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*Perception of the architectural heritage elements of Wrocław
by the students of Wrocław high schools*

Wrocław is a very interesting case of functioning of a collective memory and references to history. Due to its complicated history resulting from multi-cultural character, a collective memory cannot be attributed to one specific social community that lives in a given city at a particular time. Wrocław as a significant space and a crucial element of the cultural memory can become and indeed it is a point of reference for the collective identity (and for history too) of various nations. Apart from the Poles – residents of Wrocław – also Czechs, Austrians, Germans and Jews lived in Wrocław and co-created the image, history, politics and significance of the city in the past (not to mention ethnic and national minorities living in the city now). Multidimensionality of the cultural and collective memory is complemented by a sociological assumption of the researchers – the works of which we shall refer to – that the collective memory of the present residents of Wrocław does not have and cannot have homogenous character either. Therefore, we can say that it constitutes a conglomerate of various meanings in the same way as the Wrocław community is diverse socially. The case of the city itself is extremely interesting for yet another reason. Namely, with reference to a constructivist manner of understanding memory originating from M. Halbwachs' tradition, we treat the past as a social construct which is a function of a particular historical situation. The past is created when it becomes a subject of references [2]. History as an objective sequence of facts in the social awareness dimension does not exist due to any hermeneutical conditions. Each community or social group in certain conditions creates its own specific interpretation of the past and history. And this is exactly an interpretation.

The most important observation I would like to draw attention to refers to a significant discrepancy in function-

ing of the collective memory between intellectual and political elites of the city and average citizens. In the case of elites, the collective memory becomes an element of deliberate and relatively planned actions (not necessarily consistent) referring to the selected aspects of the town history and leading to the construction of a particular image of the city as a multi-cultural, open, tolerant and therefore buoyant, dynamic and development directed social space. Here, it would be adequate to refer to the terminology of distinction by Aleide Assmann [1]. Not going into details of wide interpretation comments, A. Assmann made a distinction of forms of collective references to the past which can have a significant influence on the existence of this collectiveness. We can talk about three forms and at the same time levels of memory – a communication memory (the most basic – individual memories passed on to next generations), a collective memory (a higher level of the generation memory complemented with an initial process of institutionalization, for example, emergence of political institutions, an attribute of a particular community with established elements of social solidarity and integration) and a cultural memory (the highest level of institutionalization of references to the past exceeding collective affective density of the contents and based mainly on the external media and institutions). In line with these determinations, we can discuss the nature of the Wrocław authorities' actions and the way they should be interpreted. It seems that it is the second level of memory, i.e. a collective memory, that shall be the most adequate expression here due to a short-term character of the city authorities' actions (limited to several years only) which have not been expressed significantly in the external and institutionalized way. In the case of average residents the collective memory (which in fact takes on the character of the communication memory in accordance with A. Assmann distinction) has a more spontaneous and distinctly incoherent character

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based on shallow historical references resulting from the generational transmission and current social and political contexts which are constructed on the basis of stereotypes and prejudices.

Another significant assumption is the statement that Wrocław's material substrate and material heritage contained in urban arrangements, architecture, buildings and public facility structures constitute a very important reference point for many collective memories of Wrocław. Firstly, this material dimension includes historical meanings and senses, secondly, these meanings are decoded in a specific way by the actual residents and thirdly, their new meanings are recorded, symbolic for the particular communities and representing their specific social contexts. The relation to structures of architecture, particularly to the historical ones, can be a very good exemplification of not only this basic simple relation 'man – his material surroundings', i.e. a relation which has its roots in one of the fundamental dimensions of the social reality. What is more important, it can also be an indicator of forms of participation in the symbolic space, which is already an integral element of building the identity. Architectural heritage of Wrocław – as in any other big city – constructs a local identity of residents. However, in the case of Wrocław, the multi-cultural history of the city is of great importance, which has a substantial meaning in the urban and architectural dimension. From the sociological point of view, a crucial question appears, i.e. whether this specificity of the city shapes the elements of the identity of residents in any way. We can focus our attention on several detailed issues such as:

- whether the architectural heritage connected with the nations living in and governing Wrocław in the past has any symbolic response in the awareness of its present residents (e.g. whether people from Wrocław recognise Czech, Austrian, Jewish or German elements of this heritage and whether this fact becomes a meaningful element of connotation of the symbolic space; we can assume that Jewish and German elements shall play a more dominant role rather than Czech or Austrian ones due to historical closeness)
- whether the local identity of Wrocław residents is constructed with reference to those historical elements or

whether a temporary distance is conducive to de-historisation for the sake of functional references to architecture (a German or Jewish character of architectural structures can be recognised easily, but decoding the meanings connected with them shall be done on a more current basis and shall be connected with the present functions of the particular buildings)

- whether this specific heritage becomes a significant reference point for other social subjects (at least two types of subjects can be meaningful – the city authorities and the subjects that are a part of the society connected with the city in some way such as foundations, associations, clubs) and another question connected with this problem can be posed, i.e. whether and what expectations Wrocław people have in relation to the authorities concerning the way of treatment and usage of this heritage.

Referring to some of these issues, we would like to discuss the results of specific empirical research that was carried out in secondary schools in Wrocław in September 2011. The research was conducted on a representative group of Wrocław youth within the framework of the international research project "The Memory of Vanished Population Groups in Today's East- and Central European Urban Environment. Memory Treatment and Urban Planning in Lviv, Černivci, Chişinău and Wrocław"¹. Our decision to choose young people as the object of the research at the initial stage of the research process was supported by several significant premises. First of all, in this way we try to describe attitudes towards history and cultural heritage, which can constitute a test of competence and possible dispositions as well as attitudes towards these issues in the future. Material surroundings and architectural heritage is the topic of many concrete as well as symbolic actions of

¹ International research project "The Memory of Vanished Population Groups in Today's East- and Central European Urban Environment. Memory Treatment and Urban Planning in Lviv, Černivci, Chişinău and Wrocław", is carried out under the auspices of the Centre of European Study of University in Lund in cooperation with a team of architects from the Faculty of Architecture of Wrocław University of Technology. The research is multi-dimensional and consists of several stages with the use of various research techniques. This article deals with only the initial data from one of the first measurements conducted in four secondary schools in Wrocław.

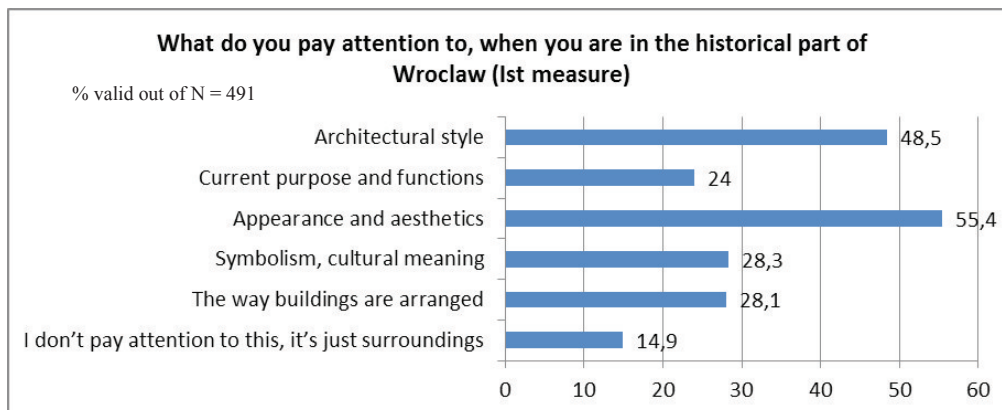


Fig. 1. Question – 1st measure (ed. by . Czajkowski, B. Pabjan, 2012)

