

## The Issues of Protecting Modernist Architecture in Łódź of the Second Republic of Poland

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It has been over 160 years since the beginning of the long term industrial revolution in Łódź, and nearly 90 since promoting the city to the rank of the provincial center. While the consequences of the industrialization - caused by the import of the first steam engine by the industrialist Ludwik Geyer in 1837 (for textile production in the so-called "White Factory") - are well known and serve as an identity label of Łódź, the other fact is still barely noticed and appreciated. The administrative promotion, which took place in February 1920, was accompanied by the establishment of a military garrison and the creation of the Łódź Diocese<sup>1</sup>.

The architectural landscape of the city was enriched by many new buildings, worthy of the provincial capital, such as: state departments, offices, public institutions, facilities for culture, education, health, recreation, religion, monuments, as well as housing complexes, apartments, townhouses, residential houses and urban villas<sup>2</sup>. A significant number of these objects (out of approximately 400 identified by the article authors within the framework of their studies since the 1980s) was shaped according to the rules of the interwar European modernism (which has more than "one face")<sup>3</sup>. A valuable face, but more and more dilapidated. Many of these buildings are still not under a constant and effective conservatory protection.

What level of interference is acceptable when modernizing public utility buildings, luxurious apartments and rental housing or adapting housing complexes to modern requirements, especially when it comes to transport services, urban densification or thermal modernization? In search for these answers let us analyze selected examples from Łódź.

### 1.

It is the most favourable - in terms of caring for the legacy of the period of administrative promotion of the city - contemporary modernization of public utility buildings in two

1. See: Wojalski Mirosław, *Kieszonkowa kronika dziejów Łodzi*, Łódź, 1998.
2. See: Olenderek Joanna, *Proces kształtowania przestrzeni w Łodzi II Rzeczypospolitej a awans administracyjny miasta*, Łódź, 2004.
3. See: Kłosiewicz Lech, *Modernizm Polski - Wprowadzenie do tematu*, "Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki", R. 2000, No. 2, p.88.

groups: "public institutions, offices and state service buildings" and "monuments and buildings of religious character". Among the first to deserve special recognition are the effects of renovating and modernizing (carried out with great care in the first years of the 21st century) buildings important for the provincial center such as: the Chamber of Revenue (1926-28), the District Court (1927-30) and the P.A.S.T. head quarters (1926-29)<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 1). All three came from one of the most prominent architects of the interwar Łódź - Józef Kaban, who changed his name to Korski after the World War II<sup>5</sup>. The Bishop's Palace (1922-1924) was renovated as well, also by Kaban, changing (for the enlargement of illumination windows in the attic) a part of the frieze in the cornice and the tympanum structure, originally decorated with a medallion shaped bas-relief<sup>6</sup>. The former Department of Sewerage and Water Control (1928-38), which is the current residence of the Vice Chancellor of the University of Łódź, was renovated as well. The original entrance portal, made of colored precious plaster, kept in the aesthetics of modernism of a geometrical style (corresponding with the rest of the architectural detail), was replaced with granite and marble stone covering, rather far from the intentions of the interwar project architect Wiesław Lisowski<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 2).

At the conclusion of the review of the state of the selected buildings from the "offices, public institutions and state departments" group, it is worth sharing the observations concerning the newly finished "skyscraper" restaurant of the General Mutual Insurance Company, built between 1929-1932, designed by Warsaw artists: Waclaw Rytel - architect and Stefan Bryła - designer. Over the years of continuous usage, degraded externally due to technological deterioration, the building was renovated - a new and elegant look, kept close to the original color. The inherent element of the architectural expression of the façades and interiors, (the building was shaped in the streamline style) is "marine detailing". Unfortunately, not all elements have been reconstructed (Fig. 3).

The aforementioned J. Kaban was the interwar period full-time architect of the Bishop Curia in Łódź. It is not surprising that he designed two Roman Catholic churches,

1. Polish Telephone Company Office in Łódź, Józef Kaban architect, (1923) 1926. Postcard from the collection of the Centre for Research and Documentation of Monuments in Łódź; Photo by authors, 2005

4. Centre for Research and Documentation of Monuments in Warsaw, Regional Office for the Protection of Monuments in Łódź, *Karta ewidencyjna zabytków architektury i budownictwa, Siedziba Polskiej akcyjnej Spółki Telefonicznej w Łodzi*, J. and M. Olenderek, Łódź, 1986.

5. See: Stefański Krzysztof, *Architekt Józef Kaban (1886-1869)*, "Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki", R. 1990, z. 3-4, pp. 207-215.

