

**SELECTED PRACTICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS  
OF RENOVATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS OF MODERNIST  
BUILDINGS FROM THE AFTER-WAR PERIOD  
IN UPPER SILESIA**

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At the beginning of the economic transformation in Poland, buildings constructed after 1945 were treated as symbols of an unacceptable system. Currently, the modernist architecture of the twentieth century is seen as an important element of historical and cultural heritage. However, the problem of its protection against a number of adverse events that may lead to the loss of its essential values and often result in its destruction has been recently growing. The spectacular examples include demolition of the railway station in Katowice (built in 1964-1972) or the reconstruction of a part of the historic structure forced by the protests of various parties. Therefore, the authors attempted to identify the key factors for determining the assessment methods of modernist buildings, and to find possible ways of their transformations. At the same time, it is essential to indicate the significant risks that result both from the lack of understanding of the needs to protect the selected objects (erected in this period), and from the problems that result from the current legislation.

Keywords: modernist buildings

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The main reasons for which the post-war architecture has become the subject of thorough analysis of the degradation or even destruction of a number of objects recognized by a great number of historians of architecture as cultural heritage. On the other hand, it was necessary to adapt the remaining facilities to the requirements of the modern user. This includes the comfort of use, the changes of functionalities due to new needs as well as the transformations

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resulting from the fact that the buildings have to be adapted to meet the requirements of current safety regulations and usage standards.



Fig. 1-2. The negating attitude - Katowice Railway Station, designer Waclaw Kłyszewski, George Mokrzyński, Eugeniusz Wierzbicki, Waclaw Zalewski, 1959 - 1972, state of 2010 (photo on the left), demolished in 2011, the renovation of a part of the "cone" structure in the "railway station gallery" - new shopping centre formed in place of the railway and bus stations, 2012 (photo on the right).

Photos by. R. Nakonieczny.



Fig. 3. The beginning of the demolition of the Railway Station in Katowice (photo by R. Nakonieczny 2010).



Fig. 4. Former House of Silesian Scientific Institute in Katowice, designed by Stanisław Kwaśniewicz, 1972.

The most important aspects to be considered in the project activities relating to the objects of the years 1945 to 1989 should include: the formal and compositional values, functional and structural values, material and technological values, historical and cultural values.

While in the case of protection of cultural heritage, one of the first elements of the assessment is a criterion of oldness, (time of origin related to the specific cultural context of a particular area), in the case of post-war buildings it is not perceived as a significant factor, mainly due to the seemingly small time distance separating us from the inception of the analyzed objects; hence the lack of understanding for the use of the term "monument" when the modernist buildings are referred to. Therefore, when we demand protection, we often refer to other elements of the analysis of the work. These are mainly the analysis of the form of the object, which we evaluate in terms of stylistic features typical

for the era, its artistic expression, its location (uniqueness) in the area. The second element is the composition in relation to the object itself but also its importance in the landscape (individual or complex). The third element is the function which we consider not only in terms of its adaptability to current requirements, but we are also looking for innovative solutions or the ones which are characteristic of the period when it was in use. Then we investigate structural values, relating them primarily to the construction of the object (assessment in terms of a traditional versus innovative structure when it was erected).

The material and technological values are considered, *inter alia*, in terms of the type of the construction technology, building materials and finishing. There is an element of authenticity as the value which may classify the object to be protected by the historic preservation officer. While for the assessment of the object it is important to consider the number of similar objects (frequency of occurrence), the originality of applied solutions or its uniqueness, in the analysis of modernist buildings it should be considered that some of them may be based on “typical projects”, but they may present a significant value for their scarcity.



Fig. 5-6. The attitude of the partial acceptance - the Department of Civil Engineering Laboratory, Silesian University of Technology. Designed by Professor T. Teodorowicz-Todorowski (1973), Elevation before and after thermal insulation in 2012. Its project, completely obliterating the original features of the building, although obtaining a building permit, the attorney of the Academic District, Dr. G. Nawrot, protested thanks to which the building has partially retained some features characteristic for modernism. Unfortunately, the elevations have lost their original avant-garde character. Photo by R. Nakonieczny 2012.