II. 1. Pytanie – pierwszy pomiar (oprac. P. Czajkowski, B. Pabjan, 2012)

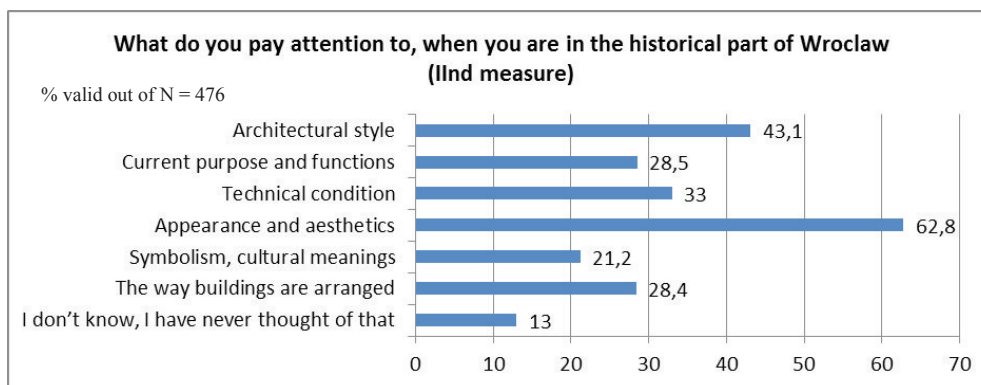


Fig. 2. Question – 2nd measure (ed. by P. Czajkowski, B. Pabjan, 2012)

II. 2. Pytanie – pomiar drugi (oprac. P. Czajkowski, B. Pabjan, 2012)

various social subjects – starting from authorities which make decisions connected with these actions. Opinions of young people are also very good indirect indexes of their parents’ opinions. This in turn illustrates an intergenerational cultural message, transmission of values and models of attitudes in relation to this symbolic dimension and can be treated as a manifestation of the communication memory. And finally, we also deal with an institutionalized form of the intergenerational message in the school. Educational institutions are for obvious reasons predestined not only to conduct activities which form elements of knowledge and the collective identity but also to socialize students with certain competences and abilities to refer to the phenomena such as the past contained in the material surroundings of man. This aspect can be treated as a manifestation of the cultural memory.

Below, we refer to some of the questions included in the framework of the research, first of all to the ones which are directly concerned with the architectural heritage. The introductory question was supposed to check the respondents’ attitude to the historical surrounding, perception of elements of this surrounding and to test the importance of particular dimensions (functional, aesthetic, architectural, symbolic) in the awareness of their users. This question

can also have a greater explanatory power due to the fact that it was posed in two different groups of respondents and in various measurements². Therefore, we can assume that possible errors in one of the research procedures shall be corrected in the other one. Figure 1 and 2 present the arrangement of answers in the first and the other measurement. Lack of any evident differences in the opinions of respondents shown between these arrangements may speak in favour of the procedures and reliability of the results themselves.

² The research conducted among secondary school students was carried out in two various aspects comprising different groups of respondents. The first measurement was carried out with the use of a standard auditorium survey in the classrooms where young people under the supervision of a trained pollster gave answers to a set of standardized questions. The second measurement constituted a variation of the auditorium survey and was concentrated mainly on the perception of the chosen architectural heritage structures in the so called ‘picture test’ during which the students answered the questions concerned with the enclosed photographs of the particular structures. During each of those measurements, there were several questions which were repeated for various significant research reasons. As a result, the survey comprised 512 students while the test 514 students from all types of secondary schools in Wrocław.

Tab. 1. Answers to question: What do you pay attention to, when you are in the historical part of Wrocław? – according to type of school (ed. by P. Czajkowski B. Pabjan, 2012)

Tab. 1. Odpowiedzi na pytanie: Na co zwracasz uwagę, będąc w historycznej części miasta? a typ szkoły respondenta (oprac. P. Czajkowski B. Pabjan, 2012)