6. Archiwum Akt Nowych, *Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych 1918-1939*, sygn. 2939.

7. Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Wyd. Techn., sygn. 20426-20429; Centre for Research and Documentation of Monuments in Warsaw, Regional Office for the Protection of Monuments in Łódź, *Karta ewidencyjna zabytków architektury i budownictwa, Gmach Wydziału Kanalizacji i Wodociągów w Łodzi*, J. i M. Olenderek, Łódź 1985.





2. Division of Sewerage and Water Magistrature of Łódź, architect Wiesław Lisowski, (1927) 1928. Photo by authors, 1985, 2009

3. Building of General Mutual Insurance Company in Łódź, arch. Waclaw Rytzel, 1929. Photo by authors, 2003, 2009



representative of the sacred buildings constructed in the city during the war period. The first is the Church of Our Victorious Lady (1926-38) decorated in style of academic classicism<sup>8</sup>.

The restructuring of the roof is complete, replacing its flat structure with steep, leaning rafter framing which changed - formalized through the years - the nature of the shape of the church. Its original silhouette, with surfaces hidden behind attic partitions, has always dominated with its varied composition at the end of the old Św. Anny Street (presently J. Piłsudski and A. Mickiewicza Avenues, the so called "Łódź W-Z Road"). However, advances in flat roof drainage technology allowed to keep the temple crowning structure intact, which was an essential identity feature, fixed in the public perception (Fig. 4).

The second building (designed by J. Kaban) is the Church of St. Francis of Assisi (1932-35). This time, the "academic classicism" designer found himself in the modernist era. High quality modernism, with multinational elements. During the 1980s the front tower gained an additional storey and a bell tower was erected in accordance with the designs made by two architects - Leszek Łukoś and Ludwik Mackiewicz, outstandingly corresponding with the intentions in Kaban's design<sup>9</sup>. At the beginning of the 21st century the building was renovated and insulated, keeping the original colour of the plaster. The surroundings of the church were organized as well, which makes it an example of contemporary attention maintaining Łódź infrastructure we inherited from the interwar modernism period (Fig. 5).

## 2.

Unfortunately, the present condition of "the facilities of education, science and culture" is much worse. Out of 17 newly erected schools, which the city could be proud of at the end of 1937, only three are being renewed (only one still serves as a school). It is the first Józef Piłsudski Public School, which was built (1920-22) as an answer to the "Decree on the Compulsory School Attendance", 7 February 1919, designed by the municipal architect Waclaw Kowalewski,<sup>10</sup> situated next to the old Zagajnikowa Street, renamed as St. Kopciński Street. This huge complex, representative of the national romantic trend, was restored only from the front. The courtyard still awaits renewal. On the other hand, the

old State School of Commerce and Industry, built between 1933-36 at Wodna Street (frontage of Plac Zwycięstwa)<sup>11</sup>, was completely modernized and insulated (keeping to the original colour and modernistic details). Currently, it houses the Provincial Sanitary-Epidemiological Station. Unfortunately, in the case of the third building - the old Stanisław Konarski State School (1922-24) at the 11 Listopada Street (now Legionów Street), designed by W. Lisowski - the renewal, which began at the end of the 20th century, restructuring connected to its adaptation to the needs of the PTTK Youth Hostel not only included the interior but also adversely affected the façade (the loss of the character of the gate, main entrance and the high ground course)<sup>12</sup>.

Next to the schools in the review group ("the facilities of education, science and culture") it is worth considering the current state of three essential city buildings. First of all, there is concern about the state of the "Polish Y.M.C.A." - Young Men's Christian Association. The project was commissioned to W. Lisowski. Its original version, kept in the spirit of tradition, has been abandoned. Finally, in 1932 the construction started (the design was adapted from the American project), keeping to the stylistic trend of the architectural avant-garde of the time, containing a number of facilities: swimming pool, 2 gymnasiums, baths, showers, medical clinic, library with a reading room, meeting and club rooms, lecture halls, hotel with 120 seats and dining halls. In 1935 a large part of the building was opened. The "Polish Y.M.C.A." building in Łódź was regarded as the most impressive and well equipped headquarters of Young Men's Christian Association in the interwar Europe. In December 1949 the Y.M.C.A. organization was banned in Poland. The treasury became the building's owner and the name was changed to Municipal Culture House of Julian Tuwim, housing the youth palace and the theater "Variety". In 1990 the "Polish Y.M.C.A." was reactivated and 3 years later the building was returned to the original owner<sup>13</sup>. Unfortunately, presently this building, important for the cultural heritage of the city, is being rented to various

11. Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Wydz. Techn., sygn. 20749.

12. Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Wydz. Techn., sygn. 20480-20483; Centre for Research and Documentation of Monuments in Warsaw, Regional Office for the Protection of Monuments in Łódź, *Karta ewidencyjna zabytków architektury i budownictwa, Gmach Szkoły Powszechnej im. Stanisława Konarskiego*, J. i M. Olenderek, Łódź 1985.

13. Centre for Research and Documentation of Monuments in Warsaw, Regional Office for the Protection of Monuments in Łódź, *Karta ewidencyjna zabytków architektury i budownictwa, Gmach "Polska Y.M.C.A." w Łodzi*, Walczak W., Łódź 1996; Stefański K. *Gmachy użyteczności publicznej dawnej Łodzi. Banki, hotele, szkoły, szpitale, teatry...*, Łódź 2000, p. 82.

8. Olenderek J., *Proces kształtowania przetrzeni...*, op. cit., pp. 214-216.

9. Ibidem, pp. 219-220.

10. Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Wydz. Techn., sygn. 20565-20566; Centre for Research and Documentation of Monuments in Warsaw, Regional Office for the Protection of Monuments in Łódź, *Karta ewidencyjna zabytków architektury i budownictwa, Gmach Szkoły Powszechnej im. Józefa Piłsudskiego*, J. i M. Olenderek, Łódź 1985.



4. The Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady Victorious in Łódź, architect Józef Kaban, 1926. Photo by authors, 2003, 2009

5. The Roman Catholic Church of St. Francis of Assisi in Łódź, architect Józef Kaban, 1930. Photo by authors, 2005





6. *The Monument - Marshal Józef Piłsudski's House in Łódź, architect Wiesław Lisowski, 1935. Postcard from the collection of the Centre for Research and Documentation of Monuments in Łódź. Photo by authors, 2003*

7. *Building of the Free Polish University, now the seat of the Faculty of Economics and Sociology of the University of Łódź, the view from the POW Street, designed by architects Waclaw Kłyszewski, Grzegorz Mokrzyński, Eugeniusz Wierzbicki (1937), "Architektura i Budownictwo", R. 1937, No. 8, p. 309. Photo by authors, 2001, 2009*



parties, which through uncoordinated modernization ruin the social and aesthetic-spatial qualities of this impressive building.

The Monument - Marshal Józef Piłsudski's House, also built according to the design of architect Lisowski (between 1935-39), stood the test of time well. This design won the open competition for the "House of the Rifleman", organized by the Łódź Municipality, in the framework of the National Campaign in Memory of Józef Piłsudski after his death in 1935. The major part of the building (the north and east wing) containing a theater room, club rooms, military and veteran organizations - the Polish Legionnaire Association, the Rifle Man Association, the Silesian Insurgents Association, was opened in 1939. After 1945, the building was the headquarters of Trade Unions and later the Łódź Cultural Center. The construction was continued in the 1980s. Erecting the northern and western wing and expanding the southern in accordance with the design of Jerzy Kurmanowicz. The façades (left in crude brick), the interior was modernized, woodwork replaced, mechanical ventilation was installed as well<sup>14</sup>. In the 1990s the original name of the building was restored (Monument - Marshal Józef Piłsudski's House), and granite monument of the patron was erected in the front (Fig. 6).

The present development of the Free Polish University Building (presently the Faculty of Economics and Sociology of Łódź University) caused some controversy among the professionals. At first the branch of the Free Polish University in Łódź, opened in 1928 with the approval of the city authorities, was located in the public school building (free of charge) at Nowotargowa 24 Street (now. S. Sterlinga Street). In October 1936 the board of the Łódź branch of the Polish Architects Association announced the General Competition No. 66 to design the Building of the Free Polish University in Łódź. The competition ended in March 1937. From 45 designs the first prize was awarded to the Warsaw team (Waclaw Kłyszewski, Jerzy Mokrzyński and Eugeniusz Wierzbicki). According to the design it was a three-storey brick building with a library, auditoriums, research laboratories, guest rooms for out of town scientists, designed to house a thousand students. In December 1937 there was a foundation stone laying ceremony for the first high school building in Łódź.<sup>15</sup> In late August of 1939, the construction was stopped due to a tense political situation and finally abandoned due to the outbreak of war. The building was partly finished during the Polish People's Republic period, in a form not fully compatible with the innovative (at the time), original design. At the beginning of the 21st century the facility began to expand, which was completely different from the vision of the authors - "Professional Modernists". Presently, balanced in proportion, a rather purist "Mother Building", which is a precious heritage of the Polish architectural thought of the 1930s modernist period (with references to the international style) is simply "lost in the maze" of elegant, but stylistically different buildings (Fig. 7).

