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Modernization and development of the Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź

The Central Museum of Textiles has been on the cultural map of Łódź since 1950s and it constitutes an example of a museum institution which is in constant progress and still enriches its offer. CMW (Polish acronym of the name) is an exceptional institution – not without reason it was created in the greatest Polish centre of the textile industry called ‘Polish Manchester’, and in this way it emphasizes the specific character of Łódź by documenting its industrial tradition, with time becoming a distinctive feature of the city. Also the location of the museum is symbolic – it is housed in the town’s oldest, attractively located factory consisting of many departments whose architecture is so extraordinary that it is nowadays considered as one of the most beautiful examples of the industrial architecture in Poland.

As a public institution, the Central Museum of Textiles plays many important roles and fulfils various tasks, has cognitive functions adapted to changing requirements and expectations and it encourages visitors to enjoy its rich program in many dimensions. Each visitor may choose their own sightseeing path by focusing attention on buildings, their construction, architecture, details... A visitor can admire the size and space of old factory halls, can look at machines and try to understand how they functioned and can learn about history and development of the textile industry. Finally, visitors can admire fabrics, fashion and works of art; also, in the near future it will be possible to enjoy the virtual world of technology and art... All this can be found in that one exceptional place on famous Piotrkowska Street.

The first important element is the very place – location of the museum, factory buildings and the adjoining, designed by us, wooden architecture open-air museum. Due to their unique character, these structures in themselves became almost museum exhibits in the developing city

tissue. The fact that these buildings were revitalized and they are now housing cultural institutions contributed to the protection of the original factory buildings and typical wooden residential buildings, which are so important in the history of the industrial city. Thus, the museum was turned into the symbol of great respect for the continuity of local urban and architectural tradition, which can be felt by visitors who analyze in detail the particular structures.

Another cognitive element is the method of adapting interiors and their adjustment to the new requirements. Wandering around halls, floors and buildings, visitors have a unique opportunity to see the typical 19th century factory interiors – their construction, overall dimensions and characteristic space, they can witness the subsequent phases of the textile factory development, imagine what old workplaces looked like and thanks to the presentation of textile industry tools and equipment, they even have the chance to observe the production process. By documenting the textile industry development, the museum became the guardian of memory about the industrial revolution times, about the era of formation of Łódź and its factories and it is also the witness of history, thought and technology development and the witness of human labour as well...

The enormous factory halls also perform another role – they constitute the place where various contemporary and historic objects of art are exhibited and presented. In this way, the museum combines the industrial tradition of the city with modern times, while the exhibitions held in the museum provide the visitors with a chance to admire an exhibit, work of art, effect of artist’s thoughts and activities. The museum is proud to have one of the greatest collections of industrial and metric fabrics as well as printed, harness and Jacquard ones, it has numerous ready patterns, and it archives projects, sketches, technical drawings and photographs of fabrics. The collections are an excellent source of knowledge about textile technolo-

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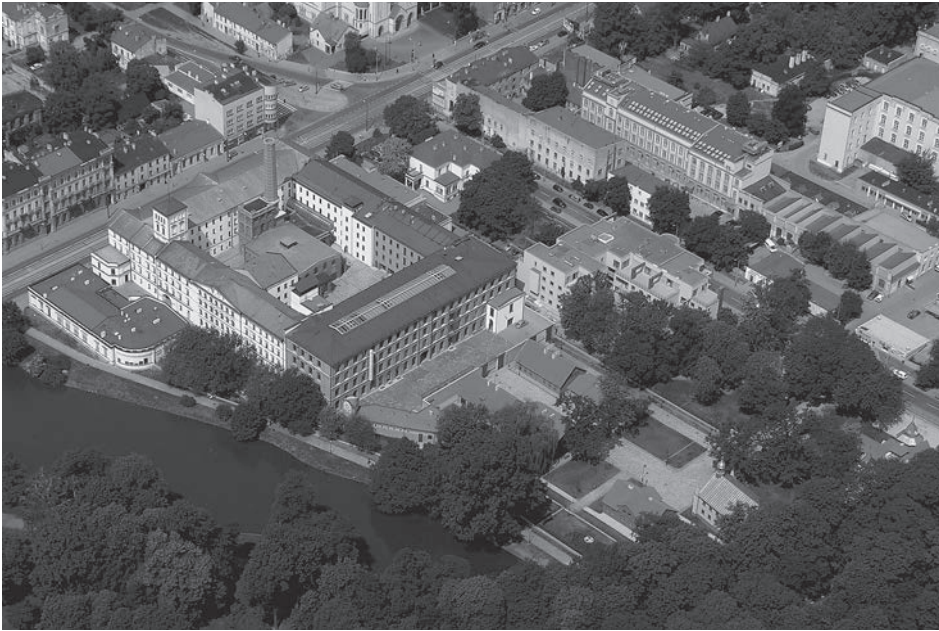


