

Urban Conservation and Political Legitimacy in Socialist Poland: The Case of the Historic Center of Kraków (1945-1978)

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ABSTRACT

The historic center of Kraków in the Polish People's Republic was the first European urban quarter listed as a World Heritage Site in 1978. Its winding road to global recognition after 1945 is a salient illustration of how the socialist authorities in Poland understood the political role of material heritage throughout the period. The process of growing recognition for the historic center as an area deserving special treatment and comprehensive conservation took place in accordance with the logic of political centralization. The idea of the restoration of the historic center of Kraków, originating in the early 1950s, was a direct response to the advancing centralization of the state, affecting the cultural and, above all, symbolic role of this city in post-war Poland. The central government's initial absorption with reconstructing Warsaw, Poland's capital, and building Nowa Huta (the new Kraków) evidently compromised the needs of the old Kraków. It also urged the local socialist elite to develop specific heritage preservation strategies to draw the attention of their political superiors. However, the success of the idea was possible only after its takeover by a centralized state. The urban heritage of the former capital proved attractive to the central government at the beginning of the 1960s because of the celebrations of Poland's millennium. The preserved material heritage of Kraków became then a symbol of the centuries-old state, to some extent a historical equivalent of rebuilt Warsaw, which was a symbol of modern (socialist) Poland. It may be argued that the political history of the conservation of the Kraków historic center in the post-war period essentially reflects the influence of centralization on the socialist politics of history in post-war Poland.

KEYWORDS: Heritage, politics of history, old town, Polish People's Republic, Kraków, historic district, centralization

Declaration on Possible Conflicts of Interest

The author has declared that no conflicts of interest exist.

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The historic center of Kraków was one of only two urban quarters chosen for listing as original World Heritage Sites in 1978 (the other was the historic center of Quito in Ecuador).¹ The decision of the Polish People's Republic to submit this candidacy served both the external and internal interests of the socialist government under Edward Gierek's leadership. It provided an opportunity to consolidate the international prestige of the country and was a reflection of Gierek's policy of international openness, securing the position of Poland as a mediator between the West and the East. Moreover, the success of this candidacy was fuel for the state's "propaganda of success," legitimizing the relatively liberalized but still Soviet-dependent regime at home.² However, the inscription on the UNESCO list also marked the symbolic end of a decades-long process in which Kraków's historic center was becoming gradually more appreciated by political authorities in Poland itself. This area, encompassing the originally independent districts of medieval origins (the Inner City, Wawel, Kazimierz, and Stradom) had already been recognized by conservation experts as a space of historical importance before World War II. However, this specific part of the city (and not only individual buildings or their complexes) became an object of comprehensive state protection policies only during the socialist period.

The subject of this article is the development of the idea of the protection of the Kraków historic center as a specific urban area between the end of World War II and the UNESCO candidacy of 1978. It is an analysis of the distinct stages of this process rather than a detailed description of the Kraków center's conservation history in the socialist era. I am arguing that the process started in the early 1950s as a response to the political alienation of Kraków during the Stalinist period. The regime had already been firmly established a few years after the war and the descent of the Iron Curtain. The government was focused not only on post-war reconstruction but also on centralization, nationalization, and robust industrialization. However, its political power constantly remained in dire need of legitimacy at both national and local levels. This was especially the case for Kraków. Central authorities generally mistrusted the city's community, viewing it as conservative and inherently anti-socialist. Nevertheless, local politicians tried to make use of the urban historical capital to the benefit of their legitimacy. They did their best to associate the material heritage of Kraków, concentrated in the city center, with the socialist notions of progress and development, symbolized then by the reconstruction of Warsaw and the building of Nowa Huta. They created a vision of the historic center as a symbol of Kraków's extraordinary contribution to national progressive culture through the ages. It was also an opportunity to capture the attention of the central authorities, which was essential to securing funding for restoration works that

1 TANJA VAHTIKARI: *Valuing World Heritage Cities*, London 2017, p. 193.

2 On the political specificity of the 1970s in Poland, see: RAY TARAS: *Ideology in a Socialist State: Poland 1956–1983*, Cambridge 1984, pp. 143–175; ALEKSANDRA KOMORNICKA: *Poland and European East-West Cooperation in the 1970s: The Opening Up*, New York 2024.

were the ultimate sign of recognition. However, their endeavors proved effective only at the turn of the 1960s, in the years that followed the Stalinist period. Then, the changing priorities of the central-level legitimacy policy finally opened an opportunity for the idea of the Kraków historic center's comprehensive conservation being recognized as a national mission. Subsequently, the area itself also became an international asset.

This essay mainly comes from research on the hitherto understudied records of the central (Social Fund for the Reconstruction of the Capital, Office of the Council of Ministers) and local (Presidium of the Municipal National Council, Municipal National Council, Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party) political authorities concerned with the conservation of Kraków's architectural heritage after the war. This relationship between the idea of the historic center as a specially protected area and the socialist legitimacy policy has not been so far discussed with regard to Kraków. There are many monographic studies dedicated to the city's conservation history, including the post-war period, but they are not concerned with its developing political context.³ It is notable that the specific circumstances of the historic center's nomination in 1978 have recently attracted scholarly attention. Nevertheless, in Julia Röttjer's article about the Polish contribution to the development of the UNESCO list at its early stage, the Kraków case was treated merely as a secondary context for the concurrent Auschwitz-Birkenau candidacy, without discussion about its deeper individual genesis.⁴

The phenomenon of Kraków is intriguing not only because of the city's extraordinary role in Polish pre-socialist history. Its historic center was not destroyed during World War II (unlike many other historic cities in Poland) and the city itself was not a political center of the highly centralized state. Therefore, the case offers a more (politically) decentralized perspective on the rela-

3 See: JAN SKIBA: *Rewaloryzacja zespołów zabytkowych Krakowa* [The Restoration of the Historical Architectural Complexes of Kraków], Kraków 1976; MIECZYŚLAW TOBIASZ: *Konserwacja zabytków architektury Krakowa (1897–1975)* [The Conservation of the Monuments of Architecture in Kraków (1897–1975)], Kraków 1977; LESZEK LUDWIKOWSKI: *Ochrona dóbr kultury w Krakowie (1945–1974)* [The Protection of Cultural Property in Kraków (1945–1974)], in: Krzysztofory 1 (1974), pp. 8–20; ZBIGNIEW BEIERSDORF: *Ochrona i konserwacja dóbr kultury w Krakowie w latach 1944–1989: Próba oceny* [The Protection and Conservation of Cultural Property in Kraków 1944–1989: An Assessment Attempt], in: *Kraków w Polsce Ludowej*, Kraków 1996, pp. 91–114; ANDRZEJ CHWALBA: *Dzieje Krakowa* [The History of Kraków]. Vol. 6: *Kraków w latach 1945–1989*, Kraków 1992, pp. 532–546; ŁUKASZ KADELA: *Interpretacja estetyki dzieł architektury w procesie ich ochrony na przykładzie Krakowa* [The Interpretation of the Aesthetics of Architectural Works in the Process of Their Protection—the Case of Kraków]. Vol. 1: *1945–1970*, Kraków 2021.

4 JULIA RÖTTJER: *International Experts—National Martyrdom—Socialist Heritage: The Contribution of the Polish People's Republic to the Early UNESCO World Heritage Program*, in: ESZTER GANTNER, CORINNE GEERING et al. (eds.): *Heritage under Socialism: Preservation in Eastern and Central Europe, 1945–1991*, New York 2022, pp. 56–77.

tionship between heritage conservation and politics in socialist Poland. The subject's historiography has been hitherto dominated by the case of the reconstructed historic center of Warsaw (although there are also analogical studies dedicated to other reconstruction cases, such as Gdańsk).⁵ However, it also demonstrates how much the central and reconstruction-oriented perspective significantly influenced the conservation of preserved heritage in postwar Poland. The three above-mentioned factors determined the specific status of Kraków's urban heritage after 1945. This article analyzes how these apparent drawbacks would gradually turn into advantages in the course of the regime's political development.