What do you pay attention to being in the historical part of the city		Type of school (% from N in the column)				
		Basic vocational	Profiled secondary school	Technical school	General secondary school	Total
to architectural style	no	52,0%	56,1%	59,1%	45,3%	51,5%
	yes	48,0%	43,9%	40,9%	54,7%	48,5%
to current destination, function	no	76,0%	84,2%	75,6%	74,3%	76,0%
	yes	24,0%	15,8%	24,4%	25,7%	24,0%
to appearance, aesthetics	no	44,0%	54,4%	53,0%	36,7%	44,6%
	yes	56,0%	45,6%	47,0%	63,3%	55,4%
to symbolism, cultural meaning	no	76,0%	73,7%	70,1%	71,8%	71,7%
	yes	24,0%	26,3%	29,9%	28,2%	28,3%
to the way of integration with other buildings	no	88,0%	71,9%	78,7%	65,7%	71,9%
	yes	12,0%	28,1%	21,3%	34,3%	28,1%
I do not pay attention to this, it is a common surrounding	no	88,0%	75,4%	79,9%	90,6%	85,1%
	yes	12,0%	24,6%	20,1%	9,4%	14,9%

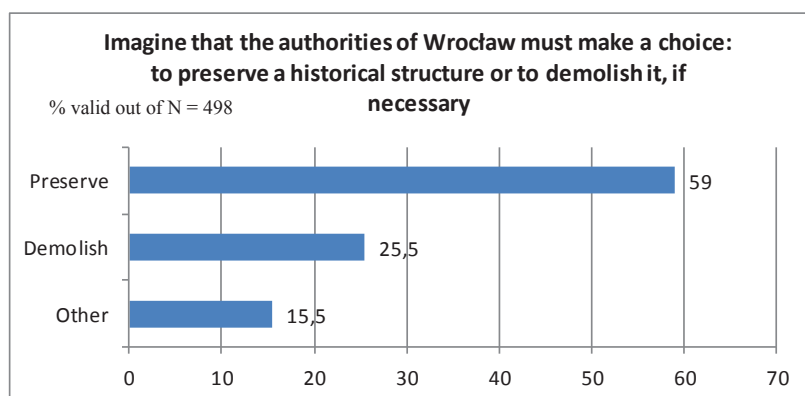


Fig. 3. Question: If municipal authorities have to choose – preserve or demolish a historical building if necessary – what should they do? (ed. by P. Czajkowski B. Pabjan, 2012)

II. 3. Pytanie: Czy władze dokonujące wyboru powinny zachować historyczny obiekt czy wyburzyć w razie potrzeby? (oprac. P. Czajkowski, B. Pabjan, 2012)

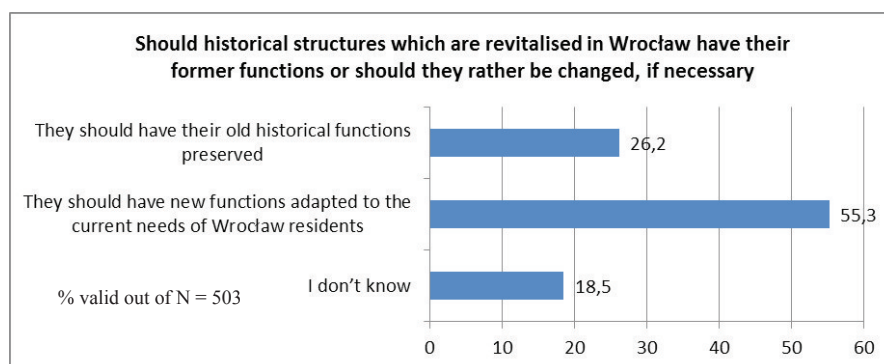


Fig. 4. Question: Should the historical objects preserve a former functions or have a new one if necessary? (ed. by P. Czajkowski B. Pabjan, 2012)

II. 4. Pytanie: Czy obiekty rewaloryzowane powinny mieć dawne czy zmienione funkcje? (oprac. P. Czajkowski B. Pabjan, 2012)

