

MONIKA SROKA-BIZOŃ

ORCID: 0000-0003-1521-2287

Silesian University of Technology, Poland

## ON THE IDENTITY OF POST-INDUSTRIAL ARCHITECTURE – THE NEW SILESIAN MUSEUM: HISTORY OR AVANT-GARDE?

### O TOŻSAMOŚCI ARCHITEKTURY POSTINDUSTRIALNEJ – NOWE MUZEUM ŚLĄSKIE: HISTORIA CZY AWANGARDA?

#### Abstract

The economic and social transformation processes of the 20th and 21st centuries have forced many industrial cities around the world to change their function. The decline of heavy industry and mining in regions such as Upper Silesia has left behind vast post-industrial areas in need of redevelopment. The subject of the research presented in this paper is the transformation of the former Katowice coal mine into the Silesian Museum. The aim of the research was to analyse the identity of the post-industrial architecture of the revitalised building, with particular emphasis on the relationship between the preserved historical substance and modern architectural interventions.

*Keywords: architecture, Silesian Museum, the identity of architecture, post-industrial architecture*

#### Streszczenie

Procesy transformacji gospodarczej i społecznej w XX i XXI w. wymusiły zmianę funkcji wielu miast industrialnych na całym świecie. Zanik przemysłu ciężkiego i górnictwa w regionach takich jak Górny Śląsk pozostawił po sobie rozległe tereny poprzemysłowe, wymagające nowego zagospodarowania. Przedmiotem badań przedstawianych w niniejszej pracy jest przekształcenie dawnej kopalni węgla kamiennego “Katowice” w Muzeum Śląskie. Celem badań była analiza tożsamości architektury postindustrialnej rewitalizowanego obiektu, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem relacji pomiędzy zachowaną substancją historyczną a nowoczesnymi interwencjami architektonicznymi.

*Słowa kluczowe: architektura, Muzeum Śląskie, tożsamość architektury, architektura postindustrialna*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“In recent times, everything has changed – the world of art and architecture is full of coexisting ideas and forms, Diversity is immense. In the past, a specific form was assigned to a specific type of building”<sup>1</sup>. A tempting thesis. Tempting with this extension – *in the*

<sup>1</sup> Thesis of the 24th International Conference – “Defining The Architectural Space”, Cracow 2025, Thesis in English 2025 [in:] International Conference – Defining The Architectural Space, <https://dpa.arch.pk.edu.pl/thesis-in-english-2025/> (access: 7.07.2025).

*past*. In once upon a time. Things used to be better. It used to be simpler. It used to be different – maybe simpler, maybe better, maybe easier? By understanding what *used* to be, we try to understand what is happening now, today. Because, after all, we are participants and witnesses of the present. We study history, and as architects, we avidly study the past of architecture – the history of architecture. We create concepts, we name styles, we define paradigms – we study, we research, trying to grasp the context and name, define this aspect of creating space, which we – architects – call architectural space, which is difficult, in fact. Professor Bohdan Jałowicki, in his famous work *Social Production of Space*, defines three main paradigms of the way space is produced:

- volitional-creative,
- mechanical-deterministic,
- dialectical.

B. Jałowicki links the voluntarist-creative paradigm of space production with the figures of the architect and the urban planner, who shape space according to their knowledge and skills. At the same time, according to this paradigm, it is architecture and urban planning, understood as a symbiotic whole, that are, as it were, the tools of space production<sup>2</sup>. The mechanistic-deterministic paradigm of space shaping assumes that anonymous natural and social forces are the creators of space, while the dialectical paradigm describes the creation of space as a conflict-filled social process conditioned by natural, economic, political, and cultural factors. According to the dialectical paradigm, the way in which space is created is determined by the conditions of the natural environment, the social model of a given society, the system of power, civilisational development, and the methods of production associated with it. In the process of space production described in this way, we are confronted with conflicts of interests of entities operating in space, as well as with the expression of the individual's creative power. At the same time, as the author points out, the creative power is not only shared by architects or town planners – “for one can reasonably conclude that the author of Versailles was Louis XIV rather than Le Nôtre and Le Vau”.<sup>3</sup>

The subject of the research presented in this thesis is the transformation of the former coal mine “Katowice” into the Silesian Museum. The aim of the research is to analyse the identity of the post-industrial architecture of the revitalised building, with a particular focus on the relationship between the preserved historical substance and modern architectural interventions.

