

Piotr Gerber, PhD
Institute of History of Architecture, Art and Technology
Wrocław University of Technology

New forms of protection of industrial heritage in Poland.

After the system transformation that took place in 1989, as a result of opening of the economy to products and technologies of the free market, most of state-owned, obsolete and badly managed enterprises were liquidated, or fell into chronic economic crisis. Gradual destruction of state-owned property affected most of the public sector of economy and in spite of attempts made to revitalise it (mainly through privatisation), is still proceeding. The process refers particularly to those branches of economy that for social reasons were financed with the use of various systems of protection and government subsidies. The cases of negligence in the area of protection of public property mentioned above are specifically visible in: mining, power production, metallurgy and engineering industry. Many of the already closed or currently liquidated companies had long traditions.

Due to economic stagnation, which occurred in the period of a centrally planned economy (in communism), the plants were based on out-of-date technologies applied with the use of machinery representing historic value. Failure to modernize the economy based on inefficient technologies was possible in the system isolated from the principles of competition, in which demand substantially exceeded the level of production. As a result, each product, even one of the lowest quality, found its purchaser. Such economic system automatically maintained efficiency of old devices and machines and preserved technologies not used elsewhere anymore.

Thus paradoxically, one can state, that a centrally planned economy supported protection of industrial heritage in Poland.

Such situation exempted conservation services responsible for monument protection from a duty to protect and provide documentation concerning industrial heritage. Hardly ever were any works to document the state of technological monuments in Poland undertaken on a larger scale.

Dynamic changes taking place in the Polish economy in the nineties led to creation of a public sector in production, trade and services competitive to the public one. Since the mid 1990's the process of bankruptcy and collapse of public manufacturers intensified, accompanied by the process of destruction of old technologies, machines and devices, which in spite of huge historic value ended up in scrap yards. When production stopped, historic industrial buildings were devastated or demolished. Lack of effective actions on the part of services responsible for protection caused that those buildings were destroyed without even any prior conservation documentation left.

There are a few reasons for that.

The fundamental problem was and still is a low social awareness of the necessity to protect industrial heritage. According to a widely held belief that a monument is an appropriately old item having aesthetic qualities, contributed to the fact that machines, devices, technical installations did not fit in the commonly accepted definition of the monument.

Shortage of adequate examples of proper management of industrial constructions at home contributed to frequently ignorant and economically unjustified destruction of technological monuments.

During the last few years as well, many valuable buildings, including complexes of substantial historic value went to ruin, for instance, the 19th century complex of slaughterhouse buildings in Wrocław, slaughterhouse buildings in Łódź and Gorzów Wielkopolski, a ruined textile complex in Żyrardów as well as numerous plant buildings in Łódź, and a recently demolished industrial district of Bielsko-Biała. Recently, a railway sector is at the greatest danger of destruction. It is due to the start of liquidation of the majority of inefficient railway lines.

Chain reaction bankruptcies of textile production plants started in the 1990s led to removal of old production machinery. Existing museums of textile industry, mainly due to lack of resources necessary to finance their statutory activity, did not make efforts to take over machines and devices endangered with destruction. Consequently, it is now difficult to complete at least one production line dated to the beginning of 20th century.

After liquidation of industrial buildings used in such a crucial branch of industry as textile industry was in Poland, no new museum documenting this branch of production was established.

Economic changes being described, had influence on the loss of industrial identity by many Polish districts and towns. It refers, for instance, to Wałbrzych dominated by mining industry and Nowa Ruda, where one can get acquainted with the history of mining only in the Museum of Industry and Mining, or Włocławek and Bolesławiec developed due to ceramic production. Recession in textile industry was a reason for economic collapse of such towns as, Walim, Bielawa, Kamienna Góra oraz Żyrardów. Economic collapse in these towns contributes to the fact that ownerless post-industrial buildings, frequently with meaningful traditions and of substantial value, cannot find buyers and go into ruin.

The situation looks different in large cities. A boom especially in trade led to growth of interest in sites previously occupied by decaying, state-owned plants, most often built in the 19th century, which as a result of spatial development are now located in the centres of modern conurbations. Bankrupt plant sites are attractive areas for new investments. Lack of good examples and low activity of conservation services did not help to enforce investors to adapt the existing buildings.