Initially, we assumed that the working hypothesis according to which young people have a pragmatic (functional) attitude to symbolic issues such as history, cultural heritage or architecture as elements of the historical heritage shall be confirmed. On the other hand, we assumed that a certain form of indifference and distance shall be revealed due to far-reaching processes of individualisation or due to the fact of uprooting tradition from such social institutions which are particularly typical of urban heterogenic communities. As we can see in the diagrams above, indexes of pragmatic attitudes such as ‘current purpose and functions’ are chosen relatively rarely by 24% and 26,5% (I and II measurement relatively) of the respondents. In the other measurement there was an additional category ‘technical condition’ and it was chosen relatively more often (33%) but not often enough to treat it as a distinct symptom. However, the index of an uncommitted distance ‘I do not pay attention to this, it is just surroundings’, ‘I have never thought about that’ has the lowest level of positive indexes – almost 15% and 13% (II measurement), which excludes the attitude of indifference in relation to the material forms of heritage. Nevertheless, it does not mean any distinct forms of active attitudes and engagement in the symbolic dimension of the surrounding, which is illustrated by the level of positive choices of the

index ‘symbolism, cultural meaning’ a little bit over 28% and 21% (I and II measurement). In fact, the highest level of indexes refers to a very general category – ‘appearance and aesthetics’ – over 55% and almost 63% (I and II measurement) and ‘architectural style’ – 48,5% and 43% (I and II measurement). The categories of style and aesthetics constitute a ‘safe’ choice which does not engage in a reflexive consideration about the symbolic or functional dimension and which in effect refers to a simple choice ‘nice – ugly’. This attitude could be defined as indirect and ‘uncommitted acceptance’ – young people perceive the presence of the historical heritage and they are aware of the existence and significance of this element, however, the symbolic or functional dimension is not in the field of their interest which is limited to the aesthetic dimension.

The data presented in Table 1³ complement the above findings by the correlation with a quite significant characteristic of students such as a type of school they attend. A type of school is usually treated as a good gauge of other important features such as the level of cultural capital. It is the cultural capital that should differentiate students’ opin-

³ All the other analyses discussed in this article are made on the basis of the auditorium survey, i.e. measurement I referring to 512 respondents.

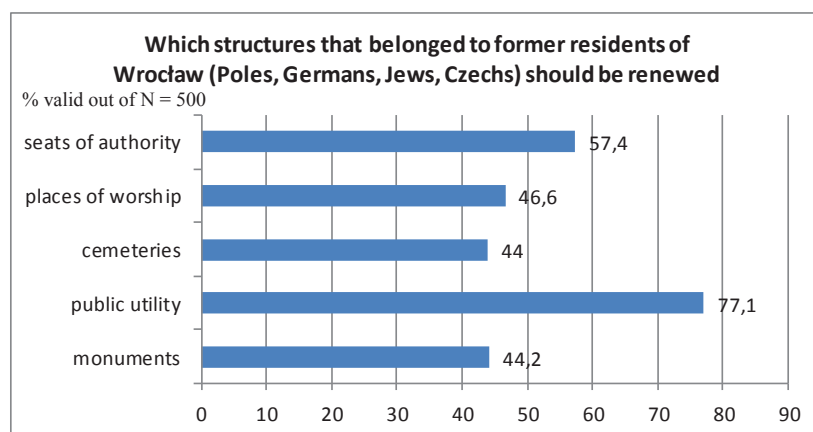


Fig. 5. Question: Which type of the historical objects should be renovating? (ed. by P. Czajkowski, B. Pabjan, 2012)

II. 5. Pytanie: Które z obiektów dawnych mieszkańców Wrocławia powinny być odnawiane? (oprac. P. Czajkowski, B. Pabjan, 2012)

ions in an explicit way in the discussion about attitudes with reference to the symbolic and historical dimension of the material surrounding which is the architectural heritage. As we can see, it does not take place in this case. The highest differentiations oscillate within the limits of 20 percentage points and only with reference to the one most often chosen index, i.e. ‘appearance and aesthetics’ between secondary school students and profiled secondary school students. Other differences are insignificant or they refer to relatively rarely chosen indexes. Lack of significant differences in students’ opinions from different types of schools may confirm the above mentioned dose of indifference or lack of distinct involvement in a given problem. The issue of the historical architectural heritage – from a young man’s point of view – is not attractive enough to focus attention on it.

Confirming one of the above observations concerning an indifferent attitude towards the historical material heritage of Wrocław, we can present the data from another question (Fig. 3): ‘Imagine that the authorities of Wrocław must make a choice: – to preserve a historical structure: a building or a monument; – or to pull it down in order to make the thoroughfare wider, to build kindergarten, nursery or another building necessary for Wrocław residents; which option would you recommend?’

