

Zacisze Community Center aka “Chimney of Culture” in Targówek Fabryczny in Warsaw

Abstract

The Community Center is the most common institution promoting culture, and at the same time an important facility in the public space of cities in Poland. A large district of Warsaw – Targówek – faced the problem of the lack of an appropriate-sized community center. The existing building of the community center in Zacisze, even after the expansion in line with the 2018 architectural competition program, will not meet the expectations of the residents of this district of Warsaw. As a solution, the author of the article proposes the construction of a new facility, located in the vicinity of the existing historic factory chimney at Radzymińska Street. In order to stimulate the discussion and find the right spatial, functional and aesthetic solutions, the author introduced this topic under the name “Chimney of Culture” during the design classes conducted in the 7th semester at the Faculty of Architecture of the Warsaw University of Technology. Student projects show that this magnificent, tall chimney, like in many other Polish and European projects, can become the dominant feature of the district, an identifier of its center. Such an object, spatially connected with Radzymińska Street, could be the center of the social and cultural life of the entire Targówek district, and an important element in the structure of Warsaw.

Keywords: community center | Warszawa
Targówek

Introduction

„The Community Center is the most common institution in Poland, acting for the promotion of culture, cultural education, social and cultural animation and promotion of culture”¹. In the Polish landscape, it is an important architectural element in the urban and rural space, as well as an object that focuses the life of local communities. It is important that enough such institutions operate, and that they function efficiently, offering forms of activity and content suited to the needs of the inhabitants of a given environment². In which the right architectural solutions can help greatly. The subject of this article is the search for a suitable form for a community center in Warsaw’s Targówek district, conducted by the author and students during the design classes during the seventh semester at the Faculty of Architecture of the Warsaw University of Technology.

Location

Targówek is one of the largest districts of Warsaw. It has about 125 thousand inhabitants, including about 30 thousand retirees. The cultural institutions in the district are scarce – the most important of them, the center of Targówek’s cultural life, is the Zacisze Community Center at 1 Blokowa Street, which was created from social contributions fifty years ago. Targówek has other cultural facilities, including:

- The impressive socialist realist building

¹ *Dom kultury w XXI wieku, wizje, niepokoje, rozwiązania*, ed. B. Jedlewska, B. Skrzypczak, Olsztyn 2009, p. 6.

² E. Atafiałek, *Osiedlowy dom kultury w procesie integracji społeczności osiedlowej*, „Kieleckie Studia Pedagogiczne i Psychologiczne”, Vol. 7, 1997, p. 166.

of the former District Cultural Center at 20 Kołowa Street, formerly known as “Dedek”. The facility was built in the 1950s, and since 1975 it the home of the Rampa Theater;

- Świt Cinema in Bródno, which is to be merged into one organizational unit with the Zacisze Community Center (opposed by the local community);
- The small and intimate Center of Culture and Local Activity of Targówek Fabryczny at 6 Siarczana Street.

In 2018, the Targówek commune announced a competition for the expansion of Zacisze Community Center at 1 Blokowa Street, because its current functional and spatial layout, technical and aesthetic quality fail to meet modern-day expectations³. The building was rebuilt inside and “fixed-up” outside many times. Yet, solutions for evacuation and accessibility for people with physical disabilities still do not meet the regulations in force today. The competition covered the extension of the existing building of the “Zacisze” Community Center, the addition of a performance hall with facilities for artists, an entrance hall with a gastronomy facility, toilets, a cloakroom, information office, and a few classrooms on the first floor. The current area of Zacisze Community Center is 698 m², and according to the terms of the competition, it may be extended up to 2,278 m² (i.e. it would be an extension of the facility’s area by over 300%). The narrow plot, the inability to extend the parking lot, and the strict provisions of the local spatial development plan mean that the Zacisze Community Center will not reach the spatial parameters appropriate for this type of facilities, even after its significant expansion. In terms of the competition, there are also noticeable program

“gaps”, i.e. the lack of many needed rooms and the exceptional modesty of the auditorium complex. As a result, the functional program and the offer of cultural activities will forever be incomplete, and will not meet the aspirations of the inhabitants of one of the largest districts of Warsaw – a district that is constantly expanding its housing base (large housing complexes are being built in the eastern part, e.g. the “Wilno” neighborhood). In the author’s opinion, the only significant outcome of the competition may be a change in the aesthetic values (facade and interiors) of the existing building, improvement of some functional solutions, and compliance with fire safety regulations.

