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19th-Century Wooden Houses of Craftsmen from Zgierz – Precious Heritage or Troublesome Inheritance?

Introduction – Development of the Town of Zgierz Until 1830

Zgierz is located in central Poland, in the historic Łęczyca Land and the Bzura River Valley, on a territory that used to be densely forested. The town is located at the edge of the Łódź Upland, between Łódź and Łask mesoregions. The Old Town is located in the valley, at 180 m above sea level (*Zgierz. Dzieje miasta...* 1995: 40), whereas the New Town is located on a hill, with a market square on top, at 200 m above sea level (Jasiński 2002: 21).

The first written mentions of the town date back to the 13th century, and they concern a formed urban centre where dukes met and stayed. As early as in the first half of the 12th century, Zgierz had a customs house, and the oldest church existed here at the turn of the 13th century (Rosin 1981: 78). Archaeological research conducted in the town revealed that it had been inhabited at least from the 12th century. In 1318, in a privilege for the monastery in Wąchock, it is referred to as *Shegrz civitate*; earlier documents, however, allow us to determine that Zgierz was an urban centre even before 1288 (Rosin 1981: 84–86). In 1420, the town was rechartered according to the German (Środa) law (Rosin 1981: 89). There used to be a gord near the town, but it still have not been located. From 1345, it was mentioned in written and cartographic sources as remains of a gord west of the town, next to a crossing on the Bzura River (Rosin 1981: 84). The Old Town Market Square was located at the intersection of important traffic routes: the Piotrków–Łęczyca and Kalisz–Mazovia roads. The street arrangement in the town was irregular and adjusted to the lie of the land, with most buildings probably made of wood (Jasiński 2002: 15). This situation did

not change until 1820, when Rajmund Rembieliński, President of the Mazovia Provincial Committee, visited Zgierz in search for locations for new industrial centres. This is how he described Zgierz in his report submitted to the Viceroy of Congress Poland, General Józef Zajączek: “The town is shapeless, sprawling and in a poor state, without markets or fairs, even though it does not lack privileges, and generally it does not deserve to be called a town” (Ostrowski 1949: 48). The situation of the town was supposed to improve thanks to top-down government decisions: Zgierz, together with a few other towns in the Łęczyca District (including Łódź, Dąbie, Przedecz, and Gostynin), was selected as a location of a new weaving settlement. At that time and a bit earlier, also a few private towns with a similar production profile were created from scratch: Ozorków, Aleksandrów, Konstantynów (Krawczyk, Kopijka 2012b: 5–6).

Based on the Ordinance of the Viceroy of Congress Poland of September 18, 1820, preparation to establish an industrial settlement east of the Old Town started. Another important document, which later became a model for other industrial settlements created, was the so-called Zgierz Agreement signed on March 28, 1821. The document determined the rights and obligations of settlers and granted them numerous privileges. Pursuant to it, each craftsman received a plot to build a house and a garden with a surface area of 1,5 Chelmno morgens (approx. 0.8 ha) (Jasiński 2002: 19–20), six-year exemption of taxes and military duty, and wood for construction purposes. The settlers did not have to pay duty on the movable assets brought, and they received loans to start production. The government of Congress Poland supported the construction of evangelical churches. The craftsmen could establish rifle associations, and the Weavers’ Guild was also created. Thanks to an extensive recruitment campaign among the so-called useful immigrants from German weaving centres, until 1828, between a hundred and two hundred thousand people came to Congress Poland, mostly from Prussia, the Grand Duchy of Posen, Pomerania, Silesia, Saxony, and Bohemia. A large proportion of them were immigrants of Polish descent from the Prussian Partition (Krawczyk, Kopijka 2012a: 6–7; Krawczyk, Kopijka 2012b: 12).

Between 1820 and 1830, thanks to an efficient policy, Zgierz experienced a true economic miracle. In 1828, the town, earlier competing with Ozorków, became the leader of cloth production in Congress Poland, producing 37% of the value of cloth export in the Mazovia Province, which constituted approx. 15% of the value of total cloth export of Congress Poland. This was possible thanks to a sudden population influx and the development of many new workshops. For example, in 1817 Zgierz had 664 inhabitants, mostly farmers; in 1821, this number increased to 1,010, and in the years 1825–1829 the population grew from 4,479 to 13,054 people including floating population. This means that between

1817 and 1829, the population increased by nearly 2,000%. Even though most inhabitants of the New Town of Zgierz produced cloth (cloth makers, shearers, dyers), there were also other craftsmen there, such as bricklayers, carpenters, joiners, locksmiths, shoemakers, tailors, bakers, confectioners and artists (musicians, painters). In 1828, out of 9,071 inhabitants, 5,281 people dealt with crafts and services (58% of the total population) (Krawczyk, Kopijka 2012a: 15–19).