The research questions posed by the author of the study at the outset of the research were:

- whether the adaptation of a historic industrial building, the Katowice coal mine, into a public building – the Silesian Museum – is a spectacular, outstanding example of the revitalisation of this type of building,

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<sup>2</sup> “According to the volitional-creative paradigm of space production (...) architecture and urban planning are not only a science and art of space production – through a specific shaping of space it becomes possible to modify human behaviour and influence social relations. In the extreme case, spatial design becomes a *sui generis* design of society, shaping new behaviours, social bonds, etc. In this situation, the architect and the urban planner take on the roles of demiurges, trying to change an imperfect world. Within this paradigm, the way space is produced is explained by the history and theories of architecture and urbanism, by doctrines, models, styles, and the creative power of individuals, only somewhere in the distant background are the economic and social processes characteristic of the eras and periods in question”. B. Jałowicki, *Spoleczne wytwarzanie przestrzeni*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2010, pp. 12–13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

- whether the architectural form assigned to the former function made it possible to create a new space,
- whether the revitalised mine has become a new architecture reflecting contemporary social and economic reality,
- whether it is possible to identify and describe who *created* this new space, using the concept of B. Jałowiecki.

The research method adopted for the study is a case study – the revitalisation and adaptation of the Katowice coal mine into a public facility – the Silesian Museum. The research carried out is within the realm of qualitative research into architecture, which involves the technique of observation, as well as analysis of the content of a number of sources documenting and describing the process of creating, or producing, architectural space.

## 2. KATOWICE – A POST-INDUSTRIAL CITY

The origins of the spatial layout of the city of Katowice are linked to the natural landscape, which was dominated by a vast, untouched-by-human-hand forest and post-glacial ponds<sup>4</sup>. The beginnings of settlement in the area of today's Katowice date back to the Middle Ages – the 12th and 13th centuries. In the 14th century, the iron smelting and processing industry developed in the settlement of Kuźnica Bogucka. In the 19th century, coal mining, metallurgy of zinc, other non-ferrous metals, and iron developed in many of the settlements that are now part of Katowice. Some 70 former settlements and hamlets developing around the industrial plants formed the spatial layout of the city<sup>5</sup>. It was the development of industry that was the influential factor shaping the city space<sup>6</sup>.

Nowadays, Katowice is a post-industrial city<sup>7</sup>, serving as the central centre of the Upper Silesian and Zagłębie Metropolis, with a population of approximately 5.3 million.

### 2.1. THE SILESIA MUSEUM

The origins of the Silesian Museum in Katowice date back to 1924, and the institution itself was established by a resolution of the Silesian Parliament in 1929. The modern museum building, erected just before World War II, was destroyed in 1941, as a result of the occupation activities of the German authorities administering Katowice during the war<sup>8</sup>. After the war, the institution changed its premises many times, and the topic of building a new space for the museum has been recurring since the 1970s. A key moment for the Silesian Museum

<sup>4</sup> J. Moskał, ...*Bogucice, Załęże et nova villa Katowice. Rozwój w czasie i przestrzeni*, Wydawnictwo Śląsk, Katowice 1993, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> B. Jałowiecki, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> T. Tołwiński, *Budowa miasta współczesnego*, Trzaska, Evert i Michalski, Warszawa 1948, pp. 49–50.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Bell, in his publication *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, put forward a thesis on the evolutionary transformation of society from an industrial stage to a post-modern society based on the dominance and development of a broadly defined service sphere. With the evolution of society comes a change in the social spaces created by and for society. Consequently, the industrial city is becoming a post-industrial – post-industrial city. B. Smółka-Franke, *Miasto poprzemysłowe – nowa jakość czy skansen*, “Zeszyty Naukowe. Organizacja i Zarządzanie” 2016, no. 95, p. 454.