In this case the majority of respondents (59%) definitely choose the option of preserving historical structures. In the construction of the question a deliberate symbolic reinforcement of the negative option (pull down) was made through a reference to the functional dimension in order to explicitly ‘clash’ history with the present as well as symbolism with pragmatism. In this case we concentrate only on two dimensions, which in the first analysed question do not have a significant meaning for the students and which we, as researchers, would like to emphasise with regard to the presentation of processes of the intergenerational symbolic message. Here, again, it would be possible to consider which of the components of students’ attitudes towards the heritage is dominant in their opinion. And if we were to interpret the discussed arrangement in a simple and direct way, we could draw only one conclusion, i.e. the one in favour of history. Of course, in the case of young people it would not be so obvious and perhaps it would additionally confirm too optimistic statements that history shapes a multi-cultural image of Wrocław. However, this interpretation should have a context character. The first element of the context (of course not sufficient) shall consist of another question testing the opinion previously expressed. The distribution of opinions, which is presented

Tab. 2. Crosstabs – “preserve or demolish” and “historical function or new function” of the objects (ed. by P. Czajkowski, B. Pabjan, 2012)

Tab. 2. Tabela krzyżowa – „zachować czy wyburzyć” a „historyczne funkcje czy nowe funkcje” (oprac. P. Czajkowski, B. Pabjan, 2012)

q20 Imagine that the Wrocław authorities have to choose: preserve a historical structure or demolish it		q23 Should historical structures which are revitalised in Wrocław have their former functions or should they rather be changed, if necessary		Total % of N = 495
		They should have historical functions preserved	Functions adapted to the current needs of Wrocław residents	
preserve	% of q20	32,9%	51,7%	100,0%
	% of q23	73,3%	54,7%	59,0%
demolish	% of q20	20,5%	60,6%	100,0%
	% of q23	19,8%	27,9%	25,7%
Total	% of q20	26,5%	55,8%	100,0%
	% of q23	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

in Fig. 4 and also in Fig. 5, shows the actual complexity of the respondents' opinions.

In the first place we must admit that it is not possible to confirm an opinion about any particular sensitivity of Wrocław residents (in this case – students) to the historical dimension of heritage contained in the architectural surroundings. Most of the respondents are in favour of adjusting the historical structures' functions to the contemporary needs (55% – Fig. 4); whereas reconstruction and restoration, namely, a specific kind of care about architectural and urban resources which are common for various nations ought to refer to public utility buildings in the first place as well as widely understood consumption or seats of authorities (77% and 57% – Fig. 5). So, how to explain contextually the fact that the students are in favour of preserving the historical substance at the expense of functional benefits? Aren't the opinions presented in Figs 3 and 4 in contradiction to each other to some extent? Well, not necessarily. Taking into account our interpretation, in this specific 'clash' of values 'current functionality versus history', young people (just due to their age) shall usually refer to functional aspects as those which have a palpable character for them. The choice of values located in the historical dimension can take place in particular conditions. And the question about the authorities' decision on the preservation or demolition of monuments was of that nature. Demolition is an irreversible and final decision, therefore, in these conditions it is safer to choose an option that is not necessarily in accordance with the dominant axiological profile.

Moreover, we can point to one more characteristic of young people's choices. Namely, the students' views are not always coherent with each other. The issues contained in the questionnaire brought about the necessity to refer reflexively to the problems which are not within the domain of daily routine of the respondents. The particular circumstances in which the questionnaire was filled in by the respondents, i.e. during the lesson in the presence of other students did not necessarily facilitate thoughtful choices. However, on the other hand, it was connected with spontaneity of reactions which in this case can be closer to internalised ideas and models of behaviour. Those irrational inconsistencies appear only at the moment we pay attention to the correlation of two questions referring to a similar range of potential decisions. In this case, we can compare the questions analysed above – the first one referring to the authorities' decision on demolition or preservation of a historical structure and the other one referring to preser-

vation of historical functions or introduction of new functions to old buildings (Table 2)⁴.