The New Town of Zgierz as a Biedermeier Town¹



Fig. 1. A street plan of the New Town of Zgierz prepared by Jan Leszczyński in 1821 (source: State Archive in Łódź, ref. no. 99; graphic processing: K. Barucha).

1 Not long before this paper was submitted, an article analysing the Biedermeier phenomenon in Zgierz was published: P.K. Krawczyk, A. Ozaist-Przybyła (2018), *Biedermeier w Zgierzu i wybranych miastach fabrycznych Królestwa Polskiego*, [in:] A. Rosales-Rodríguez (ed.), *Polski biedermeier – romantyzm udomowiony*, Wydawnictwo Neriton, Warszawa, p. 135–159.

The New Town of Zgierz was laid out east of the Old Town by a land surveyor Jan Leszczyński at the beginning of 1821. The centre created had a symmetrical street layout, with a square market (Fig. 1) in the middle, on top of a hill. The Market Square of the Old Town and the Market Square of the New Town were connected with Długa Street, a former Warsaw–Kalisz route, which became the axis of the new development. The border between the Old Town and the New Town was Błotna Street. Between the streets, rectangular blocks were created for one-storey houses of similar appearance. Inside the blocks, there was space for gardens and orchards. 258 plots of land for development were marked out, and until 1829, 200 of the plots were developed, mostly with wooden houses (Krawczyk, Kopijka 2012b: 6–11; Jasiński 2002: 20–25). The form of the buildings was a continuation of the architecture of Prussian cloth makers' settlements from the 18th century, combined with the local tradition of wood construction (Krawczyk, Kopijka 2012b: 13; Jasiński 2002: 42).

Even though the notion of 'Biedermeier style' is rarely applied to architecture, in the case of Zgierz, the urban layout, aimed at simplicity, functionality and reduced classical architectural forms, has all the characteristics of Biedermeier, which was a style of late classical period, with its peak in the 1820s. A famous example of a Biedermeier town is Baden in Austria, which was rebuilt after the fire in 1812. The Biedermeier architecture valued symmetry and harmonious proportions. It used classical architectural elements such as columns, pilasters, bossage, and jerkinhead roofs. The town was to provide for all the needs of its inhabitants, and the houses were to be the places of both work and rest. The urban development concept of the New Town and its social and economic functions can be recognised as a creation of a perfect town with regard to the concepts known from Renaissance (Krawczyk, Kopijka 2012b: 10–13). The New Town was created during a one-time construction and settlement operation and, as such, it was a unique urban phenomenon. Wooden construction, which is, by definition, temporary (brick houses were preferred), fully reflects the pioneer period of the town development.

The houses built by Zgierz craftsmen followed three designs produced by architect Trauzold. Unfortunately, the designs have not survived, and a description of the three variants would require a separate analysis. The appearance of the houses was typical and rather uniform: these were mostly wooden houses on a base course of cobblestones and bricks (Fig. 2), one-storey, with an attic combining residential and storage functions. On the ground floor, there was a production shop and prestige rooms. The houses were built with their roof

ridges parallel to the street. They had five or seven axes, with an entrance, frequently in a recess, and a through hallway along the main axis. In many cases, there was a mansard window along the axis above the main entrance, supported on decorative columns or pilasters flanking the entrance. The houses had walls of vertical-post log construction, joined in the corners with woodwork joints. They also had jerkinhead roofs, and the gable walls of the attic were framed walls with infill (the so-called Prussian wall) or without infill and boarded (Sitnicki, Heim, Bogusławski 2011: 14). The roofs were supposed to be tiled. Shingles were only allowed as a temporary solution and people had to paint them red so that they looked like tiles.



Fig. 2. The Weaver's House at 5 Narutowicza Street, as seen from Rembowskiego Street (source: the collection of the D.O.M. foundation).

Some changes to the imposed designs were allowed, mostly in relation to the outline dimensions, joinery, and architectural decor (Jasiński 2002: 37–38). Despite using mostly short-lived raw materials, i.e. wood, the houses were decorated. The walls were boarded with wide planks, and the elevations were painted different colours (imitating 'stone colours': yellowish and pale green; light grey and dark red, with bright and dark colours being forbidden, Jasiński 2002: 55–56). In order to add variety to the appearance of the elevations, pilasters with plinths and capitals flanking the entrance and optically 'supporting' the mansard windows were used, which granted the building a representative character, resembling a typical manor house of the period. The corners were also covered with vertical planks, sometimes imitating pilasters

(Fig. 3) or fluting (e.g. the house at 5 Kilińskiego Street). Below the cornices and on the mansard windows, there were openwork slats. Window and door joinery was decorative: double-layered doors, diamond-boarded (Fig. 4, Fig. 5), and frame-and-panel doors, with decorative hardware and woodcarving details, produced by local carpenters (Kopijka 2013: 41–87). Window ledges were supported on voluted consoles and there were boards (Fig. 6, Fig. 7) imitating bossage on the corners, while façade boards (Fig. 8) had profiled edges that imitated ashlars (Jasiński 2002: 54–55). Some of the features (imitation pilasters, columns with plinths and capitals, bossage) indicate that the architecture in question drew on classical masonry construction. It is worth mentioning that the houses of Zgierz craftsmen were to be ultimately masonry, and wood was only allowed as an exception. It was cheap and easy to process yet short-lived, and so temporary. Thus, the meticulous attention to the aesthetic and individual finishing of the buildings and the fact that so many of them have survived until today are all the more significant.