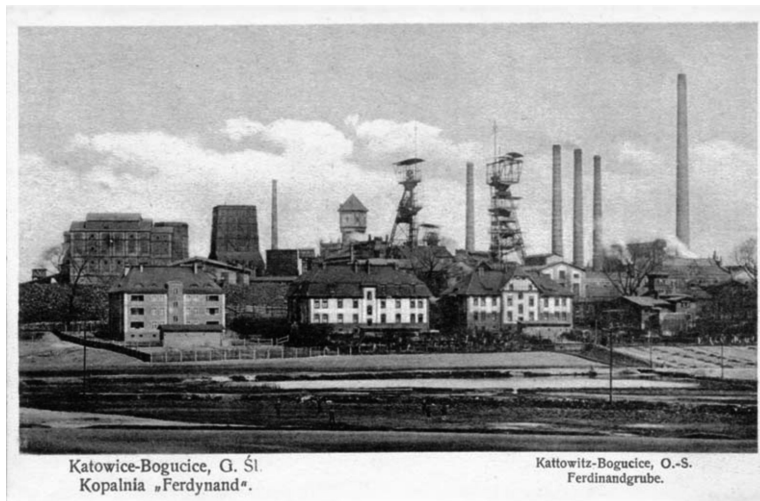
<sup>8</sup> J. Moskał, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

was the decision to locate the museum on the site of the former Katowice coal mine, closed in 1999 as a result of the restructuring of the Silesian coal industry.

## 2.2. FROM THE MINE TO THE MUSEUM

The historical industrial buildings revitalised and adapted for the Silesian Museum in Katowice were, until 1999, part of the Katowice coal mine, the former Ferdinand mine<sup>9</sup> (Ill. 1). The mine was founded in 1823 in the settlement of Bogucice, now a district of Katowice. The Katowice mine operated almost continuously for 176 years. The decision to close the mine, due to its unprofitability, was taken in 1999<sup>10</sup>. In 2003, an idea was floated among city and Silesian Voivodship officials to locate the Silesian Museum on the site of the decommissioned mine.

In 2004, a preliminary agreement was signed between the Silesian Province, the city of Katowice, Katowicki Holding Węglowy S.A., Spółka Restrukturyzacji Kopalń S.A., and the Silesian Museum in Katowice to take joint action to build a new museum building in the area of the Katowice coal mine<sup>11</sup>. On 30 October 2006, the Silesian Museum announced



Ill.1. The Coal Mine “Katowice” formerly known as “Ferdynand”. View of the mine from the south, interwar period, source: Museum of History of Katowice

<sup>9</sup> L. Szaraniec, *Osady i osiedla Katowic*, “Śląsk” Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Katowice 2010, pp. 62–63.

<sup>10</sup> On 1 July 1999, the last tonne of coal was extracted from Movement II of the Katowice-Kleofas mine, thus ending the operation of the Katowice mine. Due to the high costs of mining and the need to reduce the environmental nuisance in the centre of Katowice, it had been planned for several years to reduce the operations of the mine. In the decommissioning programme for part of the plant drawn up in 1996, it was concluded that, due to the need to meet conditions for surface protection, it would not be economically feasible to continue mining the coal seams in the mine’s fields, the mine site was to be developed with the involvement of an external investor, and the surface historic buildings were to be preserved and adapted to their new functions. P. Rygus, *W głąb historii – zapiski z dziejów kopalni “Katowice” (“Ferdinand”)*, “W muzeum” 2023, no. 3, p. 13, <https://muzeumslaskie.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/MuzeumNr3.pdf> (access: 7.07.2025).

<sup>11</sup> J. Krzyk, *Szalfynster. Od kopalni Ferdinand do Muzeum Śląskiego*, Wydawnictwo Agora, Warszawa 2016, p. 10.

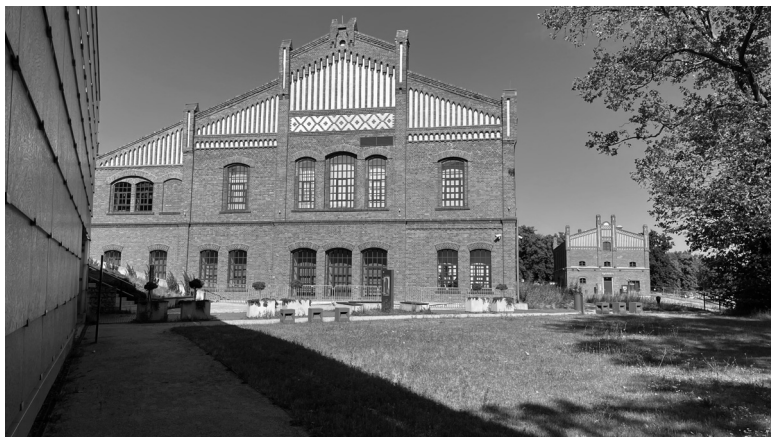
an international competition for the architectural concept of the new Silesian Museum building and the development of part of the former mine site. In the same year, the initial concept for the adaptation of the former mine buildings for use as a museum was extended – the city authorities redesigned the assumptions related to the functioning of the city centre – a concept was created for the creation of a generally accessible public space on the 20-hectare post-mining grounds – the Katowice Cultural Zone, with new premises: The Silesian Museum, the National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra and the International Congress Centre extending, in a way, the exhibition functions of the “Spodek” Sports and Entertainment Hall.

