

CONSERVATION AND REVITALIZATION OF SACRED ARCHITECTURE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20th CENTURY

Aleksandra REPELEWICZ^{1,*}, Izabela MAJOR¹, Kinga JEŻ¹

¹ Czestochowa University of Technology, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Department of Civil Engineering, Akademicka Street 3, Czestochowa 42-218, Poland

Abstract

The article presents the issue of architecture of the second half of the 20th century in Poland, with particular emphasis on the sacred architecture of that period. These resources, associated in the collective consciousness with the gloomy period of communism in Poland, are not treated as valuable monuments of their era but are often subject to demolition, devastation and radical transformations. The sacred architecture of this period, created despite very unfavorable conditions, is treated in a slightly different way, being a testimony to the rebellion and determination of a significant part of society. Despite this, churches from the Polish People's Republic (PPR) period, not being treated as historic monuments, are often not preserved and renovated with respect for their original assumptions. Due to the increasing secularization of society, some buildings are currently too large in relation to current needs, which is why the problem of adapting some of these buildings for other purposes begins to arise. These adaptations should be carried out with respect for the basic function of the temple and the original architectural assumptions. The work presents examples of churches from the second half of the 20th century in the Archdiocese of Czestochowa that were subject to this type of intervention.

Keywords: *Architecture of the second half of the 20th century; Sacral architecture; Conservation and adaptation of churches*

Introduction

Despite the existing fashion for reminiscence of the Communist era, the architecture of that period is not held in high esteem by the society. Perhaps too little time has passed to appreciate the relics of this era. Critical attitudes and devaluation of the architectural heritage of the second half of the 20th century prevail and the phenomenon of non-acceptance of monuments from this period is quite common. One example is the demolition in 2006 of the Supersam, a 1962 Warsaw store with an innovative design, considered by critics to be a special architectural work, not least because of its unique structure at the time. Many more examples prevail. The situation is slowly beginning to change and it seems that we have arrived at a time when the achievements of the previous Communist era are now being appreciated and the relics of that period, surviving from demolitions and radical transformations, will finally be cared for by conservators. Of course, the buildings in question are ones with significant artistic value and that provide excellent testimony of their time. Imposed norms and political constraints have left their mark on the buildings of the People's Republic of Poland, so it is reasonable to ask the

* Corresponding author: aleksandra.repelewicz@pcz.pl

Vitruvian question: "was the architecture of the second half of the 20th century in Poland durable, useful and beautiful?" It seems that despite the great difficulties in the field of construction, many beautiful and important buildings were erected at that time, representing the cultural heritage of the places where they were built. It is undoubtedly a collection of monuments that, among others, have an impact on the development of national consciousness.

The literature on the conservation of architectural monuments is very extensive and it is impossible to include in a literature review even the most representative items. Only a few selected examples from recent years can be given. These are publications on selected conservation methods and modern, innovative materials [1], as well as ones describing various examples of conservation and revitalization work [2, 3]. Articles reviewing the literature on selected conservation issues are also noted [4]. A certain, quite numerous group among the publications on conservation and restoration is those devoted to church buildings [5], including a large group on the adaptation of historic church buildings to new functions [6-8]. However, there are relatively few articles on the conservation and revitalization of architecture created in the second half of the 20th century. For the most part, the architecture created during this period in Central European countries, including Poland, is not treated as monuments but often rather as quite troubling testimony of its time [9]. Despite this, one can find works dedicated to the protection, conservation and revitalization of buildings constructed in the second half of the 20th century [10-12]. To a large extent, they are calls for preservation of selected valuable buildings from this era. A few of these works are devoted to religious buildings, especially to the protection of outstanding late modernism projects [13, 14]. It therefore seems expedient to expand on this issue in this paper.

