

ANNA MARIA WIERZBICKA
ORCID: 0000-0003-4548-6844
Warsaw University of Technology, Poland

ANITA ORCHOWSKA
ORCID: 0000-0001-5086-3160
Warsaw University of Technology, Poland

RECIRCULATION IN REFERENCE TO THE TRUTH ABOUT ARCHITECTURE

RECYRKULACJA W ODNIESIENIU DO PRAWDY O ARCHITEKTURZE

Abstract

A proper approach towards the structure of an object based on a deep analysis often leads to modernization which is connected with changing the usage or extending and adapting the original tissue to current requirements. Recirculation helps to ensure the continuity of the used structure of a building or functioning of the architectural space by creating new versions of the same object. Recirculation gives a possibility to search for the truth about architecture in the context of its new function. The examples presented in this study confirm many possible approaches towards revitalization. They may range from small, hardly visible changes to a wide spectrum of works, including spatial reinterpretations. Preserving the original structure or its sections, proves the truthfulness of architecture and defines the authenticity connected with the previous and future use. The whole truth about architecture is included in its variability and timelessness, and by reference to the original concepts of structure and form it displays contemporary aesthetic values of space.

Keywords: revitalisation, space, object, semantic architecture, reinterpretations, the truth about the matter

Streszczenie

Adekwatne podejście do struktury obiektu oparte na gruntowych analizach prowadzi często do modernizacji związanych ze zmianą sposobu użytkowania czy rozbudową i dostosowaniem pierwotnej tkanki do obecnych wymogów. Recyrkulacja pozwala przedłużyć ciągłość użytkowanej struktury budynku czy funkcjonowania przestrzeni architektonicznej tworząc nowe kreacje tego samego obiektu. Recyrkulacja daje możliwość poszukiwania prawdy o architekturze w kontekście jej nowej funkcji. Przedstawione w pracy przykłady potwierdzają wiele możliwości podejścia do rewitalizacji. Od drobnych ledwo zauważalnych zmian po bardzo szeroki zakres działań, jakim mogą być nawet re-interpretacje przestrzenne. Zachowana pierwotna struktura lub jej części dowodzą prawdziwości architektury i określają autentyczność związaną poprzednim i kolejnym użytkowaniem. Cała prawda o architekturze tkwi w jej zmienności i ponadczasowości, a poprzez odwołanie do pierwotnych założeń struktury i formy w eksponowaniu współczesnych wartości estetycznych przestrzeni.

Słowa kluczowe: rewitalizacja, przestrzeń, obiekt, architektura znaczeniowa, reinterpretacje, prawda o materii

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, revitalisation is a common phenomenon, which is increasing the architectural values of existing and neglected building stock. A sensitive approach towards the structure of an object based on a thorough analysis often leads to modernization, which is connected with changing the usage, extending and adapting the original tissue to modern requirements. Reuse means to restore the space with the same function and give it new aesthetics or change its purpose and create new spatial values. In this case, the overlapping layers are a significant issue: the initial use of space, its scale and a new purpose, new function and form in the original structure. Retaining the elements or details of construction in a *new* building may complement the whole concept. Effective revitalisation often gives surprising functional and aesthetic results, giving architectural objects a new life and discovering their hidden potential. The examples of functional changes and recirculation of the buildings confirm that many problematic aspects appear in terms of construction, function or aesthetics. They are also controversial from the perspective of the ethics of architecture. What is the social message of the revitalised objects? Is it the truth about architecture, which is perceived as an interpretation of *old* solutions, or perhaps it is a new value? Does the biggest truth about architecture exist in its social role, its current purpose or in the elements of its original form, structure and identity? Is changeability of architecture, its timelessness becoming the truth about itself?

