

Architecture against time – longevity vs temporariness



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The subject of this article is the problem of the antinomy of longevity and temporality in architecture. Excluding the so-called temporary structures, man designs and creates buildings with the assumption of their longevity. This presupposition is not undermined by architectural concepts, exposing functional and spatial solutions, opened to potential flexibility – variability

Genesis of the antinomy longevity vs temporality in architecture

Works of architecture constitute artifacts that identify characteristic parameters: spatial quantities, functional dispositions, meaning and symbolic narratives. The common name of architecture is its susceptibility to changes – transfigurations¹ [5]. They include both buildings with a "short-term use" and those with some "elements of longevity". Their stimulators are environmental and civilization conditions as well as the particular expectations of users² [3]. Buildings that seem to be timeless "icons" are in fact subject to constant transformation – functional recycling³ [6] [7]. The shift from static to proactive architecture accentuates contemporary architectural concepts – especially those driven by the influence of digital technologies⁴ [4].

In Western culture, each generation ambitiously builds its new buildings, and the inherited ones are restored, conserved, mod-

ernized or irretrievably destroyed. The unsatisfied creative instinct of the Western man makes his existence an exciting dream of complete freedom, unlimited possibilities, immortality, eternal happiness. In Eastern culture – where its primal core is still cherished – the awareness of participation in the organic processes of nature constitutes the source of human creative energy. The buildings created by the man of the East are works responsibly inscribed in the perspective of harmonious passing, taking place in the rhythm of cyclically reborn nature⁵ [1].

The material end of works of architecture – both in the Eastern and Western culture – does not close the perspective of their impact as a universal cultural phenomenon. [fig. 1., fig. 2.] There are buildings that take the form of legends, myths, archetypes, symbols – even though they no longer exist, and perhaps never actually existed. We recall their shapes from "civilization memory". The catalog of mythical buildings is filled not only with the won-

ders of sacred architecture, such as the Tower of Babel or the Jerusalem Temple, but also examples of utilitarian architecture, such as the Crystal Palace or the WTC skyscrapers.

Temporary nature of sacred buildings – a paradox or a rule?

The paradox of the temporary nature of architectural works, which in their essence have encoded stability – durability – timelessness, has/reaches a special dimension in relation to sacred buildings. Temporality is also the inevitable fate of buildings dedicated to the timeless God. They are influenced by the natural conditions of the place, the passage of time, historical turning points or cultural reevaluations, even though its creators try to provide them with the values of indestructibility, timelessness and eternity. Even those extremely durable – considered as extraordinary or holy and worshiped by the faithful – are subject to transformation, expansion, ... destruction.

Contemporary examples of the transformation of sacred buildings – modernizations, conversions, evacuations, demolitions – are the result of many factors and do not only denote of the secularization of societies. The



Fig. 1. Ruins of the Parthenon – Greece Acropolis, 5th century BC



Fig. 2. Military History Museum in Dresden – 2016

¹ Rabiej J., *Architektura sztuka transfiguracji*, Monografia 462, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, Gliwice 2013. In the monography, the author develops the characteristics of the essence of architecture perceived in the light of its features, which are subject to permanent changes – from the moment of specifying the functional and spatial concept, creating a design, construction stage, through the phases of the buildings' "life", to its end... and further during its duration in the sphere of human memory.

² Lavin S., *Quatrieme de Quincy and the Invention of a Modern Language*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass. 1992, p. 56–59.

³ Rossi A., *The Architecture of the City*, Massachusetts 1982. Por.: Zukin S., *The Culture of the Cities*, Blackwell Publishers Inc, Massachusetts 2000.

⁴ Oosterhuis K., *Towards a New Kind of Building*, Rotterdam 2011, p. 111–114.

⁵ Boorstin D.J., *Twórcy. Geniusze wyobraźni w dziejach świata*, Warszawa 2002, s. 171–179.

various manifestations of the temporary nature of sacred architecture are influenced by natural conditions, cultural transformations, urbanization processes or the direct effects of particular decisions of their owners or users.