The purpose of the article is to provide an overview of the history of architecture of the second half of the 20th century in Poland, with a particular focus on sacral architecture and attention to the artistic and historical value of selected projects. Familiarizing readers with the history of the architecture of this period will allow, in the next part of the article, an examination of the legitimacy of undertaking conservation protection and treating outstanding architectural works from the Communist period as monuments. Examples of sacral buildings undergoing restoration and the adaptation of parts of these buildings for non-sacral purposes will be presented. The buildings discussed are all located within the Częstochowa archdiocese.

Historical outline of architecture of the second half of the 20th century in Poland

The architecture of the second half of the 20th century in Poland was closely linked to the political, social and economic changes taking place in the country at the time. It was influenced by both the doctrines of Socialist Realism and later modernist, brutalist and postmodernist tendencies. Between 1945 and 1949, there was a brief episode of post-war modernism, closely alluding to interwar modernism. The 1950s were dominated by Socialist Realism, in line with the ideological tenets of the Communist government. Buildings of this period were characterized by monumentalism, symmetry and classicizing details. The flagship example is the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, a Soviet-inspired symbol of the architecture of the time. An example of housing construction of this period is Krakow's Nowa Huta housing estate, which was originally designed according to the principles of modernism. Its construction, however, fell into the period of socialist realism, resulting in numerous changes from the original design. From the mid-1950s, with the political thaw, architecture began to move away from the tenets of Socialist Realism in favor of functionalism and modernism. The 1960s is the most interesting period in Polish postwar architecture. That decade pursued the

program of the interwar avant-garde: new art for new people. Experiments with new materials, structures and technologies started. Large glazing, innovative forms and unusual roof coverings were used. Examples of such projects include the WKD railway station in Warsaw, the Cracovia hotel and the BWA pavilion in Cracow, the "okrągłak" department store in Poznań, the railroad station in Katowice, the college town and the Bieńczyce housing estate in Cracow. The early 1970s was a period of Brutalism, a time of further development of residential construction and a time of prestigious public projects, such as Warsaw's Central Railway Station, which combines elements of Brutalism and Futurist Modernism. The large panel system made it possible to build quickly and cheaply, thus meeting the needs of the growing urban population. Among others, the 1970s was a period of intensive development of the Ursynów housing estate in Warsaw as well as large housing estates in all Polish cities. The urban space was also enriched with numerous department stores, hotels and office buildings. Large hospitals were built, including the Children's Health Center in Warsaw and the Polish Mother's Health Center in Łódź. Sanatoriums and rest houses were erected in spa towns, including the sanatorium and rest house complex in Ustroń, the Granit rest house in Szklarska Poręba and "Dom Budowlanych" in Krynica. After the 1980s martial law, Polish architecture gradually began to evolve toward postmodernism, which involved greater creative freedom and a rejection of strict modernist forms. Buildings with more varied styles and historical details appeared, with references to earlier eras. To sum up, the second half of the 20th century in Polish architecture was a period of dynamic change - from ideologically imposed socialist realism, through functional modernism and brutalism, to postmodern experiments. Each of these trends left a lasting mark on the landscape of Polish cities, influencing the way public and private space was shaped.

Historical outline of the sacral architecture of the second half of the 20th century in Poland

The history of post-war religious architecture began with the completion of churches, the construction of which started before the war and the reconstruction of the buildings destroyed during the war. There were also several new developments. The situation changed radically after 1949, when it became virtually impossible to obtain permission to build a new temple. People resorted to official renovations and expansions that actually resulted in new facilities or to building without a permit or under the guise of a permit for a facility with a different purpose (e.g., the slaughterhouse house in Rększowice in the Częstochowa archdiocese). During the first 12 years of the People's Republic of Poland, only three new temples were erected in the entire diocese of Częstochowa and the construction of two churches, which had begun before the war, was continued.