Fig. 3. Pilasters flanking the entrance and ‘supporting’ the mansard window of the house at 23 1 Maja Street (source: the collection of the D.O.M. foundation).



Fig. 4. Decorative slats on the façade of the building at 16 Dąbrowskiego Street (photograph by P. Trzeźwiński).



Fig. 5. Decorative boarding on the façade of the building at 15 Długa Street (source: the collection of the D.O.M. foundation).



Fig. 6. A frame-and-panel door at 7 Narutowicza Street (source: the collection of the D.O.M. foundation).



Fig. 7. A diamond-boarded door, at 29 Narutowicza Street (source: the collection of the D.O.M. foundation).



Fig. 8. Volute consoles under the window ledges of the house at 29 3 Maja Street, 1965 (photograph by M. Pracuta, the collection of the Museum of the City of Zgierz, hereinafter referred to as MMZ).

Craftsmen's Houses in the New Town of Zgierz

In the middle of 1827, the population of Zgierz exceeded 4,500. There were 362 houses in town, including only 12 masonry houses. Until 1844, more than 200 new craftsmen's houses were built in the New Town, but most of them were made of wood. Not all 258 plots were developed. Starting in the middle of the 19th century, the production was gradually moved to new factories and manufactures, and some of the houses or rooms were rented. Basements also served trading and service purposes, however, in some houses cloth was woven on manual looms until 1945. At the edge of the New Town (Zegrzanki Street, the northern part of Wysoka Street), masonry factory buildings started to supplant wooden craftsmen's houses. In 1860, the town had 12,000 inhabitants, 140 masonry buildings and 317 wooden buildings. This number grew steadily, but timber buildings still dominated (in 1878, there were 160 masonry buildings and 394 wooden buildings). At that time, some wooden houses were pulled down and masonry buildings were erected in their place, sometimes resembling the former (Jasiński 2002: 25–28).

During the interwar period, the twelve wooden craftsmen's houses in Kilińskiego Square remained intact. Under German occupation, a corner house was pulled down when a tram terminus was constructed. The clear urban layout from the time when the settlement was planned survived until 1945, dominated by wooden houses, with only a few factory buildings and tenement houses. Starting in the 1950s, the houses of weavers were gradually pulled down and the plots were developed, as a result of which the original subdivision of the New Town area was distorted. In 1965, the first local development plan was prepared for the town. It did not, however, recommend for any conservation work on the historic buildings. In the 1970s, the frontages of the Market Square and Długa Street were marked on the local development plan as having an established cultural value, but the demolition continued and service buildings were erected in Długa Street, at variance with the original building alignment (Jasiński 2002: 28–32).

In the 1980s, more craftsmen's houses were pulled down. In 1984, Dąbrowskiego Street was also marked on the local development plan as a historically valuable area. At the same time, the 19th-century houses were converted into trading and service buildings (mostly in Długa Street). In the 1990s, many factories and plants were closed down, and the degradation of the town centre increased (Jasiński 2002: 33). Some of the surviving craftsmen's houses on the left-hand side of 1 Maja Street (between 3 Maja Street and Kilińskiego Square) were pulled down, and a building was erected, which was to refer to Zgierz houses with passageways resembling triangular gables supported on columns,

however, the effect is rather grotesque. In the Market Square (Kilińskiego Square), a few 19th-century craftsmen's houses were demolished and modern architecture took their place, without any references to the historic buildings of Zgierz. After the war, the houses were demolished and no one intervened in the case of fire or their slow deterioration. Today, there are empty spaces in their place, used as, for example, car parks (39 Długa Street, 10 Kilińskiego Square – demolition after 2000).

After the Second World War, the historic craftsmen's houses were taken over by the municipality as most old owners and inhabitants had moved out, and communal flats were created there. This is when the most unfavourable period for the historical urban fabric started. The houses, initially single-family (rarely two-family), were divided into even as many as eight flats each. This entailed uncontrolled renovations using cheap materials unfit for the restoration of historic, mostly wooden, buildings. Ceramic roof tiles and wooden shingles were substituted with bitumen paper, and the original boarding was removed to install plastic siding boards. Window and door joinery was exchanged, which altered its original articulation. In many cases, this led to the disappearance of the architectural detail, or even complete erasure of the visible historical value



Fig. 9. The house at 15 Długa Street, 1960s/1970s (source: fotopolska.eu).



