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## ARCHITECTURE AND LABOR. HERITAGE OF PRAGA IN WARSAW AS A LEGACY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Summary

Architecture and urban spatial patterns are shaped by complex processes, consisting of cultural, social and economic factors. A city adapts to the needs of its stakeholders by constantly re-modeling its space and built environment, within the framework of the existing legal, technical and financial restrictions. Thus, the city components encompass protected heritage as well as the desire or need to change, rebuild, expand and construct new buildings and create new solutions in urban planning.

In the history of European cities, for many centuries, existing buildings and sites were treated primarily as an environment that should be used to best meet the current needs. Today, we perceive the inherited urban environment as an important testimony of the past, a precious heritage that should be preserved, and should remain at least partly unchanged. To what extent and what should be preserved and protected and what can or should be dismantled or reconstructed is the subject of several discussions, both ideological and practical, of a general and a specific nature.

This paper's goal is to contribute to this broad and multi-fold debate. It presents an interdisciplinary point of view in which architectural and urban heritage is a tangible representation of an intangible heritage related to labor and economic development. To illustrate this perspective, the Praga-Północ (Praga North) district in Warsaw was chosen, a traditionally industrial, workers' and trade-craft district, which today is subject to far-reaching changes. The paper draws attention to architecture as a record of changing factors of socio-economic development.

**Key words:** architecture; heritage; post-industrial sites; urban economics, economic development.

### Introduction

Cities are shaped by the complex processes, consisting of cultural, social and economic factors, created to meet the need and expectations of their inhabitants and other stakeholders. In time they consist of multi-layered built environment, created in various historical periods, to meet various needs, and – finally – constructed as the financial and technical circumstances allowed. In the history for many centuries, existing buildings and sites were treated primarily as an environment that should be used to best meet the current needs, from practical (like access to a drinkable water) to higher ranking needs (such as aesthetic standards). Therefore, the built environment was re-built and re-used. Today, we perceive the inherited urban environment as an important testimony of the past, a precious heritage that should be preserved, and at least partly unchanged. To what extent and what should be preserved and

protected and what can or should be dismantled or reconstructed is the subject of many discussions, both ideological and practical, of a general and a specific nature.

Some forms of the European heritage, especially buildings and sites of high aesthetic values and these created in the long past times are indisputably valued. Value of the heritage in case of sites and buildings created for their usefulness and not aesthetics poses more difficult issue, especially if in the process of creation, they provided the indispensable minimum for the users, be it inhabitants or workers. How we should evaluate them today, not as a monument of the past but as a living heritage, linking today principles and needs with their (and our) past is not a question with an easy answer.

The paper presents the case of one of the Warsaw districts, Praga North (referred as Praga) and the complex circumstances in which today we have to identify its heritage and decide how it should be preserved and how it may be re-shaped. The heritage is not defined only in terms of sites protected by the legal instruments, but of the built environment created in the past, which values are, among others, continuity and identity of the city. The author argues that use and economic activity creates an important part of the intangible heritage and its tangible forms should be evaluated together with these less obvious aspects.

### **Architecture of purpose – industry and economic development**

Shaping a city always has a twofold character, comprising aesthetics and usefulness. In several cases one dominates the other, as beauty or monumentality will be crucial in buildings constructed for cultural or religious purposes. Sometimes it is a dominating factor to such extent that what happens inside the building is less important than its external form – from pyramids in Giza to contemporary museums, said to overshadow the art within (Plaza *et al.* 2009; Sadowy 2017). In buildings serving mostly economic and productive purposes, such as factories, manufactures or warehouses, practical and pragmatic approach is understandably dominant. It is especially prominent if the area underwent a sudden shift in its development and the investment had to catch up with the quickly changing economic circumstances.

Such situation was common in the era of early industrialization. Number of cities, their populations and the share of urban dwellers in total population give a testimony to this change, often perceived as one of the most radical in human history. As Table 1 presents, number of big cities rapidly increased, a phenomenon which is also mirrored by a difference between Northern Europe and Mediterranean, industrialization leaders and countries lagging in the Industrial Revolution.

Compared to the year 1500, number of cities with 1000 000 inhabitants increased in 1890 over 24 times in Europe as total, 81 times in Northern and approx. 5 times in Mediterranean Europe. The increase of the number of cities with more than 100 000 dwellers and the appearance of the city with more than a million only partly reflects the rapidness of the increase in the total number of urban population, as presented in Table 2.