14. Centre for Research and Documentation of Monuments in Warsaw, Regional Office for the Protection of Monuments in Łódź, *Karta ewidencyjna zabytków architektury i budownictwa, Gmach Łódzkiego Domu Kultury*, J. and M. Olenderek, Łódź, 1986.

15. *Wolna Wszechnica Polska w Warszawie - Oddział w Łodzi. Sprawozdanie z lat 1928-37*, pp. 25-27; Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Wyd. Techn., sygn. 20573; "Architektura i Budownictwo", Vol. 8, R. 1937, pp. 309-311.

### 3.

The Second Polish Republic period brought Łódź not only a number of "institutions of education, science and culture" but also a large group of "institutions of health, welfare and recreation". Most of them still serve their original purpose, struggling with a lack of funds for health care and more broadly defined non-commercial recreation. But not all of them. A negative example of protection and conservation of architectural heritage is the current state of the former National Health Service Hospital in Łódź. The building was built between 1929-1931 at Łagiewnicka Street according to the design of the third prominent (next to J. Kaban and W. Lisowski) Lodz architects of the interwar period, Witold Szereżewski, commissioned by the municipal authorities. After the World War II, it served as an excellent clinic (Helena Wolff Hospital), during the transformations of the Third Polish Republic, the hospital was privatized, closed and falling into disrepair. And yet it was a building of unique qualities, not only when it comes to usage but also architecture and location, being an excellent example of historical modernism with detailed elements of a geometrical style.<sup>16</sup> Restoring this damaged building, connected with the hospital garden, will be a difficult task. In this context, the fact of recent insulation of the former District Military Hospital of Gen. Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski demands respect. This facility was built between 1935-37 on the basis of a winner design in January 1935 (1st prize - Stanisław Odyniec-Dobrowolski, Julian Lisiński, Janusz Krauss) in the open SARP Competition<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 8). The competition requirements specified the inclusion of construction stages, and due to the outbreak of the World War II, the extreme northern wing (scheduled to be built as the second part) was built in 1953. The current renovations of the Clinical Hospital of the Medical University of Łódź were made with high attention to detail, trying to maintain the original colour of the façade along with the cut of the windows in connection with the exchange of the woodwork for PVC. However, despite a careful approach, some loss of clinker brick framing, high quality metal fittings and grating could not be avoided.

So much for the current state of selected public utility buildings representative of the architectural achievements of the interwar period in Łódź.

### 4.

What is the current state of housing built during the Second Polish Republic? This article could not contain all of the architectural heritage, which survived the period of Nazi occupation largely intact. Therefore, let us focus on the

16. Olenderek J., *Proces kształtowania przestrzeni...*, op.cit., pp.188-189.

17. "Architektura i Budownictwo", R 1935, z. 1, pp. 17-29.

8. *Gen. Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski Regional Military Hospital in Łódź, architects Stanisław Odyniec-Dobrowolski, Julian Lisiński, Janusz Krauss, 1935. Photo by authors, 2004, 2009*





9. Łódź residential colonies of the Society of Settlement Workers in Marysin III, architects Barbara and Stanisław Brukalscy, Helena and Szymon Syrkusowie, 1934 and Na Stokach, architects Barbara and Stanisław Brukalscy, 1936. Photo by authors, 1985, 2009



10. Łódź townhouses, corner at the intersection of T. Kościuszki and A. Mickiewicza avenues architect unidentified; Uniwersytecka and St. Jaracza streets, architect Paweł Rudolf Sunderland 1928; Zielona and Gdańska streets, architect Paweł Lewy 1936; G. Narutowicza and St. Kopcińskiego streets, architect unidentified. Photo by authors, 2009

most valuable and impressive buildings, characteristic of the selected types of construction.

There are two multi-family housing buildings, which have avoided most of the negative changes in shape: the Housing Colony at Polesie Konstanyńskie commissioned (at great effort) by the City Municipality (1828-33, authors - Jerzy Barliner, Jan Łukasik, Miruta Stońska, Witold Szereszewski); the Z.U.S. Housing Estate in Bednarska - Sanocka Streets region (1930-32, author Jan Kukulski). Due to the actions of the renovating authorities as well as the residents themselves, who organized public education (including the authors of this article) and are aware and proud of the unique value and timeless aspects of the surrounding buildings, the uncontrolled development or the rebuilding of the public transport was avoided.<sup>18</sup>

