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The Influence of Architectural Practice in Poland on Cultural Heritage – Selected Problems

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Abstract. The condition of architect's profession in Poland has changed significantly in the last thirty years. It doesn't mean that important progress can be observed in every part of this specific job nowadays. Of course, there are many advantages of a political transformation, which were in place in this country starting from the year of 1989. The economic situation of architects today differs very much from the past. Meanwhile, alarming things have occurred in many examples of adaptive re-use of old building and gentrification of historical areas. The purpose of the research was to recognize reasons of controversial actions in the field of architectural design related to conservation issues. The main aim of the article is to outline a few problems of contemporary practice, which have impact not only on modern, but also on historical architecture. Among others, principle results are mentioned in the next couple of sentences. Very significant are contracts. In many times, there is a lack of proper balance between an investor and an architectural studio. It concerns primarily the part of the designing process. The essential chapters of contracts have some information about remuneration for services, usually quite low, and punishments for delays and withdrawals from the contract. In practice, the position of architects in Poland is very weak. The other problem is law regulations that seems to be rather inadequate to reality in the area of historical buildings' preservation. Another issue is the fact that a designer has often no relevant knowledge, experience and interest in the field of tangible cultural heritage. Also, the architectural organisations, operating in Poland, seems to act not strong enough in discussed topics. There are many things to do in the matter of public orders, workshops, interventions and others. The discussion and conclusions include proposal of ways of changing the situation. Some of them have begun already, others can be improved. The content of the paper may help to understand why economic growth can be a negative factor in preventing ancient buildings from damage. Values of heritage are part of the basis of architectural design. Combining them with modern needs to find the best solution is difficult, even for professionals, but can be conducted properly, due to continuous development of theoretical findings.

1. Introduction

The purpose of the work is to explore some particular issues, which are important for preventing tangible cultural heritage. The conservation of historical settings is a knowledge that should be widely promoted among a society, especially investors. One of the objectives of the work is to find reasons why the situation of many old buildings in Poland significantly decreased in the last period. Another one is related with possibilities of changing their situation by architects. Do they aim on preservation or rather



on creating completely new structures? An important thing is also to find a few of the regulations, which impact improperly on contemporary architecture practice in the above-mentioned country.

The method of observation may be chosen to examine practical problems. So it was in the case of looking for reasons of unsatisfactory conditions of serving as professional architects in Poland. Of course, a critical analysis can also be very useful. It was partly conducted to outline the theoretical background.

2. Theory of the conservation of ancient monuments and its importance for architects

The discourse on restoration and conservation of ancient monuments has lasted for more than a hundred years. Between many individuals of the nineteenth century two adversaries are probably most recognized as the authors of opposite statements. Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc and John Ruskin indicated two different approaches to historical buildings. The discourse was continued after their death and provided emphasis on the significance of conservation. It could be possible because of three theoreticians working in Vienna – Camillo Sitte, Alois Riegl and Max Dvořak. Findings of these and other researchers allowed later to gather important statements in many international doctrinal acts, which were established in XX-th century. Among others, two of them have probably influenced at most on architectural practice in the field of old buildings' adaptation design, i.e. *The Athens Charter of the Restoration of Historic Monuments* (1931) and *The Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of the Monuments and Sites* (1964).

A modern society has its own foundations, which are grounded on philosophy. It evolved during thousands of years but can be taken under consideration by the architect working today. Geoffrey Galt Harpham, in an article "Architecture and ethics: 16 points", deliberates: 'How would the architect in a classical society answer the questions about whose justice and which rationality should govern his practice?' [1, p. 35]. He points next: 'If that society were regulated by Aristotelian principles, the answer would be: those of the polis, the civic public space in which people meet to deliberate the common good. For Aristotle ethics is a sub-field of the larger category of politics, and this fact indicates a great deal about what counts in a classical society, as legitimate ethical reflection. In such a society, there would be little room for a caped seducer in any profession. For ethical attitude would be tested in interpersonal relations, above all in the relation of friendship.' [1, p. 35]. There is a vast difference between the contemporary practice of architecture and its counterpart in Ancient Greece. The societies also changed beyond all recognition. The separation between architects and common people is noticeable. The importance of cultural heritage is gradually emerging in the awareness of inhabitants of historic towns. Designers are usually conscious about that. Understanding of an adequate way in design is crucial, if someone approaches to change a historical setting, evolved during centuries. Which values are essential for beneficiaries? After explaining reasons of A. W. N. Pugin's attitude to the Gothic style, David Watkin, in his book "Morality and Architecture Revisited", noticed completely different arguments in convictions of another famous architect of the epoch of 1800s, who admired the same style. He argued that 'Viollet-le-Duc seems in certain passages to be one of those writers who see only two possible alternatives for architecture: either as capricious fashion, arbitrary and trivial, or as the expression of some external centre of gravity such as social and political ideals, technological necessity, or the spirit of the age.' [2, p. 29]. So often criticized mentioned authors of Gothic Revival caused social interest in old buildings.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a dissociation of architectural profession from the crafts became more noticeable. Progress in this depended on a particular situation in different countries. For instance, as can be read in the book titled "Ethics and the Practice of Architecture" the architectural education in United States was established after 1850. Before that time Americans, who wanted to become architects, had to travel to Europe to obtain formal studies in France and work in an atelier [3].