The sense of building, transforming – and even demolishing – sacred buildings loses the hallmarks of a paradox in the full understanding of the essence of Christian sacred architecture. The Christians' God "Is" immanently present in the dramaturgy of shaping the environment of own existence by human being. Christians place temples at its center. These metaphysical spaces are not, however, alienated spheres of the sacred. Churches are "God's dwellings with people". The essence of the specificity of Christian sacred architecture understood in this way is its integral bond with the presence of the faithful and the everyday life experienced by it. The acts of spiritual growth, decline, conversion, renewal and rebirth taking place in this environment correspond to the actions of building, rebuilding, destroying and rebuilding. As a consequence, the temporariness of Christian churches is not a paradox but a rule – a state of affirmation of transformations taking place in their context.

Case study – transfiguration of the Church of St. Joseph Worker in Bytom

An example of Christian sacred architecture illustrating the state of affirmation to the transfiguration taking place in it is the history of the Roman Catholic Church of the St. Joseph Worker in the mining district of Bytom – Dąbrowa Miejska. Its construction began in 1927 according to the design of Theodor Ehl. It was located in an exposed urban area, adjacent to an important city artery. The form of the church became one of the dominant features in the panorama of the then Bytom. The features of its architecture reflected the historicising stylization tendency typical of that period. [fig. 3.]

The church consecrated on October 21, 1928 by Cardinal Adolf Bertram of Wrocław functioned uninterruptedly until March 19, 2016, when it was evicted by the decree of the Bishop of Gliwice, Jan Kopiec. This act an-



Fig. 3. Church of St. Joseph in Bytom from 1928–2016

nouncing the demolition of the building was influenced by two main factors:

- consequences of the demolition of residential buildings in the vicinity of the church in order to build arteries communicating Bytom with the neighboring cities: Zabrze, Piekary Śląskie – as a result of these transformations, the district Dąbrowa Miejska ceased to exist, and its inhabitants were relocated to another district of Bytom, to the Stroszek estate; church of St. Józef Worker remained "lonely" – deprived of the closeness of parishioners,
- poor technical condition of the church building as a result of mining operations – numerous progressive cracks in the load-bearing walls, significant deviations from the vertical bell tower; many years of actions to stop the degradation of the church did not bring any results – further use of the building was associated with a real threat to safety.

In these circumstances – with the approval of the parish priest and the faithful, the Curia of the Gliwice Diocese, the Provincial Office for the Protection of Monuments, and the local administrative authorities of Bytom – an unprecedented decision was made to demolish the church. It was carried out in the period from 04/10/2016 to 22/11/2016 [fig. 4]. During it, valuable elements of the church equipment



Fig. 4. Demolition of the Church of St. Joseph – 2016

were secured in order to integrate them into the interior design of the new church, which was planned to be built in the Stroszek district in Bytom.

The conceptual design of the new church was selected through an architectural competition⁶. However, the implementation of the competition concept of the new church was prevented by geological conditions – the area intended for construction turned out to be embankment soil requiring the use of very expensive pile foundations. In this situation, work was started according to an alternative church design, meeting the revised investor criteria and the real economic possibilities of the parish. The architectural form of the church is a contemporary reinterpretation of the archetypes of Christian sacred architecture: a plan in the shape of a Greek cross, a tented silhouette crowned with a vertical accent in the form of a signature. The use of a light, prefabricated roof structure made of glued laminated timber frames turned out to be an economically viable and rational solution from the point of view of the functional criteria. [fig. 5, 6, 7.] In accordance with the assumptions, the design of the new church includes elements preserved from the original church, including: tabernacle, baptismal font,

⁶ Architect Jan Rabiej is the author of the project selected in the competition procedure for implementation.



Fig. 5, 6, 7. Church of St. Joseph in Bytom – 2021



figure of St. Joseph with Jesus, the cross, the Stations of the Cross.

In its present shape, this building is the next stage in the "life" of the Church of St. Joseph Worker in Bytom. In the almost 100-year continuity of this process, a sequence of transformations has been coded – construction, renovation, modernization, demolition... restitution. It is still open to possible changes – perhaps the next acts of transfiguration are its perspective.

