The city of Cracow – cultural heritage at the time of the system transformation

Małgorzata Anna LALICKA

Summary
A consequence of the rebirth of free market and its mechanisms in Cracow was the rise of conflicting interests, also encompassing questions related to the cultural heritage of the city. This is especially visible in the case of the illegal spreading of advertisements. The development of legal measures that would allow for efficient control and regulation of such phenomena fails to keep pace with the spontaneous urban development processes. For many years, Polish reality did not allow for the economic dimension of culture heritage. This awareness is making very slow progress. The idea that monuments of culture and heritage may be commodity and may often bring profit, is still found too shocking to be commonplace. However, in the case of Cracow, it is gradually evolving in the proper direction.

Introduction
The city of Cracow, the former capital of the Polish state, has inherited the greatest abundance of the most precious artistic, cultural and historic treasures in the whole of Poland. It is the largest Polish heritage complex, including approximately 6,000 objects of built heritage, and about 3 million of ‘movable heritage’, that is, sculptures, paintings, and works of artistic craft gathered in the city’s museums and in church and private collections. Cracow’s heritage dates back to all epochs and styles from the Romanesque period until now. Proof of the general recognition of the city’s value was the entering of the historic core onto UNESCO’s first World Cultural and Natural Heritage List in the year 1978 (BEIERSDORF, 2000).

At present, the city of Cracow encompasses five historic urban structures, merged during the ages into one organism. The oldest of these is Cracow itself: today’s Old City, including the royal Wawel castle, was chartered in the year 1257 when it replaced even older urban settlements. The city has preserved the whole urban layout from that time, with the centrally located, spacious Main Market Square, which is square indeed, and is one of the largest squares of Medieval Europe. The Old City also includes the University Complex: the university was founded in the year 1364 by King Casimir the Great. The former fortifications of the city were replaced in the 19th century by a municipal park, the Planty park ring, and only a small fragment of the city walls with a few towers, one gate, and the huge, late-Gothic Barbican have survived to our day.

The two remaining medieval urban organisms are the cities of Kleparz and Kazimierz (Casmir). Chartered in mid-14th century to the south and north of Cracow, each of them had its own spatial design with a centrally-situated market square, and were originally surrounded by their own fortifications. Especially precious is Kazimierz, with its city hall, churches and monasteries, and burghers’ homes. It was the place where, in the 15th century, the ‘Jewish city’ with its unique character arose.

Early in the 20th century another segment was added, namely, the 18th-century city of Podgórze, founded by Austrians after the First Partitioning of Poland on the other bank of the Vistula River. The fifth urban module entered into the structure of Cracow is Nowa Huta, founded in the year 1949 as a satellite industrial city, a unique monument to the architecture and urban planning of the social-realist era.

A specific feature of Cracow and its monuments is their authenticity; this results from a historical fact rare in the reality of Central Europe: the city was spared the damages of both the World Wars.

Not only does the cultural heritage of Cracow determine the contemporary shape of the city, it is in itself the city’s potential and can be used for its future growth. It becomes necessary to include in a proper and harmonious manner the cultural heritage of Cracow into the great changes which have recently taken place in Poland. Such development provides efficient protection for the city’s heritage on the one hand, and on the other provides the city and its inhabitants with immeasurable material benefits.

System transformation after World War II
Following the introduction of the new political and economic system after World War II, Cracow lost its sovereign authorities as a municipality and economic independence. Respect for property rights and the natural economic mechanisms related to the principles of the free market ceased to exist. At that time a principle saying that it was not only the substance, but also the form that decides the value of heritage was accepted: this principle brought about far-flung reconstruction works, such as the reconstruction of Warsaw, yet the new system was incapable of managing and maintaining of existing sites. This rendered Cracow, spared destruction by the war, in a most un-
fortunate condition. The transformation of the city into an industrial centre with the largest Polish steelworks situated in Nowa Huta spelled danger and destruction to the historic substance and premises. Supported by communist ideology, the insane economy of the whole system resulted in vast decapitalisation and degradation of the historic substance of the city, especially in the 1960’s and 1970’s. What followed was huge spatial, environmental, and cultural damage, which eventually forced the initiation of preservative action on an impressively large scale.