Urban Heritage and Conservation Policies in Pre-Socialist Kraków

The historic architecture of Kraków's city center, mainly its medieval core, formally known as the City Proper (*Miasto właściwe*) between 1859 and 1881 and the Inner City (*Śródmieście*) between 1881 and 1954, had already become an object of both local and national concern by the turn of the nineteenth century.⁶ In the aftermath of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's collapse in 1795, that old capital of Polish monarchs, then part of the Austrian province of Galicia (and a free city between 1815 and 1846), became a true icon for Poles longing for independence. Although the early nineteenth-century efforts to modernize the city space led to the destruction of medieval walls (the whole area was transformed into a linear park called Planty Park), they also increased general interest in Kraków's architectural heritage. In the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, such monuments as a former royal castle, medieval churches, remains of medieval city walls, old university buildings, or a monumental cloth hall became objects of great care and reverence. Polish antiquarians, historians, art lovers, and architects intended to preserve them for

5 For example, see: PIOTR MAJEWSKI: *Ideologia i konserwacja: Architektura zabytkowa w Polsce w czasach socrealizmu* [Ideology and Conservation: Historic Architecture in Poland in the Period of Socialist Realism], Warszawa 2009; DAVID CROWLEY: *Memory in Pieces: The Symbolism of the Ruin in Warsaw after 1944*, in: *Journal of Modern European History* 9 (2011), 3, pp. 351–372; DAVID I. SNYDER: *Rhetorics and Politics: Polish Architectural Modernism in the Early Post-war Years*, in: JOHN PENDLEBURY, ERDEM ERTEK et al. (eds.): *Alternative Visions of Post-War Reconstruction: Creating the Modern Townscape*, Abingdon 2015, pp. 161–178; MAŁGORZATA POPIOLEK-ROSS-KAMP: *Warschau: Ein Wiederaufbau, der vor dem Krieg begann*, Paderborn 2021; on the Gdańsk case, see: JACEK FRIEDRICH: *Odbudowa Głównego Miasta w Gdańsku w latach 1945–1960* [The Reconstruction of the Main Town in Gdańsk During the Years 1945–1960], Gdańsk 2015.

6 BOGDAN KASPRZYK (ed.): *Poczet zwierzchników dzielnic miasta Krakowa (1396–2018)* [Dictionary of the Heads of Districts of the City of Kraków (1396–2018)], Kraków 2018, pp. 36, 38.

future generations as mementos of the glorious national past.⁷ The independent development and institutionalization of the Austrian conservation movement in the mid-nineteenth century also contributed to the growing awareness of the historical importance of local monuments. By 1856, Kraków had already become the seat of the provincial conservator of Western Galicia.⁸

During the long nineteenth century, however, the attention of the public as well as officials and experts focused mainly on individual buildings of note. The idea of Kraków's historic center as a specific urban unit deserving special treatment and regular conservation as a whole had not been established yet, even with regard to the Inner City. Despite the city's constant development, its medieval core was still the real center of Kraków's social, political, and cultural life. It was densely populated, being also the seat of prominent families and the Catholic bishop, many public institutions such as municipal and ecclesiastical offices, the university and learned societies, art galleries, hotels, banks, and theaters. Therefore, it was not uncommon for owners of medieval and early modern houses to comprehensively rebuild them in order to adapt them to changing needs and uses.⁹ Moreover, the districts that would become recognized as a coherent historic center in the 1950s had no common identity at that time. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Inner City was dominated by Catholic Poles, often representing the cultural and economic elite, while Kazimierz was dominated by Orthodox Jews, often of lower economic status. The latter made up 76 percent of Kazimierz's population. More than half of the population of Stradom (the area linking the Inner City with Kazimierz) was also Jewish.¹⁰ Poles did not generally recognize the Jewish historic architecture, concentrated mainly in the northeastern part of Kazimierz, as an equal element of the city's heritage. The early twentieth-century Polish guidebooks about Kraków rarely mentioned such structures.¹¹

It was only after World War I, in the independent Polish Republic, that the state and local administration slowly started to perceive such districts as areas of special historical significance as a whole. In 1933, the provincial monument conservator Bogdan Treter placed the outline of the Inner City on the national register of historical monuments. This was an official inventory of cultural pro-

7 See: JERZY FRYCZ: *Restauracja i konserwacja zabytków architektury w Polsce w latach 1795–1918* [The Restoration and Conservation of Architectural Monuments in Poland during the Years 1795–1918], Warszawa 1975, pp. 42–49, 53–59, 89–121.

8 FRYCZ, p. 108.

9 PAWEŁ DETTLOFF: *Odbudowa i restauracja zabytków architektury w Polsce w latach 1918–1939: Teoria i praktyka* [The Reconstruction and Restoration of Architectural Monuments in Poland during the Years 1918–1939: Theory and Practice], Kraków 2006, pp. 381–382.

10 MONIKA A. MURZYN: *Kazimierz: Środkowoeuropejskie doświadczenie rewitalizacji* [Kazimierz: The Central European Experience of Urban Regeneration], Kraków 2006, pp. 106, 108.

11 OZJASZ MAHLER: *Przewodnik po żydowskich zabytkach Krakowa* [A Guide to Jewish Monuments in Kraków], Kraków 1935, p. 3.

perties protected by the state. The following year, he also added Kazimierz, Stradom, and the outline of Wawel Hill (where the royal castle and cathedral stood) to the list.¹² These decisions were allowed by a recent ordinance of the President of Poland of 1928, in which both the ensembles of historic buildings and outlines of historic urban areas were included in the group of objects that deserved legal protection.¹³ In 1934, it was also in Kraków that the summit of the State Conservators Council took place, and where the problem of historic urban areas was discussed with a special focus on the Inner City.¹⁴ In 1936, in anticipation of the 700th anniversary of Kraków's foundation according to Magdeburg law in 1957, the municipality intended to thoroughly rearrange an area of four historical squares in the middle of the Inner City. Therefore, it organized a special competition for the best design. The contest aimed to determine specific functions for each square (either commercial or ceremonial), establish new modes of communication, and propose a design for the pavement and the appearance of house façades facing the squares. Participants were obliged to respect the historical character of the area, taking into account the traditional uses of the squares, archaeological findings, and historical events that deserved commemoration. They also were encouraged to plan the demolition of the structures built at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁵ However, the contest ended without a winner.

Despite such measures, reflecting the growing concern over the general situation of the Inner City and the adjacent areas, the modern development of the city center was still barely controllable by the central and local government. In fact, the existing monument protection law did not provide public administration with an effective power to limit the freedom of private investors who did not respect the historicity of their buildings, let alone their urban environment.¹⁶ The most controversial example of this predicament was the Modernist Feniks Building. Built for an insurance company in the Main Market Square in 1932, it visually and spatially stood out from its surrounding architectural landscape. Contemporary art historians feared that this 'dangerous experiment' would have ramifications in other historic areas in Poland, such as the Old

12 ANDRZEJ BIAŁKIEWICZ: Przyczynek do biografii Bogdana Tretera [A Contribution to the Biography of Bogdan Treter], in: *Ochrona Zabytków* 38 (1985), 1, pp. 17–28, here p. 24.

13 Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 6 marca 1928 r. o opiece nad zabytkami [The Ordinance of the President of Poland of 1928-03-06 on the Care of Monuments], article 2, paragraph 6, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19280290265/O/D19280265.pdf> (2026-01-12).

14 DETTLOFF, p. 134.

15 Konkurs powszechny na projekt uporządkowania Rynku Głównego, placu Mariackiego, Rynku Małego oraz placu Szczepańskiego w Krakowie [A Public Competition for the Design of the Rearrangement of the Main Market Square, St. Mary's Square, Small Market Square and St. Stephen's Square in Kraków], in: *Architektura i Budownictwo* 13 (1937), 3, pp. 74–82, here p. 75.

16 See, for the case of Warsaw: POPIOLEK-ROSSKAMP, pp. 111–114.

Town of Warsaw.¹⁷ Ironically, it was Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, not only an architect but also a prolific conservator (the chief conservator of Wawel Castle), who designed this building.¹⁸ The case evidenced that even conservators had different views on the status of the city center (in particular the Inner City) as a protected area.

During the German occupation of Poland between 1939 and 1945, Kraków was the capital of the so-called General Government or General Governorate (*Generalgouvernement*). This Nazi-dominated territory was directly ruled by the Germans. Their official propaganda acknowledged the capital of the General Governorate as “the ancient German city” (*uralte deutsche Stadt*) and “the Nuremberg of the East,” because many German (or Germanic) merchants, artisans, and artists had contributed to its economic and cultural rise during the late Middle Ages and the early modern period.¹⁹ The German heritage of Kraków was a “confirmation of the German cultural leadership” in the occupied Polish territory.²⁰ Therefore, the Nazi authorities were generally interested in the preservation and even exposition of the city’s medieval and early modern architecture, concentrated in the city center and directly associated with Germanness. For example, they demolished modern buildings that blocked the view of Wawel Castle (then the seat of the German General Governor Hans Frank) and the fourteenth-century Corpus Christi Church in Kazimierz. They also classicized the radically Modernist façade of the Feniks Building and removed its massive attic to restore the previous skyline of the Main Market Square.²¹

Nevertheless, they simultaneously also contributed to the devastation of some parts of the city center. For example, the Nazi authorities rebuilt some interiors of the early modern Palace under the Rams (Pałac pod Baranami), the biggest aristocratic residence in the Inner City, and connected it with adjacent tenements in the Main Market Square. The newly arranged structure became the headquarters of the governor of the Kraków District. They also built the

17 STANISŁAW LORENTZ: *Opieka nad Starem Miastem Warszawy* [The Care of the Old Town in Warsaw], in: *Architektura i Budownictwo* 12 (1936), 4, pp. 108–113, here p. 109.

