

REVITALIZATION OF MONASTIC COMPLEXES AS CARRIERS OF 20TH CENTURY IDENTITY

A. Bialkiewicz

Cracow University of Technology
Warszawska 24, 31-155 Krakow, Poland
abialkiewicz@pk.edu.pl

Keywords: Architecture, Modernism, Monastic, Maintenance, Revitalization

Abstract. *This document provides information about the revitalization of a Modern Movement monastic complex, whose original function has been restored. The choice of solutions is determined by the need to introduce some new elements adequate to the modern standard of living. While historical values are still a priority, the current use of the object must also be taken into consideration, which involves application of modern technologies and architectural forms. On the other hand, cultural heritage cannot be regarded as a closed entity which is separated by barriers from contemporary times. The monastic complexes which have been presented in the report developed historically as architectural compounds. It should be pointed out that their historical layers often include valuable forms which are representative of a given epoch. Thus cultural heritage becomes, in a way, a resource to which we add new values, just the way it happened in the past.*

1 INTRODUCTION

Modernist buildings play a significant role in the history of our cities and add a special quality to their atmosphere. They often continue to perform the original functions for which they had been designed. This kind of architecture has lived to see objective criteria for its evaluation and is perceived from the point of view of its historical value. The need for the preservation of selected objects, evaluation of their condition with respect to current demands and the projects of their revitalization and conservation lead to some attempts at presenting specific problems and drawing some conclusions. While being used, the objects usually changed significantly to adjust to the needs of contemporary times and little care was taken of their aesthetic values.

Nowadays it is the economic criterion that determines the fate of many ventures since it is more advantageous in financial terms to build a new object to obtain the required space that would meet modern standards. And yet, sacred complexes of remarkable architectural value, embedded in tradition and attractively situated in urban space are restored to the technical condition which meets modern requirements and standards. Decisions are often taken to refurbish or revitalize them. Basing on some implemented projects I would like to present the specific nature of such actions.

The projects in question also concerned sacred architecture complexes whose function was, for a long time, completely different from the one they had been designed for. When the buildings were not in the hands of their legal owners, all the adaptations or reconstructions were non-professional improvisations and their sole purpose was to make the object suited to perform the changing functions. In some cases, the property was deserted and the result was further devastation and decay. In the 1990s, many objects were reclaimed by their former owners. The process was quite widespread. However, the technical condition of the buildings and the modifications that had to be made in order to restore their original function posed a whole range of problems to be solved

2 SKALKA, KRAKOW.

A striking example is the Seminary of the Pauline Fathers Na Skalce (on the Rock) in Krakow designed by Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz in 1931. It should be pointed out that the Order of St. Paul treats their cultural heritage with the utmost care. Although it is mainly the architect who takes responsibility for his work, the architecture of the Pauline Fathers' building was to a great extent influenced by the founder and investor. The Seminary was built in the style of the subdued Krakow modernism. Because of its style, it is a significant object in the history of the inter-war Polish architecture. In the first version of the architect's project, it was a two-story building on an elongated rectangle plan covered with a flat roof. The asymmetric façade accentuated the representative character of the building and, at the same time, mirrored its function. However, the project was not approved either by the investor or the district historical buildings conservator. They feared that the volume with its prominent detail would dominate the neighborhood. In the second version that was approved for implementation the form of the building was stripped of the original details, which gave it a modest and subdued character. The dominant feature of the facade is a vertical staircase with a rounded entrance to the building and circular windows of the chapel emphasized by vertical buttresses. Basically, the differences between the preliminary version and the final one consist in the removing of the towers and pronounced ornaments and the setting back of

the building from Skaleczna street. It is often the case that committees appointed to select a project for realization do not favour more innovative versions. In this case, the choice of the concept was determined by its location which was unique in terms of history and tradition because of its proximity to the Pauline Fathers' monastery and church considered to be one of the most renowned Polish necropolis.



Table 1: The Seminary of the Pauline Fathers Na Skalce, Krakow, Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, 1931.

In 1949, the Order was deprived of the building which was turned into a lay comprehensive school. All the alterations made to the building in the course of conservation and refurbishment works reflected the temporariness of its use. In 1991, the Order repossessed the building and decided to restore a seminary there except that it was to be a higher education institution. This involved making significant functional changes in relation to the use the building had been designed for.