The 2007 competition for the architectural concept of the new Silesian Museum building was won by Riegler Riewe Architekten in Graz. The jury was unanimous in its opinion, recognising the solution proposed by the Austrian architects as original and highly symbolic, with an unambiguous link to the place where it was to be built and to its memory. The spatial concept for the new museum assumed that the museum areas would be placed underground. On the surface of the ground, there were six glazed volumes housing the entrances to the various zones of the museum and the administrative rooms. At the same time, the transparent cuboids allowed for lighting and ventilation of the underground parts<sup>12</sup>. The architectural forms proposed by Riegler Riewe Architekten were minimalist; the designers used the language of simplicity and a conscious renunciation of monumental gestures. Rather than dominating the site, the new museum was discreetly integrated into the space, while allowing the historical buildings of the mine to be displayed (Ill. 2, 3).



Ill. 2. Silesian Museum in Katowice, aerial view, source: Grzegorz Bargieła/WKatowicach.eu, Ter-ech M., *Mija 9 lat od otwarcia siedziby Muzeum Śląskiego na terenach po KWK “Katowice”* [in:] wKatowicach.eu, 26.06.2024, <https://www.wkatowicach.eu/informacje/w-katowicach/Mija-9-lat-od-otwarcia-siedziby-Muzeum-Slaskiego-na-terenach-po-KWK-Katowice-/idn:6766> (access: 9.07.2025)

<sup>12</sup> R. Riewe, F. Riegler, *Pomysł na podziemne muzeum. O projekcie Muzeum Śląskiego architektki Roger Riewe i Florian Riegler*, “Architektura-murator” 2014, no. 3, <https://architektura.muratorplus.pl/realizacje/pomysl-na-podziemne-muzeum-o-projekcie-muzeum-slaskiego-architekci-aa-d9cH-GeaY-t7NG.html> (access: 7.07.2025).



Ill. 3. Silesian Museum in Katowice, revitalized Main Bathhouse – currently the Łaźnia Gallery, photo by Monika Sroka-Bizoń

The spatial layout of the surface buildings of the mine was developed in a phased manner, in accordance with the growing mining and technological needs. The mine buildings were characterised by a classic strip layout for the mining industry, in which the individual technological functions were linearly distributed along the railway tracks and transport routes. The central element of the layout was the hoisting tower of the “Warsaw II” shaft, which has survived to this day as the most important symbol of the area’s industrial architecture. Around the shaft were located buildings of the engine room, boiler room, sorting plant, workshops, and administrative offices (Ill. 4).



Ill. 4. Silesian Museum in Katowice, revitalized winding tower of the “Warszawa II” shaft – currently a viewing tower, photo by Monika Sroka-Bizoń

In 2001, the decision was taken to decommission, or demolish, 86 of the mine’s surface buildings. Out of the historical buildings of the mine, a dozen or so buildings of high historical value were left (Table 1). According to the records of the list of historical post-industrial buildings of Katowice, they are examples of utilitarian-functional industrial architecture

of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, maintained architecturally in the style of brick historicism, with a predominance of Neo-Gothic and Neo-Romanesque forms. The buildings have rich architectural details in the form of cornices, stepped and arcaded friezes, pinnacles, biform and tripartite window frames, articulation with lesenes and pilasters, or decorative gable forms with plastered blinds<sup>13</sup>.