18 DETTLOFF, pp. 132, 381, 383; WALDEMAR KOMOROWSKI, ALDONA SUDACKA: *Rynek Główny w Krakowie* [The Main Market Square in Kraków], Wrocław 2008, pp. 204–205, 334.

19 On the German vision of Kraków’s history during the war, see: JAN M. MAŁECKI: *Niemiecka historiografia Krakowa w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej* [The German Historiography of Kraków during the Nazi Occupation], in: JAN M. MAŁECKI (ed.): *Historiografia Krakowa i jej twórcy*, Kraków 2005, pp. 81–97.

20 An undated document by W. Coblitz (?), stipulating the aims of the Section of Art History of the Institute of German Eastern Work in Kraków, cited in: SABINE AREND: *Sekcja Historii Sztuki w Instytucie Niemieckiej Pracy Wschodniej w okupowanym Krakowie (1940–1945)* [The Section of Art History at the Institute for the German Eastern Works in Occupied Kraków (1940–1945)], in: WOJCIECH WALANUS (ed.): *Kraków 1940: Kampania fotograficzna Staatliche Bildstelle*, Kraków 2017, pp. 9–32, here p. 18.

21 KADELA, pp. 29–30.

Chancellery of the General Governor on the site of a historic kitchen block and mews of Wawel Castle. The building closed off the south end of the castle's Renaissance inner courtyard.²² Above all, the occupants had no respect for the Jewish architectural heritage. They devastated centuries-old synagogues, robbing and converting them into warehouses. The destruction also affected many historic tenement houses. As a result of the occupation, Kazimierz was the most devastated part of Krakow in 1945.²³

"Through Struggle and Victory to Socialism"

The end of the war and the German occupation in January 1945 coincided with the beginning of socialist rule, imposed on Poland by its liberator, the Soviet Union. Initially, socialist politicians intended to maintain a semblance of democracy by, for example, allowing different parties to participate in political life, including general elections. The rise of the socialist regime had its distinct stages in the second half of the 1940s. This process eventually concluded with the formation of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZUR) in 1948 and the subsequent intense Sovietization of Poland at the turn of the 1950s, known since 1952 as the Polish People's Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa).²⁴ However, the enforcement of the socialist regime proved to be a real challenge for local politicians. Kraków, despite being one of the biggest cities in Poland, was relatively poorly industrialized. Therefore, the working class, the natural social basis of socialist parties, could not play an important role in local political life, traditionally dominated by the middle class (lawyers, homeowners, small and middle factory owners, and craftsmen), intelligentsia (university and school professors, clergymen, clerks, and artists), and landowners.²⁵ The referendum of 1946 and parliamentary election of 1947 confirmed that the level of support for socialist rule was relatively low in this city.²⁶ Therefore, the building of a large steelworks on the outskirts of Kraków, initiated by the Soviet authorities but welcomed by their Polish counterparts, was expected to change this proportion to the re-

22 MIKOŁAJ GETKA-KENIG: Historic Architecture Losses in Kraków during the Second World War (1939–1945), in: *Totalitarian and 20th Century Studies* 4 (2020), pp. 388–409, here pp. 396–397.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 396.

24 On the political history of early socialist Poland, see: KRYSZYNA KERSTEN: *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943–1948*, Berkeley 1991.

25 CHWAŁBA, *Dzieje Krakowa*, pp. 23–27.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 171–183; JACEK PURCHLA: Miasto niepokorne: Znaczenie lat 1945–1956 dla rozwoju Krakowa [A Disobedient City: The Significance of the Years 1945–1956 for the Development of Kraków], in: KRZYSZTOF BROŃSKI, JACEK PURCHLA et al. (eds.): *Kraków—Małopolska w Europie Środku: Studia ku czci profesora Jana M. Małeckiego w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, Kraków 1996, pp. 271–286, here pp. 274–275.

gime's advantage.²⁷ The new city of Nowa Huta, intended to house the workers at the adjacent steelworks, was founded in 1949. It became an integral part of Kraków as its largest and quickly developing district only two years later.²⁸

However, full support for the industrialization of Kraków and the consequent drastic socio-political change did not conflict with endeavors to seek legitimacy in more or less distant history. Understandably, local politicians were especially interested in the cultivation and promotion of the socialist and proto-socialist heritage of the city, traceable back as far as the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1948, the Municipal National Council (*Miejska Rada Narodowa*), a local legislature, solemnly celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Springtime of Nations. The Austrian bombardment of Kraków in 1848 was one of the most important events during this revolutionary period. The earlier Kraków Uprising (1846), remembered for flattering mentions by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, also was officially recalled and commemorated on this occasion.²⁹ In the following years, new plaques were unveiled and streets renamed to honor historic leaders of the socialist movement who had been somehow connected with Kraków. Among them, there were Ludwik Waryński (1856–1889), Julian Marchlewski (1866–1925), and Feliks Dzierżyński (1877–1926). Waryński, the leader of the first Polish workers' party (founded in 1882), who was tried in Kraków for his political activity during Habsburg rule, became the new eponym of an important artery leading directly to Wawel Royal Castle along the southeastern border of the Inner City (formerly St. Gertrude Street).³⁰

In 1950, the Provincial House of Culture (*Wojewódzki Dom Kultury*), in cooperation with the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków (*Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Krakowa*), organized the temporary exhibition "The Red Kraków 1794–1950: Through Struggle and Victory to Socialism." It showcased local leftist traditions, relating the late eighteenth century Enlightenment reformer Hugo Kołłątaj or the Kraków Uprising's leader Edward Dembowski to Lenin and Stalin.³¹ In 1952, the Historical Museum opened its first permanent exhibition presenting the history of the Kraków area from prehistory to the building of Nowa Huta. It paid special attention to "the history of the idea of social progress, the development of class struggle, as well as social and revo-

27 CHWALBA, *Dzieje Krakowa*, p. 209.

28 On Nowa Huta, see: KATHERINE A. LEBOW: *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949–56*, Ithaca 2013.

29 *Rewolucja krakowska poprzedziła "Wiosnę Ludów"* [The Kraków Revolution Preceded the Springtime of Nations], in: *Dziennik Polski* (1948), 53, p. 4.

30 JACEK PURCHLA (ed.): *Encyklopedia Krakowa* [Encyclopedia of Kraków], vol. 1–2, Kraków 2023, here vol. 1, p. 571.

31 See: [JÓZEF SIERADZKI]: *Kraków Czerwony 1794–1950: Przez walkę i zwycięstwo do socjalizmu. Wystawa historyczna* [The Red Kraków 1794–1950: Through Struggle and Victory to Socialism. A Historical Exhibition], [Kraków 1950], a leaflet promoting the exhibition.

lutionary movements in the period between the Springtime of Nations and the current era.”³²

The memory of Vladimir Lenin’s stay in Kraków between 1912 and 1914 was especially exploited during the Stalinist period. The three houses in which he lived during this period were also marked with commemorative plaques.³³ In 1954, due to the 30th anniversary of Lenin’s death, the Presidium of the Municipal National Council founded a special museum dedicated to his life and work. The Lenin Museum also was responsible for the promotion of the city’s socialist legacy.³⁴ However, the leader of the October Revolution had no street named after him in the city center. Lenin Avenue was in Nowa Huta; he was also the patron of the steelworks. Already in 1948, however, Count Andrzej Potocki Street, running along the Inner City between the main train station and Sienna Street, was renamed after Joseph Stalin.³⁵ The contemporary leader of the Soviet Union also had a short Kraków episode in his biography, when he visited Lenin in 1912. The official propaganda celebrated him also as the liberator of the city who saved it from destruction in 1945.³⁶

The discourse of official propaganda at the turn of the 1950s, glorifying Stalin and the Red Army as Kraków’s saviors, also spotlighted the preservation of the city’s architectural heritage. The local political elite evidently tried to associate the legitimacy of socialist rule with the cult of pre-socialist historic monuments. Some, like the historian Józef Sieradzki, went even so far as to explicitly relate the preservation of Kraków’s heritage with the October Revolution as its distant outcome.³⁷ Sieradzki was member of the Municipal National Council and the chief curator of the above-mentioned exhibition of 1950. He also once declared that the plaques and memorials commemorating the socialist past of Kraków were not to replace the old “mementos” but to contribute to the “old tradition” of the city.³⁸ Note that the Memorial of Gratitude to the Red Army, incorporating several graves of Soviet liberators and unveiled already in

32 JERZY DOBRZYCKI: *Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Krakowa: Jego dzieje i zbiory* [The Historical Museum of the City of Kraków: Its History and Collections], Kraków 1954, p. 84.