Fig. 7-8. The attitude of full acceptance – a sports hall "Spodek" in Katowice, designer M.Gintowt, M.Krasiński, A.Żórawski, A.Włodarz, W.Zalewski, 1960-1972. At the end of March 2011, modernization work was commenced (Figure on the left). The first project was commissioned by MOSiR and was rejected after the intervention of the Chamber of Architects and the provincial authorities who intended to favour projects which would preserve the historically well-established form of the building. In Figure on the left – the commence of the work, which resulted in protests – in this case: cladding the exterior terrace with a layer of polystyrene (!) designed in the „béton brut” aesthetics.

Photo by R. Nakonieczny 2011.

In case of the analysis of historical and cultural values, we refer to a number of aspects. An important factor is the credit of the facility – it should be verified how much the designer or the team of designers are significant for the development of architecture or engineering. In some cases, through the thorough analysis, it is possible to classify the object as a recognized work of architecture, urban planning, construction and engineering (domestic and foreign literature, prizes).

The analysis should also include the historical and symbolic values (historical events associated with the object, relationships with characters that are important to the culture and social life, the object as a symbol in social terms). Wide possibilities of transformations or liquidations can only be considered only in relation to objects of little significant values in each of these aspects.

## 2. FOUR MAJOR MODELS OF ATTITUDE TO THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Professor Andrzej Niezabitowski defines four major models of attitude to the architectural heritage:

1. **elimination-arrogance-denial**, liquidation, destruction, deletion from memory;
2. **ignorance or passive tolerance** – acceptance of the material existence of the building;



3. **acceptance (selective or full)** of modernist architecture object;
4. **creative continuation** – creative development of cultural values of the architecture of the objects.



Fig. 9-10. The attitude of full acceptance – the theatre in Rybnik, designer J.Gottfried, H.Buszko and A.Franta, (1958-1964). State before and after modernisation in 2006 designed by J.Wawrzyniak. Full respect for the historical value of the object. The project included the preservation of a number of details such as the floors which retained their original form (i.e. broken slate floors) or Marian Rak's fresco adorning the entrance to the auditorium. Photo by R. Nakonieczny.

### 3. THREATS TO THE MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE

Threats to the modernist architecture of 1945-1989 include:

1. **Moral ageing** – process connected with social changes and technological developments resulting in the fact that property no longer meets the standards of use. This problem comprises adaptations to the current legal requirements.
2. **Technical ageing** – process of materials and construction technical wear. This particularly refers to the problem of low quality of materials used in the construction or materials containing substances which are currently considered to be harmful (asbestos, slag, chemical additives in fibre boards, etc.). In the case of experimental solutions, technological shortcomings are frequently found after several years of exploitation. Often, especially in relation to the reinforced concrete structures, drawbacks resulting from the lack of technological regime resulted from the deadlines politically conditioned.
3. **Unprofessional transformation** includes reconstruction leading to the loss of historical value of the object (loss of stylistic features, changes obliterating elements characteristic for stylistic doctrines ...). This comprises

project activities based on the ideas of “humanization of the object”, “fitting to context” “aesthetic improvements” “embellishment”

4. **Ideological depreciation** – object evaluation from the perspective of the political and ideological conditions in which it was created.
5. **Relativism** – the phenomenon of assigning significant ratings which are not based on a legitimate subject knowledge, the prevalence of Internet entries.
6. **Ignorance and denial** – assessment through the prism of shallow and commonly understood "aesthetics", a lack of understanding of the modernism as an artistic direction and its ideological assumptions. This applies not only to the assessments made by people not related to architecture. Unfortunately, there are frequent cases of devastation modernist objects with the approval of historic preservation offic.
7. **The legislation**, which creates conditions for negative transformation of objects. This is particularly true for thermal modernisations – based on the Act of 18 December 1998 on the support for thermal modernisations (Journal of Laws of 1998, No. 162), which in many cases extremely adversely affect the condition of the modernist heritage. This is due to the erroneous assumption that the energy balance of the building is seen in the act as a value superior to the cultural values of the modernised object. The Act imposes audit on the author of a construction project, as a mandatory guideline, which, in the absence of conservation protection, frequently results in devastation of stylistics and the designer acts on the edge of ethics and professionalism.
8. **Pauperization** – a phenomenon that covers a wide spectrum of problems, especially subjects relating residential areas. For the use of the paper we will restrict the definition to a process of degradation of architecture in which a part of an object is transformed by a single user or tenant. In Poland, the ownership policy favours such activities since it assumes the sale of individual units to their current tenants, and the fragmentation of ownership and the ignorance of the property managers favour these procedures. Local authorities depart lawsuits brought before the court by bodies set up to protect urban spaces (including the municipal offices of the departments of architecture, urban maintenance ...) referring such cases as replacement of windows which do not follow the original divisions, “small” reconstructions, arbitrariness in the insulation, colour or detail destruction ...
9. **Devastation** – a phenomenon that mostly affects abandoned buildings, parks, monuments, sculptures and landscaping.

