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Protection of Historical Buildings and the City Landscape in the Present-day Cracow

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

Cracow is the only big historical Polish city which survived the tragedy of the Second World War intact. It is not my intention to minimize the tragedy of the War for Cracow and its heavy material and human losses. I simply wish to draw attention to the fact that Cracow has preserved its physical and social structure, which is very relevant in the context of city protection and development strategy.

After the Second World War heavy industrialisation came as a result of the Stalinist model of urbanisation implemented in Cracow and in Poland as in many other Central European cities at the very end of the 40s. That was why pollution was considered the greatest danger to the city till 1990 and the main threat to monuments and historical buildings in Cracow. The city has enormous potential in the field of conservation, as this subject is well developed at the University as well as at the Academy of Fine Arts and the Technical University. As we have very good conservators in Cracow, there are no technical problems, and pollution has been largely reduced. The most challenging problem facing the protection strategy at the moment is finding a proper compromise between modernisation aims, new urban development, and the significance of the heritage.

Heritage is a very decisive factor in a city of about 750,000 inhabitants with an area of about 300 km², in which there are five historical urban complexes and 75 suburban complexes containing about 15,000 so-called traditional objects and 5000 listed buildings, and 2.5 million cultural objects in numerous collections.

Transformation creates problems and conflicts. For Cracow, efficient protection of its heritage means finding a proper way to manage its potential. The uniqueness of Cracow in Polish reality is that, in spite of fifty years of communism, the city has protected its ownership structure.

This means that Cracow has preserved private ownership in the City Centre together with the social structure. More than 90% of all historical houses in the city are private houses, and this is why just after the great political change in 1990, we witnessed the successful establishment and development of many small restaurants, smart shops, etc, in Cracow. This "small economy" has changed the image of the city, and seems to be very helpful in rehabilitating its historical structure. From the legal and financial points of view, the main responsibility for the protection of the monuments in Cracow lies with the state.

The significance of Cracow's heritage has forced parliament to pass a special bill, and to create the National Fund for the Restoration of the Monuments of Cracow. It means that we receive annually, directly from the national budget, about 280 billion old Polish zlotys, that is about US\$ 10 million. This is quite a lot by Polish standards. The Municipality of Cracow (the local government, re-established in 1990) gives an additional 40-50 billion, which is about 15-20% of the National Fund. Together these funds create a potential which sets off a kind of a chain reaction, stimulating private owners, who, according to estimates, invest a further 50%.

I do not want to create the impression that I am advertising Cracow. We are not complaining about the lack of money. The most intriguing problem has not yet been solved in Cracow. It is how to combine smoothly and harmoniously the physical potential of the heritage with the modern functions of the city, how to deglomerate some of these functions, and how to connect the intellectual and artistic potential of the city with this physical structure. How to break isolation, and how to make Cracow a successful centre of international tourism - with the awareness that tourism may also be a threat.

Communism as a maximally centralised system and one separated from the economic calculus (in the free-market meaning of this term which goes back to Adam Smith) was conducive to conservation successes. Above all it made it possible to carry out reconstruction on a large scale. This was one of the reasons why in Poland a huge market for conservation work was also created and a great army of excellent conservators was created - a great conservation potential was established.

The success of the primacy of politics was symbolized by the reconstruction of Warsaw, which is also well known outside Poland. This formula or method of managing historic cities also brought about many negative effects. It interfered with the social tissue. It is enough to look at Warsaw Old City Centre to see that its reconstruction was not only separated from the natural economic mechanisms, but also the social make-up of this district was enforced by administration. Of course, this was combined with the significant increase in the symbolic functions of the historic monuments which occurred after the Second World War. At this point it should be recalled that in this new reality the historic monument also became an important tool for the legitimization of the new authorities. Its dimension went far beyond the framework of economy and also had extra-economic effects.