33 JAN SOB CZAK: *Lenin bliski Polakom: Śladami wspomnień i dokumentów* [Lenin Dear to Poles: On the Trail of Recollections and Documents], Warszawa 1977, p. 312.

34 JERZY JAROWIECKI: *Życie kulturalne w Krakowie w latach 1945–1969* [Cultural Life in Kraków 1945–1969], Kraków 1970, p. 34.

35 PURCHŁA, *Encyklopedia Krakowa*, vol. 2, p. 681.

36 Protocol of the solemn meeting of the Municipal National Council, 1949-12-19, in: *Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie (ANK)* [National Archives in Kraków], 29/700/0: *Miejska Rada Narodowa w Krakowie* [Municipal National Council in Kraków], inv. no. 9, p. 353.

37 Protocol of the extraordinary meeting of the Municipal National Council on 1950-04-21, *ibid.*, inv. no. 11, p. 189 (member of the Council and historian Józef Sieradzki’s paper); see also: Protocol of the solemn meeting of the Municipal National Council, 1949-12-19, *ibid.*, inv. no. 9, p. 353.

38 Protocol of the meeting of the Municipal National Council on 1950-05-16, *ibid.*, inv. no. 11, p. 244.

July 1945, was placed in the nearest proximity to the historic entrance to the Inner City, namely the Gothic Barbican and St. Florian's Gate.³⁹ This location itself "emphatically expressed" that Kraków's material heritage owed its survival to the Red Army.⁴⁰

"Noble but Somewhat Confused Rivalry"

The fact that socialist propaganda was not oblivious to architectural monuments and their preservation was itself prone to ideologization did not, however, result in the formulation of any policy of local heritage protection during the initial postwar years. Conservation works concerned mainly individual buildings of note, owing to subsidies from the Ministry of Culture or the local government, like in other parts of the country.⁴¹ It should be stressed that the conservation of preserved heritage was not a priority then, because the destroyed cities and their heritage, above all Warsaw's, were the primary focus of the state authorities. The population of Kraków, like the rest of the nation, was also expected to contribute to the reconstruction of the capital city, in accordance with the popular propagandist slogan "Cały naród buduje swoją stolicę" ["The whole nation builds its capital"]. In 1946, for example, the local branch of the Social Fund for the Reconstruction of the Capital (Społeczny Fundusz Odbudowy Stolicy) in Kraków collected money for the reconstruction of Krakowskie Przedmieście Street (literally, Kraków Foretown), one of the main historic arteries of Warsaw.⁴²

The process of the reconstruction of historic districts in postwar Poland culminated at the turn of the 1950s. It coincided with the entrenchment of the Soviet style political system in general and the rise of socialist realism in architecture in particular.⁴³ Socialist realism was the official style of Stalinist

39 STANISŁAW CZERPAK, TADEUSZ WROŃSKI: Upamiętnienie miejsca walk i męczeństwa w Krakowie i województwie krakowskim 1939–1945 [The Commemoration of the Sites of Struggle and Martyrdom in Kraków and the Kraków Voivodeship 1939–1945], Kraków 1972, p. 15.

40 HENRYK DOBROWOLSKI: Kraków, który reprezentuje postęp [Kraków That Represents Progress], in: *Dziennik Polski*, 1947-10-23.

41 See: J[ÓZEF] L[EPIARCZYK]: Woj. Krakowskie [Kraków Voivodship], in: *Ochrona Zabytków* 2 (1949), 3, pp. 204–206.

42 ALICJA KĄCZKOWSKA: Społeczny Fundusz Odbudowy Stolicy: Powstanie i rozwój w latach 1946–1966 [The Social Fund for the Reconstruction of the Capital: Genesis and Development 1946–1966], in: JAN GÓRSKI (ed.): *Warszawa stolica Polski Ludowej*, vol. 4, Warszawa 1979, pp. 96–122, here p. 100.

43 On the reconstruction of historic architecture in postwar Poland, see: MAJEWSKI; JACEK FRIEDRICH: *Odbudowa Głównego Miasta w Gdańsku w latach 1945–1960* [The Reconstruction of the Main Town in Gdańsk during the Years 1945–1960], Gdańsk 2015; HENRYK KONDIOLA: *Stare Miasto w Poznaniu: Zniszczenia—odbudowa—program dalszych prac* [The Old Town in Poznań: Destruction—Reconstruction—Program of Further Works], Poznań 1975.

Poland, often referring to native architectural history as being “national in form” and “socialist in content.”⁴⁴ It highly influenced the reconstruction of historic districts in Warsaw (especially the environs of the Old Town), Gdańsk, or Poznań. It legitimized not only the recreation of historic architecture but also its fanciful reinterpretation.⁴⁵ Kraków was not immune to these tendencies. Such projects, not only spectacular but also highly ideologized, engaged the city’s heritage in the official discourse of postwar reconstruction that was a key element of the central-level legitimacy policy. It also served to draw the attention of the central government to Kraków and its heritage. According to the contemporary urban planner Kazimierz Dziewoński, such undertakings suggested a “noble but somewhat confused rivalry” with cities that were destroyed during the war, such as Warsaw, Gdańsk, Poznań, or Lublin.⁴⁶

Local conservators and art historians played an important role in initiating such undertakings. One of their most convincing arguments was the desire to eliminate the unwanted remnants of German cultural influence, including the period of Austrian rule in the long nineteenth century. This was the case with Wawel Hill, where civil buildings were originally directly subordinate to the Chancellery of the President of Poland and then to the Office of the Council of Ministers (some objects, like the cathedral, belonged to the Catholic Church). The first postwar chief conservator, Szyszko-Bohusz, had already been responsible for the partial demolition of a former Austrian hospital in 1945. His successor, Witold Minkiewicz, planned to demolish the remaining structure ca. 1950.⁴⁷ The central authorities also endorsed similar arguments in the case of the medieval Collegium Maius, the oldest existing seat of the Jagiellonian University. The director of the university museum Karol Estreicher secured central government funds for the “reconstruction” of this building. He intended to remove the effects of its mid-nineteenth century Gothic Revival refashioning by the Vienna-educated architect and conservator Karol Kremer.⁴⁸

However, the aforementioned projects concerned only individual buildings. They also were not initiated by the local political elite, although they garnered

44 FRIEDRICH, pp. 163, 187–88; see also: VIRÁG MOLNÁR: *Building the State: Architecture, Politics, and State Formation in Post-War Central Europe*, Abingdon 2013, pp. 30–68.

45 See: MIKOŁAJ GETKA-KENIG: *Urban Development and the Politics of History: Historic Districts as Objects of Conservation in Socialist Poland (1945–1980)*, in: BIRGIT KNAUER, LAURA DEMETER (eds.): *Transforming Cities: Planning and Preserving in Historic Urban Contexts*, Wien 2025, pp. 95–113, here pp. 102–103.

46 KAZIMIERZ DZIEWOŃSKI: *Zagadnienie dzielnic zabytkowych Krakowa [The Problem of the Historic Districts of Kraków]*, in: *Ochrona Zabytków* 8 (1955), 3, pp. 141–150, here p. 141.

47 PAWEŁ DETTLOFF, MARCIN FABIAŃSKI, ANDRZEJ FISCHINGER: *Zamek królewski na Wawelu: Sto lat odnowy (1905–2005) [Wawel Royal Castle: A Century of Renovation (1905–2005)]*, Kraków 2005, pp. 92–97; MAJEWSKI, pp. 221–222; KADELA, pp. 60–63.