Recirculation is a completely natural activity which may ensure the continuity of the used structure of an object or functioning of the architectural space for a long time. It is a broader concept than revitalisation and it assumes permanent transformation, either in the past or present, which is creating new versions of the same object. There is nothing strange or unexpected about the fact that the emotions do not fade away when it comes to evaluation of truthfulness and usefulness of such solutions. Recirculation also means to search for truth about architecture in the context of its new function. Architecture does not exist without its recipients, that is why, an adaptation of objects to the users' needs is a basic element of transformations, providing a continuation of using them. Preserving the original structure or its sections, proves the truthfulness of architecture and defines the authenticity connected with the previous and future use. The aesthetic code of an object retained in its particular elements and their material part has the chance to reappear in newly designed space strengthening its identity.

Revitalisation of historic objects is a multi-faceted problem of architecture, which has been known since centuries and is connected with recirculation of functions, in other words, with the change of the objects' purpose. The first sacred objects of Christian Europe – basilicas in Rome – were originally the places of worship or gatherings. Transformation of ancient temples' functions was quite a simple process and implementation of cosmological symbols took place in a natural way. In the history of western civilization, there are examples of numerous transformations of sacred objects within various religions. The search for 'truth', which might be defined following Socrates as a man's quest for understanding oneself and the surrounding world, entered a completely new stage, when the Greek philosophy first encountered Judaist tradition and later the Christian one and it moved the sense of being to transcendence.¹ Therefore, the question arises to what extent it relates to the ethics and the ideas of architectural design? It seems that architecture, being the realm between art and technique, is placed between an idea

¹ E. Sienkiewicz, *The Question of Truth in Philosophy*, Poznańskie Studia Teologiczne, 2006, vol. 20, pp. 309–328.

in design and pragmatism. Architecture exists only on paper if it does not have any users and maintenance funds, and when it keeps its identity layer at the same time. The search for 'truth' as a design tool is one of the rules within recirculation of architecture. Changing the functions of the objects with different purposes is a constant problem appearing in practise. It affects public utility buildings such as hospitals, old factories or sacred objects to a great extent. In the 19th century, prefabrication of big cities led to urbanization.² Manufactures, factories, hospitals, sacred objects were erected. Nowadays, part of these concepts is a valuable example of cultural heritage. The issues related to revitalization of such objects are a multi-faceted topic. Majority of such historic objects are not adapted to modern functions and standards. It is difficult to use the objects connected with manufacturing due to modern technology in the production process. Another problem is relocation of existing functions beyond the inner-city zones. Thanks to their favourable location and aesthetically valuable architectural tissue, revitalization of historic objects is becoming a common process in contemporary European cities.

One of such examples is revitalization of Warsaw Vodka Factory "Koneser" built at the end of the 19th century in Praga district in Warsaw. This spectacular transformation of almost 5 hectares of post-industrial area was awarded the Architectural Prize of the President of Warsaw for *the Best Revitalisation* in 2019. The location in the tight urban tissue in a densely populated part of Praga and the necessity to integrate residential, commercial and recreational functions was a challenge for designers. Additionally, numerous historic buildings determined the aesthetics and spatial solutions, so introducing new functions was particularly difficult. Combining new blocks with the aesthetics of post-industrial objects turned out to be a challenge for designers who wanted to create multi-functional and consistent space. The authors of the project, Juvenes- Projekt cooperated with other teams of architects³ and restorers.⁴ As a result, a new complex, being an independent spatial unit and a separate urban aggregate, appeared with the central square and various functions including shopping centres and office buildings, entertainment facilities such as restaurants, cafes, cinema, residential buildings and typical loft apartments. The space of the main square consolidates a variety of functions into one homogeneous entity. It is a landmark venue for many cultural and entertainment events due to elimination of car traffic and providing underground car parks. Praga Koneser Centre is an example of a wide spectrum of revitalisation works. Modernised historic buildings have a slightly changed appearance and new objects were designed with the use of modern materials.⁵ A conference centre was exempted from conservatory rigour but the dialogue between modern blocks and the post-industrial character of historic buildings was imposed at the same time.⁶ Historic buildings were integrated with the new ones also by using red brick, fibre-cement facades and details in the form of metal finishes. Revitalised part of the old vodka factory defines the atmosphere of the old Praga district. Visible dynamism of modern blocks designed in the city gives the impression of consistency with the rest of the district and emphasises the authenticity of the