**Table 1****Number of cities with over 100 000- and 1-ML inhabitants and the increase dynamic, 1500-1890 (in thousands)**

Region/size category	1500		1600		1700		1800		1850		1890	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Europe</b>												
100 000 – 1 000 000	<b>4</b>		<b>8</b>	200	<b>11</b>	137	<b>17</b>	154	<b>41</b>	241	<b>97</b>	236
≥1 000 000	-		-		-		-		<b>2</b>		<b>4</b>	200
<b>Northern Europe</b>												
100 000 – 1 000 000	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>	200	<b>4</b>	200	<b>9</b>	225	<b>28</b>	310	<b>81</b>	289
≥1 000 000	-		-		-		-		<b>2</b>		<b>4</b>	200
<b>Mediterranean Europe</b>												
100 000 – 1 000 000	<b>3</b>		<b>6</b>	200	<b>7</b>	116	<b>8</b>	114	<b>13</b>	162	<b>16</b>	123
≥1 000 000	-		-		-		-		-		-	

N – total number; % – dynamics ( $N_x/N_{x-1}$  ratio).

Source: based on: de Vries (nd), p. 70.

**Table 2****Urban population in cities over 100 000 inhabitants and the increase dynamics, 1500-1890 (in thousands)**

Region/size category	1500		1600		1700		1800		1850		1890	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Europe	450		1270	282	2390	188	3977	166	11259	283	30861	274
Northern Europe	100		420	420	1399	333	2513	180	8875	353	26840	302
Mediterranean Europe	350		850	243	991	116	1464	148	2384	163	4021	169

N – total number; % – dynamics ( $N_x/N_{x-1}$  ratio).

Source: as in Table 1, p. 72.

The scale of urban population in the Industrial Era is unprecedented, as well as its rapidness. The number of inhabitants increased between 1890 and 1500 in Europe, Northern Europe and Mediterranean Europe respectively: approx. 69 times, 268 times and 11 times. The difference in dynamics between Northern (industrialized) part of the continent and its less production-oriented, Mediterranean area presents the challenge to rapidly construct housing and factories for these new societies.

In the early period of industrialization (which, depending on the country differs from 18<sup>th</sup> to late 19<sup>th</sup> century) construction of the new residential and production sites was not only remotely aesthetic-driven but also lacking legal regulations regarding the working and

living environment. Usefulness was the predominant feature of such architecture and urban planning. Even as some details or solutions aimed at composition or beauty, it cannot be perceived as a crucial factor. The need to provide better working condition was also restricted by the abundance of the workforce. The spatial and architectural outcome resulted first and most of all from the economic needs and is a testimony of the economic factors of urban development – accessibility of the land, scale and type of economic activities, working and housing conditions of the working class.

## **Heritage of labor in Praga**

Till the 18<sup>th</sup> century right bank of Vistula river facing Warsaw had an agricultural character, first of a conglomeration of rural settlements and later of town(s) surrounded by the forest. The process of establishing Warsaw as the capital of Poland (which started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was but it was fully realized in the 18<sup>th</sup> century) increased the importance of Praga. It became a part of the capital city in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Kula 2011). The urbanization processes were diverted by the military actions in late 18<sup>th</sup> century and few decades later in Napoleon times. Praga again gained more peripheral and countryside character and lost several already constructed sites, as well as many inhabitants (Bartoszewicz 2003, p. 167-168). The next pivotal moment in Praga history was the construction of the railway in 1860s. It connected Warsaw with Russia, but also forced better connection between left and right bank of the river. Praga became a “natural” transition area between Warsaw and an important Russian market, and – in a broader perspective, between the Eastern and Western European markets. Transport connection, less expensive and vast sites for new development made a very favorable environment for industry. However, it is also worth remembering that right bank of the river was traditionally less attractive for the upper classes, which added to the aforementioned factors of utility as the leading characteristics of architecture and urban planning, even if some attempts to upgrade the spatial patterns were made, including main arteries according to popular at the time radial scheme, squares and parks. The most emblematic buildings were orthodox and catholic churches.

Praga existed as a working-class district. Such character was rooted in the times when merchants and craftsmen followed politicians and aristocrats holding sessions at the city frontiers in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. Economic development attracted new inhabitants with low purchasing power. Living conditions were in result poor, with waterlines constructed in 1880s but operating only for 61% of housing sites, sewage system being introduced as late as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and serving less than a third of the households in 1914 (www1). Most characteristic housing area in 19<sup>th</sup> century comprised a tenant house with a series of inner courtyards, constructed one after another as the number of inhabitants rose. Workers districts were especially prone to this type of “military barracks” architecture, with strict class-based residential segregation, with up to 1000 people packed into a one tenant house and over 90%

of households living in a one room apartments (Hummel 2018). It was exactly the result of the overpopulation of Warsaw, to which the housing construction could not catch up, as the number of inhabitants rose between the 1830s and 1910s approx. 6 times from 130 000 to over 800 000 (Hummel 2018; Kiniewicz 1976). Praga was one of the areas that experienced fully this type of development.

