

**Barbara SIERECKA-NOWAKOWSKA\***

## **CULTURAL SPACE OF INDUSTRIAL ŁÓDŹ AT THE END OF 20th CENTURY**

The change from pre-industrial to industrial civilisation involved rapid development of technology, urbanisation, mass culture and, above all, industrialisation. Nobody anticipated what problems would arise as a result of these changes.<sup>1</sup>

The industrial era brought disregard by successive generations for natural relationships in the exploited environment. Intensive industrialisation and urbanisation of the past half-century has brought the natural environment to the limits of its capacity (Kurnatowski, 1995). We live in a world of great polarisation of wealth and knowledge, not necessarily related to cultural superiority, with ecological problems so severe that our existence as a biological species is threatened (Johansson, 1997). We tend to forget that humankind is part of the environment which is not only physical, biological, but also socio-cultural and socio-economic. Problems of humanity gain more significance if they are placed in a context (Oucho, 1991). Urban places are a context most closely related with man. The concept of culture or civilisation is obviously broader than the concept of town, but the relationship between them allows us to consider the history of culture within an urban space context.

Quick civilisational progress parallel with slow cultural change impairs the ability to understand the surrounding world and creates confusion. Culture and civilisation, though products of human activity, have a gradual destructive influence (Bańka and Czerny 1991). People put too much trust in technology and infrastructure. Towns which developed as a result of such thinking are devoid of individual character and cut off from their natural and cultural roots.

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\* Barbara SIERECKA-NOWAKOWSKA, Technical University of Łódź.

<sup>1</sup> Jean Laloux after Imbs (1988).

Growing urban giants absorb those parts of the city which represent its cultural and civilisational heritage and make for its *genius loci*. The idea prevalent for decades in urban sociology, based on the concept of *homo economicus* has resulted in societies driven by social stimuli instead of by objectives set by themselves. But very soon trends emerged that were opposed to this all-embracing deluge. Numerous efforts were made to create anew the identity of a city: "a feeling that you are someone who lives somewhere". Whatever time and space may mean, place and opportunity are more important, because in human mind space is a place, and time is an opportunity (Jencks, 1987).

Cultural space of a city embraces its historical heritage as well as architectural, symbolic, sacred, artistic, and prestige values. They are represented by individual buildings and monuments, sculptures and small architecture, or by urban complexes – streets, squares, parks, works of engineering art and, finally, whole districts and urban landscapes. Complexes of buildings may convey values inherent in the different periods in history (Wallis, 1977). All cities have certain structural landmarks, meaningful to everybody. These may be both larger areas and elements of the natural environment, buildings or constructions. Loss of such places may have significant influence on the identity of a whole city resulting in obliteration of the spatial structure (Staniszki, 1995). Elements characteristic of urban landscape, making for the identity of the city, may be both common and unique (Bogdanowski *et al.*, 1985).

Civilisational change, especially in industrial cities, poses some functional spatial problems. It threatens the historic urban structure which is the effect of past history. The industrial era identifies space as the structure of a socio-economic system formed as a result of specific socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions.

A representative example of an industrial city whose cultural identity is threatened is Łódź. For over 100 years from its very foundation, the development of the city was determined by the needs of industry. In the early 19th century when European and American cities began to adjust urban structure as a result of industrial expansion, Łódź entered the industrial era as a small manufacturing settlement situated on the river Łódka and surrounded by forests. Former church estates in the valley of the river Jasień, famous for the abundance of water, and situated only 4 km away from the Łódka settlement, provided a perfect site for the establishment of a cotton and flax processing manufacturing settlement. This was one of the targets of the government of the newly-established Congress Kingdom of Poland. Those two settlements joined together and gave rise to a new town. Numerous new buildings and factories were emerging as a result of dynamic development of industry mainly along the Łódka and Jasień valleys. As industrial expansion progressed, factories (rather

primitive) and houses tended to grow bigger. Housing complexes were being built for workers – characteristic, uniform housing units. But it was not until the 1880s that Łódź began to assume urban character. The main urban axis – Piotrkowska Street – joining the valleys of Łódka and Jasień, and adjoining areas have been built up with large residential buildings. Trade, banks and other services concentrated there, too. Large factory complexes were built in the valley of Jasień and Łódka. They were monumental constructions, with towers and representative gateways. In their immediate neighbourhood were set up palaces of their owners, surrounded by parks, very rich in form, which reflected the style popular in that epoch. Factories and palaces became the symbol of the new society, its wealth and prestige.