Table 1. Objects of the coal mine “Katowice” preserved due to their heritage and historical value<sup>14</sup>

	<b>Object</b>	<b>Time of construction</b>	<b>Object characteristics</b>
1.	The hoist tower of the “Warsaw II” shaft	1905, reconstruction in 1924	The most important high-rise element of the complex, converted into a viewing tower after its adaptation as the seat of the Silesian Museum in Katowice
2.	The head of the “Bartosz” Shaft with the hoisting tower	1881–1883, reconstruction in 1895–1900, and 1905	Historicist structure, brick, unplastered, built on a rectangular plan; the hoist tower has a steel lattice structure dating from 1990
3.	The engine room of the “Bartosz” shaft with a preserved steam hoisting engine from 1892	1893–1895	
4.	The engine room of the “Warsaw I” shaft	1900, reconstruction in 1905	Historicist building with Neo-Gothic elements, brick, unplastered, built on a rectangular plan
5.	The main bath	1909	Historicist structure with Neo-Gothic features, brick, unplastered, built on a rectangular plan
6.	“Gwarek” bathhouse, built as the engine room of the “Gruschka” shaft, after 1945 adapted as the mine’s bathhouse	1903	Historicist building with Neo-Gothic elements, brick, plastered, built on a near-square ground plan
7.	Mechanical workshop with locksmith’s shop and forge	1899, reconstruction in 1911	Historicist building, brick, built on a rectangular plan
8.	Electricians’ workshop	1905	Historicist building with Neo-Gothic elements, brick, unplastered, with brick details on its elevations, built on a rectangular plan
9.	The joinery	1909–1910	Historicist building with Art Nouveau elements, brick, erected on a rectangular plan
10.	The working clothes storehouse, built as a granary	1905	Historicist object with Neo-Gothic features, made of brick, unplastered, built on a rectangular plan

<sup>13</sup> B. Błachuta, E. Kowalówka, *Adaptacja zabytkowych obiektów bylej kopalni węgla kamiennego “Katowice” dla potrzeb nowego Muzeum Śląskiego*, “Wiadomości Konserwatorskie Województwa Śląskiego” 2020, vol. 12, pp. 25–45.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

	Object	Time of construction	Object characteristics
11.	The gymnasium and switchgear The building is connected to the shaft head of the "Bartosz" mine	1893–1895, extension in 1921–1928	Historicist building with Neo-Gothic elements, brick, unplastered, built on a rectangular plan
12.	The saddler's workshop	1905	Historicist structure with Neo-Gothic elements, brick, unplastered, erected on a rectangular plan
13.	The water tower	1915	One of the tallest elements of the complex. Historic building, brick, plastered, built on a circular plan, with a cylindrical tower shaft

The grand opening of the new Silesian Museum took place on 26 June 2015. The first stage of the extremely extensive project involved the creation of an underground museum with exhibition space located between 5 and 14 metres underground.

In the revitalised post-mining areas, the glass cubes of the new establishment appeared. In subsequent phases, six post-industrial historic buildings were adapted for the museum:<sup>15</sup>

- the hoist tower of the "Warszawa II" shaft (Table 1, item 1) – adaptation to a viewing tower,
- the engine room building of the "Warsaw I" shaft (Table 1, item 4) – adaptation for a restaurant,
- main bath house (Table 1, item 5) – adaptation for the Bath House Gallery,
- "Gwarek" bathhouse (Table 1, item 6) – adaptation for exhibition space dedicated to historic industrial buildings,
- carpenter's shop (Table 1, item 9) – adaptation for the Carpenter's Shop Gallery,
- workwear warehouse, erected as a granary (Table 1, item 10) – adaptation to the seat of the Scenography Centre.

Adaptation of a further three buildings is planned in the near future:<sup>16</sup>

- mechanical workshop with locksmith's shop and forge (Table 1, item 7) – implementation of the project is scheduled for 2024–2028,
- the shaft superstructure "Bartosz" with the hoisting tower and the power and switchgear room (Table 1, items 2 and 11) – the project is scheduled for 2024–2029.

The four former mine buildings awaiting revitalisation are:

- the engine room of the "Bartosz" shaft with the preserved steam hoisting engine from 1892 (Table 1, item 3),
- electricians' workshop (Table 1, item 8),
- saddler's workshop (Table 1, item 12),
- water tower (Table 1, item 13).

<sup>15</sup> Ł. Dziubek, *Rewitalizacja terenów pokopalnianych na potrzeby Muzeum Śląskiego* [in:] Polski Fundusz Rozwoju, <https://pfr.pl/baza-miejskich-innowacji/rewitalizacja-terenow-pokopalnianych-na-potrzeby-muzeum-slaskiego> (access: 7.07.2025).

<sup>16</sup> Silesian Museum – Information on projects financed by the European Union and other foreign funds, <https://muzeumslaskie.pl/category/projekty/zadania-realizowane-ze-srodkow-unii-europejskiej/> (access: 7.07.2025).