Feeling the critical and aggravated condition of Cracow’s built heritage towards the end of the 1970’s, the authorities began a complex restitution of the Old City. However, the actions undertaken were conducted in accordance with a centralised system of management, and severed from economic and historic contexts. An important argument in favour of rescuing the historic city was the placement of the city of Cracow on UNESCO’s first World Cultural and Natural Heritage List in 1978, and the acceptance of the idea of restitution by the local community and experts. A long-term preservation programme was devised and implemented by the Civic Committee for the Renovation of Cracow Heritage (SKOZK), which became the managing body for the National Fund for Renovation of Cracow Heritage instituted by the Parliament. Yet inhabitants were usually removed from the restored sites, which were usually devoid of their previous functions. In the case of Cracow’s built heritage, the system of enforced policy, despite its unquestionable achievements in its mission to rescue the historic substance, led to great losses in the social structure of the Old City, which began to turn into an open-air museum of sorts. The premises from which residents were removed during the time of the restoration became the seats of various administrative and sometimes cultural institutions. It is, however, to be noted here that for all this time Cracow, as the only major city in the Socialist Poland, maintained the pre-war property mix. Although the rights of the owners were grossly limited, and they were denied the income from their estates, the property rights remained formally in action. This greatly facilitated and sped up the changes during the system transformation in the early 1990’s. There was, however, a certain paradox hidden here: within the centralised system encompassing any civic activity, it was much easier to control preservation. In recent years the situation has changed radically.

Restoration of democratic mechanisms after 1990

Restoration of the democratic mechanisms in Poland in the year 1990 resulted in the establishment of municipal self-government, which initiated a new development strategy. The new political and economic reality based on the principles of free market allowed for a new context of preservation-related activities. Protection of the cultural heritage of historic cities, including Cracow, became a fully interdisciplinary task. Problems related to urban planning, architecture, and preservation were integrated with economic issues. The owners of historic premises were given the opportunity to acquire the finances which, to a great extent, were invested in profit-giving heritage. The preservation policy of the city of Cracow assumes maintaining the role of the city as a ‘living’ organism, and not turning it into an open-air museum. Such a solution is possible and even necessary in a city where the historic centre continues to operate as the heart of the contemporary city (ASHWORTH, 1994). Yet some dangers which were not earlier anticipated became evident.

A consequence of the rebirth of free market and its mechanisms in Cracow was the rise of conflicting interests, also encompassing questions related to the cultural heritage of the city. This is especially visible in the case of advertisements. Their usually illegal spreading over the facades of buildings renders the municipal preservation officers practically incapable of action. The development of legal measures that would allow for efficient control and regulation of such phenomena fails to keep pace with spontaneous urban development processes. The Municipality of Cracow has undertaken to assist in the problem by providing suitable local legal regulations, yet the whole case is a highly complex one, and calls for more time.

Another problem caused by system changes is the need to modify the whole philosophy of the approach to the protection of cultural heritage. On the one hand, there appeared a justified tendency to respect the most precious works of 19th and 20th-century architecture (including the social-realist constructions), while on the other there is the pressure exerted by the investors and some architects who aim at an introduction of radical changes to historic buildings, providing them with a more ‘modern’ form, which would bring harm to the built substance of the Old City. A wise merging of the culture heritage with the new economic reality has become necessary. Yet, state-of-the-art protection of heritage means more than just preserving heritage; it also encompasses new interpretations of protecting laws, marketing, and conscious usage (PURCHLA, 2000). The harmonious compromise between the principles of heritage care and the requirements of life and rules governing the economy is the requirement of the moment.

After the system transformations, the SKOZK, being so far the only source for financing preservation works within the city, received major support from the budget of the Municipality of Cracow. During 2001 ex-
penditure from the National Fund for renovation of Cracow reached US$ 8.468 million, while the corresponding value for expenditure from the budget of the Municipality was US$ 2.980 million. The total expenditure, including the funds provided by other bodies including: the Voivod, Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Ministry of Education, other institutions, and individual people amounted to US$ 13.941 million. This allowed for the conclusion of the restoration and preservation works at 16 sites, the providing of maintenance for 66 historic buildings, and the continuation of work in a total number of 98 sites. Although the results can already be seen, on the scale of the whole city it is but a drop in the sea of needs.