Detachment from economy became visible after the Second World War, primarily in those historic cities which were not destroyed - precisely in such centres as Cracow. The tissue of these cities, their historical core, were, on one hand, frozen in their functions and in natural development mechanisms, and, on the other hand, were subjected to gradual decapitalisation. This was one of the reasons for the paradox of our realities over the last 50 years. On the one hand one could note spectacularly great achievements of conservators in the field of reconstruction, on the other hand the new system could not altogether cope with a seemingly much easier thing - that is with the maintenance of the existing, authentic historic matter and tissue of the cities which survived war destruction such as Cracow.

This deepening discrepancy between conservation achievements and the less and less effective protection on the scale of whole urban complexes was a simple result of the diseased economy of the whole system.

This disease also affected the tissue of historic cities, which underwent, particularly in the sixties and seventies, a process of rapidly progressing decapitalisation and degradation. In Cracow this rapidly developing degradation was counteracted by restoration which started in the late seventies. It was carried out through the central budget and as part of the centralised system of administration. With all due respect for the conservation achievements of restoration, one must note however, that this conservation was again separated from both the economic and social contexts.

It clearly departed from what is an important determinant of historic cities and a component of their value - from the natural, spontaneous process of the city's life and authenticity of its social tissue. Only a few years ago restoration in Cracow led to a peculiar "modelling" of the city. Subjected to costly conservation work, buildings were also deprived of authentic dwellers, and quite often of their past functions.

This was a special paradox in Cracow, the only large Polish historic city to have survived the tragedy of the Second World War physically and socially intact. One of the measures of the absurdity was the fact that as recently as the eighties economists from the Academy of Economy were busy over the city map drawing or appropriating proper service functions for particular shops. What should be regulated by the free market under the supervision of the conservation service became a subject of pseudo-scientific studies. This example is a good illustration of the helplessness faced in approaching the problems of a historical city at the final stage of the command-and-control system. This road led to nowhere, as it was based on static thinking about the city and on the treatment of a city as a peculiar reserve.

The utopianism of this approach was conclusively laid bare by the breakthrough of the year 1989, after which the cities of Central Europe found themselves in a wholly new political and economic reality. One must add at this point that this reality varies in different countries of our region. This depends on the range and character of systemic transformation in particular countries of the former Soviet block. Polish cities after the Balcerowicz reform and local government reform of 1990, historical cities in the Ukraine, and cities in the Czech Republic and Slovakia are all in different situations. But the key element of this new situation and a starting point for seeking new solutions to the management of historic cities is primarily the regaining of independence by them. This happened both through the decentralisation of the state as well as through restoration of the local government after 1990 at the grass roots level. Another principal factor of changes was the "unfreezing" of economic mechanisms. The experience of Cracow and my own experience from 1990 and 1991, when I also directed the town's policy with regard to historic monuments' protection, are very instructive. "Defrosting the fridge" in which the city had been prior to 1990 above all brought about spontaneity of town-planning processes. In Poland, Cracow played in these processes a pioneering role, for it preserved the ownership structure from before the war.

In communist times it was embraced by the compulsory administration of the state. This significantly restricted the rights of owners and deprived them of income (thus contributing to the decapitalisation of urban tissue) but did not deprive them of their right to property. This is why in 1990, when the compulsory administration of the state over private property came to an end, the owners regained full and sovereign rights to their property.

In a short time this changed the past system of the functioning of a historical city. It was soon necessary to search for new legal instruments to effectively control the vehement process of the regeneration of free market mechanism at the heart of the historic city.

This process generated the need to quickly abandon static thinking about the historic city and instead assume a dynamic approach to the complexity of town-planning. This need was strengthened by the appearance of great conflicts together with systemic transformation, including conflicts of interest between various social groups in historic cities. These conflicts are visible today as well. They can be easily seen on the Market Square in Cracow, which focuses the conflicting interests of various lobbies. They recognise the advantages in the attractiveness of such places as the Market Square whereby they use this attractiveness to advertise and promote their products. The only remedy for the peculiar chaos and spontaneity of the processes we are facing is a fundamental change in the philosophy of thinking about the city's economy and about the management of the historic city. It was a peculiar paradox before 1990 in this part of Europe that under this centralised system, which controlled all manifestations of social life, it was easier to control conservation issues. All the more so as this occurred within the economic system, whose main determinant was economic stagnation.