The conservation project aimed at the creating of a contemporary function while preserving the original spatial layout and nature of the object. The important task was to create new values indispensable for the object to function while respecting tradition and preserving the cultural uniqueness of the site. New functions called for substantial extension of the size of the object. Residential and recreational space was needed. It was impossible to add even one story, not only because of the aesthetic quality of the object itself but also the unique cultural value of the immediate surroundings. The conservation project proposed to turn the attic into residential space. The object retained its original form. Original details in the interior were reconstructed and the poly-

chromy in the chapel was restored. The chapel interior itself had to be redesigned due to the changes in liturgy. Contemporary needs necessitated a complete replacement of plumbing and wiring.

After the conservation works the modernist object can be said to have resumed its initial form which serves still the same though substantially modified function.

3 CLARA MONTANA, CZESTOCHOWA

Historical complexes of sacred architecture are often a result of layer upon layer of styles due to a prolonged process of construction, different sponsors or investors and the inevitable changes in the function. This also applies to modernist layering. The first monastery of the Pauline Fathers in Poland was Jasna Góra (Clara Montana). It was founded by Prince Władysław Opolczyk in 1382. Its extension was carried out in the 18th century by the master mason I. Neugebauer and engineer and general Ch. Dahlke sent there in 1745 by Great Crown Hetman Potocki. The buildings in Jasna Góra were constantly modernized and rebuilt. The oldest part which dates back to the foundation times is the gothic presbytery of the chapel where the miraculous icon of the Mother of God is kept. Following the fire in 1690, the present basilica was erected on the site of the former gothic church built in the years 1430-63. The complex has also been rebuilt and modernized in modern era.

3.1 Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz

In 1919, Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz was appointed a builder and conservator of the monastery. Before, there had been no appropriate conditions for giving communion to and confessing large numbers of pilgrims. A. Szyszko-Bohusz proposed to place the Cenacle on the former burial grounds and to renovate the Potocki gate through which the pilgrims enter into a small square that is a kind of a church porch and from there descend the wide stairs leading to the Cenacle - Confessional which is a kind of an open air church. It is a spacious courtyard on a rectangular plan surrounded by open arcades. Opposite the entrance and above the arcades of the cloister, the architect placed a picturesque gable. The cloisters have groin vaults. Semicircular arcs and stylized Tuscan capitals are used in the arcades. A balustrade for pilgrims to receive holy communion is placed in the cloisters alongside the northern, western and southern axes. The floor of the Cenacle has been lowered so as to align the upper cloisters with the fortifications. A. Szyszko-Bohusz also designed the Confessional adjoining the southern wall of the church porch. It is a building on the plan of an elongated rectangle with a large hall. It is entered from the porch preceding the cloisters.

It can be concluded that the architecture of the Cenacle with its references to the Renaissance and late Baroque forms was composed in the spirit of the vernacular. It was certainly determined by the time and place, namely the early years of regained independence and Jasna Góra.

3.2 Wiktor Zin

Another architect whose works for Jasna Góra I would like to present is profesor Wiktor Zin. In mid 1980s he had a post similar to that of Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz 60 years before. Wiktor Zin's first realization in Jasna Góra was *Brama Jana Pawła II* (John Paul II's Gate). The need for another gate became urgent since the only existing gate accessible for car transport was situated on the western side and its size was insufficient to let through any cars larger than a medium-

sized delivery van. Safety regulations required a new gate to be built or the old one to be widened. I can still remember the care with which Professor Zin worked on his project 25 years ago as I had assisted him. Both the height and the width of the clearance were extended to meet fire safety regulations. The gate interior within the embankments was covered with a tunnel vault in compliance with the system of the other vaults. The gate exterior was topped with an attic featuring the Pope's name and coat of arms. A few month after it had been completed, the wooden roof structure next to the monastery library caught fire. The fire could not be extinguished using helicopters because this would have endangered the tower. If it had not been for the new size of the gate, much more damage would have been done.



Table 1: Clara Montana, Czestochowa, John Paul II's Gate.