Fig. 1. The Central Museum of Textiles and Open-air Museum of Łódź Wooden Architecture. Photo by Wiesław Stępień

gies, current changes in pattern designing of fabric and the process of formation of trends and fashions. The most prestigious periodic exhibition to be held in the CMW is the International Fabric Triennale, which has been organized since 1972 and it is the oldest and greatest international exhibition of this type that promotes a unique fabric and ‘the art of the yarn’ in a broader context. The museum designated the area of seven thousand square meters in total for the exhibition purposes and there have been almost one thousand exhibitions organized since the museum was established...

The exhibitions organized in the museum give the visitors a chance to see the exhibits, while in the design of the modernized boiler room we suggest a new way of presentation and a different interior organization. The main purpose of the adaptation of the building is to create an original space and a modern structure based on the 21st-century technology which is addressed to a new recipient.

Apart from its statutory activity, the CMW also constitutes an attractive ‘active’ public space, resilient centre, adapted to various creative and cultural activities. It hosts numerous events and periodic presentations – starting from the graduation banquet of Academy of Art students, fashion shows such as Fashion Week, Comics and Games Festival and finally symposia, workshops and concerts.

It has taken many years to introduce these changes and create the present state of the CMW... This institution developed gradually but consequently and thus it was turned into a significant institution and the centre of great importance to the Polish culture.

The history of factory buildings, which are now part of the CMW, was started in 1828 when Ludwik Geyer arrived there from Saxony to occupy the attractive areas situated on Piotrkowska Street, the main road of the developing city, on the corner of Górny Rynek next to the picturesque pond created on the Jasień River. In the years

1835–1837 the first monumental factory building was constructed on the scale never seen before; this building was the seat of a spinning mill, weaving mill and printing house. The structure was based on the English solutions; it was given 26-axis white plastered classicist façade, which was not typical of factory construction and it contributed to its name: ‘White Factory’, which expression is in use until today.

In 1838 the boiler room was built along with the northern wing and ten years later the southern wing – a four-storey spinning mill situated by the pond on the Jasień River and finally in 1886 the eastern wing was built of bricks, which significantly differed from the others. In the meantime, the buildings were complemented by additional extensions and elements thanks to which an original complex of various buildings was created, equipped with water and dust towers situated around romantic, irregular and cobwebbed yard. Through such evolution, a dense quadrilateral building complex was formed – so untypical as for a textile plant and unusual for the Łódź city tissue, making the factory similar to a fortress. The Geyer’s factory is a unique place also for other reasons: in the factory boiler room the first steam machine in Łódź was installed; in was here that the first smokestack in town was built, which is part of Piotrkowska Street scenery until today; finally, in 1907 the factory bathhouse was erected – this is one of the first buildings of this type in Łódź and the only one preserved until now.

After the Second World War and the nationalization, the former Ludwik Geyer factory was used by the Cotton Industry Works ‘Eskimo’ until 1990; in the end this plant was declared bankrupt, which took place in 2002.

The idea of establishing a museum of textiles appeared already in 1946. In 1952 at the Museum of Art, the Weaving Department was created which after 1955 got its own seat and in 1960 the independent Museum of Weaving History was created; in 1975 the name was finally changed into the Central Museum of Textiles.



Fig. 2. Open-air Museum of Łódź Wooden Architecture

In the oldest buildings of the spinning mill and Geyer weaving factory a new city institution was created in the 1950s – the Weaving Department of the Museum of Art. The location of the cultural institution on the territory of the unique factory complex, which had unusual historical and artistic values, was symbolic and gave an opportunity for favourable functioning and perspective development of the museum. Reconstruction of buildings in the early post-war years resulted in the fact that the museum in a way became a pioneer in adapting industrial structures for exhibition functions – the process of rebuilding the western wing was probably the first in Poland and doubtless one of the first post-industrial architecture reconstructions for museum purposes in the world.