In this way Central Europe came into a phase with which conservators of historic monuments in Western Europe and in other continents were familiar for a long time. This already happened several dozen years ago in the United States of North America, where a very dynamic development of urbanisation forced conservation to be understood in what in English is termed as "the management of change". The management of change means an attempt to control and regulate rather than plan spontaneous urbanisation processes, which often cannot be put within the confines of planning. It can be said that the cities of our region are in the process of continuous systemic transformation.

This is the principal message we have for other areas. Cities from our geographic and cultural zone again became peculiar laboratories for experiments and for testing on the living matter of historical cities not only various conservation doctrines but also various approaches to the issue of economy and trade, and to the issue of city management. Replacement of a command-and-control system with a system based upon structural and economic freedom of the cities and on economic liberalism, is primarily an opportunity for their effective protection, but also poses considerable risk. A distinctive link between the cultural landscape and the socio-economic system becomes particularly conspicuous during the transition period. Its first symptoms were gaudy advertisements in the historic tissue of our cities against which our conservators have no defence. This is not only a sign of change in the system of ownership and restoration of the land rent, but also evidence that the past principles and instruments of protecting our heritage are collapsing.

They were in a way efficient in a system based on economic stagnation and total control, but today they fail to stand the test when confronted with the dynamic life of our cities. The extension of the chronological field of protection of the tissues of our cities by the architectural heritage of the 19th and 20th centuries also plays some part. This also forces a change in the philosophy of thinking about the protection of cultural heritage. Even cities, deeply medieval in origin, which preserved their structure from that epoch (for example Cracow) are dominated by nineteenth-century tissue. The new scale of the problem of heritage protection in this part of Europe is symbolised by Berlin, Prague or Saint Petersburg.

This new scale calls for a new formulation of goals and scope of protection - a transition towards the process of efficient revitalisation of the extensive housing complexes. In this process of total protection, the only guarantee of success may lie in the wise incorporation of cultural heritage into the new economic circulation (rather than its exclusion from this circulation). This in turn requires that a balanced compromise be found between the preservation doctrine, the needs of everyday life and the laws of economics. This is of course the individual experience of particular states and particular cities in our region. Comprehensive cultural heritage protection should be viewed also from the perspective of what the Germans define as *Kulturgesellschaft*, and by acknowledging the fact that the cultural sector also has its economic dimension (we had lost the habit of this over the last few decades). Culture is also part of the whole system of the communication vessels of our economic and social policies. One of the key issues here is the problem of the introduction of proper urban policies to often dilapidated historic districts.

The efficiency of this protection is guaranteed by creating a suitable image of the city. Its attractiveness often depends on its cultural potential and on the extent of the preservation of the heritage. Still these issues are too slow to reach the consciousness of political and economic decision makers. The historical cities of Central Europe have also another potential resource, which should be better synchronised and used in the global strategy of historic city management. This factor is great human potential based on strong artistic and intellectual circles living in our historic cities. They work mostly in the state sector still based on an outdated system of financing, which only in part uses their potential. Creating a market for cultural tourism, including great festivals of art, should also be an element in the strategy of heritage in its broadest sense. A very positive experience in this respect was the European Cultural Month, a great festival of European art organised in 1992 in Cracow by the International Cultural Centre.

In closing one can again repeat that protection of cultural heritage in Central Europe found itself after 1989 in a wholly new reality, and because of this, it requires a new approach. It also requires that the scope of protection be redefined and considerably extended. Thank you for your attention.