In this case it is worth focusing our attention on this fraction of the respondents' answers who while answering one question are in favour of demolishing historical buildings and in another one they simultaneously indicate the possibility of preserving historical functions of the revitalised buildings which would potentially be suitable for demolition. It is not a significant figure – 19,8% out of those who previously were in favour of 'demolition', who in turn constitute 25,7% of all the respondents. In this case, it is difficult to draw definite conclusions as to any significant tendencies, however, it seems that the situational inconsistency of the views may appear here.

We can venture to draw some preliminary conclusions, emphasising the fact that these are very general reflections which are only an introduction to a further deeper analyses. Firstly, when faced with the necessity to refer to the general category of the architectural heritage of Wrocław, the young people most often indicate these elements that are connected with its aesthetic dimension. Secondly, only when they explicitly compare two various aspects of this heritage, i.e. functional meaning and historical and symbolic meaning, do the young people become oriented towards functional values. Thirdly, a symbolic and historical dimension becomes a point of reference in potentially extreme situations such as a possibility to lose the heritage (e.g. demolition). Provisionally, this kind of attitude towards the materialised past of the city could be defined as 'uncommitted acceptance'. It is also worth drawing hypothetical conclusions as to further research, this time with the adult part of Wrocław population. A specific character of lifestyles of young people from secondary schools makes it rather difficult to consciously take advantage of this heritage in order to construct elements of their collective identity. The organised actions of educational institutions which are predestined to form elements of the cultural memory can turn out to be only superficial. It is also possible that the intergenerational message within a family can end in merely the easiest aspects which boil down only to aesthetic assessments.

Translated by
Bogusław Setkiewicz

⁴ The percentage values in columns and lines will not sum up to 100 due to the fact of excluding the category 'another answer' and 'I don't know', which constitute a complemented rest up to 100 in particular cases.

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***Postrzeganie elementów dziedzictwa architektonicznego Wrocławia
przez uczniów wrocławskich szkół średnich***

Wrocław jest bardzo ciekawym przykładem funkcjonowania pamięci zbiorowej i odniesień do historii. Ze względu na swoją skomplikowaną historię, wynikającą z wielokulturowego charakteru, pamięć zbiorowa nie może być przypisana do jednej konkretnej zbiorowości społecznej, która właśnie zamieszkuje miasto. Wrocław jako przestrzeń znacząca i istotny element pamięci kulturowej może być i jest punktem odniesienia do tożsamości zbiorowej (w tym i historii) różnych nacji. Wielowymiarowość pamięci kulturowej i zbiorowej dopełnia socjologiczne założenie autorów badań, do których będziemy się odnosić, że pamięć zbiorowa obecnych mieszkańców miasta, także nie ma i nie może mieć jednorodnego charakteru.

Najważniejsze spostrzeżenie, na które należy zwrócić uwagę, odnosi się do istotnej rozbieżności w funkcjonowaniu pamięci zbiorowej,

pomiędzy intelektualnymi i politycznymi elitami miasta a przeciętnymi mieszkańcami. Kolejnym istotnym założeniem jest stwierdzenie, że bardzo ważnym punktem odniesienia dla wielu pamięci zbiorowych Wrocławia jest jego materialny substrat, dziedzictwo materialne, zawarte w układach urbanistycznych, architekturze, budynkach i obiektach użyteczności publicznej.

Odnosząc się do części tych zagadnień, należy odwołać do badań empirycznych przeprowadzonych we wrześniu 2011 roku w szkołach średnich Wrocławia, na reprezentatywnej próbie młodzieży wrocławskiej, w ramach międzynarodowego projektu badawczego "The Memory of Vanished Population Groups in Today's East- and Central European Urban Environment. Memory Treatment and Urban Planning in Lviv, Černivci, Chişinău and Wrocław".

Key words: architectural heritage of the city, cultural remembrance of the young people

Słowa kluczowe: architektoniczne dziedzictwo miasta, pamięć kulturowa młodzieży szkolnej