² K. Broński, J. Szpak, *Procesy urbanizacyjne w Europie w XIX i XX wieku. Problemy i koncepcje badawcze* [Urbanization Processes in Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Issues and Research Concepts], Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Ekonomicznej w Krakowie, 2002, no. 587, pp. 17–30.

³ Architectural Studios belonging to them: Are and Bulanda & Mucha Architects.

⁴ The investor of the venture – BBI Development and Liebrecht & wood.

⁵ Centrum Praskie Koneser – nowe życie fabryki [in:] Sztuka architektury, <https://sztuka-architektury.pl/article/12968/centrum-praskie-koneser-nowe-zycie-fabryki> (access: 18.08.2020).

⁶ Centrum Praskie Koneser. Wzorowa rewitalizacja [in:] architectu, 5.02.2020, <https://architectu.pl/artykuly/Centrum-Praskie-Koneser> (access: 23.08.2020).

design concept. Successful revitalisation tells the truth about this place, by looking at the past it introduces a new and universal value into the space without defining its expiry date. This is a kind of recirculation in architecture, which contributes to the attractiveness of the right bank of Warsaw thanks to its visual effect and the extension of the concept. What is more, it has a strong influence on functioning of this part of the city.

Another example of redefining the whole urban concept is revitalisation of a former military hospital in Antwerp, Belgium. The whole complex had a closed character due to its multiunit purpose, including hospital buildings, residential buildings for staff and command. As it did not serve any functions for many years, it created a dead space in the city structure. The object was purchased by the city in order to integrate the site into the city structure and connect Posthofwijk with Zurenborgwijk district. In order to complete the project, the City Council decided to collaborate with two developers Vanhaerents Development nv and Matexi nv to carry out a design competition. Modernisation of this site was a big challenge for designers, despite the fact that the area offered many possibilities. Designers had to deal with the identity of a former enclave and at the same time they had to adapt the concept to the current housing standards. The designers and investors' concept of revitalizing the district in Antwerp assumed an optimal integration of the site with the surrounding area through numerous entrances. Residential buildings were put on commercial market and mixed with social housing. The area was designed in such a way so as the highest number of residents could benefit from the revitalised site. This quarter allowed pedestrian traffic only. Because of the luxurious character of the housing development, the number of occupants was restricted to 400 families.

In order to preserve the existing urban structure, the hospital pavilions were transformed into residential buildings, the chapel was converted into *The Jane*, a top restaurant run by a chef Sergio Herman, the monastery became a hotel and the former boiler house is now an office space for start-ups. Apart from the residential function, there are service facilities, offices and car parks. The area of 7.7 hectares called Groen Kwartier is not closed, city bikes and public playgrounds are available. The project was carried out in collaboration with Stéphane Beel, 360 Architecten, Collectief Noord (architectural designs), uapS (masterplan designs), Michel Desvigne Paysagistes (public domain project), Grontmij (structural engineering MEP), Talboom (public project – domain study).

The most interesting object, which underwent revitalisation, is the church transformed into *The Jane* restaurant. The architects did not change the external elements of the object, only the marks of a sacral character were left and the whole structure remained untouched. In the 20th century, the church was connected with particular hospital units so patients did not have to go outside. Some of these corridors, symmetrical on both sides, were incorporated into a gastronomical part. In the central nave there is a guest room and in the place of a former presbytery there is an open kitchen now. At the choir above the church porch there is a bar with alcohol. During revitalisation, furnishings of the presbytery were removed. Designers preserved many signs connected with the sacral function of the object. The vault of central nave was not fully restored so as to keep an old character of the interior and the aged paint was left showing the passage of time. Walls and floors were restored and the interior is kept in the modern glamour style in order to accentuate exclusive character of the restaurant. In spite of the secular character of the object, the designer architect Piet Boom decided to retain the sacral character of the interior, sticking to the New Age narration. The windows were filled with modern stained-glass from the project of two graphics Job Smeets and Nynke Tynagel from Studio Job. The artists designed the windows in the form of a print, consisting of 500 unique panels. The designers