Fig. 10. The house at 15 Długa Street, today (source: the collection of the D.O.M. foundation).



Fig. 11. The house at 38 Długa Street, 1965 (photograph by M. Pracuta, the collection of MMZ).



Fig. 12. The house at 38 Długa Street, today (source: the collection of the D.O.M. foundation).

of the buildings (Jasiński 2002: 66–67). Examples can be the houses at 15 and 38 Długa Street. Starting in the 1980s, there were more and more negative changes (Fig. 9—12). In the conservator’s photographs taken by Mieczysław Pracuta in 1965, one can see that many of the houses described, at least on the outside, had not suffered much from the time of their construction. Thus, it is all the more painful that despite the fact that the historic houses were gradually covered with official conservator’s supervision, they received more and more adverse modifications over time, while their owners – including the Commune of Zgierz – failed to respond to this.

The interest in the houses in the New Town of Zgierz as historic buildings dates back to the Second World War, when German conservator’s photographs mostly showing masonry architecture were taken. In the 1950s, a few of the buildings received provisional conservator’s descriptions made by the Monument Conservation Office in Łódź. In the 1960s, M. Pracuta documented nearly all existing craftsmen’s houses including those being under demolition at the time. This collection is an invaluable material for comparison within today’s research².

The first scientific studies conducted with the aim to preserve the architecture and the urban layout of the New Town were undertaken after the Second World War. From the 1960s, selected craftsmen’s houses were entered into the Register of Historic Monuments, and in the 1970s, an urban conservation area was established. Moreover, the Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Łódź University of Technology developed land-use studies. However,

² The photography collection is kept in the Museum of the City of Zgierz. The D.O.M. foundation would like to thank for access to it.

recommendations from these studies, also ordered by the Town Hall, were never taken into consideration when managing the urban space. This could probably be because the applicable guidelines did not specify the conservator's activities and were rather general (Jasiński 2002: 76–79). The reasons for the devastation of the historic buildings have always included: lack of idea how to use the buildings appropriately to their historical value, lack of any measures taken against their neglect and deterioration, and unawareness of their value. I believe that the last of the reasons listed is mostly responsible for the present situation.

Establishment of the Culture Park and Revitalisation of the Buildings

In 2003, as the Monument Protection Act changed, the authorities of Zgierz undertook activities with the aim to protect a small part of the historical urban layout of the New Town. The Town of Weavers Culture Park was established, covering Narutowicza Street (from 3 Maja Street to Dąbrowskiego Street), Rembowski Street (from Narutowicza Street to 1 Maja Street), and a portion of Dąbrowskiego Street (Fig. 13) (*Uchwała nr XV/142/03...*). The Culture Park was created to protect a fragment of the existing cultural landscape including two streets with a large number of preserved 19th-century houses. The plan was to restore the area to its former appearance through the revitalisation of the streets (with cobbles, pavements, trees, and gas lamps) and to gradually move the most valuable buildings from outside to the Culture Park and renovate them.

In 2004–2008, three houses were revitalised (at 17 Rembowski Street, 10 Narutowicza Street, and 29 Narutowicza Street) (*Informacja...*). This was the first attempt to restore the craftsmen's houses and, from the conservator's point of view, it was not successful.

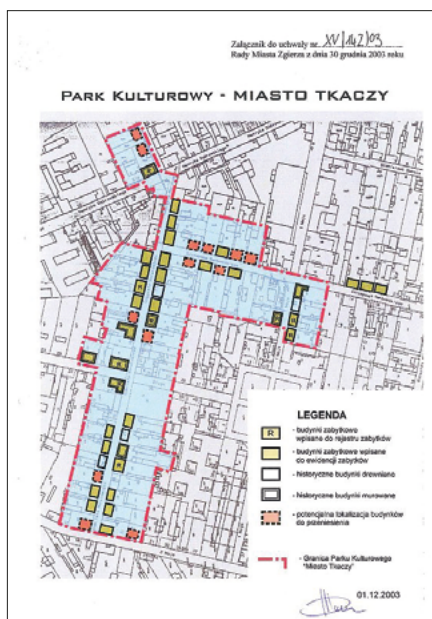


Fig. 13. The borders of the Town of Weavers Culture Park in Zgierz, a drawing attached to Resolution No. XV/142/03 of the Zgierz Town Council of December 30, 2003 (as reproduced in: Sakowicz 2009: 9).