Of interest are the material effects of all these investment processes. Unfortunately, unfavorable construction conditions, lack of appropriate building materials, lack of specialized equipment and inability to rent it from state enterprises, approval of designs for catechetical buildings (for which it was easier to obtain a permit), introduction of changes to the design and a number of other difficulties all contributed to the decline in the quality of church buildings. Despite this, outstanding projects have been built all over Poland that are examples of quality architecture. Such temples include the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Władysławowo (1957-1961); the aforementioned Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary Queen of Poland, the so-called "Lord's Arc" in Cracow (1967-1977); and the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Cracow (1967-1977). The Church of the Holy Spirit in Wrocław (1972-1994); the Church of the Divine Mercy in Kalisz (designed in 1958, constructed in 1977-1993); the

Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and Our Lady of the Healing in Katowice (1977-1993); the Church of St. Adalbert in Częstochowa (1978-1985); the Church of the Holy Spirit in Tychy (1979-1983); the Church of St. Joseph in Tychy (1979-1983); and the Church of the Holy Spirit in Częstochowa. The church of St. Queen Jadwiga in Cracow (1979-1988); the church of Our Lady Queen of the World in Radom (1982-2012); the church of the Blessed Virgin Mary Queen of Poland in Świdnica (1982-2001); the church of the Holy Spirit in Mielec (1983-1987); the church of Jesus Christ the Redeemer in Czechowice-Dziedzice (1995-1998). Of course, the group of churches presented here does not exhaust the list of successful projects in the field of religious construction; it only contains examples, selected by the authors, with widespread recognition in the architectural community.

Conservation of architectural works of the second half of the 20th century in Poland

Currently, the 2003 Monument Protection and Care Act, amended in 2024, is in force in Poland [15]. Article 3(1) of the law specifies: *a monument is understood to be an immovable or movable property or parts or complexes thereof, which have been developed by people or are associated with their activity and are a testimony of a bygone era or event, the preservation of which is in the public interest due to its historical, artistic or scientific value.*

Article 6.1(1) states that: *The following are subject to protection, regardless of the preservation condition: 1) immovable monuments that are, in particular, (...) c) works of architecture and construction.*

According to Article 7, the types of monument protection include 1) *entry in the register of monuments; 1a) entry on the Heritage Treasures List; 2) recognition as a historical monument; 3) establishment of a cultural park; 4) protection arrangements in the local land development plan or in the decision establishing a public-purpose investment, the decision on development conditions, the decision to authorize a road investment, the decision to determine the location of a railroad line or the decision to authorize the implementation of a public-use airport investment.*

As can be seen from these provisions, the traditional forms of protection of architecture of the second half of the 20th century, which are either listed in the register of historical monuments or protected by a record in the local development plan, are currently being applied. Sometimes a building from this period is located in a historical monument or cultural park. In addition to recognizing a structure as one of the listed forms of protection, the provisions of the aforementioned law require defining the values of the building defined as historical, artistic or scientific. Defining these values is one of the activities associated with registration of a building in the register of historical monuments, but also with defining the scope of protection of a building under the legal protection based on land development. Unfortunately, the architecture of the second half of the 20th century is now the most vulnerable. These buildings are associated with the political system of the People's Republic of Poland; moreover, it is only recently that architectural historians have become interested in this historical period and there is still no uniform method of describing, categorizing or valuing its works.

The paper by Lewicki [16] presents the history of the demolition in 2006 of the Warsaw “Supersam” (1959-62), designed in 1953 by E. M. Krasinski, J. Hryniewicz, M. Gintowt, W. Zalewski, A. Zórawski and S. Kusia, which took place despite widespread recognition of its architectural values. The author wrote as follows: *The Conservator of the Mazowieckie Province, on their last day in office, refused to recognize Supersam as a monument based on the opinions of experts. This happened at a time when one of the world's most prestigious institutions associated with architecture - the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—was*

hosting a large monographic exhibition of projects by the co-founder of this building, Professor Wacław Zalewski (author of the experimental structure) and the cover of the accompanying catalog was adorned with a photo of the Warsaw Supersam.

A similar situation occurred in the case of the “Chemia” pavilion in Warsaw, designed by J. Bogusławski. This building no longer exists, despite numerous protests against its demolition. It happened despite the inclusion of the building on the list of modern cultural assets by the Association of Polish Architects.