48 ANDRZEJ CHWAŁBA: *Collegium Maius*, Kraków 2009, pp. 141–149; MAJEWSKI, p. 221; KADELA, pp. 63–77.

the support of its members, like in the Collegium Maius case.⁴⁹ The municipal authorities ventured to initiate a much more spectacular undertaking of that kind—the rebuilding of the surroundings of Wawel Hill.⁵⁰ Its main patron was Marcin Waligóra, chairman of the Presidium of the Municipal National Council 1950–1954, an office that was equivalent to that of mayor or president of the city after the reform of local administration in 1950 (eliminating independent self-government).⁵¹ The Presidium established the Civic Committee for the Rebuilding of the Wawel Architectural and Urban Surroundings (Obywatelski Komitet Przebudowy Architektonicznego i Urbanistycznego Otoczenia Wawelu). Waligóra accepted the leadership of this body and was joined by some members of the Provincial Committee of the PUWP and the Presidium of the Provincial National Council. However, the majority of the committee's members were experts in urban planning, architecture, or heritage protection.⁵²

The idea of rebuilding the Wawel surroundings was not new, since it had been originally proposed at the beginning of the twentieth century and then again in the late 1930s.⁵³ However, these unsuccessful precedents only fueled the postwar propagandist image of the capitalist elites that were unable to carry out such a challenging urban project. The definition of the Wawel surroundings that was espoused by the committee was quite broad. It was a mostly riverside area stretching between the Pauline monastery on Skalka Hill in the Kazimierz district and the Norbertine monastery in the Zwierzyniec district (to the west of the Inner City). It encompassed ca. 141 hectares.⁵⁴ It was partly covered by relatively tall tenements built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This urban environment of Wawel proved an eyesore to the local authorities. These buildings were slated to disappear, making room for modern dwellings, allegedly more harmonized with the neighborhood's historic architecture. The provincial conservator, directly subordinate to the Ministry of Culture, also recommended their demolition.⁵⁵

49 CHWALBA, *Collegium Maius*, pp. 145, 146, 148.

50 On this initiative see: MAJEWSKI, pp. 222–224; KADELA, pp. 84–88.

51 BOGDAN KASPRZYK (ed.): *Poczet sołtysów, wójtów, burmistrzów i prezydentów miasta Krakowa (1228–2010)* [Dictionary of Sołtyses, Wójts, Mayors, and Presidents of the City of Kraków (1228–2010)], Kraków 2010, p. 806.

52 List of the members of the Presidium and Sections of the Civic Committee for the Rebuilding of the Wawel Architectural and Urban Surroundings, in: ANK, 29/832/0: *Społeczny Fundusz Odbudowy Kraju i Stolicy—Komitet Wojewódzki w Krakowie* [The Social Fund for the Reconstruction of the Country and the Capital—Provincial Committee in Kraków], inv. no. 7/SFOS KW 66, p. 39.

53 See: AGATA ZACHARIASZ: *Kształtowanie najbliższego otoczenia Wisły w centrum Krakowa—historia i współczesność* [Shaping of the Immediate Surroundings of the Vistula in the Center of Kraków—History and Present Times], in: *Architektura Krajobrazu* (2009), 4, pp. 10–20.

54 Statute of the Civic Committee for the Rebuilding of the Wawel Architectural and Urban Surroundings, in: ANK, 29/832/0, inv. no. 7/SFOS KW 66, p. 35.

55 Conservator Guidelines for the plan of the Wawel surroundings, in: *Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie (AAN)* [The Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw],

Despite the initiative's local character, it was the Supreme Council for the Reconstruction of the Capital City of Warsaw (Naczelna Rada Odbudowy Miasta Stołecznego Warszawy) that was expected to provide money for the project's execution. The Supreme Council, subordinate to the Council of Ministers, was in charge of the Social Fund for the Reconstruction of the Capital.⁵⁶ This association of the reconstruction of Warsaw with the urban development of Kraków was not only of symbolic or ideological importance. Since the fund was co-financed from private donations from all over Poland, residents of Kraków were thought to contribute to the reconstruction of Warsaw more enthusiastically because of direct benefits for their city. The fund was financed by compulsory employee contributions at fixed rates, but they could be raised only with payers' permission.⁵⁷ The Presidium justified the necessity of the Warsaw fund's engagement by stressing the national significance of Wawel itself—it should be a centrally financed undertaking because it concerned Wawel, an ultimate symbol of the centuries-old traditions of Polish statehood.⁵⁸ However, the Chairman of the Supreme Council, Jerzy Grabowski, insisted on the inclusion of “utilitarian works” into the rebuilding project. The consent of the Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz was contingent on this modification.⁵⁹ In response, the committee decided to include the redevelopment of the working-class district of Dębniki on the other side of the Vistula.⁶⁰

In subsequent official declarations, both undertakings appeared to be naturally interrelated. The other side of the river was poorly developed and dominated by low-rise buildings. Therefore, Waligóra publicly complained about this “frame” that the previous capitalist regime had provided for the “most significant ensemble of monuments in Poland.”⁶¹ He announced a transformation of the neglected riverbanks into parks and boulevards and the slums on the Dębniki side into modern housing estates with “bright, sunny apartments.”⁶²

2/392/0: Biuro Naczelnej Rady Odbudowy Warszawy i Rady Głównej Społecznego Funduszu Odbudowy Kraju i Stolicy w Warszawie [The Office of the Supreme Council for the Reconstruction of Warsaw and Main Council of the Social Fund for the Reconstruction of the Country and the Capital in Warsaw], inv. no. 3/195, pp. 1–2.

56 On the Warsaw fund see: KĄCZKOWSKA, *Społeczny Fundusz*, pp. 96–122.

57 Report on the finished works and future projects of the Civic Committee for the Rebuilding of the Wawel Surroundings, 1954-01-21 in: ANK, 29/832/0, inv. no. 7/SFOS KW 66, p. 727.

58 Civic Committee to the Provincial Committee of the Reconstruction of Warsaw, 1952-01-04, *ibid.*, p. 105.

59 Report on the meetings in the Ministry of Construction and the Supreme Council for the Reconstruction of Warsaw, 1952-03-05 and 1952-03-06, *ibid.*, p. 97.

60 *Ibid.*, pp. 98–99.

61 MARCIN WALIGÓRA: Ogólne założenia akcji przebudowy otoczenia Wawelu [The General Assumptions of the Action of the Rebuilding of the Wawel Surroundings], in: STEFAN BANACH (ed.): *Przemiany dziejowe otoczenia Wawelu*, Kraków 1953, pp. v–xi, here pp. v, viii.

62 *Ibid.*, p. ix.

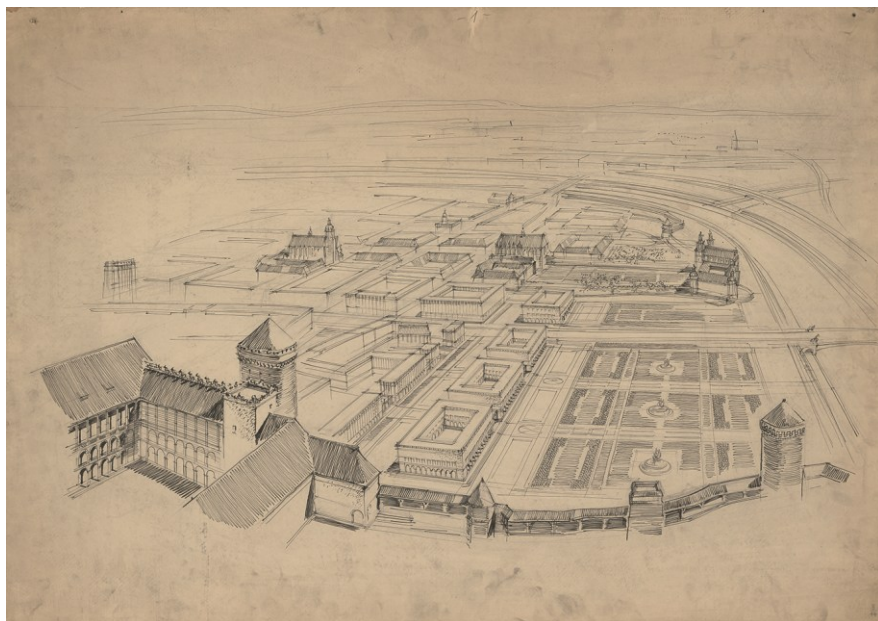


Fig. 1: Józef Korski, Witold Cęckiewicz, Witold Korski, Area between Wawel and Skalka, in: ANK, 29/1410/0: Archiwum planów Budownictwa Miejskiego w Krakowie [Archive of the Plans of Civic Construction in Kraków], inv. no. 2.3.3/ABM TAU Konkursy4 p29

This transformation, uniting the care of monuments with the concern for the needs of the working class, was to expose “the beauty of Wawel [...] in all its glory.”⁶³ Waligóra also drew a parallel between the socialist appreciation of the Wawel complex and the building of Nowa Huta. For him, these two great urban undertakings were representative of the pursuit of the interests of the working class. He explained that “we protect the monuments of the past because we want the working class to know the history of the nation and learn about everything that was creative and progressive in our history.”⁶⁴ He probably meant the Renaissance heritage of Wawel Hill. This epoch was highly valued in Marxist historiography as an important phase in the teleological progression towards socialism.⁶⁵

However, the committee’s activities were ultimately limited to conducting an urban planning competition and organizing an exhibition on the history of

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., p. vi.