Conclusions

- Architecture "lives" in the trend of historical dramaturgy – also when it becomes a monument, open-air museum, ruin, rubble... and even an "artifact" recorded in human memory.
- The transformations to which buildings are subjected form a process of changes, including both their constructional structures, functional systems and aesthetic values – the temporality of architecture is not a paradox but a rule.
- In creating new architecture and transforming the existing one, it is indispensable to be aware of its temporality – creative anticipation of changes is one of the conditions ensuring the values of sustainable development for the urbanized environment.

Literature

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PRAWIDŁOWY SPOSÓB CYTOWANIA

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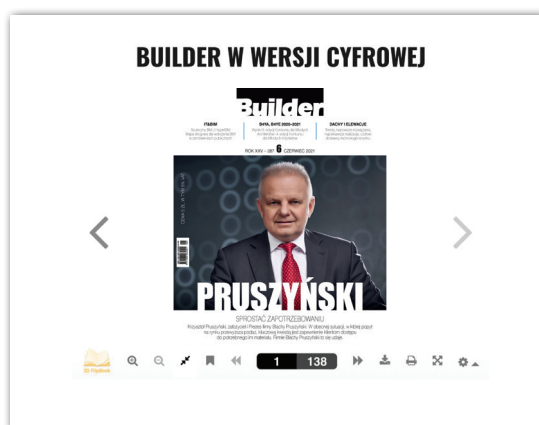
Abstract: The subject of this article is the problem of the antinomy of longevity and temporality in architecture. Excluding the so-called temporary structures, man designs and creates buildings with the assumption of their longevity. This presupposition is not undermined by architectural concepts, exposing functional and spatial solutions, opened to potential flexibility – variability. Also, ultra-modern designs of "self-adapting" architecture to the changing conditions of the context assume, indeed, the extension of its "vitality" – longevity.

The aim of the research synthesis presented in the article is to specify the criteria which in shaping architecture make it possible to overcome the tension inherent in the antinomy of longevity and temporality. These analyzes, summarized with conclusions, were carried out in two complementary approaches: theoretical: based on the characteristics of the relationship between architecture and time, with particular emphasis on their exposure in the Christian sacred architecture; practical: based on the case study of the sequence of transformations of the church of St. Joseph Worker in Bytom over a period of approximately 100 years.

Keywords: architecture and time, architectural transformations, temporary architecture

Streszczenie: ARCHITEKTURA WOBEC CZASU – DŁUGOWIECZNOŚĆ VS TYMCZASOWOŚĆ. Przedmiotem artykułu jest problem antynomii długowieczności i tymczasowości w architekturze. Z wyłączeniem tzw. budowli tymczasowych człowiek projektuje oraz tworzy obiekty z założeniem ich długowieczności. Nie podważają tego założenia koncepcje architektoniczne eksponujące rozwiązania funkcjonalno-przestrzenne otwarte na potencjalną elastyczność – zmienność. Również ultranowoczesne projekty architektury „samoadaptującej się” do zmiennych uwarunkowań kontekstu zakładają w istocie przedłużanie jej „żywności” – długowieczność. Celem zaprezentowanej w artykule syntezy badań jest sprecyzowanie kryteriów, które w kształtowaniu architektury pozwalają znieść napięcie tkwiące w antynomii długowieczności i tymczasowości. Przedmiotowe analizy, podsumowane wnioskami, przeprowadzono w dwóch komplementarnych ujęciach: teoretycznym: w oparciu o charakterystykę relacji architektury wobec czasu, ze szczególnym ich wyeksponowaniem w chrześcijańskiej architekturze sakralnej; praktycznym: w oparciu o studium przypadku sekwencji przekształceń kościoła pw. Św. Józefa Robotnika w Bytomiu dokonanych w okresie ok. 100 lat.
Słowa kluczowe: architektura i czas, przekształcenia architektury, architektura tymczasowa

REKLAMA



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