However, there was no independent Poland at this time, but similar evolution had taken place also in this country.

Students of architecture in Poland are taught the theory of the conservation of historical monuments. There are also many lessons of conservational design and similar others. Educational base is quite solid, but nevertheless it must be said that not every adept of architecture uses it properly. Many times students' main concerns are subjects devoted to designing new buildings and urban spaces. After all, every architect should have some information about values of monuments, for instance based on systems of them proposed by Alois Riegl and Walter Frodl. Learning of conservation issues ought to be continued after studies in case, if someone wants to work in this special field. Lack of competence in this matter could cause unfavourably either on cultural heritage or professional career. To broaden one's own knowledge, architects may attend to post-graduate studies concerning historical monuments issues, but in reality, only a minority does it. There is no necessity of doing it, if someone doesn't want to work with old buildings. Otherwise, developing personal skills should be a must.

An essential problem of today in architecture is preserving historical structures. One of the most important things is to save the values that heritage possesses. Regina Maga-Jagielnicka in article "Axiology of space as a base of reflection on attitudes in the architect's profession" evoked an example of the Old Town in Wrocław to examine some ethical issues associated with transformation of this area. She considers: 'An attempt to answer the question of why throughout the centuries there have appeared so many spatial deformations in transforming the area that is so exceptional – often referred to as a phenomenon of urban planning and architecture – must lead to another reflection. If we assume that these actions were legal, perhaps what they lacked was axiological thinking.' [4, p. 22]. Next Maga-Jagielnicka continued that: 'Among the values which were lost we could mention urban planning and architecture consistency, style, historical truth and respect for authorship.' [4, p. 22]. This was consideration mainly about land development and what if someone takes under account only an individual construction plot?

An inquiring case study of "Adaptive Re-Use/Historic Preservation" was formulated in already mentioned book "Ethics and the Practice of Architecture". It concerns a hypothetical situation of designing a restoration of a public building, but it consists of a peculiar discussion, which could help in the real world [3]. Such developments are created all over the world in places of historic significance. Essential dilemmas are not only rooted in philosophy, but also associated with social, political and, among others, economical issues.

3. Free-market economy in design branch

Poland, as many other countries from Eastern Europe, had remained in the communist block since 1945 until 1989. At the end of this period, heavy economic decline had taken place. There was a monopoly of state enterprises in design branch, and of course in almost the whole economy, up to the beginning of 1980s when the crisis affected most. Strangely enough, the situation wasn't worst for valuable historical buildings. There were not too many investments in old structures as compared to later times. Besides, almost only one public company dealt with conservation design. It was called *Przedsiębiorstwo Państwowe Pracownie Konserwacji Zabytków* (what means: *State Enterprise Monuments' Conservation Studios*), in short *PP PKZ*. This situation was favourable for the heritage remaining in Poland, because high-skilled professionals, who were specialised precisely in historical buildings, designed adaptations and interventions in old settings. There was plenty of time for proper research of subjects of documentation and the pressure to bringing profits for the company was much less than it is nowadays in average enterprise.