The Former Worker's Company Housing Estates, both in Marysin III (1934-36, authors - Barbara and Stanisław Brukalscy, Helena and Szymon Syrkusowie) and in Stoki (1936-38, authors - Barbara and Stanisław Brukalscy) are in much worse shape. Currently, in the case of both housing estates, there is an increase in "self building initiative" among the owners of terraced houses (which were carefully designed as a single estate by foremost interwar period architects), which is unrestricted.<sup>19</sup> The renovation authorities are probably helpless to stop the investments of inhabitants, which are aimed not only at garages (in narrow plots of land) but also at increasing the living space, not through merging with other houses for instance, but through various extensions and additions. It's hard not to notice the effort of the owners to raise the living standards (which provided the "minimum of existence" once, but not enough in the 21st century) and condemn them for this. However, they should be instructed in proper development and the houses included in a single, well designed improvement plan. Otherwise, the constant process of degradation will lead to the total loss of their unique and valuable character and worth, which is important for the development of the Polish modernist and avant - garde design (Fig. 9).

In relation to urban apartments or rent housing, which were built in several hundreds (during the interwar period) and many of them represent the mainstream of the "luxurious" modernism, their present aspect is dependent on the awareness, sense of aesthetics, respect for the authors and an understanding of the architect's profession by the owners - the housing union or the present owners, both the new and the old heirs (few) of the original investors.<sup>20</sup> The state is varied. Beginning with the continuous degradation, through completely preserving the status quo (without much needed repairs, such as: flashing or balconies, which leads to their destruction or the loss of valuable and creative detail, rare but important in modernism) and ending with more or less successful insulation or façade renovation. Due to such wealth

of modernist urban housing (inherited from the Second Polish Republic Łódź period) let us examine the above actions (or lack thereof) on the examples of buildings of particular importance for the formation of urban space and city landscape, which constitute its identity and allow for orientation in the so-called "nodal points"; i.e. corner apartment houses<sup>21</sup> (Fig. 10).

First - "progressive deterioration":

- the abandoned corner apartment house at the meeting point of T. Kościuszko and A. Mickiewicz Avenues, erected between 1935-1937, which was still inhabited and well maintained in 2004;

Second - "status quo":

- the apartment house at the corner of Uniwersytecka and St. Jaracz streets, built between 1928-1930, currently without a number of balconies;

Third - "insulation and façade renovation":

- negative example - the apartment house at the corner of Zielona and Gdańska streets, erected between 1936-1938; the use of bright yellow plaster façade is completely incompatible with the original state, where the author alluded the coloured exquisite plaster and relief to the noble "Szydłowiecki" red sandstone;

- positive example - the apartment house at the corner of G. Narutowicza and St. Kopcińskiego streets, built between 1936-1938; the colour of the mineral plaster reflects the original state of the building.

## 5.

To summarize the above observations of the select examples, characteristic (according to the authors) to illustrate the phenomenon of "modernizing the modernism" inherited from the period of the Second Polish Republic in Łódź, it should be noted, that the main rule to be followed by the modern "renovators" should be *Primum non nocere*. How can this be done if most of these valuable buildings are not legally protected by the status of a monument or contemporary cultural property? Firstly, through a wide public education, aimed at the ennoblement of the interwar Łódź heritage, just as it is being successfully done in relation to the post-industrial buildings from the great industrial development of "Promised Land". Secondly, promoting positive activity in restoration, renovation or rational modernist architecture restructuring taking part in European countries. Activities with clearly defined and sometimes encouraged changes, such as: window renovation without changing their shape, insulation with respect for detail, façade renovation with the selection of textures and colours suitable for the "colourful modernism", function - installation modernization to raise the standard of living while protecting the surroundings from increased urban development or interference of too many vehicles (i.e. cars).

Vienna, Berlin and Frankfurt are perfect examples of socially accepted achievements in the area of "modernizing modernism" (from the interwar period). Let us follow these examples, because the Polish achievements in the art of shaping the space of the Second Polish Republic (including Łódź), both in public and housing area, fully deserve international recognition and a nomination to join the European circle.

18. See: Olenderek J., *Jak chronić kolonie mieszkalne Łodzi II Rzeczypospolitej w czasach III RP*, [in:] *Budownictwo społeczne I poł. XX w. w Europie. Problemy ochrony i rewitalizacji*, Gdańsk 2000, pp. 119-137.

19. See: Olenderek J., *Architekci realizujący w Łodzi hasła europejskiego ruchu reformy mieszkaniowej w okresie II Rzeczypospolitej*, "Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki", R. 1990, Vol. 3-4, pp. 197-205.

20. See: Olenderek J., *The faces of the luxurious trend in the architecture of interwar Łódź*, "Architecture, Civil Engineering, Environmental", Vol. 1 No. 2/2008, pp. 5-11.

21. Cf: Lynch Kevin, *The image of the city*, London 1960; idem, *City sense and city design*, London 1995.