The historical urban fabric suffered the greatest loss when the house at 17 Rembowski Street was demolished despite the recommendation of the Provincial Monument Conservator that “the conservation work should be performed with extreme caution and utmost care, preserving the original condition of the outer walls which constitute relics of wooden architecture” (*Informacja...*: 11). The building located at 17 Rembowski Street today was built from scratch and has no historical substance. However, it is still listed in the Provincial Register of Historic Monuments (*Wykaz zabytków...*, entry no. A/1014 of December 30, 1967).

Conservation and restoration work was conducted in the houses at 10 and 20 Narutowicza Street to later use them for pro-community activity. They were to be converted into community centres and NGO seats, and to guarantee new jobs. Their interiors had to be properly adapted to the requirements of different institutions (*Informacja...*: 22–23). These plans were implemented in the building at 10 Narutowicza Street, which now houses the ‘Przystań’ community centre. However, the house at 29 Narutowicza Street has never been adapted, its interior remains unfinished, and on the outside the house is getting to look almost like before the renovation.

Another attempt to bring the Town of Weavers back to life was made in 2009. Thanks to Norwegian funds (EEA Grants), until 2011, four wooden buildings were restored and two cobbled routes (Narutowicza and Rembowski Streets) were renovated, together with gas lamps (<http://www.miastrakaczy.pl/o-firmie/historia-firmy>, access 31 VIII 2017). Three of the buildings were located at some distance from the densely packed craftsmen’s houses, in places that were to be covered by new development (two in Dąbrowskiego Street, and one in Dubois Street). Before they were moved and renovated, detailed archival studies were conducted and the construction work was thoroughly documented, a result of which was a scientific publication *Metodologia i wytyczne postępowania z zespołami budownictwa drewnianego z początku XIX na podstawie realizacji projektu “Rewitalizacja i rozwój historycznego kompleksu architektury drewnianej miasta Zgierza”* (*The Methodology and Guidelines Concerning the Handling of Wooden Building Complexes from the Beginning of the 19th Century Based on the Implementation of the Project ‘Revitalisation and Development of the Historic Complex of Wooden Architecture in Zgierz’*) (Sitnicki, Heim, Bogusławski 2011). More importantly, as new findings emerged during work, it was possible to change the construction design. This is a very important issue, frequently omitted during revitalisation as its course and effects are often determined in advance, and any later alteration is impossible. In the context of wooden buildings, which can only be examined after they have been deconstructed, the possibility of

modifying the project on an ongoing basis is very convenient. Thus, the renovation of the houses of Zgierz craftsmen in 2009–2011 can be seen as a textbook example of how to implement such projects. The buildings were inventoried and dismantled, and then rebuilt using the same technique and materials as those used in the 19th century. Their original roof covering and elevation colours were restored. The renovated buildings now house the Tourist House, Wood Preservation Centre, Site Museum, a restaurant and offices of the Culture Park.

The Current State of the Historical Architecture of the New Town of Zgierz

The Town of Weavers in Zgierz includes two streets where craftsmen's houses from the first half of the 19th century prevail. A few of the buildings have been renovated, but most are in a poor condition and the rare repairs are made using plastic. The buildings that have not been renovated are divided into communal flats occupied mainly by impecunious people. The few renovated buildings mostly house cultural institutions, and none of them serves residential purposes. This cannot be called 'revitalisation' as the aim of such a process is to restore the living space in a material, and mostly social, sense. Thus, it can be said that revitalisation in the area in question has only begun.

Some effort is required not only in the area covered by the previous project, but the whole New Town as an urban arrangement and its individual objects.



Fig. 14. The house at 16 Dąbrowskiego Street in 2019 (source: the collection of the D.O.M. foundation).



Fig. 15. A plafond from the second half of the 19th century from the house at 16 Dąbrowskiego Street (source: the collection of MMZ, 2001).



Fig. 16. A no longer existing stove from the second half of the 19th century from the house at 16 Dąbrowskiego Street (source: the collection of MMZ, 2001).



Fig. 17. The preserved column capitals and the triangular gable added to the elevation of the building at 38 Długa Street (source: the collection of the D.O.M. foundation).

and this, in turn, ended in the building's slow technical death. The district register of monuments, on the other hand, offered no legal tools that could force property owners to take any measures. This presented a paradox as listed monuments were in a worse condition than the unlisted; the latter were used and renovated, while the former deteriorated. And yet most original historic substance can be found in the listed buildings that have resisted the flow of time despite their disastrous condition.

An example can be the building at 16 Dąbrowskiego Street, the elevation and side walls of which received virtually no modifications: the original boarding with decorative slats has been preserved (Fig. 14), and the gable walls have not been rebuilt as in most other buildings. The interior, until recently, still had all the furnishings from the second half of the 19th century. Since it was taken over by the present owner, the building has been degrading gradually and more and more rapidly, which was not stopped by the entry in the Register of Historic Monuments in 1967 (entry no. A/1005/243 of December 30, 1967). Its interior, rich in cornicing, plafonds depicting genre scenes, and a magnificent tile stove have been devastated³.

