

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
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Honors theses

Żoliborz – an avant-garde area of Warsaw. Identity and shared conservation

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The city of Warsaw contains many buildings of architectural interest and entire areas built between the 1920s and 1930s which were not affected by the bombings of the Second World War. Parts of the areas surrounding the city centre – Koło, Saska Kępa, Praga, the Rakowiec colonies and the Żoliborz district - are interesting examples of experimentalism in the context of modern architectural production. They consist of building complexes that reflect social principles and the educational role of architecture and are in line with Dutch Avant-Gardism and the principles of the CIAM (Congrès Internationale d'Architecture Moderne).



Examples of modern experimentalism inside the districts of Warsaw

An analysis of and comparison between current trends in the conservation of modern architecture in Poland and international positions have revealed how little attention Warsaw's conservation organizations pay to modern heritage. Even the inhabitants themselves have difficulty recognizing the identity of the places they live in, which leads to neglected buildings and social hardship.

In order to fully understand the aspects regarding the protection and conservation of modern architecture, we chose the district of Żoliborz as a case study, and in particular the area of **Nowy Żoliborz**, which consists of the WSM Colonies for factory workers. (The district lies to the north of the Stare Miasto, in the area to the east of what is now Plac Inwalidow, and was extended between the two World Wars). The WSM Colonies are two to five floor multi-family buildings, consisting of small flats and private internal courtyards that reflect current socialist ideals of inexpensive accommodation and were built by the Warsaw building cooperative.



Area of Nowy Żoliborz with some WSM colonies

The VI Colony, which serves as an area of public utility for the district, with its typical elements (the former heating plant, ex-laundry and former cinema “Kino Tęczka”), is in need of restoration work, not only on the various buildings, but also to improve the entire complex. Having analyzed the present state of the buildings (survey phase), the materials and defects, we planned new uses for the disused buildings and analyzed the needs of the inhabitants by suggesting the method of **SHARED CONSERVATION**.

The innovative aspect of the project was that of using the principle of SHARED PLANNING, which was originally used by the architects when the colony was built, and today, as happened in the past, the inhabitants were consulted by means of a questionnaire (*ankieta*) prepared for the purpose of the study, in order to understand their ties with the historical identity of the district and their uncertainty as to their future prospects in the area.

By using this method it was possible to define a set of **guidelines for district conservation**: suggestions stemming from an awareness of the reality to be protected and, moreover, of the needs of those who will have to use the places themselves. An analysis of the data we obtained made it possible to understand how to set about changing the purpose of the existing buildings.

We were able to set up a **cultural centre** (an information centre, library, gallery for contemporary art, bookshop, cafeteria) inside the former heating plant; a district **open-air museum** (this is an open-air exhibition consisting of observation points, information points and tours of the colonies); and a new building, in the courtyards, which will serve as a **meeting point** for the elderly with its own bar, “bar Mleczny” (milk bar), a traditional inexpensive Polish bar selling typical produce to be used by people of all different social classes.

In this way the project aims to bring out and revive the identity of the place with its wealth of history and tradition, whilst helping to protect and conserve the modern buildings that characterize it and fulfilling the needs that the inhabitants themselves have pointed out.



VI Colony: the former heating plant and ex-laundry. Survey and 3D representation of the area

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