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*Revitalisation without revolution.  
Initial adaptation of post-industrial buildings for artistic purposes*

*Introduction*

The areas of the European cities which were industrialised during the 19<sup>th</sup> century cover really large terrains. In the past, factories, mainly located in the suburbs of big cities, as a result of those cities development, now constitute the elements of their developing centres. The appearance of those factories, which was in their majority worsened by their bad technical condition, from the

perspective of a contemporary man may seem austere. Factory was and still is a symbol of dynamic civilisation development and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century social system. In spite of the fact that factory has a significant material and social meaning as a symbol, it undergoes degradation because it has not been used. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century – at the time of growing culture globalisation – this symbol requires protection. Giving a new function to post-industrial buildings may contribute to the individualisation of city agglomeration spaces which become similar to one another.

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Fig. 1. Neutral interior MS2  
of Museum of Modern Art  
department at Ogrodowa Street.  
Photo by M. Rusnak, 2010



Fig. 2. Fragment of exhibition in Oskar Schindler Factory in the department of Cracow Museum of History. Exhibition scenario is constructed with the use of the multi-media presentations and many other viewer-attracting details. Photo by M. Rusnak, 2010

### *Cultural revitalisation*

Cultural revitalisation constitutes one of the very popular models of reviving industrial heritage [1]. Within the last two decades in Poland, art has become an element which supports the processes of degraded terrains transformations. In the colloquial understanding, the combination of new buildings or functions with a rough historical tissue has become very fashionable among different social groups. Among adaptations of old factories, which were made in Poland for the purpose of performing culture functions, we can mention ‘Stary Browar’ (Old Brewery) in Poznań, the Museum of Modern Art – MS2 (Fig. 1), revitalisation of Oskar Shindler factory in Zabłocie district in Cracow (Fig. 2) or rebuilding of a closed down tram generating station for the need of the Warsaw Uprising Museum [7]. These are the most famous and frequently rewarded enterprises<sup>1</sup> and they are very popular. Recently, they have become widely known and even recognized by some people as icons of

<sup>1</sup> The Warsaw Uprising Museum: ‘The best revitalisation design in central-east Europe 2008’, a modern icon of Warsaw – a reward in the plebiscite of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 3rd prize in the Competition Museum Events of the Year ‘Sybilla’ 2006, a special reward SARP 2005, Museum Event of the year ‘Sybilla 2004’, Grand Prix of the Museum of Modern Art MS2: Grand Prix 29<sup>th</sup> edition of the Competition ‘Sybilla’ for the Museum Event of the Year, a reward ‘Seven Miracles of European Funds’, a reward in the Competition of General Monuments Conservator ‘Well-groomed Monument’, 1<sup>st</sup> place in 19<sup>th</sup> edition of the Competition ‘Best Interior of the Year’ 2008, the City Museum of Cracow, department of Schindler’s Factory: ‘Best Overseas Tourism Project’ 2010. The author, who refers to the rewards received by the above mentioned institutions, does not aim to assess their values. Presenting the rewards is supposed to emphasize people’s desires, who are connected with these buildings (investors, politicians and architects), to engage in their wide social promotion.

the Polish culture, architecture and museology development<sup>2</sup>.

The introduction of culture function into the building of a closed down factory may assume an expression which is different from the commercial one. The above mentioned publicized enterprises required a lot of financial investments. Their designs caused a lot of emotions, particularly in architectural environments. Decisions and actions taken by decision makers (investors, designers and office workers) during the execution of construction works of these enterprises made many of the introduced in this way changes look controversial. It is even more alarming that there are no steps whatsoever taken in order to preserve the 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial heritage.

Taking into account the above mentioned examples, it is really worth describing the phenomenon of preliminary adaptation of unknown architectural and building intervention. Lack of spectacular changes in the shape of re-organized building results in the situation in which these transformations – in spite of their significant meaning – can be easily omitted in the revitalization characteristics of post-industrial spaces. In the article we presented three Polish realizations of preliminary adaptations of post-industrial buildings as follows: Łódź Art Center, Art Gallery in Bydgoszcz and ‘Artists Colony’ in the territory of the old Stocznia Gdańska (Gdańsk Shipyard).