Working class districts developed around working places of various character. The most modest ones were based on homeworking, carried out in over-populated rooms, related to eg. small scale manufacturing, repairing, mending or washing. Production had all scales – from such difficult circumstances to small manufactures built in the courtyards to large-scale factories, such as the mill at Objazdowa Str. or the biggest complex covering several sites at Szwedzka Str. First industrial sites were constructed in the 1870s and several followed in next 30 years. In 1904 the share of Praga industrial workers in their total number in Warsaw reached 15% (www2).

Existing Praga heritage is a testimony to this rapid economic change and variety of economic activities but also poor living and working conditions. Proximity of the working places to the place of living, urban density and variety of spaces used for labor creates the environment which should be valued in its whole character, more than the sum of its parts.

### **Adaptive heritage re-use and heritage value of Praga built environment**

Today the heritage value of Praga is often perceived in the context of the whole city, as the biggest historic area which survived the destruction of the WWII. Its authenticity is no doubt one of its greatest values. According to the Faro Convention “cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time”. Therefore, two main aspects of the existing built environment must be taken into account in case of heritage – tangible and intangible one, value of the architecture itself and its meaning.

It is proposed to approach this matter using two sets of the criteria and aforementioned aspects:

- usefulness (utility) and aesthetics (symbolic meaning)
- tangible and intangible elements of heritage

and to apply them to existing historical built environment of Praga. During the construction period usefulness dominated over the aesthetic or symbolic value of buildings. It is not of course uncommon regarding the housing and production sites, as their main goal is to provide usable space and not to create metaphysical or cultural meaning. However, as argued above, the rapidness of the development, low income of the main group of inhabitants and

low prestige of the area resulted in very modest design and often low technical quality. This said, it is not argued that some of the buildings do not possess fine architectural quality, especially in our contemporary understanding and appreciation for the industrial architecture of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Tenant houses, after several phases of technical and infrastructural upgrades remain a living environment which has various attraction for long-term and new inhabitants, appealing also to free-lancers, artists and other representatives of liberal professions. Their main values appear to be the authenticity, social bonds of the neighborhood and true urban character of the tenant houses and of the street pattern. It may to some extent overcome some typical down sides of such housing areas, including lesser amount of daylight, unfavorable acoustics of inner courtyards or lack of the open view and fresher air.

The case of production sites is very different. Several of them are not appropriate for the current technology of production, and although some examples still remain, as AVIA Factory, generally even these which had been operating in 1989 and later already lost their industrial use (Sadowy, Lisiecki 2019). It is of course related to the general de-industrialization of Polish and European economy and is in itself the tangible sign of it. The question remains, what kind of re-use of re-shaping the area will provide the best solution both for adapting to the contemporary needs and for the preservation of the unique heritage of the district.

In terms of tangible values, as discussed above, the very existence of the original buildings, however modest or dilapidated in time, is something special and cherished in Warsaw. Hence, the rather extensive conservatory protection over several buildings and/or urban composition of the sites. However, it must also be said that poor technical state and the image of the working-class district is reflected even today in the public opinion of Praga and its heritage. Such trend is reverted in recent years, but only to some extent. The area of the streets Targowa, Brzeska, Żąbkowska and Jagiellońska were declared in the 1990s as the “meanest streets” in Warsaw (Libura 1990, pp. 136-138) and the image of the district was also unfavorable, especially in the eyes of the “outlanders”, from other parts of Warsaw (Lewicka 2004, pp. 316-336.). Therefore, this heritage is of a very delicate and complex nature.

Post-industrial buildings may retain their tangible and utility value for some modern alternative production or creation, ranging between craftsmanship and art. As some authors argue, which was also supported by the interviews with Warsaw stakeholders, the needs of such artists or entrepreneurs are similar to these of industrial activities: vast space, good acoustic insulation, possibility to use heavier utensils and “dirty” technologies (Raffin, Gravari-Brabas, in: Derek 2012). Currently two municipal investments in Praga aim at exploring such possibilities (Creativity Center New Praga at 80 Targowa Str. and the Mill at 2 Objazdowa Str., so called Młyn Michla) Alternatively there are also investors who use

both the tangible elements and intangible aspects of post-industrial to make new apartment buildings or commercial centers more attractive. It is the case of new housing development at Szwedzka Str., replacing former factory and Koneser Centre, comprising several type of uses from stores to offices and hotel in both cases architecture and stories related to the sites are exploited to add the uniqueness and attraction on the very competing real estate market in Warsaw.