Another realization by W.Zin was the reconstruction of the organ prospect and the choir in the Chapel of Our Lady. They followed conservation works of the Chapel organ which revealed that it was necessary to extend the choir for the instrument to work properly. A debate ensued among art historians, particularly the ones connected with the ecclesiastical circles, who mostly opposed any works in the organ prospect even though they did not know the project. They argued that the alterations would clash with the historical interior. I remember Professor telling me that one day

he was asked by the Primate who was leaving the Chapel if it was necessary to rebuild the choir which was so beautiful and so perfectly matching its surroundings. W.Zin's answer was: *but Your Eminence, this is exactly my project.*

The urban space next to the Pilgrims' Home was also designed by W.Zin. I again had the honour to assist him in his work. The project involved designing parking lots, squares, camp sites and pedestrian facilities for large numbers of pilgrims (at present, 4-5 million a year). The problem was that the city authorities had planned to build transit roads in the area. Professor Zin managed to persuade them to abandon their plans. It is hard to imagine how services could be provided to such enormous crowds of pilgrims if he had failed to do so.

A characteristic feature of Professor Zin's conservation practice was to make all the necessary contemporary alterations fit in harmoniously with the existing context so as not to harm the historical values in the slightest degree.

Both architects' conservation activities in Jasna Gora share some features. Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz and Wiktor Zin alike adjusted the designed forms to the existing historical context in such a way that they did not compete with it or stand out in any way because of their new style. It seems that the architects did not want the observer to distinguish between the old and new elements of the architecture of the complex.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The complexes of buildings presented above like many others of the kind in Poland were in continuous use and therefore kept changing over time to meet the contemporary requirements. Apart from the fact that they bear witness to the historical tradition of the Order, they also are utility objects. This means having to reconcile historical spatial layouts with new modified functions resulting from contemporary living standards. Conservation activities cannot be based solely on economic and utility premises as this could lead to a complete replacement of the old fabric with new elements. Revitalization of an object combined with the restoring of its original function, apart from reconstruction or extension, involves a whole load of technical and functional concerns.

The need to apply new elements that would improve the living standard of modern man determines many solutions. The treatment of historical value as a priority should be combined with taking into account the contemporary use of the object, which involves using modern technologies and architectural forms. However, modern technologies and conditions which ensure man's well-being should not damage historical values because they constitute the cultural heritage which is significant for the development and existence of both the Order and society as a whole.

We cannot regard cultural heritage as a closed set which is separated by barriers from contemporary times. The monastic objects presented above developed throughout history as architectural complexes. It should be pointed out that many of their historical layers are valuable forms which are representative of a particular epoch. Thus cultural heritage becomes, in a way, a resource to which we add new values, just the way it happened in the past.

REFERENCES

- [1] A. Bialkiewicz, *Modernistyczny budynek seminarium oo. paulinow na Skalce w Krakowie*, Biuletyn Kurii Generalnej, Krakow ZP, Poland, Czestochowa 1994.
- [2] A. Bialkiewicz, *Rewitalizacja modernistycznej budowli w jej historycznym kontekście*, wydawnictwo posesyjne Międzynarodowego Sympozjum: *Teoria i praktyka w ochronie zabytkow architektury, zespolow i miejsc historycznych*, Krakow 1998.
- [3] A. Bialkiewicz, *Rewitalizacja zalozen klasztornych jako nośników szczególnej tożsamosci*, Revitalisation as a Vehicle of Identity and Development of Metropolitan Areas, Pro-Revita. Poland, Lodz 2006.
- [4] R. Cielatkowska, *Dziedzictwo, terażniejszosc, a autentyzm miasta*, wydawnictwo posesyjne Miedzynarodowej Konferencji Konserwatorskiej Krakow 2000 : *Dziedzictwo kulturowe fundamentem rozwoju cywilizacji*, Krakow 2000.
- [5] O. Czerner, H. Listowski, *Avant-garde Polonaise, Awangarda Polska, The Polish Avant-garde*, Warszawa, Interpress 1981.
- [6] M. J. Zychowska, *Miedzy tradycją a awangardą. Problem stylu w architekturze Krakowa lat miedzywojennych*, Krakow, Wydawnictwa Naukowe Politechniki Krakowskiej 1991.