The activities carried out by an informal photographic gallery are also presented further.

<sup>2</sup> Limited financial resources and differentiated social needs contribute to the fact that not all the deserted structures can become museums, galleries or other service or culture institutions. There are still many buildings which are waiting for a new concept of their use.



Fig. 3. Production hall interior at Tymieniecki Street during preparations of Katarzyna Czarnecka and Magdalena Olek photo exhibition. Photo by M. Rusnak, 2010

### *Initial cultural adaptation of post-industrial spaces*

#### **‘Homeless Gallery’**

‘Homeless Gallery’<sup>3</sup> is an ephemeral artistic organisation which transforms abandoned or not used interiors into temporary galleries of photography [10]. The main idea of its founders was to present in public their own works of art with an insignificant financial expenditure. The artists find empty places and then they try to get a free access to them. The surroundings in which they decide to exhibit their works are not associated with a place of contemplating art. Abandoned tenement houses, devastated railway stations, unused warehouses, docks or terrains of old military bases, similarly to the production halls<sup>4</sup> used by the artists, do not possess the features which would describe a typical shape of the museum edifice. The initiators, who organise those short-term events, invite other photographers. Thanks to the cooperation with them, they are able to prepare an individualised arrangement for a given interior. The way of presenting an exhibition has a spontaneous character and depends on the place as well as on the objects<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> ‘Homeless Gallery’ was founded on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2002 by two photographers Tomasz Sikora and Andrzej Świetlik. This is the date of organizing the first exhibition which took place in the tenement house at Złota Street in Warsaw. The organisation is still developing. During the last eight years the founders organised 87 temporary exhibitions, including exhibitions abroad in London, New York, Melbourne, Nantes and San Jose.

<sup>4</sup> The above mentioned places have common features. They are degraded buildings, which due to their superannuated function or sub-standard character are not used any longer.

<sup>5</sup> The artists who work in the ‘Homeless Gallery’ make constructions from old ladders, boxes, wire mesh fences, branches, wooden pallets, pieces of materials, strings, cables, road bands on which they can place compositions of their photographs. Equally good places for exhibiting their works are uneven surfaces of machines, pipes, hooks, chains, broken window glass, bars, balustrades, and destroyed stairs – simply the whole equipment to which photographs and other artistic elements can be fitted.

which are in the possession of the artists (Fig. 3). Their exhibitions took place in numerous old factories in the territory of the whole country such as ‘Diana’ clothes factory in Szczecin (March 2009), a linen spinning mill converted at present to the so called Lofts de Girard in Żyrardów (September 2007), a closed down combed wool spinning mill of ‘Merinotex’ factory in Toruń (April 2003) or in the factory at Piotrkowska Street in Łódź (May 2003) [10]. One of their exhibitions took place in the interiors of the railway station in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski (May 2007)<sup>6</sup>. They also presented their photographic shows, which were part of the existing interiors, with the cooperation of other artistic and state institutions<sup>7</sup>.

#### **Art Center and Art Factory in Łódź**

Łódź Art Center was established in 2006. Its seat is located on the fragment of the terrain of the old Łódź complex of Karol Scheibler at Tymieniecki Street. Art Center is an organisation which accepted the job of revitalisation of a specific fragment of space dedicated to them. Abandoned buildings of the part of the complex were transferred to them on the basis of the concluded agreement with the Łódź City Council. After two years Art Factory was also established there which cooperated with Art Center.

Within the territory which belongs to Art Center and Art Factory there are five buildings (porter’s lodge, offices, three old warehouses of raw and ready materials). The warehouse buildings with big cubature allow

<sup>6</sup> The author includes railway stations into the scope of the discussed post-industrial areas.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Homeless Gallery’ cooperated with, among other, the following institutions: Mieszczański Brewery in Wrocław, Gallery „Szyb Wilson” in Katowice, Alternative Culture Centre Zebra in Tczew, The City Museum in Śrem or City Office in Biała Podlaska.