65 See: KINGA BLASCHKE: *Nasze własne, nasze polskie: Mit renesansu lubelskiego w polskiej historii sztuki* [Our Own, Our Polish: The Myth of the Lublin Renaissance in Polish Art History], Kraków 2010, pp. 37–48.

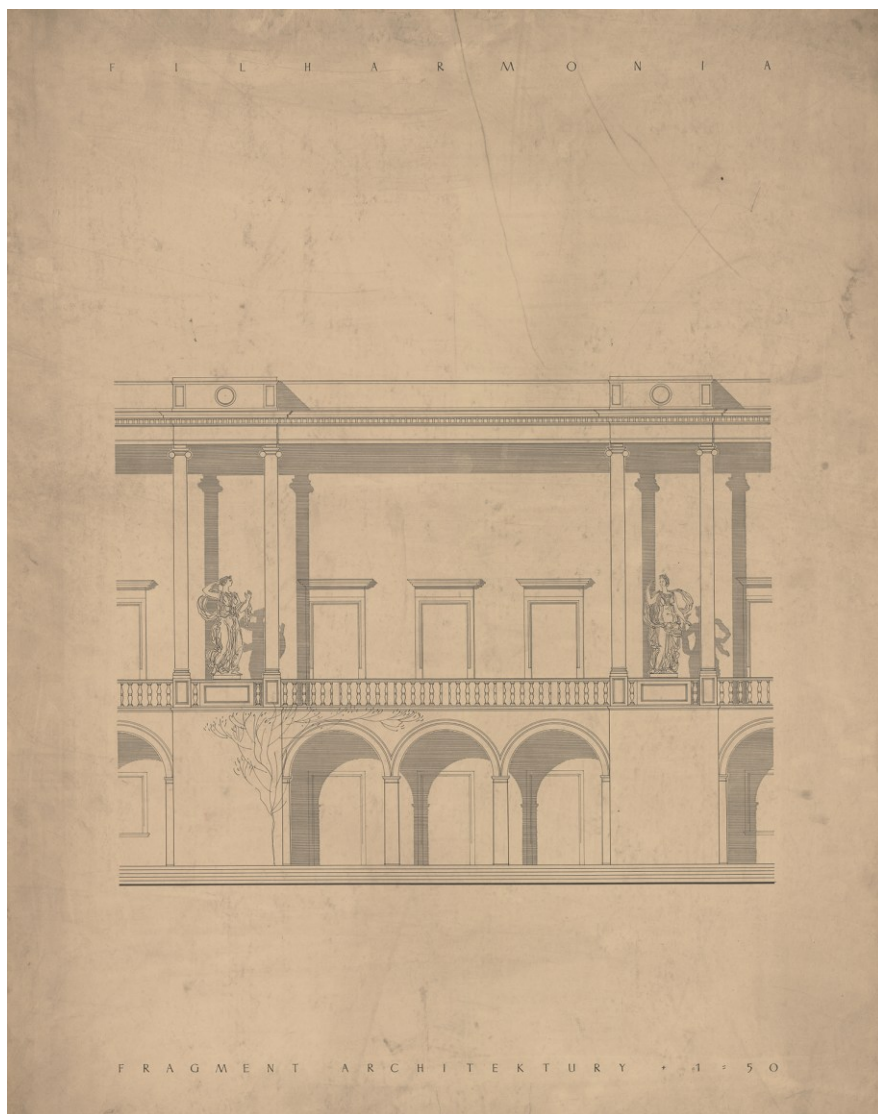


Fig. 2: Józef Korski, Witold Cęckiewicz, Witold Korski: View of the facade of a new philharmonic hall near Wawel, in: ANK, 29/1410/0, inv. no. 2.3.3/ABM TAU Konkursy4 p29b

the Wawel surroundings (along with a catalogue) in 1953.⁶⁶ The Supreme Council proved not to be very interested in the execution of this project, despite

⁶⁶ Basic achievements of the Civic Committee of the Rebuilding of the Wawel Architectural and Urban Surroundings during the last two years, an appendix to the letter of the

an initial endorsement of its modified version. It was especially reluctant to pay for conservation works. Eventually, it refused to fund the activities of the committee's bureau that coordinated the whole enterprise, practically bringing the big idea to its end.⁶⁷ Moreover, the aforementioned competition concluded without a decisive winner, despite several entries. Due to the fact that it was an urban planning competition, the participants did not pay much attention to the specific architectural form of the new structures needing to harmonize with historic buildings. The exception was the entry submitted by the team of Józef Korski, Witold Cęckiewicz (the future Chief Architect of Kraków, since 1955), and Witold Korski.⁶⁸ They designed a new housing estate at the foot of Wawel Hill in the refined socialist realist style, taking inspiration from the architecture of the Renaissance, particularly Wawel Castle (Fig. 1, 2). Notably, it also was a reference to such buildings as the headquarters of the Administrative Center of the Steelworks in Nowa Huta, built in 1950–1955 and in its architecture inspired by the heritage of the Polish Renaissance.⁶⁹ The proposed design of the Wawel surroundings symbolized the imagined kinship between the local progressive heritage and modern development.

"A Representative City of Polish Culture and History"

The unsuccessful idea of rebuilding the Wawel surroundings was the most spectacular expression of the local authorities' desire to associate the protection of local monuments with the national discourse of postwar reconstruction. Simultaneously, it also was a grand urban renewal project that provided an opportunity to reflect on the modern role and status of Kraków's city center, preserved in its medieval boundaries and dominated by centuries-old architecture. The urban planners Anna Ptaszycka and Zbigniew Wzorek pointed out in their confidential urban objectives for the Wawel-surrounds rebuilding program that the rapid postwar industrial and social development of Kraków should be reflected in the shaping of the oldest and still central districts: the Inner City and Kazimierz. They also stressed the "great historical values" of the latter and emphasized that the historic districts should primarily perform administrative,

Presidium of the Municipal National Council to the Supreme Council for the Reconstruction of Warsaw, 1953-07-30, in: ANK, 29/832/0, inv. no. 7/SFOS KW 66, p. 467.

67 Protocol of the meeting of the Presidium of the Civic Committee, 1953-12-04, *ibid.*, p. 759.

68 STANISŁAW CIECHANOWSKI: Konkurs na przebudowę otoczenia Wawelu [A Competition to Rebuild the Surroundings of Wawel], in: *Architektura* (1954), 9, pp. 209–223, here pp. 217, 223.

69 HELENA POSTAWKA-LECH: Nowa Huta—von der Neuen Stadt zum Heritage Site, in: ANDREAS LUDWIG (ed.): *Neue Städte: Vom Projekt der Moderne zur Authentisierung*, Göttingen 2021, pp. 99–116, here pp. 101–102.

economic, educational, cultural-social, and recreational functions rather than residential ones.⁷⁰

In 1954, a year after the unsuccessful contest, an analogical view was expressed by the architectural historian Józef Lepiarczyk in his report on the current situation of Kraków's historic architecture. Lepiarczyk, who wrote the report for the Municipal National Council, was the first Municipal Conservator of Monuments. This office was established in 1952, probably also in connection with the planned rebuilding of the Wawel surroundings. The municipal conservator could support the presidium in the execution of the grand project (originally, it was the provincial conservator who consulted the project program).⁷¹ In his report, Lepiarczyk paid much attention to the "historic districts" of Kraków, specified as Wawel, the Inner City, Kazimierz, and Stradom. He emphasized the terrible condition of numerous buildings in these areas, especially tenement houses. According to his data, over 90 percent of such buildings were "inappropriately used by shops, warehouses, workshops, and craft workshops, occupying historic chambers and hallways on the ground floor and higher floors."⁷² Lepiarczyk also noted the excessive overpopulation in this area, proposing to relieve the districts by erecting new residential buildings outside their boundaries.⁷³ The "old Kraków" in his vision was to serve primarily cultural purposes, being home to museums, libraries, reading rooms, clubs, community centers, scientific institutions, cultural organizations, and antique shops.⁷⁴

Lepiarczyk's recognition of the historical value of tenement houses reflected the contemporary preoccupation of postwar conservators with such monuments as the most prevalent building type in the destroyed historic areas. However, it also was the first time the alarming situation of historic dwellings in Kraków's city center came to light. Lepiarczyk put the blame on the capitalist economy that "significantly changed the appearance and character of the city in the last century by an unprecedented concentration of buildings, radical modifications of hundreds of tenements, and their inappropriate exploitation."⁷⁵ His explanation was only partially true. He glossed over the fact that postwar restrictions against private owners of such buildings (especially the decree on apartment

70 Program objectives for the detailed design of the surroundings of Wawel, in: AAN, 2/392/0, inv. no. 3/195, p. 2.

71 J[ÓZEF] LEPIARCZYK: *Miasto Kraków: Kronika za lata 1952–1953* [The City of Kraków. A Chronicle of the Years 1952–1953], in: *Ochrona Zabytków* 7 (1954), 1, pp. 54–57, here p. 54.