The pressure of entrepreneurs aiming at quick completion of investments at the lowest costs possible resulted in destruction of historic and most frequently legally unprotected buildings, on the slightest pretext. The same happened to a local slaughterhouse building and a cattle market place in Szczecin, Łódź and Wrocław.

Projects of revitalisation of historic industrial buildings in Poland.

In this situation, sparse cases of adaptations of buildings and industrial complexes for new purposes preserving their original aim are of great value and importance. A project that deserves attention is an adaptation, made in 2002, of a previously ruined paper mill from 1838 for a shopping centre in Konstancin Jeziorna (photo no. 1), near Warsaw. This is an example of a fusion of historic qualities with the new function of the buildings. The project was completed by a Polish private investor.

An office and banking centre adapted from the old gas plant in Ostrów Wielkopolski is another interesting example. A project of adaptation of a historically and artistically valuable water tower located in Wrocław for office and gastronomic purposes was completed as well (photo no. 2). Currently, a complex of buildings of a weaving and spinning mill of the former Scheibler Factory in Łódź is being adapted for shopping and entertainment purposes. The project is completed by a French investor.

The basic role in preservation of the industrial heritage in Poland is performed by museums.

At present in Poland, there are 94 museums presenting collections related to the history of industry. 22 of them are museums of old technologies (miming, metallurgy, ceramics, etc.), there are 7 museums of fire fighting, 5 marine museums and 5 railway museums. All of them are financed by the state budget or local governments.

During the last few years, museums of technology run mainly by local government institutions were established as well. It is due to, among many, the need to document the liquidated, local industrial centres.

In this place I have to mention the Museum of Technology and Mining opened in Wałbrzych in 1996, located at the site of the no longer exploited Thorez mine or the Museum of Mining in Nowa Ruda. Care for industrial heritage is visible also in some of the operating plants.

A good example for that may be conservation and presentation to the public historic steam machines, pumps, technical devices and buildings at the site of "Zawada" waterworks plant in Karchowice near Bytom in Upper Silesia.

The Upper Silesian Waterworks in Katowice, which still produces water managed to preserve a historic industrial complex and adjusted it to the needs of visitors (photos 3, 4). The waterworks plant in Kraków dated to the beginning of the 20th century was renovated with a similar care.

Single objects promoting technological achievements of a given enterprise are often preserved and later displayed as a monument in front of the plant building. This is the way in which one of the first post-war electric locomotives manufactured in Wrocław PaFaWaG was preserved. The conservation works were financed by a Canadian concern, the new owner of the company (photo 5).

At the same time some of the existing museums of technology financed with public money, due to changes in ownership and organisation, face liquidation. Such situation is, for instance, in the Railway Museum in Warsaw, which due to the change in ownership lost its current seat and was not provided with a new one.

Lack of stability affects mainly museums which earlier constituted a property of large state-owned industrial companies. Reorganised, often privatised firms are not interested in financing museums. During privatisation of Wrocław railway car factory PaFaWag (former Linke-Hofmann Werke) a collection of a factory museum was closed and damaged.

In spite of still insufficient care for industrial monuments in Poland, after 1989 growth of social interest in industrial heritage was noticed. The interest is visible, for example, in the growing popularity of collecting as well as in opening small private museums, like Mikiciuk Museum of Motorization and Technology in Otrębusy – collections of items mainly from transport and railway industry.

Moreover, a number of social organisations aiming at the protection of the chosen industrial works was established. The Association at the Historic Mine "Ignacy" in Rybnik took on a difficult, but very important task. Members of the Association very actively work to preserve two one hundred year old steam hoisting machines, being still in operation.

Active promotion makes local authorities take a position on the issue of the nearest liquidation of the historic mine (photos 6, 7).

During the last few years, there appeared also private museums functioning on a larger scale, in various organisational forms, for example the Museum of Industry and Railways in Silesia in Jaworzyna Śląska opened in 2004. The museum preserves material evidence for development of industry and railways in the Lower Silesian region. It was established as a private institution on the basis of the Skansen Museum of Locomotives in Jaworzyna Śląska intended for liquidation, previously owned by the Polish National Railways (photo no. 8, 9).