organising different events there such as theatre spectacles, fashion shows, concerts, film projections, happenings, as well as photography, sculpture and painting exhibitions. Technical condition of the buildings is bad and dissatisfactory regarding preservation aspects (Fig. 4). Façades, wooden and reinforced concrete constructions as well as leaking roofs require refurbishment (Fig. 5). A part of construction drawbacks required an immediate intervention. At present, only some emergency works have been made, which will protect the building until the target refurbishment are performed. Nevertheless, neglected buildings interiors and devastated spaces between them are 'tamed' through exhibited posters, inscriptions, pictures and furniture (Fig. 6). The present arrangements as well as an interesting cultural offer of both of the described organisations make many visitors

the whole exhibition space<sup>9</sup> [3]. It happens not only in the case of Art Center that neglected buildings become an integral element of art created in them. The form of activity undertaken in the territory of the building does not violate the substance of the structure; there are no conflicts of creative or conservatory activities<sup>10</sup>. In the case of the above described historical buildings, it is not possible to act in an artistic way totally independently, however, creating in such spaces, which still are not renovated, is certainly freer than accepted activities in the formalised spaces such as museums and art galleries<sup>11</sup>.

A big advantage of those 'half-wild' buildings is their closer contact with everyday life, which is rarely the case with the prestige exhibition buildings (Fig. 7). This closeness constitutes a sort of propagation of 'reducing limits between art and life practice' [3].

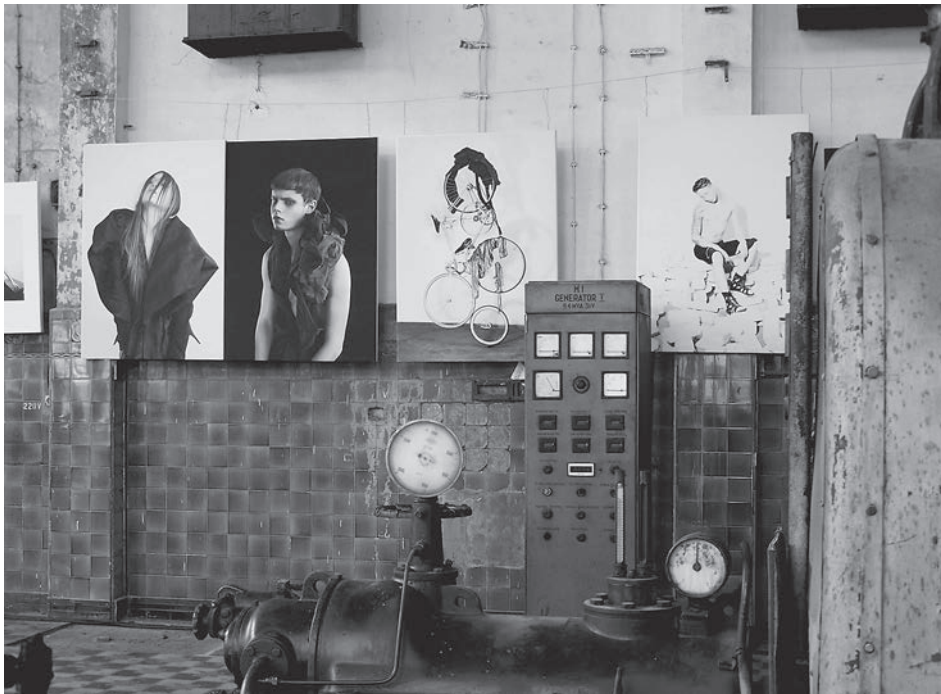


Fig. 4. Old power station interior near Art Center during preparations to one of the photo festival exhibitions. Photo by M. Rusnak, 2010

come here during the whole day and particularly in the evening. The present owners try to make the whole area safe, in particular they try to protect it from stealing historical remnants of the equipment, which poses a danger to many buildings of this type that are left without any care<sup>8</sup>.

Artistic activity of Art Factory, which was put into formal and legal frames, can be regarded as a sort of activity for creators who want to refer to the context of this type of place. Such a particular attitude to the exhibition is represented by some modern artists who level the work with the exhibition and in this way make the recipient accept

Common functioning of these two Łódź organisations so far can be defined as 'a way to survive.' It is an active desire which leads, step by step, to the chosen target. The number of participants of the next artistic events is still growing. The result of the conducted educational and promotional activities can be seen in form of numerous folders which describe both the past as well as the future of this terrain. The most formal proof of the organization activities are the construction designs which were

<sup>8</sup> In the supervised territory, which is managed by Art Center and Art Factory, there are not many elements of the original equipment; however, a valuable remnant is a big number of floors: wooden, parquet, concrete floor as well as external and internal metal plates with anti-slip geometric patterns.