The problem of the lack of the proper quality of the Community Center in Targówek and the accompanying public space, was addressed by Pracownia Projektowa Janusz Pachowski (PpiP), which tried to solve the problem in 2015 on the occasion of a competition (under the patronage of SARP) for the spatial development of Targówek Fabryczny. In the competition entry for the development of post-industrial areas at Radzywińska Street, we proposed the location of a large Cultural Center of the Targówek district in an area free from other buildings in its central part, directly connected with the existing, impressive (50 m) historic brick chimney⁴ (Fig. 1, 2). We decided that it is necessary to expose the chimney and leverage its view and the spatial connection with the main street of Targówek, the Radzywińska Street. The zone between the chimney and Radzywińska Street is a city square that could be the main public space of Targówek. The square was to be closed from the east by the new Community Center – Cultural Center (with a large public underground car park).

³ *Regulamin Konkursu. Konkurs jednoetapowy na opracowanie koncepcji architektoniczno-konstrukcyjno-budowlanej rozbudowy Domu Kultury „Zacisze” przy ul. Blokowej 1 w Warszawie*, <https://zacisze.waw.pl/pl/aktualnosci/konkurs-na-opracowanie-koncepcji-architektoniczno-konstrukcyjno-budowlanej-rozbudowy-dk-zacisze> (access 28.11.2021).

⁴ The chimney has been entered into the municipal register of monuments: Order No. 1788/2018 of the President of the Capital City of Warsaw of November 19, 2018, on changes in the register of monuments of the Capital City of Warsaw: <https://bip.warszawa.pl/NR/exeres/3171577D-5D01-43F3-9E5E-244B5AA49798,frameless.html>

The Chimney

The tall chimney is a unique and expressive dominant towering over the surroundings, allowing for easy orientation in space – a dominant which, following the thought of Kazimierz Wejchert, may “evoke in the inhabitants a feeling of sympathy, satisfaction with being in a given city, and contribute to the concept of *my city, our city*”⁵.

The idea of integrating a chimney into public buildings or spaces is known from many contemporary implementations, e.g.:

1. Gallery of Savonnerie Heymans in Brussels, Architect: MDW Architecture 21, 2015; Dominant function: housing; Approximate size of the area: 0.65 ha; Location in the city / context: close city center, compact urban tissue; Main Features: High-density residential development, with meeting room and library, public space, park, playground and pedestrian area. Modern architecture integrated into the preserved elements of the former soap factory complex. An old 40-meter chimney was repurposed to ventilate underground garages⁶.
2. Toffee Factory in Newcastle, Architect: xsite architecture, 2011; Dominant function: office park for creative companies; Approximate size of the area: approx. 0.3 ha; Location in the city: approx. 2 km from the center, near the river and green areas; Main features: preservation and strengthening of the existing brick factory structure, with extension to 2,600 m² of office space. The renovated brick chimney – a characteristic element of the area – was exposed as an element of the inner courtyard⁷.
3. Bonarka 4 Business office complex in Krakow, Architect: TriGranit, Artur Jasiński i Wspólnicy Biuro Architektoniczne, 2015; Dominant function: office; Approximate size: approx. 2 ha; Location in the city: south of the Krakus Mound, outside the city center, surrounded by open areas, in the vicinity of a commercial park; Main features: change of the character of the area, modern office buildings, the exposed 105-meter factory chimney remained as the only element referring to the history of the place⁸.
4. Koneser Praga Center in Warsaw, Architect: Juvenes, 2018; Dominant function: multifunctional complex (offices, retail, culture, apartments); Approximate size: approx. 5 ha; Location in the city: the site of the former vodka factory in Praga in Warsaw, in the vicinity of residential buildings; Main features: architectural references to the industrial past of the place (brick walls, shed roofs, woodwork, steel accessories), new functions in post-industrial buildings, chimney of the former distillery as an element of open space development⁹.
5. The “Fuzja” complex on the premises of Karol Scheibler’s factory in Łódź, Architect: Medusa Group, since 2017; Dominant function: residential, office; Approximate size: 5 ha; Location in the city: former Karol Scheibler’s factory in Księży Młyn, approx. 250 m east of Piotrkowska Street; Main features: revitalization of post-industrial buildings, new residential buildings, common

⁵ K. Wejchert, *Elementy kompozycji urbanistycznej*, Warszawa 1974, p. 61.

⁶ *Savonnerie Heymans: a former soap factory turned into a sustainable housing project*, <https://www.housingevolutions.eu/project/savonnerie-heyman-a-former-soap-factory-turned-into-a-sustainable-housing-project/> (access: 29.11.2021).

⁷ *Toffee Factory*, <https://www.ajbuildingslibrary.co.uk/projects/display/id/5362> (access: 3.12.2021).

