

NEW LIFE OF OLD INDUSTRIAL ARCHITECTURE – EXAMPLES FROM „MANCHESTER OF THE NORD”

Industrial architecture from the period of industrialization, although still too little appreciated, is used today for new purposes, mainly: public utility and housing. The *second life* it owes not only utilitarian, but also cultural and aesthetical values. The problem is illustrated by two examples from the area of Białystok, which in the nineteenth century was called the Manchester of the North.

Keywords: industrial architecture, adaptations, lofts, shopping center

Introduction

In the space of Polish cities, a surprising number of buildings and factory complexes from the industrial period remains. In the epoch of the Polish People's Republic, after industry was nationalized, most of them were still used for purposes consistent with or similar to their originally intended use. Despite the fact that they acted mainly as storehouses, production was in full swing in some of them. Their *duration* was determined by some utilitarian reasons: the relatively good technical condition of their building structure and its usefulness.

The situation changed after the year 1990 when the mechanisms of market economy began to determine the fate of the postindustrial heritage. On one hand, they led to the economic decline and closure of factories; on the other hand, they turned them, or rather the area they occupied, into the object of serious investors' desire. It turned out that the trump card was their location: complexes of factories, raised on city outskirts in the 19th century, are now found in central areas characterized by high ground rent. Restoring these spaces to the cities by replacing industrial

functions with those more adequate to their location (public use, residence) is a rational action adjusted to the policy of sustainable development. An attitude to postindustrial buildings, reflected in decisions about demolishing or adapting them, remains the principal question which causes heated arguments. It would be difficult to disagree with the opinion that *we still depreciate industrial relics as objects with no value, no significance, as technologically worn-out cubatures* [1]. However, it is also true that social awareness in this matter changed a lot in the previous decade. More and more people tend to appreciate the cultural values of industrial architecture, perceived mainly in its historical and social aspect, as well as its esthetical and ethical values. In the systematics of architectural values suggested by Andrzej Basista [2], these values are higher than the utilitarian ones. Acknowledging industrial architecture as cultural heritage is confirmed by the inclusion of numerous objects and complexes into the register of protected monuments. Regardless of their legal status, the value of old buildings is their authenticity and uniqueness which cannot be overestimated in a world dominated by global products.

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1–3. *Tytoniówka* complex in Białystok; Arch. Arch. Barbara and Janusz Kaczyński; implementation 2008–2010 1. *The big factory* adapted to flats, joined with new buildings 2. *The little factory* with twelve lofts 3. Entrance to the complex from Warszawska St. 4–6. Alfa Shopping Centre in Becker's Factory in Białystok; Arch. Maciej Kuryłowicz; implementation 2006–2008 4. View of the shopping centre from Świętojańska St. Frontage dominated by the preserved former storehouse for readymade products – *The Mercury*. Replica of the oldest building – the finishing shop – is pronounced, too 5. Internal shopping arcade along the old storehouse 6. Former coach house acts as the background for events organized at the shopping centre.



1 4



2 5



3 6



This paper presents two examples of adapting postindustrial buildings from the late 19th century and the early 20th century located in Białystok which was once called the Manchester of the North. In the last quarter of the 19th century, this city was the largest centre of textile industry in the *guberniyas* of the *Northwestern Country*. In 1898, three hundred factories employed 5,092 workers here [3].

Tytoniówka Lofts

The idea of using post-factory buildings for residential purposes is not new but its realization in Poland differs a lot from the American or English tradition. Their lofts were formed by the indigent alternative class – artists who combined studios with flats, young people looking for spacious and cheap lodgings. Under the Polish circumstances, e.g. in Scheibler's workshop in Łódź [4] or in the former granary in Gliwice [5], lofts are exclusive, big flats meant for wealthy clients who search for some original solutions and the genuine mood of old architecture. Even if the interest in lofts is just a question of fashion cherishing the illusion of artistic life in a postindustrial scenery, adaptations bring more and more historical industrial objects back to life.

Barbara and Janusz Kaczyński, the authors of the design of a residential complex *Tytoniówka* with trade, service and office functions, implemented in the years 2008–2010 on the grounds of the closed tobacco factory between Warszawska Street and Modlińska Street in Białystok, were also guided by the intention to save some old factory buildings. The first factory buildings (owned by Fajwel Janowski) were constructed in the second half of the 19th century. In the 1920s (after the factory was nationalized and handed over to the Management of the Polish Tobacco Monopoly), the complex was extended and modernized [6]. Even though, in accordance with the restoration paradigms, the architecture of the preserved buildings is described

as utilitarian and styleless, the designers noticed the unpretentious beauty of non-plastered walls of yellow brick and appreciated the suitability of simplicity. *Tytoniówka includes plain buildings with a utilitarian form and plan. However, if we look more carefully, we will see the details, the proportions, the rhythms and the living texture of the sunlit wall* [7]. Two factory buildings (the so-called little factory and big factory) were adapted to lofts. A characteristic residential building in Warszawska St. (from the first half of the 19th century, one storey and a roof, situated terminally to the street) was preserved, too, and adjusted to the structure of the new frontage building. This layout was complemented with three new residential and service buildings which formed a public passage-way and a semipublic extended internal courtyard *Between the Factories* (closed, unfortunately). The land configuration made it possible to build a two-level underground garage. From among 129 designed flats of various types, thirty-six are located within the historical walls. They have an increased area standard (for local conditions) but stay far behind the standard of lofts in Gliwice or Łódź. The scale of interference in the existing constructional structures was limited to necessary actions: the original structural ceilings and poles of reinforced concrete as well as the internal brick walls were preserved. The external walls of facing brick were cleaned; cavities were filled with the original material; the joints were refitted. They were insulated with climatic panels from the inside. The redecorated facades with new windows excellently correspond with the quiet, modernist architecture of the added cubatures. *The initial context for the designed houses was the plain architecture of those little factories. It imposed a kind of asceticism while shaping new buildings. The factories were expected to make the culminating point of an urban interior* [8]. The example of Białystok's *Tytoniówka* proves that apparently uninteresting, utilitarian industrial architecture

from the turn of the 19th century may become the main attraction of a commercial investment. It may also create a new esthetical quality combined with new architecture which respects its context.