## Conclusions

Praga experiences various types of the modernization or adaptation of the existing heritage. Tangible elements are appreciated for their rare authenticity and criticized due to their humble character and poor technical state. Intangible elements comprise even more complex collection of values: century long stigmatization of the area, pride in the industrial past and neighborhood close-knitted communities, clash between long-term inhabitants and newcomers, the radical change of the character of the district. In terms of symbolic or aesthetic value the situation is similar. Most of Praga built environment was never created to have any special aesthetic quality or meaning, and yet today many dwellers or visitors see the beauty and significance in the dilapidated walls, remains of the modest architectural detail and the urban character of narrow streets. Utility of the area is also impossible to describe in one sentence. Tenant houses provide often very modest housing environment but with the upsides described above. Some post-industrial sites are very difficult to adapt for new uses, but several of them provide the unique space for work and modern entrepreneurship, difficult or impossible to find in other parts of Warsaw.

To cover all aspects of Praga the adaptation and re-shaping of the area should be complex and at least conceptualized (if not carried out) in a comprehensive way. It is not a goal of this paper to provide definite answers. What the author argues is that all four aspects of the heritage areas should be taken into consideration during the revitalization processes and in the way in which private owners are allowed to carry out their developments in the area. Each investment should be assessed not separately but as a part of the bigger plan of preserving the heritage and of making it alive and useful for contemporary and future users. It is the author's belief that the most fruitful outcome is to evaluate the existing tangible elements not for their marketing value (as in replacing the existing structure with the new one) but for their utility, thus combining the heritage and the contemporary life.

Some of the built environment is the testimony of poverty and poor living conditions. It seems legitimate to upgrade the built environment, but using modern possibilities to protect architectural value, provided by the current technology. As to the working and production places in Praga it seems wasteful not to investigate enough the utility such sites provide

for contemporary entrepreneurship, artisanship and art. To support such economic activities would be an effective way of using the existing resources and to continue the heritage not as an open-air museum or remnants used for marketing but as a part of economic history of Warsaw. In such cases Praga heritage could both be testimony to the past and the resource for today.

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## ARCHITEKTURA I PRACA. DZIEDZICTWO WARSZAWSKIEJ PRAGI JAKO ŚWIADECTWO ROZWOJU GOSPODARCZEGO

### Streszczenie

Architektura i układy przestrzenne miast kształtują się w wyniku złożonych procesów kulturowych, społecznych i gospodarczych. Miasto dostosowuje się do potrzeb swoich mieszkańców i użytkowników przez ciągle zmiany środowiska zbudowanego, w ramach możliwości prawnych, technicznych i finansowych. Zatem chęć ochrony przeszłości łączy się z potrzebą zmiany, przebudowy i poszukiwaniem nowych rozwiązań.

W historii europejskich miast przez wiele wieków istniejące budynki i miasta traktowano przede wszystkim jako środowisko, które powinno jak najlepiej odpowiadać bieżącym potrzebom. Dzisiaj zasoby miasta są dla nas zapisem przeszłości, cennym dziedzictwem, które powinno zostać zachowane, przynajmniej częściowo, w niezmienionej postaci. W jakim stopniu i co powinno w mieście, architekturze i przestrzeni być zachowywane i chronione przed zmianą, a co może lub powinno być zmieniane jest przedmiotem wielu dyskusji zarówno o charakterze ogólnym, jak i praktycznym, szerokim lub dotyczącym poszczególnych przypadków.

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi głos w tej szerokiej i wielowątkowej dyskusji. Zaprezentowano w nim interdyscyplinarny punkt widzenia, w którym dziedzictwo architektoniczne i urbanistyczne stanowi materialny znak dziedzictwa niematerialnego, związanego z pracą i rozwojem gospodarczym. Dla zilustrowania tej perspektywy wybrano dzielnicę Praga-Północ w Warszawie – tradycyjnie przemysłową, robotniczą i handlowo-rzemieślniczą, która dzisiaj podlega daleko idącym zmianom. W artykule zwrócono uwagę na architekturę jako zapis zmieniających się czynników rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** architektura; dziedzictwo; obszary poprzemysłowe; ekonomika miast; rozwój gospodarczy.

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