⁸ *Bonarka for Business – biurowy kompleks w Krakowie*, <https://sztuka-architektury.pl/article/3019/bonarka-for-business-8211-biurowy-kompleks-w-krakowie> (access 29.11.2021).

⁹ J.S. Majewski, *Pięć hektarów w tkance miejskiej – o Centrum Praskim Koneser*, „Architektura-Murator”, 2019, no. 6, https://architektura.muratorplus.pl/realizacje/piec-hektarow-w-tkance-miejskiej-o-centrum-praskim-koneser-jerzy-s-majewski_9874.html (access: 2.12.2021).

spaces, car traffic around the perimeter. The chimney of an Art Nouveau power plant displayed in public space¹⁰.

The post-industrial chimney is a spatially attractive element and a reference to the history of the place. In the process of revitalization or adaptation of post-industrial facilities, regardless of the profile of the new functional program, it becomes an important thread, which is filled with new values and meanings. In multifunctional buildings and development complexes with larger areas, it facilitates orientation in space and organizes the composition of open areas. The architectural and material solutions of the new development naturally refer to the originally industrial character of the area.

The „Chimney of Culture” concept

In order to check and promote the idea of integrating the chimney into public spaces among students in the years 2016–2019, the author of the article conducted design classes regarding a multipurpose public utility facility, titled the “Chimney of Culture”, for students of the 7th semester of the Faculty of Architecture of the Warsaw University of Technology. The students’ task was to create a spatial layout combining: Radzymińska Street, the square, the Community Center, and the chimney. The urban layout and the method of “absorbing” the chimney were not imposed, but the functional program of the facility has been precisely defined, developed on the basis of the author’s competition and implementation experience, adjusted to the scale of the Targówek district. The designed building (complex) was to include such elements as:

- A multi-purpose performance hall (theater, concert, cinema) with an auditorium for 450 seats, with a stage and backstage facilities;
- A small room with a flat floor, 150–180 seats;

- Thematic studios (theater, 2 art, music, dance);
- Cafe, coffee bars;
- European Information Center;
- Music Club;
- District public library with a full program (lending room, reading room for adults, reading room for children, media library, etc. – there is no such facility in Targówek);
- Parking garage for at least 60 cars.

The usable area of the designed facility is to be approximately 6,100 m², i.e. more than 2.5 times more than the Zacisze DK after the maximum extension.

The result of the design classes are works with a very different approach to spatial relations: Radzymińska Street, the square, the Community Center, and the chimney. Students open the planned complex to the street, or separate it with a row of buildings, introduce symmetrical arrangements with the axis defined by the chimney or move this dominant to the side. The form and scale of the facility also differ, but buildings with a height of 3–4 storeys predominate (with a stage on the +1 level and the main foyer of the auditorium on the level +1 / +2). In most of the works, the main hall area has the form of a multi-storey atrium with a glass roof and an elegant main staircase, an atrium overlooking the chimney or even with the chimney inside. In the aesthetic expression, students mainly try to give the “Chimney of Culture” the character of the facade associated with the architecture of industrial buildings, using clinker bricks, steel elements and concrete prefabricates. This restraint in terms of colors and materials is typical for the current generation of students, it also results from the current character of the place, although it may not be fully justified for this type of objects (Figs. 3–8).

Summary

The issue of the appropriate space for culture will remain unresolved in Targówek for the next few years. The Zacisze Community Center in its current form does not meet the

¹⁰ D. Bies, *Fuzja Łódź projektu medusa group. Nowe życie pofabrycznej części miasta*, <https://www.architekturaibiznes.pl/fuzja-lodz-rojektu-medusa-group,8079.html> (access: 30.11.2021).

expectations in terms of programmatic, functional and aesthetic quality. It is not a proper symbol of an institution working for the promotion of culture, cultural education, and the promotion of culture in the Targówek district of Warsaw. The Zacisze Community Center is not, and after expansion it will still not become an important architectural and spatial object of the district, because its very location prevents it, among other things. Therefore, it will not become the center of the social and cultural life of the entire Targówek. In the author's opinion, the student works made as part of the "Chimney of Culture" project, already interesting in themselves, confirm the potential of the indicated location at Radzymińska Street. The factory chimney is an impressive dominant of Targówek Fabryczny, which could become an identifier of the central area of the district, a characteristic element, a symbol of the new Community Center. The central square with the chimney and the Community Center, as an important element of public space, should be directly connected to Radzymińska Street, which is as an important communication and spatial artery of Targówek, connecting this district with the center of Warsaw, which deserves to become an attractive public space of the district and regain its "urban character", which would undoubtedly be helped by the implementation of the complex.