A particular challenge for the local authorities, preservation office, and private investors is the Cracow district of Kazimierz. It was first a city, and later a district which, due to the tragedy of the Holocaust, lost nearly all its original inhabitants. With significant help of European Union specialists from Edinburgh, Birmingham, and Berlin, the plans for a complex revitalising of the district of Kazimierz were prepared as part of the ECOS programme. Kazimierz was to be transformed into ‘an attractive and economically sound part of the city of Cracow with international significance and with distinctive and powerful cultural identity’. The operational plan fulfilled its role in the promotion and stimulation of the process of revitalising Kazimierz. An economic agitation followed which resulted in major developments in the tourist infrastructure and inflow of considerable numbers of various institutions and firms which recognise Kazimierz as an attractive location. Residential buildings have been constructed, and historical tenement houses have been turned into hotels, shops, and restaurants. Kazimierz has become an area where major cultural institutions are active. Among these, there are the Centre for Jewish Culture, operating under the auspices of the Judaica Foundation (since 1993), whose task it is to protect and promote the cultural heritage of Cracow Jews, as well as the Technical Museum of Cracow, established in the historic tram depot. Churches and synagogues have been renovated. At present Kazimierz is the stage for cultural events connected with its two traditions, Christian and Jewish. Among the annual events, there is the procession commemorating St. Stanislaus, the patron saint of Cracow and Poland, as well as the Festival of Jewish Culture on Szeroka Street.

Economic dimension of cultural heritage

For many years, Polish reality did not allow for the economic dimension of cultural heritage. This awareness has made very slow progress. According to a common belief, historical substance is only a source of trouble for its owner, and it is never profitable. A promotional campaign aimed at changing this image and breaking this mental barrier has still not brought results (BRONSKI, 1999-1). The idea that monuments of culture and heritage, apart from being a part of the sacrum, are also a commodity, and moreover, one that may often bring profit, is still found too shocking to be commonplace. However, in the case of Cracow, this condition is gradually evolving in the proper direction.

One of the chances for the development of Cracow in its capacity as a historic city is tourism (BRONSKI, 1999-2). It is the role of the local authorities to shape, through proper marketing actions, the optimum profile of tourism. In order to achieve this, since last year a systematic monitoring of tourist-related phenomena has been conducted in Cracow. Although in the year 1991 there were only 1.8 million tourists and visitors in Cracow, the figure for last year reached 4.25 million, with foreigners being responsible for 58% of the total. The financial income from tourism grew from US$ 90 million in the year 1993 to US$ 220 million in 1999. The main goal of visits to Cracow was visiting the city and its historic attractions (91%).

The basic hindrance for the guests arriving at Cracow was the city’s insufficient lodging capacity (merely 13,000 beds), and poor tourist promotion (most foreigners learnt about Cracow from friends). Taking these into account, the Municipality of Cracow is intensifying its promotional activity. Thanks to the finding of appropriate investors, a feasible chance for a significant development of hotel facilities has emerged: many new sites will be situated in the vicinity of the historic centre.

Yet there is one more potential that Cracow possesses and may make use of in the new reality: this is its great artistic and intellectual world, capable of having a positive influence on the new approach to the cultural heritage of the city. It seems plausible that it is with growing optimism that Cracow can face the future at the threshold of the third millennium.

References

BEIERSDORF Z., ‘Kraków jako przykład polskich doświadczeń rewaryzacji miasta zabytkowego’ (Cracow as an example of the Polish experience in restitution of a historic city), Cracow, MCK, 2000.
BRONSKI K., ‘Orientacja marketingowa w zarządzaniu miastem historycznym’ (Marketing orientation in the management of a historic city), Cracow, City Prof., 1999.
BRONSKI K., ‘Monitoring zjawisk turystycznych w mieście Krakowie’ (Monitoring of tourism-related phenomena in the city of Cracow), Tourism Institute, Cracow, 1999.

Małgorzata A. Lalicka
European Integration Expert, City of Cracow
Pl. Wszystkich Świętych 3-4
31-004 Kraków, Poland
e-mail: lalickma@um.krakow.pl

Graduated in English and education from the Jagiellonian University of Cracow, Poland. In 1994 completed a postgraduate course in business administration there. In 1995 received Master of Business Administration at the Boston College Carroll Graduate School of Management. Worked at the Jagiellonian University as a lecturer and in the Commerce Bank in Warsaw as an independent business analyst. Since 1999 European Integration Expert at the Municipality of Cracow. Co-ordinated all European issues within the Municipality.