An example of the opposite activity, meaning extreme interference with the structure of the building, is the already mentioned house at 38 Długa Street

³ The building described in text is being translocated and reconstructed since 2019.

(Fig. 11 and 12). It has been modified to such an extent that it barely resembles a historic building. Its elevation is covered with plastic siding panels, the roof has been lowered and a completely new triangular gable was added along the axis (which is proven by archival photographs – Fig. 11). The only evidence of its historic substance are the preserved column capitals, barely visible from under the contemporary cladding (Fig. 17). Interestingly, the district register of monuments lists the tenement house from the second half of the 19th century located at the far end of the same plot of land. The front wooden building, which, according to archival documents, dates back to the earliest period of the New Town development (before 1827), is not listed.

Zgierz is a town with still many objects to save. According to estimates, only in the New Town there are 80 buildings erected in the earliest period of the development of the craftsmen's settlement⁴. There are also many more younger objects, from the 19th and the 20th centuries, as well as those in the Old Town. This mostly results from lack of resources for dealing with old buildings and the fact that since the end of the war the focus has been on the development of new residential neighbourhoods, at the same time adapting historic buildings (mostly for low-standard flats). In Zgierz, there is no clear investment pressure that is exerted in large cities with a historic urban layout, such as near-by Łódź. In such cases, there is a great chance of preserving the historic fabric of the city. Unfortunately, historic buildings disappear from the landscape of Zgierz also because there is no idea how to develop the area after the demolition. For example, the empty plots left after the craftsmen's houses were pulled down in Długa Street and Kilińskiego Square today serve as car parks.

Social Aspects of the Protection of Zgierz Houses

I analysed the attitude of the residents of Zgierz to historic buildings and the history of their town based on the interviews I conducted with members of the D.O.M. foundation, which has its seat in the Town of Weavers, and information available online.

Foundation for Protection of Historic Furniture and Cultural Heritage in Poland D.O.M. has its seat at 6 Narutowicza Street in one of the houses revitalised in 2009–2011. The foundation members take active part in the life of the Town of Weavers and they know its residents well. According to them, these are impecunious people who were allocated flats in the craftsmen's houses. Most of them would gladly move to blocks of flats. However,

4 Estimates based on the analysis of archival documents carried out while preparing the publication *Historyczne domy Nowego Miasta w Zgierzu*.

they are aware of the fact that the place they live in is very special and that their houses, which are nearly two hundred years old, are unique historic monuments. This awareness was mostly raised by the establishment of the Culture Park and the accompanying information campaign. Narutowicza and Rembowskiego Streets look more aesthetically now, and in front of some of the houses there are boards describing their history. Undoubtedly, this increased satisfaction with the place of residence, but did not improve the residents' standard of living as they still live in low-quality houses.

The problem of neglect of Zgierz craftsmen's houses mostly arises from overlapping social factors. Information found on the Internet and gathered during interviews with local residents indicates that Zgierz inhabitants know little about their town. Whenever there is an opportunity to talk to them about the history of Zgierz they show some interest, but it is clear that they do not believe anything can be done about the houses (referred to as wooden shacks or ruins). It is worth noting that only a handful of people feel the need to explore the town's history and get involved in initiatives aimed at changing the present situation. The reason for this may be the fact that, except for a few isolated cases, no descendants of the settlers who built Zgierz live in the New Town. Many of today's residents are migrants who are not attached to their place of residence and do not feel they own it.

Another issue worth mentioning in the context of Zgierz is the proximity of Łódź, a large centre also connected with the history of the textile industry. Zgierz is sometimes compared with Łódź, and it is not a favourable comparison. In fact, few people know that Zgierz is much older and that it used to be a pioneer, and in some aspects even textbook, town. People forget that Zgierz is a separate centre with its own history and identity. It dates back to the Middle Ages, experienced the peak of its development much earlier than Łódź, and its character was different. Łódź has a considerable group of people interested in its history, including also young people who settled there relatively recently. Over the last years, along with revitalisation and image campaigns, Łódź focused on advertising itself through historic monuments. Thanks to this, many residents of Łódź and tourists interested in the city and its history, come to Zgierz, where the 'economic miracle' started. This should be seen as an opportunity to boost tourism connected with the history of the town but it has to be emphasised that Zgierz should advertise itself using its own history, regardless of Łódź.

The group most interested in Zgierz and its history are visitors and those who decided to settle in Zgierz. These are people who, thanks to a proper distance from the new place, are able to notice its beauty hidden under concrete

and destroyed elevations with a layer of hideous advertisements. A lot of faith can also be placed in the youngest generation, free of prejudice, who gets to know the oldest part of the town and the appearance of the 19th-century craftsmen's houses thanks to the educational activities conducted in the Town of Weavers and the Museum of the City of Zgierz. In the high season, many trips of schoolchildren come to the Town of Weavers from Zgierz and nearby towns. This helps to change the way of thinking about historic buildings, particularly wooden, which for many years were treated as signs of backwardness and poverty. Thanks to such a change and education about the history of the region, one can start thinking about all aspects of revitalisation including the use of historic buildings for residential purposes.