The adaptation of post-industrial, historic mine buildings creates a multi-layered identity message for the new Silesian Museum:

- memory of place – the relic shaft tower preserves the iconographic function of the region in the cultural landscape and provides a landmark and viewing tower,
- continuum – the former buildings on an equal footing with the new spatial structures form the space of the museum,
- the regional character of the former industrial architecture is symbolically highlighted and emphasised.

### 3. SUMMARY

Post-industrial architecture is a trend that refers to the transformation of post-industrial spaces into buildings with new social, cultural, and economic functions.

It combines the preservation of the authentic industrial fabric with modern, often avant-garde forms. Several adaptation strategies are distinguished in the literature:

- revitalisation – restoring functions and spatial values to degraded areas,
- reuse – giving new functions to existing industrial buildings,
- integration – introducing new architectural structures into a post-industrial environment.

Through the application of diverse adaptation strategies, post-industrial spaces become places for meetings, art, and education, and their new function builds a dialogue between past and present. In the case of the transformation of the former Katowice coal mine into the Silesian Museum, both revitalisation and reuse and integration strategies were applied.

The new Silesian Museum, an underground museum, demonstrates a unique ability to preserve the historical identity of the site (revitalisation) while introducing modern architectural elements (integration). The exhibition space, located between 5 and 14 metres underground, draws on the tradition of mining – working underground. The works of art, like the “black gold” that has been most precious to Silesia and Silesians for centuries – coal – have been hidden deep underground. The severity of the concrete walls of the underground exhibition spaces, the light streaming in through the glass above ground, and the industrial artefacts that have been left behind – historic mine buildings into which new functions have been introduced – create a space for dialogue between past and present.

Analysing the identity of the post-industrial architecture of the revitalised and adapted for the Silesian Museum buildings of the former Katowice coal mine, it is difficult not to agree with B. Jałowicki that space is a permanent memory of society – what is today is very strongly rooted in the more or less distant past<sup>17</sup>. The former mine buildings, objects of production space, like Roman basilicas adopted by Christians<sup>18</sup>, have become contemporary temples of art, objects of symbolic space.

<sup>17</sup> B. Jałowicki, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> In the Roman Empire, the basilica was a building of public character – a place of commerce, courts, and political meetings. Its layout – with a central nave, side aisles, and an apse – proved extremely spacious and symbolically flexible. In the 4th century AD, after the Edict of Milan, Christianity needed an architectural language that was not laden with pagan connotations (like the classical temples), but at the same time, emphasised the social and communal character of the new religion. The adaptation of the basilica for liturgical use was not only pragmatic but also deeply ideological:

The revitalised mine has become a new architecture reflecting contemporary social and economic reality. *The profane* became *the sacred*. This aspect of the design solution proposed by the Austrian architects appears to be particularly important and significant, determining, as it were, the spectacularity of the adopted solution.

For the people of Silesia, and especially for the miners and their families who work there, the mine is more than just an industrial plant, a place of work. The mine is the mother, the breadwinner for the family, and its space, no matter how dirty, devastated, and industrial, is almost a mystical space. Recalling the words of the first director of the new Silesian Museum, Alicja Knast, the mine has a special place in the hearts of miners. It is a kind of idea that “non-miners” are unable to grasp<sup>19</sup>. This is why the decision to hide the museum underground can be seen as an expression of architectural courage, but above all, as an expression of humility, in the face of what has come before.

Contemporary museums are not only a place for storing and presenting collections. Their role is also to animate social life, integrate the local community, and create public space. The new Silesian Museum pursues these objectives through:

- open park spaces on the surface,
- accessible pedestrian and cycle paths,
- organisation of cultural events within the complex,
- integration with the neighbouring facilities of the Culture Zone – NOSPR, International Congress Centre.

As a result, the Silesian Museum does not function in isolation. It is an integral part of the Culture Zone, which was created on the premises of the former Katowice coal mine. The Culture Zone has become Katowice’s new urban centre, redefining its function and image on a national scale. It is a model example of the comprehensive transformation of a post-industrial space into a modern cultural and business centre. Katowice’s transformation is part of a wider trend of transforming post-industrial cities such as Bilbao, Manchester, or Essen, which have similarly used post-industrial spaces to create new urban symbols<sup>20</sup>.

On the basis of the research carried out, it can be concluded that the architectural form assigned to the former function of the industrial building has enabled the creation of a new space. The analysis of the New Silesian Museum proves that post-industrial architecture can effectively combine history with the avant-garde. The museum not only brings the space of the former Katowice mine back to life, but also becomes a modern cultural facility responding to the needs of contemporary society<sup>21</sup>.