The CMW gradually took over the next buildings – in the western and southern production buildings with wooden structures, huge and spacious exhibition halls were arranged successively, while in the southern building – technical rooms, workshops of textile preservation and conference rooms. The buildings were connected and the transport between particular storeys and functional places was provided. The first reconstruction and building works started in the oldest western wing already in 1958 but they were limited to the adaptation of big production halls for the needs of the museum exhibitions; thanks to this reconstruction, the most valuable building structure was preserved and the old ‘gloomy’ appearance of authentic halls with low storeys and a dense system of wooden supports was maintained in one-room interiors. In the years 1962–1964, according to the project of Professor H. Jaworowski, the northern building was rebuilt; in the years 1972–1975 in the northern corner of the western building a new entrance with a hall and open staircase was created and in 1981 works in the boiler room started; in the years 1989–1992 the southern wing was reconstructed.

After the liquidation of ‘Eskimo’ Factory in 2002, the CMW received the last element of buildings – a devas-

tated eastern wing which was not used for 12 years and whose revitalization was supposed to be an opportunity to integrate and modernize the whole complex of post-factory museum buildings.

In March 2002 the authorities invited tenders to prepare an architectural concept of the eastern wing adaptation and land development. On winning the first prize, we made projects which included rebuilding of the eastern wing along with the modernization of adjacent parts of the buildings, adaptation of the old factory bathhouse, and arrangement of the inner yard according to the project of Open-air Museum of Łódź Wooden Architecture as well as land development of the museum surroundings. The realization of our projects from 2002 brought about a diversity of the program & space offer and museum exhibition; at the same time, it became an example of a different approach to revitalization of industrial buildings. Revitalization of the eastern wing and bathhouse constitutes an example of creative rebuilding of structures subordinated to the exposition of the industrial character of interiors; a planned conversion of the boiler room into the multimedia museum is the example of making use of interiors deprived of original elements in order to introduce new functions and stylistics, while the open-air museum is the result of relocation which constitutes a method of wooden structures protection which are endangered in the city space development.

The basic purpose of the museum modernization was the improvement of the functional system of the complex, enrichment of its program offer and finally integration of buildings with the surroundings, which we managed to obtain by means of exposing the eastern wing to the first-rate role as well as the representative and entrance function. The change in the entrance location resulted in the change of the urban arrangement and functional reorganization of the whole museum; in this way, it gained a representative entrance zone and not existing earlier yard at the side of the city park, which was enriched



Fig. 3. Open-air Museum of Łódź Wooden Architecture

with the Open-air Museum. Thanks to the new space organization, the open-air museum became an integral part of the museum – the first ‘exhibit’ which a visitor can admire.

At the turn of the 1950s, Krystyna Kondratiukowa – the founder and first director of the museum – wanted to create the open-air museum of city wooden architecture in the part of the nearby park. This idea was made concrete in the 1970s, however, its realization took place at the beginning of the next century...

The imperative idea of creating the open-air museum was protection and preservation of the 19th-century typical wooden houses and sacral buildings which were becoming rarer and rarer in Łódź agglomeration. In the open-air museum there were eight various historical buildings translocated from Łódź and the surroundings: five living quarters

for weavers and clothiers (19th century), a summer villa (beginnings of the 20th century), a church (former Protestant church) and a tram stop (beginnings of the 20th century). This complex, which was created by us, constitutes the first in Poland open-air museum of urban architecture. Wooden buildings were dismantled, restored and then put together again on the territory of the open-air museum; the original appearance and facades colours as well as the arrangement of rooms were restored (which dispelled a myth that the 19th-century Łódź was grey and dirty). The objects in the open-air museum are not only exhibits but they are adapted to fulfil different functions; they create a space which is live and attractive for the visitors. St. Andrew Bobola Church was consecrated once again and wedding ceremonies already take place there. The complement of the open-air museum development con-



Fig. 4. Eastern building and dust tower from the side of the inner yard direction



Fig. 5. Two-storey exhibition hall
in the eastern wing;
Triennial of Fabric 2010

stitutes a revitalized former big factory bath house where a museum coffee shop is supposed to be situated; the area was enriched with the exhibition of historical technical devices and elements of small architecture creating in this way picturesque places which became photographic locations willingly visited by people.