Proposed Solutions for Historic Building Management

The needs indicated above form the basis for the activity that should cover the historic New Town in Zgierz in order to restore it to a proper condition. The town residents and tourists realise the value of historic buildings thanks to the already mentioned educational activities including tours of the Town of Weavers, cultural meetings, and the activity of the Museum of the City of Zgierz, the Wood Preservation Centre, and the Site Museum. The history of individual buildings is described on educational boards that can be found all over the town. Regretfully, it has to be said that the activities mentioned concentrate in the aesthetic, renewed Town of Weavers, which creates an impression that only these two attractive streets in the New Town have some historical value. It is not emphasised enough that the whole historic urban layout should be protected.

There are other 19th-century buildings, both wooden and masonry, requiring renovation. Their condition differs considerably as wooden buildings deteriorate much more rapidly. What has to be noted in the case of Zgierz is the fact that when the Town of Weavers was created, it was assumed that historic wooden buildings would be located within the Culture Park, including the movement of front houses from places away from the Culture Park to the far end of plots in the Park (which happened on the plot at 1 Rembowski Street). This plan, however, cannot be implemented with regard to masonry buildings that also require some conservation work.

Thus, the removal of 'survivors' from the New Town should be thought through as perhaps it is too great a compromise, erasing the traces of the original layout of the craftsmen's settlement. Perhaps, it would be a better idea to adjust newly erected buildings to the historic ones, giving them historicising

forms and maintaining the original, regular division of the street frontages as well as their height and structure. Even though this might seem complicated, it is feasible, which is proven by such cities as Gdańsk and Warsaw, both rebuilt after the Second World War, where despite enormous pressure on builders and architects, a compromise between functionality and respect for the historical urban fabric was found. As it was already mentioned, there is no such pressure in Zgierz, which is why new solutions can be well-thought-out and implemented in a reasonable way.

Another important issue that should be raised is the use of the historic buildings of the town. None of the renovated buildings serves residential purposes but it seems that the following revitalisation stages should ensure that the houses offer residential standards adapted to the 21st century. It is necessary to install or renovate appropriate wiring, heating and sanitary systems. The original arrangement of window and door openings, roof covering, and, to the extent it is functional, the original room layout should be restored. Thanks to such a change, the concept of a single- or two-family house could be reintroduced, implementing the original idea of the creators of craftsmen's houses. Are all present occupants ready to take care of historic buildings? Definitely not. However, some of them can and should be entrusted with this task. There are also definitely people who are not connected with the town but would like to move to a historic weaver's house and make it a unique place to live.

It is worth referring to the Priest's Mill Estate in Łódź, a complex of post-factory and residential buildings from the second half of the 19th century, constituting a part of Karol Scheibler's textile plant. Since 2012, the complex, which used to be classified as a degraded area, has been revitalised and adapted for residential, cultural and trading purposes. Its residents, many of whom had lived there for generations, returned to their homes, thanks to which there was no complete exchange of occupants that would be against the assumptions of the revitalisation. It was similar in the case of the Nikiszowiec estate in Katowice, which comes from a different period but is much the same in functional terms. The estate was built in the first half of the 20th century as a settlement for miners who worked in the Giesche mine (called Wiczorek after the war). According to the concept of a perfect town, it was supposed to provide for all the needs of its residents (the estate had a church, a bath house, a laundry, an inn, and shops). Economic and social problems caused by the systemic transformation started piling up there in the 1990s. In 2005, the municipality initiated activities focused not only on the infrastructure renovation but mostly on encouraging the local population to take

care of the estate and to cherish its history. The examples of the Priest's Mill and Nikiszowiec show the importance of consolidated activities combining broadly defined care of the historic space and of its inhabitants. Revitalisation needs to include a certain social factor, which is the stimulation of the local community. While it is relatively easy in the case of Łódź and Katowice, whose inhabitants are descendants of the former workers and flat owners, the situation in Zgierz is more difficult because most of the occupants are inflowing population. However, it is important to build identity by developing the awareness of the place and its history regardless of the number of generations that have lived there.

In order to continue the craft tradition of the town, it would be worth encouraging artists and craftsmen to open their workshops there. A blacksmith's or a weaver's workshop operating in the 19th-century space using old technologies would serve educational purposes and attract tourists. There should also be a place for restaurants and service joints so that the town, according to its assumptions, provides for all the needs of its residents. An adequate impetus from the municipality might create conditions for the actual revitalisation of the New Town. This should include not only financial support but also the application of available mechanisms, such as the creation of a special revitalisation area or offering tax relief to owners of historic buildings. It is also necessary to provide substantive support to residents of historic houses that require constant conservation using appropriate materials. The present residents, without any guidelines and funds, renovate the houses on their own, and they frequently do it incorrectly.