Things rapidly changed after 1989. Gradually, most of the architects started their own enterprises. Running one's own business is not easy and not every one of them reached a success. At first, in 1990s,

architectural design in Poland was comparably quite a good way of earning money, but later the situation got worse. Firstly, there was a crisis in the building sector. At this time levels of payments for architects fell sharply due to strong rivalry between designers. Secondly, the position of developers became prevalingly high to small architectural companies, which are often too weak to fight with an investor. Eventually, not only studios run by architects are designing architecture in Poland. There are plenty of companies owned by engineers or technicians, which offer services in this field. It is not proper, and probably unfair, but it is possible if only a licensed architect company for architectural projects as a designer in case of such an obligation. Convincing the moral side of such action it must be said that this should be regarded as a negative deed. The Code of Architects' Professional Ethics (in Polish: Kodeks Etyki Zawodowej Architektów) forbids such acts, but practically they are quite common. To be frank, there is nothing wrong in designing architecture by persons, who are qualified in a different field, unless they work together with an experienced architect. An interesting example of cooperation of this kind described by Andrew Ballantyne in a commentary "The Nest and the Pillow of the Fire" in the book titled "What is architecture?". He wrote about experience of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the famous philosopher of XX-eth century, in the field of design. The subject was a project of a house in the Kundmangasse in one of the Viennese old districts. Wittgenstein together with the architect Paul Engelmann designed the modernist home for his sister in the neighbourhood of historical buildings. Ballantyne remarked about the philosopher: 'He was sensitive to the effects of architecture and knew the *frisson* that can be felt on contact with great architecture, but he found that it simply was not there in the house which he had designed, with painstaking care, and so – characteristically – he walked away from the practice of architecture. So far as he was concerned, there was simply no point in him being an architect if he was not going to be a great architect'. [5, p. 8].

Interesting examples of contemporary adaptive re-uses presents Aleksandra Marcinów. Interesting examples of contemporary adaptive re-uses are presented in "Modern adaptations of farm complexes in the area of Jelenia Góra Valley" [6]. The author explained: 'The restoration authorities that require the least possible amount of changes introduced into the residences are rarely so restrictive in the case of farm buildings. Renewed or rebuilt farm buildings are first of all bound to retain their outline shape and a historicizing style supplementing the residence. A significant impact on the size of historical substance that is left is exerted by the investor and the architect.' [6, p. 64]. She also wrote critical words about improving unsuitable function to existing structures: 'Finally, it must be once again emphasized that on one hand we can observe the possibility of ennoblement of the farm facilities as a result of giving them more representative functions while on the other hand the changes resulting from a new purpose of a building contribute to the loss of the components of their authenticity value [...]. [...] The only right solution is to adapt these buildings to the functions similar to the historical ones.' [6, p. 65]. Invalid deep transformations are quite common in the country.

4. Discussion

Aforementioned problems of contemporary practice in the architectural profession are only part of a bigger whole. Regulations stated in law could mislead a laic to the conviction that old monuments are well protected. It is not the truth and practitioners know many lacks and disadvantages of legal statements.

There are two main architectural organisations in Poland, i.e. the Association of Polish Architects (in Polish: Stowarzyszenie Architektów Polskich; in short – SARP) and the Chamber of Architects of the Republic of Poland (Izba Architektów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej; IARP). They play an important role in the profession of architects in this country. The membership in IARP is obligatory, if one wants to serve architectural services and possesses relevant licensure in this matter. Joining SARP is voluntary. At least for a couple of years a little misunderstanding between the main authorities of these organisations can be observed. It does not cause many beneficial things. Indeed, such quarrels may influence rather negatively on the profession. There are many problems to be solved by architects. They should challenge, among others, also issues associated with designing in the field of cultural heritage.

One of these is monitoring who works in this kind of service. Exclusion of non-architects from this part of service is essential. Practically, only selected professionals have appropriate skills, experience and time to devote to prepare documentation of historical monument's adaptation well. Management of change is a modern doctrine in conservatory. It makes it possible to input amazing transformations of settings. On one hand giving room for creation is a necessity of proper design, but on the other hand invalid principles can easily lead to failure. Careful approach to conduct the complicated process of design may provide excellent result. But it is not for sure. There are many circumstances that might deeply harm this process. One of the former governments tried to deregulate many professions, among them were the architect and the urban planner. It wanted to make it easier to obtain a right to work in professional services. In fact, changes were not equal in particular cases. For urban planners it was a disaster, because the authorities cancelled many relevant legal regulations and their Chamber had to be liquidated. Now, it looks very clear that a huge mistake was made. The present government is going to bring back licensure in the profession of urban planners which is positive, because the access to it shouldn't be wide open for everyone. After a couple of years, it occurred to governors that the implemented experiment in the job responsible for space is not worth continuing. Fortunately, basic rules in architecture have remained hardly the same for more than a dozen years. Of course, there are some changes, but they don't depreciate the profession as it was in an urban planning. For instance, the length of the period of apprenticeship as a designer's assistant was shortened. In spite of it all, it is not easy to become a licensed architect in Poland and that fact can be assessed as favourable. Working in this profession raises huge responsibility. Also, liability is an inseparable part of spectrum of problems that concern an architect's mind. The architectural organisations should be more involved in the process of creating by government new law acts related to built environment.