The “Smyk” commercial building, a flagship example of Warsaw's modernist architecture, was also demolished. The entry in the list of monuments concerned only the original part of the building, salvaged after a fire in 1975. This fact helped the developer get permission to demolish the secondary elements, even though they were reconstructed with respect for the original concept. A modern office building was erected in its place, referring only in its external form to the former “Smyk.” A similar fate befell many buildings in Warsaw, icons of post-war modernism, including the “Skarpa” cinema, the WZ cinema, the “Praha” cinema and one of the capital's most characteristic buildings - the PKO rotunda. The Wedding Palace was demolished in Katowice and the “Mercury” department store was demolished in Częstochowa. In Wrocław, the demolition of the postmodern department store “Solpol,” designed by W. Jarząbek, was carried out despite the protests of the architectural community. The railroad station in Częstochowa, designed by R. Frankowicz, one of the icons of Polish postmodernism, has not been included in the list of monuments and is awaiting demolition. Many examples of this type from all cities in Poland could be cited.

In addition to demolitions, which are the most drastic acts, mention should also be made of unsuccessful reconstructions and restorations that do not preserve the character and spirit of the era in which the buildings were erected. Examples of this include the Katowice railroad station (1966-1972). The design of the station made by W. Kłyszewski, J. Mokrzyński and E. Wierzbicki was an outstanding example of Brutalism and innovative cup design. After reconstruction, several cups were restored, but, unfortunately, a shopping mall was located on the upper floors, thus completely changing the character of the building.

In Częstochowa, the police headquarters building designed in 1972 has undergone thermal efficiency improvement. Unfortunately, many of the original details were not preserved, which was protested by a group of Częstochowa architects, including the sons of the late designer of the building, M. Kruszyński. The architects from the Association of Polish Architects (SARP) said there was a *“blatant copyright infringement and a lack of culture and respect for one of the most recognizable buildings in Częstochowa.”* In their opinion, the façade has been degraded by incompetent thermal efficiency improvement.

An example of unsuccessful interference with an architectural work is the plastering of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Wrocław (1972-1994). The work of W. Wawrzyniak, J. Wojnarowicz, T. Zipser and W. Świecicki, included in the list of Wrocław heritage of 1945-1989, has completely lost its original expression. The building's brick façade and pointed windows alluded to the Gothic style, which can be found in abundance in Wrocław and the semicircular façade was plastered in white, evoking associations with the Holy Spirit. In addition, the white color gave the building a lightness and visually connected the façade with the white monumental staircase leading to the main entrance. The church was plastered in red and orange colors, causing the symbols and nuances carefully designed by the creators to disappear.

The selected examples cited above, of demolition and modernization without respect for the original form and context of architectural works of the second half of the 20th century, show the state of conservation protection of such buildings in Poland. Although there are many

options available for the protection of these works, daily practice shows a lot of negative phenomena, exposing barriers to the exercise of effective conservation policy. To sum up, the relevant authorities should strive for more effective protection of valuable pieces of architecture of the second half of the 20th century, especially in view of the fact that the statutory definition of “monument” does not limit protection by any time frame and thus allows protection of even the most recent works of outstanding character.

Examples of renovation, revitalization and adaptation of sacral buildings in the Częstochowa archdiocese

More than 230 new churches were built in the territory of the current archdiocese of Częstochowa after 1945, most of which are parish churches. Most were built between 1981 and 2000. Erected in times difficult for sacral investments, they present a wide variety of quality, both aesthetically and materially. However, they are all a testament to the difficult times in which they were built and the determination of the local communities that erected the buildings. After several decades of use, they require maintenance, renovation, revitalization and sometimes adaptation of certain parts to current needs. Fortunately, in Poland there is no temptation to demolish churches, even those that no longer meet the current needs of the parish, but ill-advised renovations and modernizations can effectively spoil the designer's original intention and sometimes even tarnish the building.

