post-industrial structure, whose form is a characteristic element of the district; c) and d) the previously declining part of the quarter used by small business entities, artists, for educational activities; e) and f) the facilities are rebuilt and adapted depending on the current needs of the community around *ExRotaprint*

The fact that the existing facilities can be used and adapted to new needs clearly demonstrates that buildings that are part of a historical urban layout will never lose their value. New users view them as a framework¹⁹ that can be filled up with new contents, functions and activities.

¹⁹ Such activities refer to the theory of an open form coined by Oskar Hansen or in other words the perceptual background created by an architect to be further managed and interpreted by the user.

The aforementioned examples of upcycling of locations denote one common idea of increasing the awareness on possibilities of giving second life to things that may apparently look useless.

3. URBAN ACTIVISM_IDEA OF USELESS THINGS

Upcycling may concern a variety of scales: starting from larger urban structures or buildings, ending on daily commodities.

The first level of upcycling is demonstrated through the above mentioned acquisition options of locations that the users reckon idle. The next level is realised through smaller scale activities connected with space adaptation. All the above named organisations adapted the acquired facilities with their own means, with own resources and with the assistance of volunteers and with the use of recovered or second-hand building materials, finishing materials or fit-out elements.

Most furniture in *Po-Dzielnia* has been made from recycled wood composites (Ill. 2). The interior was designed by the students of the Faculty of Architecture, Poznan University of Technology. The finishing works were performed by *Po-Dzielnia* initiators, students and project-supporting volunteers²⁰. All other pieces of furniture and part of fit-out are also the recycled items.

The refurbishment of the interior of the present seat of ZK/U and the area around the building followed a similar procedure. New facilities were erected around the adapted storage building based on unusual solutions and materials. Near the entrance zone, a tiny house of an area of 14 m² was designed by Jan Körbes. It is built based on an old grain silo and with the use of other waste materials and so are the majority of the utility systems (Ill. 3). Whereas above the building terrace, in direct vicinity of the municipal garden, the architect envisaged a pavilion intended for small group workshops or lectures. The pavilion itself is suspended on the support structure of the terrace roofing and roof-covered with old school black-boards²¹ (Ill. 4).

4. URBAN ACTIVISM_USE OF LIMITED RESOURCES

The fact that the existing structures can be reused much facilitates the implementation of program assumptions of social organisations, which, apart from creating interesting and unusual places, include a range of workshops and other activities to attract the inhabitants.

²⁰ https://www.facebook.com/pg/podzielnia/about/?ref=page_internal (access: 30.04.2019).

²¹ The idea of creating value from waste was conceived at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s in Drop City, Arizona, where housing structures started to be made from recycled car bodies. To refer to another example, Bruce Goff is known for designing houses from construction, industrial and organic waste – Jencks Ch., *Architektura późnego modernizmu*, Arkady, Warszawa 1989, pp. 160–169, and Jencks Ch., *Ruch nowoczesny w architekturze*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1987, pp. 103–105, 219.



II. 2. *Po-Dzielnia*, Poznań. Reconstruction and arrangement of the interior of the acquired service premises for the needs of the first free-shop in Poznań; a)–d) author's photo; e) photo Kalina Olejniczak – *Po-Dzielnia*; a), b) and d) the design of the reconstruction, interior arrangement and all the furniture was made by students of the Faculty of Architecture at the Poznań University of Technology. A significant part of the finishing materials used during the renovation are recycled materials; c) activities that unite the community around the idea of upcycling: participation of volunteers in construction and finishing works; e) *Po-Dzielnia* activity: periodic upcycling activities, in the background: cabinets for exchanging clothes, books, house accessories



3a



3b



3c

II. 3. Center of Art and Urban Planning (ZK / U), Berlin. Research on the possibilities of developing structures complementing the basic form, based on solutions and non-obvious materials. Author's photo; a)–c) SILOCITY, arch, Jan Körbes, house with an area of 14 m², implemented, inter alia on the basis of an old grain silo

Even though ExRotaprint was set up upon the initiative of a group of artists, its core activities focus on cooperation with the local community. The current needs of the community will further dictate the topics to be included in the educational activities, trainings or lectures held. A wide range of activities and issues raised results from the cooperation and co-existence of artists, social organisations and business entities in one and the same space²².

The main program assumptions of *Po-Dzielnia* is to extend the life of daily life commodities²³ and to organise educational and artistic activities in reference to social and ecological problems: overproduction, excessive consumption and collection of things, useless items for second-hand circulation²⁴.

Co-housing community of Łazarz, a district in Poznan, decided to use part of the leased Summer Bathing Area in Kasprowicz Park²⁵ for a communal garden *Kolektyw Kapielisko*. Owing to the activities of *Kolektyw* a unique place was created to serve pro-social activities – mainly organisation of cultural and educational events and popularisation of ecological trends^{26 27}.

ZK/U activities directly refer to the issues of an urban scale. The organisation mainly researches the constantly changing urban problems stemming from geopolitical, social and cultural situation. On the basis of the Berlin example, we can analyse the specifics of the constantly transforming urban nature of the city deriving from its complex history.