The Shopping Centre in Becker's Factory

As far, the best (certainly the best-known) example of using historic post-factory buildings in Białystok has been the Alfa Shopping Centre in Świętojańska St. which came into existence on the grounds of the former silk plush factory of the Society of the *Eugeniusz Becker & Co.* Workshop in Białystok. Its oldest buildings – the finishing shop and the dye house – were raised in 1883–84. In its economic boom (1895–1911), the complex was extended and complemented with three vast one-storey weaving halls, a boiler house with a steam engine, a storehouse for readymade products, a locksmith's shop and a coach house with a stable[9]. Buildings from that period had uniform stylistics: austere facades of red and yellow brick with detail exposing the features of this material. The landmark of the complex as well as a symbol of the Manchester of the North was the storehouse for readymade products, constructed in 1895, colloquially called *The Mercury*. Situated along Świętojańska St., with an impressive cubature (three storeys), built of red brick only, it was distinguished by its carefully designed multi-axis façade accented with an elevated flat break topped with a figure of Mercury at a run. Another characteristic element was a connecting passageway between the finishing shop and *The Mercury* at the third storey level supported with cast-iron cantilevers. In 1902–1905, a two-storey little palace for the management was built in the style of the French neo-Renaissance. The retreating German army demolished the manufacturing halls and the storehouses in 1944. Only the palace and *The Mercury* were spared. After the war, the ruined objects were rebuilt, and the factory resumed work as the Białystok Fleece Factory *Biruna*.

In 2005, the complex was sold to JWK Invest PLC. One year later, they received a decision on constructing a shopping centre in this area. The restoration guidelines indicated just two objects for unconditioned preservation: the little palace of the Society Management and *The Mercury* storehouse because only they entered the provincial register of monuments. The restoration service, guided by the strict principles of selection, regarded objects with special historic and artistic values, preserved in their original condition, as monumental. Even the oldest building in the complex – the finishing shop – was not recommended; the cultural values of the preserved substance were ignored, too, which in practice meant consent for demolishing most of the complex. Fortunately, the designer – Maciej Kuryłowicz – did not limit himself to the minimum programme. *The Mercury* as well as the coach house were included in the space of the shopping centre. The stamp of the oldest finishing shop was also left: in the interior, it is the negative of the old cubature reproduced in the form of a shopping arcade; outside – the gable of the pulled-down building which proudly stands out against the glass façade. Undoubtedly, the success of the Alfa Shopping Centre (confirmed by four awards) was determined by a skillful combination of a modern structure and some historical objects. They build the climate of the place and act as its distinguishing features. However, a beholder may feel some kind of insufficiency: the standard design of the shopping centre does not reflect the spatial layout of the factory complex, while the shaken proportions between *new* and *old* turn the original tissue into the form of a gadget. *The arrangement of the interiors of the preserved buildings uses the postindustrial character of the space in an unsatisfactory manner. (...) This old architecture has lost its austere authenticity and been equalled to theatrical decoration in this "temple of commerce"* [10].

Summary

Adaptations of historical postindustrial buildings are not only a rational reaction which uses the existing constructional structures but, first and foremost, the best manner of preserving objects which make a part of the history of a city and certify the industrial stage of its growth. Adjustment to new functions – more adequate to locations, necessary for the

contemporary society and, in the economic respect, more profitable – guarantees the gain of means for keeping historic objects in good condition. We may also venture a hypothesis that new embodiments of postindustrial architecture make its distinguishment or sometimes even its appreciation. From the position of utilitarian architecture, it entered the world of architecture-art.

ENDNOTES

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- [3] J. Łukasiewicz, *Białystok w XIX wieku*, [in:] *Studia i materiały do dziejów miasta Białegostoku*, Vol. 3, ed. J. Joka, Białystok Scientific Society, no. 15, Białystok 1972, p. 109
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- [6] M. Dolistowska, *W poszukiwaniu tożsamości miasta. Architektura i urbanistyka Białegostoku w latach 1795–1939*, Białystok University of Technology Press, Białystok 2009, pp. 148, 264–265.
- [7] J. Kaczyński, *Kilka słów o projekcie pn. Tytoniówka* (<http://www.kaczynskispolka.pl/projekty>).
- [8] *Ibidem*.
- [9] M. Dolistowska, *Fabryka Towarzystwa Białostockiej Manufaktury „Eugeniusz Becker i Spółka”*. *Dzieje zespołu i jego współczesne przeobrażenia*, [in:] *Z badań Katedry Historii Architektury*, Vol. 6, Białystok University of Technology Press, Białystok 2008, pp. 8–10.
- [10] *Ibidem*, p. 15.