Joint efforts of the founder of the Museum and municipal government of Jaworzyna Śląska together with a group of railway fans resulted in suspension of the liquidation process in the Skansen Museum and decision of the management board of the Polish National Railways to give over the buildings and the historic railway rolling stock to the Municipal Government of Jaworzyna Śląska. Eventually, in agreement with the Ministry of Culture, the Museum of Industry and Railways in Silesia was established.

The Museum is based in buildings adapted after the old, historic locomotive shed dated 1889. The entire museum is situated on 2 ha area and equipped with track-ways, junctions and all required infrastructure. In the Museum over 120 various vehicles used in the railway traffic are displayed.

The Museum focuses on gathering of object, documents and iconography representing economic and industrial development of Lower Silesia, with special regard to railway transport, which dominates the exhibition.

Moreover, the employees of the Museum conserve industrial objects at specially prepared stands placed in the locomotive shed.

Besides exhibit items connected with railways, the Museum has also collections of items used in industrial production.

In the Museum one can see many unique types of locomotives, such as Pt 31 – the Polish fast steam locomotive from the 1930's – one of the two left in Poland, or TKh 2 steam locomotive from 1890, which is the oldest locomotive in Jaworzyna Śląska. A collection of Ty 2 steam locomotives, so called Kriegslok, that is, German war locomotives is also worth noticing.

Moreover, the Skansen Museum gives an opportunity to the visitors to see the interior of a locomotive shed, repair shops and many other historic technical devices related to the operation of the steam traction.

The founders of the Museum plan to start railway connections along the tourist trails of Lower Silesia with the use of historic steam locomotives and railway cars.

The budget of the Museum includes income obtained from the sale of entrance tickets, remuneration for conservation works and renting of exhibit items. Investment resources have been provided so far by the founder of the Museum.

Since 2006 the Museum has participated in the international research programme financed by the EU Frame Programme 6 concerning introduction of new technologies to conservation of historic objects made of cast iron and steel.

References:

- 1). M. Barszcz, Zabytki techniki kolejowej – problemy i ochrona.

(Monuments of railway technology – problems and protection.)

2). P. Gerber, A. Gryglewska, Historical Slaughter House in Wrocław. in *Patrimoine Industriel*, 2001

3). dane Ośrodka Dokumentacji Zabytków w Warszawie według stanu w dniu 01.03 2002 roku

(data provided by the Centre for Historic Monument Documentation as of 01.03.2002)

4). I. Sygowska, Z. Maj, Zabytki kultury Przemysłowej, stan posiadania, możliwości i metody rewitalizacji, rola w umacnianiu tożsamości narodowej. *Informacja na posiedzenie Sejmowej Komisji Kultury i Środków Przekazu opracowana w Urzędzie Generalnego Konserwatora Zabytków 2002.*

(Historic Monuments of industrial culture, property, opportunities and methods of revitalisation, a role in strengthening of national identity. Information prepared by the Office of the General Inspector of Monuments and presented at the meeting of the Parliamentary Committee of Culture and Mass Media 2002).

5). J. Dolat, Rola Działu Historii Przemysłu, Techniki, Technologii i Organizacji Produkcji w Ochronie i promocji dziedzictwa przemysłowego. Muzeum Historii Przemysłu w Opatówku.

(A role of the Department of History of Industry, Engineering, Technology and Production Organisation in protection and promotion of industrial heritage. The Museum of Industrial History in Opatówek.)

6). Strategia Ochrony Dziedzictwa Przemysłowego. Seminarium TICCIH, Opatówek 1-2. 12. 1999

(Industrial Heritage Protection Strategy. TICCIH Seminar, Opatówek 1-2. 12. 1999)

7). Lisia Sztolnia w Wałbrzychu jako zabytek techniki europejskiego dziedzictwa kulturowego. Międzynarodowa konferencja, Wałbrzych 20-22. 09. 2001

(Lisia Sztolnia in Wałbrzych as a technological monument of European cultural heritage. International conference, Wałbrzych 20-22. 09. 2001)