Favourable conditions in the job may raise coherent standards of service. A high level of practice is crucial in designing in the field of historic monuments. Only if someone has ability, talent and understanding in this matter, then sophisticated results may appear. Recognizing old estates as the work of arts in many times could help obtaining proper respect. An adequate research of the building is a must. It can allow to define which values are most important. The theory of conservation is very useful in that assessment. Focusing on values such as authenticity, integrity, cultural identity, testimony of the past, state of preservation or originality should be a part of the job. Evaluation of aesthetic values is similar to an architectural approach. Structural condition of a monument is also important. Nevertheless, utility often is considered as the most precious value, especially for the owner of the building. But an architect responsible for a project must be anxious about other principles, which are important in this matter. One of them is the rule that new units should have adequate scale comparing to historical neighbourhood. The designer must not forget about proper view at the heritage. New extensions or other volume ought to fit to historical substance. Serving according to the mentioned principles of conservatory could be more directly obligatory due to Polish law acts. There is a lack of formal obligation to act according to many of the important rules in legal statements in force. In fact, the restoration issues are not represented enough in the building regulations.

Introducing transformations obviously influences an existing structure, for example a cultural heritage. Designers should be aware of which involvements are positive for a historical setting and which are negative. There are a number of workshops associated with conservatory and restoration issues offered by IARP. Similar actions can make a special note. The changes may come more visible in different historical places. Architectural conduct is very influential on existing cultural heritage. It can cause irreversible damage in space. Many examples of that can be noticed in Bydgoskie District in Toruń. This historic area experienced a few demolitions of old buildings in order to make space for new investments. Architects should avoid such orders until the historical building still exists. Otherwise, they may be accused of causing loss in the space. The gentrification and revitalisation of historic districts, especially in such towns like Warsaw, Kraków or Toruń, are probably inevitable processes. The great role of architects is to affect relevantly to remained values of it and listening to people's needs.

Examples of good practice aren't a rarity in Poland's architectural conduct with historic plots. One of them is the Chopin's Centre in Warsaw, a new beautiful building designed by Bolesław Stelmach and

his partners. It replaced an old city palace, which didn't exist **yet** in the moment of a call for an architectural contest for the design of this place. The shape of new object represents values of aesthetic and respect to its neighbourhood and former object there as well.

The deliberations about values are an essential part of the designing process. There are plenty of considerations associated with an assessment of what is worth to remain and what can be changed before the right decision is made. Inevitable difficulties can occur, such as conflicts of interest between the investor and local community. On which side will the architect stand? The desired solution would be to remain independent from these opponents, but in practice real situations are often complicated due to relationships implied by a contract between two parties. The architect depends on the developer, because of the rules stated there. Of course, there is no obligation to sign it, but a majority of public orders' contracts in the design branch have paragraphs that are unfavourable for architects. IARP tries to change the situation and protests in many cases, where unjust or even illegal obligations have been found in a proposed contract. These acts, in spite of being only the tip of an ice-berg, give some hope for the future.

Two parties of a contract have to accept its statements. In practice, in case of an adapting building it is difficult to decide at the beginning about everything, because inevitable features can occur during either designing process or realisation. Tough rules for a contract of works are associated with punishments. Many times they are incredibly high, if compared to low remuneration. Risks of withdrawals from the contract make the situation even worse. There is no sense in engaging in a process sometimes, if the rules were constructed unfairly and don't provide balance of rights and duties of contractors. Cases of problems with cash-flow are not rare. Increasing standards of practice, which is different among architects, is correlated also with the financial situation of a studio. Unsatisfactory payments for service is a persistent disadvantage of an unstable market.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, it must be explained that it could be possible to evoke only some problems in this article. The work could unveil a part of uneasy practical conduct that influence doubtless on cultural heritage. Only a couple of controversial actions were slightly described. They are although quite often seen in historical areas. The distinguished problems lead to the conclusion that there is no chance to modify the reality of today by an individual. Only an effort of a big group of practitioners may provide a favourable solution. Although, there are some difficulties related to economics, politics, legal regulations, etc., but designers are able to make improvements outside and inside their conduct.

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