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the space of judgment and secular authority became the space of divine judgment and salvation. Buildings such as the Basilica of St. John Lateran (4th century) or the later Basilica of St. Peter in Rome showed that the transformation of function could go hand in hand with the transformation of the symbolism of a place without destroying its formal framework.

<sup>19</sup> J. Krzyk, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> O. Taborsky, *Creating Silesian Identity: A Comparative Review of Three Regional Museums*, “Cultures of History Forum”, 21.06.2018, <https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/creating-silesian-identity-a-comparative-review-of-three-regional-museums> (access: 7.07.2025). DOI: 10.25626/0085.

<sup>21</sup> On the day of the museum’s grand opening, 26 June 2015, 12,000 ‘entrance tickets’ were booked to enable visits to the museum (the exhibition spaces can accommodate up to 1,000 people at a time). During the first year of the museum’s operation, its new premises were visited by 333,000 people. It was not just the effect of novelty, the museum’s popularity has not waned, with 250,000 visitors in 2018. Among the readers of “Gazeta Wyborcza”, the new headquarters of the Silesian Museum

Both the architectural design and the functional programme of the museum are exemplary examples of the thoughtful adaptation of post-industrial spaces, taking into account aspects of regional identity, formal minimalism, and social openness.

Is it possible to identify and describe who *created* this new space of the Silesian Museum, using the idea of B. Jałowicki's concept? An architect? An urban planner? A politician? A landowner? An industrialist from the nineteenth century deciding to locate a mine in this particular place? One could say that each of these actors played a role in the game for the museum space, as architecture is not a structure frozen in time – on the contrary, it is a dynamic record of social, ideological, and technological change. The historicised main bathhouse of the Katowice coal mine with its Neo-Gothic features, in the process of revitalisation and adaptation, becomes an exhibition space – the Łaźnia Gallery. The most important landmark of the complex, the hoist tower of the “Warszawa II” shaft, whose rotating wheel in the days of the mine's operation signalled that underground mining was in progress, now serves as a viewing tower. The defunct mine, a relict of Silesia's industrial past, has been preserved with reverence and respect for what is past, and valuable in terms of identity. Like a medieval castle,<sup>22</sup> it continues to build the city's silhouette.

In the case of the Silesian Museum, we are dealing with Transition Architecture – a space suspended between the past and the new order. The transformation of the function of architecture in the face of cultural change is not so much a design, engineering process as an ideological process. Architectural space, if it is to last, must evolve with the community that uses it.

In attempting to answer the question posed in the title of the work – whether the new Silesian Museum is History or the Avant-garde – one can say that it is a bridge connecting these two poles in a harmonious architectural synthesis.

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was chosen as the new icon of the Silesian Voivodeship in 2023. J. Krzyk, *op. cit.*, p. 19, Ł. Dziubek, *op. cit.*, P. Jedlecki, *Jak to naprawdę z Muzeum Śląskim było? “To jest wasz zamek średniowieczny, nie możecie tego sprzedać pod galerię handlową”*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 26.05.2023, <https://katowice.wyborcza.pl/katowice/7,35055,29788896,jak-naprawde-z-muzeum-slaskim-bylo-to-jest-wasz-zamek-sredniowieczny.html> (access: 9.07.2025).

<sup>22</sup> This beautiful comparison of the Katowice mine to a medieval castle was used by Prof. Krzysztof Gasidło, PhD, DSc, Arch., supervisor of the thesis entitled “Adaptation of the historical buildings of the decommissioned Katowice Mine for the Academy of Fine Arts and Applied Arts”, prepared in 2001 by the young architects Maciej Pucher and Maciej Strączek at the Faculty of Architecture of the Silesian University of Technology. P. Jedlecki, *op. cit.*

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#### Author's Note

##### **Monika Sroka-Bizoń, PhD, Architect**

Doctor of technical sciences in the discipline of architecture and urban planning. Adjunct at the Faculty of Civil Engineering of the Silesian University of Technology, and a practicing architect. She specialises in research on the perception of space and architectural geometry. Author of publications in these fields. Editor of the scientific monograph *Geometry Graphics Computer*.  
[monika.sroka-bizon@polsl.pl](mailto:monika.sroka-bizon@polsl.pl)