were inspired by a sacral function of the chapel, that is why there are such signs as spatulas, sunflowers, devils, skulls, babies, Jesus on the cross, dice, cut apple, wrenches, ice cream cones, canon, croissants, penguins and truffles. A strong message of the ideological content of the designed graphics is visible here. The eclecticism of meanings shows that different concepts from the language of gastronomy, cultural archetypes and religious symbols are mixed up. As the designers assumed ‘...archetypes from various worlds each tell masterpiece stories of good and evil, rich and poor, life and death as well as good food and religion’.⁷ The entire stained-glass windows are made in bright colours to draw the guests’ attention, however, it is difficult to see a deeper sense there, what is explained by the New Age narration. The most significant element of this interior, which influences the overall reception, is a gigantic chandelier placed in the centre of the restaurant. This construction, weighing 800 kilograms, of 12 x 9 meters with over 150 lights, was designed by the Beirut-based design studio PSLAB to optically lower the central part of the nave. Designers, by installing this oversized lamp, intended to create the intimate and ‘divine’ atmosphere of the chapel interior, which was completed by the overall lighting project.⁸ In the interior, first-rate materials such as satin, precious wood and exclusive finishing elements were used. As a whole, the interior seems to be elegant and luxurious, however, the project shows cultural ignorance of the designers. For contemporary Europeans the interior is not iconoclastic, however, numerous religious references indicate the attempt of sacralisation of the object, which went in the wrong direction. Cultural narration is broken or even thickened, what is visible in blending Christian symbols with Satanist and gastronomic ones. It seems interesting whether in some other culture such profanation would ever be allowed. This question remains open and concerns rather ethical and philosophical ‘search for truth’ in architecture. Aesthetic solutions do not always carry ethical content. Searching for ‘truth’ in architecture in revitalised objects rises the ethical question about the sense of an architect profession.⁹

Currently, at the Faculty of Architecture of Warsaw University of Technology, a doctoral dissertation is being prepared, which relates to revitalisation of sacred objects with the change of their function. The research study is being prepared under supervision of Anna Maria Wierzbicka in the Department of Sacred and Monumental Architecture. In this work, written by Maria Arno, her own narrative method employing multi-faceted research tool is applied.¹⁰ This method is supposed to analyse and diagnose modernisation of the buildings with a radical change of their function, which, in many cases, violates the structure of the sacrum. The research showed that incorporating some elements into the fixed structure of the object causes profanation of some symbolic layers. In modernisation of sacred objects, preservation of valuable architectural tissue together with retaining the ethical aspect of an object is an interesting issue. Semantic-narrative research, thanks to multi-faceted analysis, is the tool which might be used to categorise the whole urban concepts. Revitalisation of historic urban areas is quite a common procedure. Old objects are attractive in terms of their location due to constantly shrinking resources of development land. In 2015, a German publishing house ‘Details’ published a special volume related to architectural revitalisation *Sanierung*

⁷ Restaurant ‘The Jane’ Antwerp / Piet Boon, 8.04.2014, <https://www.archdaily.com/494392/restaurant-the-jane-antwerp-piet-boon> (access: 23.08.2020).

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ K. Kucza-Kuczyński, *Zawód – Architekt. O etyce zawodu i moralności architektury*, Oficyna Politechniki Warszawskiej, Warszawa 2004, p. 5.