<sup>9</sup> Some artists desire is to equal the status of the exhibition space with the presented exhibit in it.

<sup>10</sup> Here I refer to *street art* as an extremely liberal trend which through its interventions can break the law (Act on Copyright, Act on Monuments Protection). This problem was widely discussed in the article by Stanisław Gzell entitled *Reurbanisation: conditions* which was published in the Interuniversity Scientific Issue, "Urbanista", Warszawa 2010.

<sup>11</sup> As it was in the case of MS2 or the present form of the Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum.



Fig. 5. Façade detail showing the present condition of buildings in Sheibler complex.  
Photo by M. Rusnak, 2010



Fig. 6. Window bars used as an exhibition element, building façade of ready material warehouse in the territory of Factory of Art.  
Photo by M. Rusnak, 2010

authorized in the middle of 2009 by the District Monument Restorer in Łódź<sup>12</sup>. The realization of the first part of the construction design referring to the development and changes in the way of usage of three warehouses is supposed to be started in 2011. The completion of the re-

<sup>12</sup> Design materials (construction design and visualizations) were given to me courtesy of the area administrator, Art Factory. Some of them are accessible in the archives of District Monument Bureau in Łódź (ref. No: 212/146, 205/from 53 to 72). The projects' author (dated 05.11.2009 with regard development and change of usage of buildings B and C and hall A) is the company AB-Projekt from Tychy.

vitalization process of the whole structure is planned for the year 2014. The construction design provides a connection between the two warehouses by means of a glass roof (Fig. 8). A narrow space is to be filled with a high 14-meter hall with an information centre and an elevator for people (Fig. 9). The authors of the design suggested filling the wall losses and reconstructing original window divisions during the replacement of window woodwork. The design can be described as the one that blends in with the trend on minimalist intervention and the interior aestheticism. The suggested construction solutions are the results of adapting to the new function and regulations of





Fig. 7. Free way of utilisation of the historical power station in the territory of Art Centre. Photo by M. Rusnak, 2010

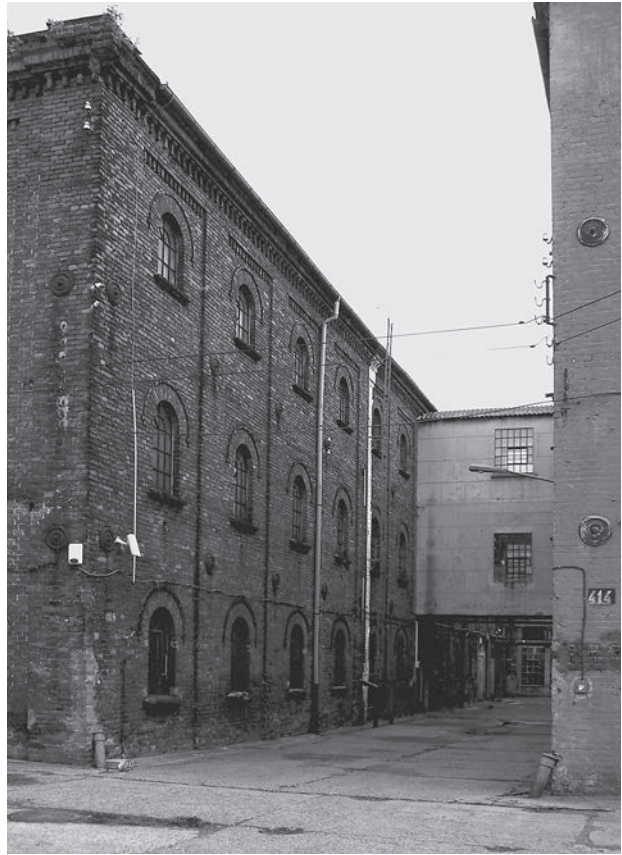


Fig. 8. Current condition of warehouse buildings in Sheibler complex to be revitalized. Photo by M. Rusnak, 2010



Fig. 9. Visualization of the adaptation design for the needs of Art\_Inkubator. The investor Factory of Art made the photo available to the author in August 2010

the building law. Rebuilt monumental buildings are supposed to become the seat of Art\_Incubator organization. The new entity is to support activities of young artists and a creative sector of Łódź economy [9].