5. URBAN ACTIVISM AS HERITAGE PROTECTION_CONCLUSIONS

Activities of the inhabitants cooperating with the social organisations represent a successful exercise of their *right to the city*, so defined by David Harvey, a social theorist, *the right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is (...) one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights*²⁸.

Organisations presented herein adhere to a cohesive idea that further dictates their activities. The idea is demonstrated via the policy of **using the limited resources** in its broad

²² <https://www.exrotaprint.de/en/arbeit-kunst-soziales/> (access: 14.03.2018).

²³ Daily activities of this freeshop include: exchange of clothes, books, household appliances, upcycling lectures and workshops or campaigns such as *Kawiarenka naprawcza*: help in repairing electrical or electronic equipment.

²⁴ https://www.facebook.com/pg/podzielnia/about/?ref=page_internal (access: 30.04.2019).

²⁵ The opened garden and activities of *Kolektyw* to improve the structure of the municipal bathing area have translated into an additional measurable benefit for the inhabitants – the summer bathing area complex in Kasprowicz Park was renovated and opened to the public again in 2018 – from the Internet site <http://posir.poznan.pl/oddzialy/oddzial-kasprowiczka/plywalnia-letnia/> (access: 30.03.2019).

²⁶ What distinguishes the activities of *Kolektyw* in Poznan is the cultivation of edible plants in communal gardens, a popular trend in other European cities e.g. *Prinzessinnengarten in Berlin* or *Frau Gerolds Garten* in Zurich.

²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/pg/kolektywkapielisko/about/> (access: 30.03.2019).

²⁸ Harvey D., *op. cit.*, p. 123.



II. 4. Center of Art and Urban Planning (ZK / U), Berlin. Research on the possibilities of developing structures complementing the basic form, based on solutions and non-obvious materials. Author's photo; a) and b) a workshop pavilion suspended above the terrace located at the back of the building, in the immediate vicinity of the social garden established on the rest of the area; c) and d) the transparent wall of the pavilion crops openly to the social urban garden and further to the surrounding industrial buildings; e) and f) for the needs of the new structure, the cover of which was made of old school boards, the roof terrace roof support structure was used. Part of the pavilion's construction comes from recycled materials

sense, applied at a number of different areas and applicable to almost all disciplines of life. Such activities render measurable benefits for the urban structures in the city centres. The fact that these structures can be reused and adapted, so far only on a small scale, testifies to the emergence of a positive phenomenon of joint exercise of authority over urban evolution processes stimulated to preserve a legible layout of the historical urban structure and to introduce well-thought, non-profit and indispensable changes resulting from social, economic and technological development. To lay the foundations for such revitalisation processes, we first need to increase the social awareness of the potential of the existing structures and the ability to spot their assets and to work out a wide range of educational activities directly pertaining to the issue of modern urban development.

References

- [1] Harvey D., *Bunt miast. Prawo do miasta i miejska rewolucja*, bęc zmiana, Warszawa, 2012.
- [2] Jencks Ch., *Architektura późnego modernizmu*, Arkady, Warszawa 1989.
- [3] Jencks Ch. *Ruch nowoczesny w architekturze*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1987.
- [4] Miessen M., *Koszmar partycypacji*, bęc zmiana, Warszawa 2013.
- [5] Montgomery Ch., *Miasto szczęśliwe. Jak zmienić nasze życie, zmieniając nasze miasta*, Wysoki Zamek, Kraków 2015.
- [6] Staniszkis M. *Przedmieście nie*, Autoportret. Pismo o dobrej przestrzeni, 2010, no. 2 [31], pp. 44–49.
- [7] <https://www.exrotaprint.de/en/arbeit-kunst-soziales/> (access: 14.03.2018).
- [8] <https://www.exrotaprint.de/en/die-uebernahme/> (access: 14.03.2018).
- [9] <https://www.exrotaprint.de/en/exrotaprint-ggmbh/> (access: 14.03.2018).
- [10] <https://www.facebook.com/pg/kolektywkapielisko/about/> (access: 30.03.2019).
- [11] <https://www.facebook.com/pg/podzielnia/about/> (access: 30.04.2019).
- [12] https://www.facebook.com/pg/podzielnia/about/?ref=page_internal (access: 30.04.2019).
- [13] <http://posir.poznan.pl/oddzialy/oddzial-kasprowicza/plywalnia-letnia/> (access: 30.03.2019).
- [14] <https://www.zku-berlin.org/about/> (access: 02.04.2019).
- [15] <https://www.zku-berlin.org/location/> (access: 02.04.2019).

Author's note:

Agnieszka Janowska, architect and urban planner, assistant professor at the Faculty of Architecture of the Poznan University of Technology. Author numerous articles about relations between architectural forms and residual spaces, the impact of applicable law on the quality of a space and influence of features of semi-private space on positive social relations. Runs her own architectural practice.