¹⁰ A.M. Wierzbicka, *Architektura jako narracja znaczeniowa*, Oficyna Politechniki Warszawskiej, Warszawa 2013.

Refurbishment – Best of Detail by Ch. Schittich, 2015.¹¹ This edition was dedicated to issues connected with design in a strict context. This publication shows that modernisation does not refer only to historic objects but also to objects built in the '60s of the last century. In spite of the fact that in some objects the interference is quite significant, there is a visible attempt to retain the existing structure and tendency to maintain 'the truth'. One of the examples of searching for 'the architectural truth' in historic objects is revitalisation of the ruins of the 11th-century castle in Nuneaton, Warwickshire, England by Witherford Watson Architects.¹² In a revitalised structure, historic elements revealing the beauty of a historic structure are noticeable. An interesting example is also revitalisation of St. Moritz church in Augsburg, in Germany, by an architect John Pawson.¹³ The first building was erected in medieval times and was modernized many times. During the war, the church was considerably damaged. Only the outer walls were left and the interior was burnt out. In the '60s of the last century, an architect Dominikus Bohn, a designer of many sacral objects, undertook a difficult task of restoring the church. The architect retained an old structure of the object, significantly minimising the decorations. As the object was built before the Second Vatican Council, the presbytery was located in the central apse. In 2013, on the request of the Metropolitan Curia in Augsburg, an architect John Pawson,¹⁴ the major representative of the minimalist movement, conducted the project of revitalisation mainly of the object's interior. The presbytery was moved towards the central nave and in the section of the apse the choir was located. The interior was reduced to a minimum by the use of three dominant materials – white plaster, dark wood and sandstone, from which the design elements of the presbytery were made.¹⁵ In this work, despite its radical character, a tendency to retain the existing structure is noticeable, which might be defined as the search for 'the truth' in recirculation of architecture. The examples of modern revitalisations depict various tendencies of design, however, one common tendency of preserving the existing structure by revealing its beauty is visible, which might be understood only through 'the truth' about the subject.

Revitalisation of objects and space covers multilayer and multi range activities and is a long-term process of material and social transformations. The analyses of the examples confirm many possible approaches towards design. They range from the ones which are hardly noticed to a very vast scope of activities, which might include spatial reinterpretations. In other cases, partial works are possible or even a modernisation of the whole urban spaces. Recirculation may also focus on an authentic and historic structure but not on heritage one by applying re-used building tissue and providing its continuity and new usage. Dissertations covering the topic of revitalisation of residential developments made in industrialised technology prepared at the Faculty of Architecture of Warsaw University of Technology are such an example. It is particularly important from the perspective of improving the living environment and current world tendencies in the context of revitalisation of modernist residential estates. Some of such dissertations were prepared in the Department of Architecture, Interior Design and Industrial Forms under supervision of Anita Orchowska.

¹¹ C. Schittich (ed.), *Sanierung Refurbishment – Best of Detail*, Institut für internationale Architektur-Dokumentation, München 2015.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 170–175.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 176–182.

¹⁴ DETAIL, 2013, no. 11.

¹⁵ Interior Remodeling of St. Moritz Church / John Pawson, 11.12.2013, <https://www.archdaily.com/456312/interior> (access: 23.08.2020).

The first example is the master thesis, in which the key concept referred to changing the objects' scale and shaping the building environment in a more human-friendly way by demolishing 6 upper floors of the 14-storey building. This new architectural and functional exposure encourages strengthening neighbourhood ties and the sense of identity, it helps to perceive the built-in space in a different way. The significant element of the project are functional changes in the interior of the building and the aesthetics of the objects. Reconstructions, extending and combining flats were offered in order to adjust them to contemporary expectations, family or individual users' needs. Also, more glazing and various possible arrangements were provided. The ground floors gained new residential functions and green front-yards. On the upper floor, terraces and common rooms were built, which may shape the sense of belonging to the tenant community. Such complex construction changes were possible thanks to the H frame system, in which the object was erected. In this case, recirculation of the buildings refers to the flats and common spaces, encouraging to purchase the properties by users with different preferences.