72 LEPIARCZYK: *Stan i potrzeby Krakowa w zakresie ratownictwa i konserwacji zabytków* [The Situation and Needs of Kraków with Respect to the Salvage and Restoration of Architectural Monuments], in: *Ochrona Zabytków* 8 (1955), 3, pp. 195–203, here p. 200.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 202.

74 *Ibid.*

75 *Ibid.*, p. 196.

rentals of 1948) also had contributed to this situation.⁷⁶ However, the reference to the capitalist context, as previously in the case of the Wawel surrounds, was necessary to legitimize actions on such a large scale. Lepiarczyk treated capitalism as a force that destroyed historic areas. The preserved heritage of the pre-capitalist era could consequently be considered especially valuable.

According to Lepiarczyk's report, the ultimate aim of this extensive revitalization of the historic center was to "underscore the monumental character of Kraków as a representative city of Polish culture and history." He stressed, however, that the success of this idea was dependent on the urban development of "the modern Kraków."⁷⁷ It was apparently a new strategy aimed at attracting the attention of the central authorities on the eve of the new centralized economic plan for the period 1956–1960. This strategy responded to their potential expectations, bearing in mind the preference for utilitarian projects. The focus had already shifted from the Wawel complex and its environs to the whole historic center, presented as a collective monument that was not only a national symbol but also a living and working space. The report became the basis of an official address sent to the prime minister and the Central Committee of the PUPW in March 1955.⁷⁸ Lepiarczyk's idea of the coherent historic area in the city center also found its expression in the local administrative reform of 1954. The Inner City, Wawel, Kazimierz, and Stradom then formed one district, called "Stare Miasto" [Old Town].⁷⁹ It was an unprecedented merger of the hitherto distinct areas. The name itself was a novel invention, without precedent in the history of Kraków's administrative nomenclature, probably inspired by the Old Town in Warsaw.

Although the new strategy of the local authorities catered for the attention of the central government, the local community was also engaged in its execution. The presidium established the Social Fund for the Protection of Monuments of the City of Kraków (Społeczny Fundusz Ochrony Zabytków Miasta Krakowa) in May 1955. The administration of the fund was entrusted to a special committee that was headed by the presidium's chairman. Among the committee's members, there also were the municipal conservator, chief architect of the city, head of the presidium's Department of Culture, and chair of the municipal council's Commission of Culture.⁸⁰ Although the committee petitioned the Social Fund for the Reconstruction of the Capital for financial help shortly after its establishment, the Kraków fund was from the outset expected to be

76 PURCHLA, *Miasto niepokorne*, pp. 276–277.

77 LEPIARCZYK, *Stan i potrzeby Krakowa*, p. 202.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 195.

79 Resolution of the Provincial National Council in Kraków no. 33/IV/54, 1954-10-06, in: *Dziennik Urzędowy Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej w Krakowie* (1954), 11, p. 30.

80 Draft Resolution of the Municipal National Council in Kraków, May 1955, concerning the Social Fund, in: ANK, 29/701/0: Prezydium Rady Narodowej Miasta Krakowa [Presidium of the National Council of the City of Kraków], inv. no. 6134, p. 101.

financed primarily from a local tax on tram tickets and voluntary donations.⁸¹ In contrast to Waligóra's civic committee for the Wawel surroundings, the new committee did not promote the idea of the Warsaw reconstruction. Its scope was local.⁸²

It may seem that the establishment of the Social Fund was a logical consequence of the above-mentioned strategy, presented by Lepiarczyk in 1954 on behalf of the presidium. The strategy, in turn, traced its roots to the idea of rebuilding the Wawel surrounds. However, the political situation in 1955 was slightly different to that of the previous years. Two years after Stalin's death, the Soviet-style totalitarian regime in Poland entered a phase of evident crisis. It was only the series of demonstrations in June 1956 that definitely ended the Stalinist period and ushered in the era of relative liberalization in October that year (the so-called Polish thaw). However, the political elite was already facing growing criticism by 1955. The propaganda representations of the building of Nowa Huta also were the target of this criticism, as exemplified by the *Poemat dla dorosłych* [Poem for Adults] by Adam Ważyk.⁸³ Therefore, the Kraków fund may have appeared to be an ideal instrument for cultivating a positive image of the authorities in a city that was still mentally dominated by "capitalists elements" and "magnate clans" (citing Edward Gabara, the contemporary First Secretary of the Provincial Committee of the PUWP).⁸⁴

Characteristically, it was not the municipal conservator who brought up the idea of the Social Fund in 1955. Lepiarczyk even openly opposed an additional body with significant funds under its management (he left office the following year).⁸⁵ This was an initiative of the council's Commission of Culture. The body was headed by Bolesław Drobner, a well-known advocate of Kraków's cultural development, but also a political outcast who had been sidelined for his criticism of the regime's totalitarian degeneration by the late 1940s. He also

81 Social Fund for the Protection of Monuments to the Provincial Committee of the Reconstruction of Warsaw, 1955-06-29, in: ANK, 29/832/0, inv. no. 7/SFOS KW 66, pp. 817–818.

82 On the fund's history, see: STANISŁAW ZAŁUBSKI: Społeczny Fundusz Ochrony Zabytków Miasta Krakowa (1955–1962) w świetle zbiorów Archiwum Państwowego [The Social Fund for the Protection of Monuments of the City of Kraków (1955–1962) in View of the State Archives' Collection], in: Biuletyn Społecznego Komitetu Odnowy Zabytków Krakowa 57 (2007), pp. 123–130.

83 See: EVGENY DOBRENKO: Once Dr Faul Has Left: The Agony of Socialist Realism in Poland, 1955–56, in: EVGENY DOBRENKO, NATALIA JONSSON-SKRADOL (eds.): Socialist Realism in Central and Eastern European Literatures: Institutions, Dynamics, Discourses, London 2018, pp. 39–60, here pp. 40–41.

84 JULIAN KWIEK: Rok 1956 w Krakowie i w województwie (wybrane problemy) [The Year of 1956 in Kraków and the Voivodeship (Selected Problems)], Kraków 1999, p. 10.

85 Chair of the Sub-Commission of Monument Conservation to the General Conservator of Poland, 1955-03-19, in: Archiwum Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie [The Archives of the Royal Castle in Warsaw], Archiwum Jana Zachwatowicza [The Archives of Jan Zachwatowicz], box no. 5, file no. 9, not paginated.

opposed centralization and resented Kraków's subordinate political position. He evidently took the opportunity to raise his political profile in the changing circumstances (he would eventually become the new, though short-standing, provincial leader of the party in the aftermath of the 1956 crisis).⁸⁶ Although formally only an ordinary member of the Social Fund's committee, Drobner also played a key role in the further development of this institution.