Considering the functional programme that covers workshops and residential buildings for workers (in this case being the same place), Zgierz houses can be classified as a factory and residential complex. Apart from the already mentioned places of work and residence, it included other infrastructure elements aiming to satisfy the living needs of the residents, similarly to other factory and residential complexes (Walczak 2010: 229–231). Examples of such complexes are the already mentioned Priest's Mill in Łódź and the Nikiszowiec estate in Katowice. In Zgierz, this programme of 'a perfect town' was implemented by providing shambles, gardens, and a church. Treating the urban complex of the New Town of Zgierz in the same way as other post-industrial complexes would offer a comprehensive overview of the area in question, allowing to apply the methodology developed for factory and residential complexes to the revitalisation process.

The basic mistake in the way we think about Zgierz today is the limitation of revitalisation to two streets. The New Town of Zgierz has 80 buildings

listed in the district register of monuments, with 27 located in the Culture Park, and 53 located outside it (*Ewidencja Zabytków Miasta Zgierza*). Even though the conservator's recommendation is that the whole urban layout of the New Town should be protected, the actual activities only focus on the Culture Park, whereas the cultural landscape covers all historic buildings and they all require comprehensive protection and revitalisation.

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Summary

19th-Century Wooden Houses of Craftsmen from Zgierz – Precious Heritage or Troublesome Inheritance?

Zgierz, a town located in the central part of the Łódź Province, has a unique urban complex in the form of a craftsmen's town built from scratch in the first half of the 19th century. This was a result of a settlement operation carried out in Congress Poland to boost the economy of the newly created state. The settlers were mostly cloth makers of Polish and German descent, primarily from the territory of the Prussian Partition. Regular arrangement, with symmetrical streets and a market square in the middle, on a high river bank, went hand in hand with aesthetic and functional late classical architecture, which is why this centre can be called a Biedermeier town. Even though durable materials were preferred, most houses that have survived are made of wood, and yet decorative elements can still be seen on many of them. Today, the houses, divided into numerous flats and inhabited by qualifying occupiers, are used contrary to their original purpose and inappropriately for their status. So far, two attempts to revitalise the area in question have been made. In consequence, the Town of Weavers Culture Park was established, seven of the houses were renovated, and fragments of two streets were restored to their former appearance. The paper presents the past and present situation of the historic development of the New Town considering its social context, and attempts to summarise the revitalisation activities performed to date.

Keywords: Zgierz, 19th-century architecture, wooden buildings, heritage, revitalisation

Streszczenie

XIX-wieczne domy drewniane zgierskich rzemieślników – cenne dziedzictwo czy kłopotliwy spadek?

W Zgierzu, mieście położonym w centralnej części województwa łódzkiego, znajduje się unikalny zespół urbanistyczny miasta rzemieślniczego, założony od podstaw w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku. Działo się to w wyniku akcji osiedleńczej, którą prowadzono w Królestwie Polskim w celu ożywienia gospodarki nowopowstałego państwa. Sprowadzano głównie sukienników, zarówno pochodzenia polskiego, jak i niemieckiego, przede wszystkim z terenów zaboru pruskiego. Regularny układ miasta o symetrycznie rozplanowanych ulicach, z rynkiem pośrodku na szczycie zbocza doliny rzeki, zabudowany estetyczną i funkcjonalną architekturą późnoklasycystyczną, pozwala na określenie tego ośrodka miastem w stylu biedermeier. Choć w powstającym mieście starano się wznosić budowle z materiałów trwałych, większość z zachowanych do dziś domów wybudowano z drewna. Mimo to, ich dekoracyjna oprawa architektoniczna wciąż jest czytelna w wielu obiektach. Obecnie domy te, dzielone na wiele mieszkań i zamieszkałe przez lokatorów z przydziału, są użytkowane niezgodnie z ich pierwotnym przeznaczeniem i nieodpowiednio do swej rangi. Do tej pory podjęto dwie próby rewitalizacji omawianego obszaru, w wyniku których powołano do życia Park Kulturowy Miasto Tkaczy, wyremontowano siedem domów oraz przywrócono dawny wygląd fragmentom dwóch ulic. Artykuł przedstawia przeszły oraz obecny stan zagospodarowania zabytkowego budownictwa Nowego Miasta, z uwzględnieniem jego społecznego tła, a także podejmuje próbę podsumowania dotychczas podjętych działań rewitalizacyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: Zgierz, XIX-wieczna architektura, drewniane budynki, dziedzictwo, rewitalizacja

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