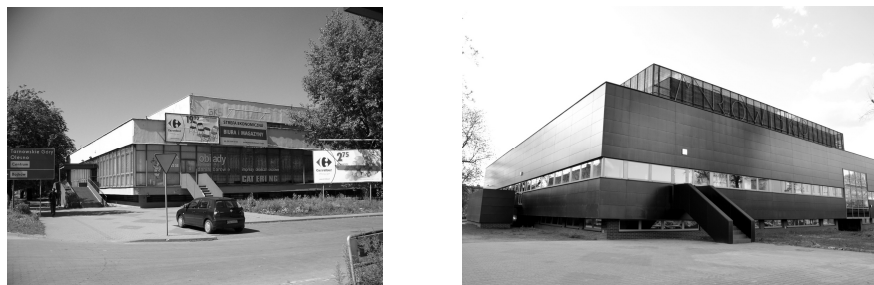


Fig. 11-12. The attitude of the creative continuation – adaptation of an academic canteen No. 2 in Pszczyńska Street into Student Cultural Center Mrowisko in Gliwice. A typical project by prof. T.Mańkowski and prof. K.Lenartowicz carried out in the 70s (the second object based on this project is located in Łużycka Street in Gliwice). 2010-2011 – reconstruction of the Cultural Centre, according to the design by prof. J.Witeczek and T.Wagner. The state before (2005) and reconstructed (2011)<sup>I</sup>. Photo by T. Wagner.



Fig. 13-14. The attitude of creative continuation – the reconstruction and extension of the Department of Organization and Management at Roosevelta Street 32 in Zabrze (former Military Command Replenishment). The design of the building sygn.1973 WBP, reconstruction 2006-2011, the authors of the project J.Witeczek, G.Nawrot, T.Wagner. The state before (2005) and reconstructed (2011)<sup>II</sup>. Photo by T. Wagner.

<sup>I</sup> Within the rebuilding the function and the spatial arrangement were completely changed. The solid of the original facility was maintained; the interior uncovered, the formerly covered, interesting reinforced-concrete and steel structure of the building. The facility won the first prize for “The best public Space in Silesian Voivodship (13<sup>th</sup> edition of the competition, 2012)”

<sup>II</sup> The facility was granted an award in “The best public Space in Silesian Voivodship (13<sup>th</sup> edition of the competition)”.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In several high-profile cases, scientific society initiated activities supported by the social movements brought back positive results in the form of either the protection of cultural values by inscribing them into a register of monuments, or changes in the method of carrying out the modernization and adaptation processes, as well as changes of projects to be implemented. This allows us to hope that social participation, which is a phenomenon characteristic for stable democracies, has started to grow in Poland.

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#### WYBRANE ASPEKTY PRAKTYCZNE I METODOLOGICZNE RENOWACJI I ADAPTACJI OBIEKTÓW MODERNISTYCZNYCH Z LAT POWOJENNYCH NA TERENIE GÓRNEGO ŚLĄSKA

#### Streszczenie

U progu transformacji gospodarczej w Polsce budynki wzniesione po 1945 roku traktowano jako symbole nieakceptowanego ustroju. Obecnie modernistyczna architektura XX wieku jest postrzegana jako ważny element spuścizny historyczno-

kulturowej. Tymczasem w ostatnich kilku latach nasila się nagły problem jej ochrony przed szeregiem zjawisk niekorzystnych, które prowadzą do zaniku jej istotnych wartości, a często unicestwienia. Do spektakularnych przykładów należy rozbiorcza Dworca Kolejowego w Katowicach z lat 1964-72 i wymuszona protestami różnych środowisk rekonstrukcja fragmentu historycznej struktury. Stąd próba określenia podstawowych czynników pozwalających określić metody oceny obiektów modernistycznych oraz możliwe drogi przekształceń. Jednocześnie należy wskazać istotne zagrożenia jakie wynikają zarówno z braku zrozumienia dla konieczności ochrony wybranych obiektów tego okresu, jak i problemów jakie wynikają z obecnie obowiązującego ustawodawstwa.