The space composition of the open-air museum referring to historical urban structures of Łódź is based on the rectangular net which additionally arranges the space and emphasizes a newly created entrance zone. The element which organizes the space arrangement is the longitudinal axis of the museum buildings on which particular elements of the urban structure were placed – the inner yard with the boiler room, museum buildings, entrance square with the old bathhouse and the complex of historic wooden buildings of the open-air museum situated along the so called ‘Łódź Street’.

According to our project, in the eastern wing which adjoins the cast-iron yard there is a representative entrance hall whose favourable location ensures a convenient entrance to the exhibition spaces of the southern and western wing as well as to the conference rooms and a technical equipment room which are situated in the northern building. Thanks to this rebuilding, it is now possible to use all the buildings situated around the inner yard; walking through particular rooms it is possible to observe the yard from different perspectives.

The main goal of rebuilding the eastern wing was to maintain the industrial character of the building according to its original purpose; therefore, the imperative aim was to make an impression as if the rooms were one-space and open interiors of the old production halls. Intensification of this impression results from the en suite arrangement of rooms and application of transparent and neutral glass divisions which allow the visitors to see particular rooms; visitors who walk on the open staircase hung in the atrium, can observe the interiors from new perspectives. Thanks to these new spaces it was possible to make

a spectacular exhibition of fabrics of great sizes, which was earlier difficult to make.

Adaptation of the boiler room shall complete the revitalization of ‘White Factory’ buildings complex and enrich the exhibition space as well as ensure additional transport inside the complex. There will be a hidden surprise in the brick boiler room – the external cover shall include rooms and objects which will form the protection for illusions and a peculiar theatre hidden in the inner labyrinth spaces. A visitor is supposed to become a participant of spectacles which are created from virtual ‘artificial’ reality, performances generated on the basis of arranged light scenes and interactive projections. The hero of spectacles shall be the textile industry – its history, development, buildings and factories, equipment and machines as well as the product, effects of their work and man’s activities – thread, weft, fabric and finally a work of art... A spectator will be able to learn about all these things thanks to the multi-media presentations, computer programs, logic games; he will be able to familiarize himself with the CMW collections and see the work of huge production devices.

The most satisfying for us is the fact that the eastern wing received the title ‘The Best Interior of the Year 2008’ and the adaptation of the museum and the open-air museum got a honorable mention of Polish Union of Urbanists in 2009 and a special prize of Polish Urbanists Association in Łódź in the category of ‘Newly created public space’.

Thanks to the revitalization, which has been carried out in recent years, the museum became an important place not only because of the unique collections documenting the history of the textile industry or collections of art, but it also became an attractive public space where concerts, shows and ceremonies important for the city are organized. The new space created new perspectives and we do hope that the Central Museum of Textiles will be developing in future...

Przebudowa i rozwój Centralnego Muzeum Włókiennictwa w Łodzi

Centralne Muzeum Włókiennictwa, mieszczące się w zabudowaniach tzw. Białej Fabryki Ludwika Geyera w Łodzi, stanowi przykład stale rozwijającej się i wzbogacającej swą ofertę jednostki muzealnej. Muzeum dokumentuje rozwój przemysłu włókienniczego, eksponuje elementy historycznego wyposażenia technicznego oraz promuje sztukę współczesną związaną z tkaniną unikatową, łącząc w ten sposób industrialną tradycję miasta ze współczesnością.

W artykule zaprezentowano projekty autorskie z lat 2002–2010, dotyczące rewitalizacji Centralnego Muzeum Włókiennictwa, dzięki

którym zostały zmodernizowane dziewiętnastowieczne zabudowania, zaadaptowana d. łaźnia zakładowa oraz powstał Skansen Łódzkiej Drewnianej Architektury Miejskiej. Nadrzędnym celem przekształceń było poszerzenie roli muzeum jako miejsca kontaktu z kulturą, sztuką i zabytkami, miejsca inicjującego różnorodną działalność, stworzenie interesującej wieloelementowej przestrzeni publicznej oraz wykreowanie nowych relacji między muzeum a otoczeniem.

Key words: Łódź, museum design

Słowa kluczowe: Łódź, projekt muzeum