An example of a not-so-successful reconstruction is the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Fig. 1). This church, erected in 1949-56, was designed by engineer Sachse (the designer's first name could not be established) in a convention reminiscent of the Renaissance style. It is a building with a rectangular floor plan, covered with a gabled roof. In the side façades, tall, slender windows are capped with flat arches. The front and rear façades were varied with masonry projections and horizontal cornices, as well as spiral volute tracery. In 2018, a large canopy over the main entrance and a smaller one over the side entrance were added to the church's front façade.



Fig. 1. Front and side façade of the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

The investor's motives are understandable - to protect the front door and worshippers entering the church from rain and this function is indeed fulfilled by the new element of the building. In turn, the form and, in particular, the materials used are completely mismatched with the style of the building. What is particularly striking is the use of red corrugated sheet metal, juxtaposed with the noble patina of the copper sheet covering the main body of the church. Even the light color of the new bricks stands out unpleasantly against the dark red of the old brick façade. Practical considerations completely predominated over the desire to preserve the original style of the original building.

A similar example is the church of St. John the Baptist in Libidza (Fig. 2). Designed in 1983 by Henryk Cekiera, this small, single-nave building with a very simple, proportional form was expanded ca. 2009. A porch was added to the front façade, topped with a half-gable roof. The typically modernist body of the building is now adjacent to a porch whose gabled roof does follow the angle of the slope of the main building, but its style refers to regional construction, disrupting the stylistic uniformity of the building.



Fig. 2. Front and side façade of the church of St. John the Baptist in Libidza



(a)



(b)

Fig. 3. Front façade of the church of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ in Wrzosowa before renovation (a) and after renovation (b)

The Church of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ in Wrzosowa was the first one in the diocese of Częstochowa to receive a building permit after 1970. Marian Ficenes was the designer and construction was carried out from 1974 to 1978. It is an example of late modernism with a roof-and-wall configuration. The body of the church consists of three parts, resembling open tents meeting in the middle of the temple (Fig. 3). Stained glass windows were placed in the openings. In the entrance section, a massive cross was placed diagonally at the original highest point, on an extension of the ridge, which appeared to support the entire structure. The entirety symbolizes the three tents of Mount Tabor.

The sloping walls of the building were covered with local limestone, a characteristic of the Kraków-Częstochowa Upland. Due to the slope of the walls, moisture was appearing in the interior, so the decision was made to replace the front wall cladding. Rectangular façade tiles were used and on this occasion the diagonal cross was removed and replaced by a smaller vertical one. This cross no longer symbolically supports anything, which has impoverished the symbolism of the entrance area. The renovation work has completely changed the expression of the temple. It should be added that the new façade, after several years of use in the lower parts of the walls, is already damaged; some of the tiles have fallen off, while others are splintered.

St. Adalbert's Church is one of Częstochowa's most distinctive religious buildings (Fig. 4). Designed in 1975 by Antoni Mazur, it was built in 1977-1985. The concept of this modernist building was based on the offset of the unequal triangular prisms that mark the arch divisions. Lighting of the interior is provided by openwork planes, which were created by shifting the solids against each other. They are filled with glazed latticework. The roofs have varying slopes, which can be interpreted as a symbolic reference to "M," as in Mary. The renovation of the façade of St. Adalbert's Church, carried out almost 40 years after the building was put into use, was combined with a change in the color scheme. The use of warm shades of beige slightly changed the austere expression of the formerly white and later white-gray, walls. It is certainly debatable whether this is a beneficial change.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 4. Front façade of St. Adalbert's Church in Częstochowa before renovation (a) and after renovation (b)

St. Adalbert's Church is affected by yet another upgrade, related to the use of too much space for the current needs of the parish. According to the project's data, the volume of the entire facility is 24,000m³ and the development area is 1,400m². The ground floor area of the building, which includes the nave and chancel, is about 940m². The building has a full basement and there is a large chapel under the nave. The sacral part is connected to a six-story catechetical building. Since then, 3 new parishes have been established in the "Północ" district to fully meet the needs of the district's residents. Two new churches were built in the

“Tysiąclecie” district, within the boundaries of the parish of St. Adalbert. As a result, the number of parishioners was significantly reduced. The cost of maintaining such a large facility fell on a relatively small number of believers. In search of additional uses for the currently too-large space, the catechetical building currently houses a community elementary school and physical therapy offices have been organized in part of the ground floor. The use of additional space for educational and health-related purposes does not conflict with the primary function of the structure. Nor does it affect the exterior form of the building.