#### **Gallery of Modern Art of the Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz**

In a similar way as it was in the case of the factory at Tymieniecki Street in Łódź, a historical steam mill was converted to the seat of Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz. In 1997 the museum became the owner of the building. During the first ten years, due to bad technical condition and lack of funds to continue design and construction activities, only small seasonal exhibitions of modern art were organised. Thanks to this, the process of destruction was stopped and the residents got accustomed to the new planned function (Fig. 10). During the time of initial usage it was possible to create a concept of the building adaptation as well as to leverage sufficient sources of funds to continue the investment. Similarly to the Art\_Inkubator designers' suggestion, an additional glass transport staircase was built on the main building.

#### **'Colony of Artists' in the territory of Stocznia Gdańska (Gdańsk Shipyard)**

Describing low-budget programs of post-industrial terrains revitalisation, which initiate further revitalisation, we should not forget about artistic activity within the area of Stocznia Gdańska. In 2001 Stocznia Gdańska became the seat of many small fine arts, theatrical and film organisations. The investor – an international company BPTO (Bal-



Fig. 10. New cubature view with a staircase and person elevator added to the old steam mill on Mill Island in Bydgoszcz. Photo by M. Rusnak, 2010

tic Property Trust Optima) which now has over 50 hectares of the post-shipyard terrains – used the artists as a social group being able to improve and propagate a new usage of the place. This group activity created the basis for giving the elaborated design ‘Young City’<sup>13</sup> a fashionable status of cultural revitalization. The initial purpose of reviving the old docks was the change of the manner in which this area was perceived by Tri-city residents. ‘Colony of Artists’ (this phenomenon was that name) was the first design in Poland, which was fully financed by the independent creative circles of Gdańsk. The activity of a big group of artists<sup>14</sup> was so influential that within only five years of activities the shipyard acquired the status of a significant place of art.

At present, most of the institutions which take part in this design must look for other seats. At the place of

‘Modeler’s Room’ seat a new service and office building will be erected. BPTO Company removed the artists from the buildings which were to be demolished or rebuilt and offered some of them temporary supplementary places. The owner of post-shipyard terrains does not guarantee that the artists will have a possibility to continue their previous activities.

It is difficult to criticize strongly the investor because the lease agreement, which was signed by the artists, was to be valid for five years. However, we may get an impression that thanks to the artists’ own money and enthusiasm, they were able to create the artistic brand called ‘Stocznia Gdańska’<sup>15</sup>. The process of soft terrains adaptation<sup>16</sup>, which started in Stocznia Gdańska, is not continued, which may influence the final success of the whole enterprise.

<sup>13</sup> The name of the revitalization design of a part of post-shipyard terrains ‘Young City’ refers to the name of the old Teutonic location (*Historia Gdańska*, red. Jan Kucharski, Sopot 1997). More information about the design we can find on official websites of Gdańsk City Council as well as on the information website of the water front revitalization design, <http://youngcity.pl/>.

<sup>14</sup> Among organisations which acted during the first five years of ‘Colony of Artists’ activity were: Theatre Znak (Sign), Discussion Film Club, Gallery MM, PGRart, Synergia’99, Institute of Art Island, Modeler’s Room and individual artists studios.

<sup>15</sup> Lidia Makowska from the City Culture Association accused Baltic Property Trust Optima Company of using the prestige created by Colony of Artists: ‘You as a company took over the potential after Synergia. There is a notion of social responsibility in business. After five years you came here to the territory which is already recognized as a brand’. This statement was published on the website <http://modelator.blogspot.com> in January 2008. In the foreign press we can find another expression for establishing a brand, i.e. ‘branding’.

<sup>16</sup> The notion of soft design refers to, among other things, low-budget activities which promote culture, tourism and sport.