Another engineering dissertation project develops the concept of conversion of the residential spaces in blocks of flats. It also covers the issues of reusing slabs from demolition works. This project refers to a wide spectrum of changes ranging from the residential estate's image to reducing the scale of the development and inter-block spaces. Old buildings were lowered from 11 to 6 storeys and some of the flats were enlarged to create family apartments. In combined and converted flats, functional layouts were changed in accordance with contemporary needs, various types and surface structures. Common spaces, stairways were extended and well-lit, lifts were installed and cladding panels were changed. The concept assumes that in the next stage new 5-storey residential buildings with services on the ground floors will be erected in this housing development. In order to build them, the use of demolished and floor slabs was offered in the Wk-70 system, which was obtained from the existing and transformed blocks. The purpose of revitalisation was to create modern standards in terms of the scale of the buildings, their functional and aesthetic solutions, but also to strengthen social ties by providing some common spaces.

2. SUMMARY

Recirculation is a chance for a better image of the modern cities and hope for neglected and unused spaces. Forgotten architectural masterpieces, which undergo recirculation, form a new value in in-built spaces, a new quality in terms of their function and have a strong impact on neighbourhood spaces. In recirculation of objects, the scale of transformations is varied and to a large extent it is defined by potential possibilities of the object and it is also subject to social needs. According to the analysis, in most cases, a modern continuation or interpretation of the base structure of the building depends on contemporary architectural trends, formal and material ones, not denying the historical continuity of spatial creations or their elements and details. Recirculation ensures constant exploitation and generates material value of the structure or space always in reference to its authenticity. The whole truth about architecture is included in its variability and timelessness. The social role of architecture is to answer contemporary needs of the recipients, reinterpret old solutions, make functional corrections in order to provide reference to the original concepts of the structure and its form, and on this basis modern architectural values are displayed.



- Ill. 1. Praga Koneser Centre, photo by A. Orchowska
 Ill. 2. Praga Koneser Centre, photo by A. Orchowska
 Ill. 3. Groen Kwartier, Antwerp, Belgium, photo by A.M. Wierzbicka



- III. 4. The interior of the revitalised restaurant, The Jane, in Antwerp, photo by A.M. Wierzbicka
- III. 5. Master's thesis project: The scale of prefabricated buildings and shaping neighbourhood ties. Revitalization of the section of the residential estate in industrialised technology in Praga-Południe district in Warsaw. Author: Joanna Suchożebrska



III. 6–8. Engineer's thesis project: Transformation of a section of modernist residential estate in Włochy district in Warsaw. Author: Bartosz Teodorczyk

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Authors’ Note:

Anna Maria Wierzbicka, Prof. D.Sc. Ph.D, Arch.

Architect, University Professor. Specialist in semantics architecture. From 2018, Head of the Laboratory of Sacred and Monumental Architecture at the Faculty of Architecture of the Warsaw University of Technology in Warsaw. She teaches architectural design, conducts seminars and lectures on sacred and monumental architecture. Secretary of the Working Group of the International Union of Architects (UIA) Spiritual Places, member of the Warsaw branch of SARP. Since 2014, Member of the Architecture and Art Commission at the Warsaw Metropolitan Curia. Her academic work covers the topics of semantics in architecture, revitalisation of sacral objects and universal architecture. It includes numerous scientific publications and participation in international and national thematic conferences.

wierzbicka.abt@wp.pl

Anita Orchowska, Ph.D. Arch.

Assistant Professor at the Unit of Architecture, Interior Design and Industrial Forms at the Faculty of Architecture Warsaw University of Technology. She conducts didactic works and individual design activity. The author of numerous scientific publications, participant of international and national thematic conferences on housing industry, the process of revitalization of urban areas and modern architectural concepts.

orchowska@poczta.fm