An example of a renovation that preserves the original character of a building is the façade of the Church of Divine Providence in Częstochowa (Fig. 5). Renowned Częstochowa architect Edward Usakiewicz designed the church building in functionalist style in 1948 and construction was completed by 1950. The church has a two-nave structure with the nave and a smaller side aisle on the west side. The body is made up of cuboids of varying heights and widths, covered by two-sided and single-sided roofs with a slight slope. From ground level, these roofs are invisible, enhancing the impression of simplicity and cubic form of the building's body. The rows of narrow rectangular windows in the nave are characteristic of Usakiewicz's work. Simplicity of form and its subordination to function were his hallmark. The church has already been plastered in the 21st century with great respect for the original form and preservation of the color scheme. No additional element was added to any of the façades. The last example is the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Blessed Virgin Mary in Czarny Las, designed in 1984 by T. Krzyrkowski as a catechetical building (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5. Front and side façade of the Church of Divine Providence in Częstochowa



(a)



(b)

Fig. 6. Front and side façade of the Church of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Czarny Las, before expansion (a) and after expansion (b)

During construction, the conversion of the catechist chapel into the nave and the adjacent catechist room into the chancel was introduced by removing the partition wall between these rooms. This type of treatment was deliberately introduced at the time of obtaining a building permit, as it was then easier to obtain a permit to build a so-called “catechism point” than a church. In addition to its sacred role, the building also has a residential function; the living quarters are located above the chancel, which seems rather unusual.

The multitude of functions determined the shape of the building, in which it is difficult to discern a particular architectural style. In the 1920s the church was expanded, with a porch located in the entrance area and a tower above it, giving the building a religious character. The tower is not yet plastered; construction work is ongoing. The tower is a simple prism shape with a hipped roof and narrow openings at the top. It refers to the Romanesque style. The expansion appears to be to the benefit of the building, the exterior appearance of which had previously not emphasized its proper function. The building was given a sacred character.

Conclusions

Churches in post-war Poland played a special role because, in addition to their primary purpose, they were often the only space of national identity and freedom. Some temples, such as the “Lord’s Ark” in Nowa Huta, had already become a national asset during construction and were treated on a par with historical monuments. Many of the churches, due to their avant-garde form and artistic class, which was rare in communist times, have become tourist attractions and even local landmarks.

Referring to the preservation of works of architecture of various purposes and throughout Poland, this paper presents examples of modernization and revitalization of the Catholic churches built between 1945 and 2000 in the Częstochowa archdiocese. Various types of renovations and conversions were particularly conducted in older buildings, due to their natural technical wear and tear. These works can and must be carried out with respect for the original architectural principles, especially for buildings that have become true icons of their neighborhoods and towns because of their artistic values and their perfect integration into the surrounding landscape. A guarantee of just such treatment of these architectural works would be to place them under conservation protection in whatever form is applicable in Poland. Unfortunately, the vast majority of churches built after World War II are not subject to such protection. A significant role in the proper treatment of religious monuments from the Communist era is played by the priests-administrators of these buildings and it seems expedient that this particular group should have knowledge and awareness of the protection and proper maintenance of the administered buildings.

Many opportunities are available for the protection of pieces of architecture of the second half of the 20th century, while many negative phenomena are observed that show the inadequacies of conservation policy. It is therefore important to protect outstanding architectural works, even ones from the recent past. To sum up, there should be a broader and more effective protection of valuable pieces of architecture of the second half of the 20th century, including Catholic temples, especially since the statutory definition of “monument” is not limited by any time frame for the purposes of protection.

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