Architectural form is the outcome of both its builders creative ability and the investor's financial means. The products of industrial architecture in Łódź are so impressive because it was the leading Polish centre of textile manufacturing highly renowned in Europe and in the Far East. This large, industrial centre attracted people from all over Poland and from abroad, who contributed to its multinational, multi-religion culture.

Until the Second World War Łódź retained its social character dominated by continuous development of the textile industry. Only in the new, post-war situation of Poland, when the country was devastated and its capital in ruins, Łódź had its big chance. The city started to develop as a multifunctional centre. It took over important administrative, cultural and educational functions. Its industry provided employment for thousands of people who came from the whole country and its eastern frontier areas (Sierecka-Nowakowska, 1992).<sup>2</sup> In the existing socio-economic and political conditions, characterised by great chaos, the spatial development of the city was as unbalanced as it was one hundred years before. Factories continued to fulfil their traditional roles, but dozens of palaces and residences with surrounding parks were put to many different uses, frequently quite inappropriate, which led to devastation in some cases or loss of character in others. Ideologically motivated use of some palaces resulted in considerable losses in the cultural space of the city. Some of the historical buildings had better chances to survive: they were adapted to house educational and cultural institutions which were being established, which was mutually beneficial. Valuable monuments of the industrial era were properly looked after and prestigious functions of the city, such as scientific societies, cultural establishments, higher education institutions and exhibitions, had representative locations.

Currently Łódź extends over 300 km<sup>2</sup>. Its historically shaped linear centre constitutes only a small part of the city, but retained its original character in

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<sup>2</sup> The author discusses spatial development in the context of urban open spaces.

terms of the spatial and functional structure. After extensive rehabilitation and renewal, it is an original, unique 'marketplace'. Many historical buildings are being restored to their former splendour after being taken over by new owners. On the other hand, a number of factories and architectural complexes are either abandoned or fulfil only temporary functions. Vast industrial areas in the valleys of Łódka and Jasień are becoming deserted, as if the roots of the city were forgotten. Several factories are being restructured and adapted for new functions.

There is much controversy about the future role of the historic areas of industrial Łódź. It seems only appropriate that the largest complexes of historical buildings, creating the identity of the city and shaping the cultural space of industrial Łódź, should be functionally active. In this way the image of the city will be preserved without compromising its development needs. An additional advantage will be enhanced architectural diversity.

The prospect of assuming by Łódź the role of the capital city of a much enlarged region in central Poland, which is due to the new socio-political situation of the country, opens new opportunities, but also brings new challenges. The new situation creates the need to develop Łódź so that it can successfully fulfil its role as a regional centre, which involves development of administrative, cultural, educational, recreational and commercial functions, as well as other elements of socio-economic infrastructure. Spatial planning should embrace all these elements and precede any initiatives. It is essential to develop a strategy of actions aimed at preserving the cultural heritage without compromising socio-economic needs of a city on the threshold of the 21st century, in accordance with the sustainable development principles. Lack of a comprehensive vision results in fragmentary, isolated actions which may cause irreparable damage to the landscape of the city. For this reason it is recommended that two structural teams be secured along the Łódka valley in the north and the Jasień valley in the south. Development of open spaces would supply recreational areas for the inhabitants of the city and region. By restoring the river-related character to Łódź, the identity and uniqueness of the city, lost in the existing urban structure, would be re-emphasized. There is, however, a threat to the present chance. Too slow processes of functional and spatial transformation may result in the destruction of the existing urban tissue and space, which would lead to loss of the individual character of the cultural landscape of industrial Łódź.

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