## Summary

Initial cultural adaptation presents the method of protecting these buildings which are so important for the region development and history and using at the same time their potential. Through the implementation of soft activities, it is possible to slow down the process of destruction – without big sums of money – and prevent these

adaptations which are too hasty and are created without thorough planning.

A particular value of this non-commercial and slightly aggressive method of promoting culture – through the initial recycling of architectural structures – is that it takes care of the forgotten places, i.e. neglected post-industrial



heritage in this case. The organised exhibitions and shows are also an opportunity to see the place which after the rebuilding process, in many cases, will become a private structure inaccessible for the recipients of art. We should see numerous benefits, which have already been appreciated in other countries, of using this 'initial revitalisation' model as a prelude<sup>17</sup> for further activities.

Evans and Shawn in their report for DCMS (Department of Culture and Sport)<sup>18</sup> from 2004 listed the features which, according to them, increase chances to achieve success of cultural revitalisation designs [1]. Among the characteristic features of successful adaptations which are suggested by them we can find a reference to the necessity of public participation in creating a regeneration program.

<sup>17</sup> It is significant to emphasize the timing of this approach. It would be reprehensible in consideration of public matters to use a historical building as a nostalgic staffage which would help only in marketing or lead to the building's ruin under the false banner of using it for the needs of art.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Culture and Sport – British Ministry of Culture and Sport.

According to Evans and Shawn observations, communities and artistic organisations – which in the case of the Gdańsk realisation were excluded from the whole project – constitute a good way to propagate active participation of local communities in the process of development of the remodelled part of the city. The abandoned factory can become a place of identification and development of local community as a result of evolving and appropriately animated process.

Initial adaptation, which is understood by the author as utilisation 'without investments' of the post-industrial space, in our Polish conditions may contribute to revealing values of many still not destroyed factories, industrial warehouses, railway stations, military bases territories, mines and docks. The form of initial annexation of buildings for the needs of exhibitions and other artistic activities can show many investors a way how to use them to a full extent and protect the national heritage of these places. Those designs which are connected with the social popularisation of art may bring more long-term benefits than converting these structures into shopping centres.

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## Rewitalizacja bez rewolucji. Wstępna adaptacja obiektów przemysłowych dla działań artystycznych

Jednym z bardzo popularnych modeli ożywiania terenów przemysłowych jest rewitalizacja kulturowa<sup>19</sup>. Na całym świecie sztuka stała się elementem wiodącym bądź wspierającym procesy przekształcania terenów zdegradowanych. Nie wszystkie zamknięte zakłady mogą stać się muzeami sztuki czy prestiżowymi galeriami. Ilość obiektów czekających na nową wizję użytkowania jest duża. Tereny fabryk, pomimo ich znaczącej

<sup>19</sup> Określenie *cultural revitalisation* lub *cultural adaptation* jest używane w publikacjach angielskojęzycznych i oznacza tyle co rewitalizacja na cele bądź przy pomocy kultury [1]. Termin ten określa rewitalizację terenów zdegradowanych, w których kultura jest elementem dominującym spośród pozostałych nowych funkcji.

wartości materialnej i społecznej, w wyniku braku ich użytkowania stają się miejscami omijanymi, szybko wypieranymi z pamięci ogółu. W artykule zaprezentowano działania kulturalne, wprowadzające współczesne życie na tereny dawnych fabryk, o niewielkim stopniu ingerencji w ich materialną strukturę. Są to akcje o charakterze ewoluującego procesu lub jednorazowego happeningu. Głównym celem tych działań jest zwrócenie uwagi na zły stan techniczny budynku, utrzymanie pamięci o społeczno-kulturowym znaczeniu miejsca, odtwarzanie lub wspieranie społeczności lokalnych oraz zbieranie funduszy na renowację. Organizowane wystawy i pokazy są również okazją aby po raz ostatni zobaczyć dane miejsce, które po przebudowie będzie obiektem prywatnym, na przykład loftem albo budynkiem biurowym.

**Key words:** cultural adaptation, exhibition, post-industrial terrain

**Słowa kluczowe:** adaptacja kulturowa, ekspozycja, teren przemysłowy