Political changes did not thwart Drobner's idea. On the contrary, they clearly gave it additional impetus, at least in the initial years. Although financial support from the central government was not forthcoming, the tolerance for this local action, apparently popular among the city's residents, was crucial. Furthermore, in 1957, the city of Kraków was separated from the Kraków Voivodeship as an independent entity of equal rank, which accounted for greater financial capacity for organizing the municipal conservation service, with which the fund's committee had to closely collaborate.⁸⁷ The fact that, at the central level, the first years after 1956 were marked by a clear shift away from the idea of rebuilding historic buildings and toward preserving those that had survived the war was apparently also significant. Due to many cases of destruction affecting historic buildings in different parts of Poland after 1945, often under the guise of repairing war damage, the Ministry of Culture began working on a new law for the protection of historic architecture in 1957. This work was finalized in the form of the 1962 Act on the Protection of Cultural Property (*Ustawa o ochronie dóbr kultury*).⁸⁸

In these apparently favorable circumstances, the committee managed to secure funding for multiple conservation projects on its own. These projects were predominantly centered in the Old Town area. Drobner, himself of Jewish extraction, was especially interested in the Jewish heritage of Kazimierz. This concern also could have a political motivation, responding to the mild rapprochement between socialist Poland and Israel in the early post-Stalinist period.⁸⁹ Owing to Drobner's influence and determination, the so-called Old Synagogue, built in the fourteenth century and devastated by the Germans during the last war, became thoroughly renovated. It was the most expensive endeavor of the fund, costing over 5 million *złoty*.⁹⁰ The remaining Jewish community donated

86 See: MICHAŁ ŚLIWA: *Bolesław Drobner: Szkic o działalności politycznej* [Bolesław Drobner: Sketch on Political Activity], Kraków 1984, p. 271; SEBASTIAN DRABIK: *Elita polityczna krakowskiej PZPR w latach 1956–1975* [The Political Elite of Kraków's PUWP 1956–1975], Kraków 2013, p. 32.

87 LUDWIKOWSKI, p. 14.

88 JAN PRUSZYŃSKI: *Ochrona zabytków w Polsce: Geneza, organizacja, prawo* [The Protection of Monuments in Poland: Genesis, Organization, Law], Warszawa 1989, pp. 191–198.

89 See: JACEK TEBINKA: *Uzależnienie czy suwerenność? Odwilż październikowa w dyplomacji Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1956–1961* [Dependence or Sovereignty? The October Thaw in the Polish People's Republic's Diplomacy 1956–1961], Warszawa 2010, pp. 203–208.

90 Report on the activities of the Social Fund, in: ANK, 29/701/0, inv. no. 6134, p. 7.

the building to the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków (Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Krakowa) in exchange for a symbolic rental fee. Since 1959, the building has been home to the museum's branch dedicated to the history of Kraków's Jews, the first such museum in postwar Poland.⁹¹ The fund also financed a thorough restoration of Kazimierz's early modern tenements in Szeroka Street, as well as the sixteenth-century High Synagogue (with an adjacent school), donating to these causes over 3.5 million *złoty* and 0.6 million *złoty* respectively.

Among the fund's other expensive undertakings in the Inner City (over 0.5 million *złoty*) were: the renovation of façades of tenement houses in the Main Market Square (2.4 million *złoty*), as well as thorough restorations of the Myszkowski Chapel in the Dominican Church (0.9 million *złoty*), tenement houses in St. Mark Street (0.75 million *złoty*) and Senacka Street (0.7 million *złoty*), the former Carmelite monastery (0.65 million *złoty*), and Krzysztofory Palace (0.6 million *złoty*). The two latter buildings were to serve as museums. The fund also paid for relatively minor conservation works in St. Peter and Paul's Church (0.8 million *złoty*) and shared in the restoration of the Cloth Hall (3.5 million *złoty*).⁹² Note that the fund's managers did not neglect the Catholic sacral architecture, treating it as an integral element of the city's heritage.

"A Task of National Significance"

The financial stability of the fund started to wane in 1959, eventually leading to its dissolution in 1962.⁹³ It was due to the local government redirecting the sources of the fund's income to the disposal of the Municipal Conservator Office. Despite the relative liberalization of the regime in 1956, it did not take long for it to revive its authoritarian ambitions. It seems that the fund as a semi-independent institution had become a problem for the local authorities that preferred to provide more money to their direct subordinates. However, the stricter control of the funds was apparently also a necessity for the local government in the anticipation of the state-sponsored comprehensive renovation of the Old Town. This long-awaited opportunity arose at the turn of the 1960s because of the official celebrations of the Millennium of the Polish State. The series of events marking this anniversary, carried out 1960–1966, had been planned

91 Protocol concerning the handover of the Old Synagogue to the Historical Museum on 1958-01-12, in: KAZIMIERZ URBAN: Cmentarze żydowskie, synagogi i domy modlitwy w Polsce w latach 1944–1966 (wybór materiałów) [Jewish Cemeteries, Synagogues and Prayer Houses in Poland 1944–1966 (a Selection of Materials)], Kraków 2006, p. 613; MICHAŁ NIEZABITOWSKI: Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Krakowa 1899–1996–2019 [The Historical Museum of the City of Kraków 1899–1996–2019], Kraków 2021, p. 118.

92 Report on the activities of the Social Fund (as in footnote 90), pp. 7, 9. See also: ZAŁUBSKI, pp. 129–130.

93 ZAŁUBSKI, pp. 128–129.

since the beginning of 1958.⁹⁴ The celebrations of the state's millennium resulted primarily from the desire to compete with the Catholic Church, which prepared itself for the simultaneous celebrations of the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland (the year of baptism, 966, was traditionally considered the beginning of statehood in Polish historiography).⁹⁵ However, it also evidenced a characteristic nationalist reorientation in the post-Stalinist period. Then, the relatively liberalized regime under Władysław Gomułka's leadership treated national history as an effective (but strictly controlled) instrument of legitimacy.⁹⁶ Also, important celebrations did not take place only in Warsaw, providing an opportunity for such cities as Kraków to captivate national attention because of their pre-socialist historical importance. Kraków was especially in the limelight in 1964, when the Jagiellonian University, the oldest academic institution in Poland, celebrated the 600th anniversary of its founding by king Casimir the Great. In 1966, the last year of the multi-year jubilee, the city also hosted a two-day conference of the Polish Academy of Sciences. It was convened to review the academic contribution to the Millennium celebrations and attended by the state's highest officials.⁹⁷

However, history was not the only motivation for the central government to accept responsibility for the Old Town's maintenance. The deteriorating technical condition of centuries-old tenements in the Inner City and Kazimierz, already noted by Lepiarczyk in the above-mentioned report and the subsequent address to the prime minister in 1955, finally became recognized as a grave problem in its own right. Note that in July 1961, Cyrankiewicz appointed a special governmental commission for the development of residential construction in Poland, followed by another commission, established in August of that year and entrusted specifically with the assessment of the housing situation in Kraków.⁹⁸ The concurrence of the ideological and social factors, directly marrying heritage with modern life, apparently helped trigger the government's decision. In October 1961, the Council of Ministers resolved to secure funds for the restoration of the "housing resources" in the Old Town.⁹⁹ The compre-

94 BARTŁOMIEJ NOSZCZAK: *Antymilenium: Konflikt państwa z Kościołem na tle obchodów tysiąclecia chrztu Polski (1956–1966/1967)* [Anti-Millennium: A Conflict between the State and the Church against the Background of the Celebrations of the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland], Warszawa 2020, p. 109.

95 NOSZCZAK, pp. 109–111.

96 On the role of nationalistic ideology in Władysław Gomułka's Poland see: MARCIN ZAREMBA: *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* [Communism, Legitimacy, Nationalism: The Nationalistic Legitimization of the Communist Power in Poland], Warszawa 2005, pp. 263–352.

97 NOSZCZAK, pp. 163–165, 185–186.

98 Ordinances of the President of the Council of Ministers of 1961-07-08 and 1961-08-01, in: AAN, 2/290/0: *Urząd Rady Ministrów w Warszawie* [The Office of the Council of Ministers in Warsaw], inv. no. 117/20, pp. 264, 272–273.

99 SKIBA, pp. 100–103.

hensive restoration of the district was to be carried out with full respect for historic architecture and an urban layout. The government recognized that the “residential and service facilities” of the Old Town were of “unique value as monuments of Polish national culture.” The preservation of these values “should be a task of national significance” during the millennium of the Polish state.¹⁰⁰

While the central government provided necessary financial resources, the local authorities determined the specific program of works. They were also responsible for the overall development strategy for the Old Town. The works were focused on the Inner City (then called “the Old Town within Planty Park”) and Kazimierz.¹⁰¹ The restoration process was expected to bring significant changes to the district’s socio-economic role in the city, with a view to creating the best possible conditions for the restored architecture. The Presidium of the Municipal National Council planned not only to eliminate small industries, warehouses, and other “burdensome” services but also to reduce population density in this area. They adapted spatial development plans to these goals.¹⁰² The renovation plan also included demolitions of facilities whose technical condition was poor and which were also devoid of historical value.¹⁰³ The experiences of the reconstructed historic districts, such as Warsaw’s Old Town, evidently influenced these activities. However, they also were a reflection of the previous ideas of Ptaszycka, Wzorek, and especially Lepiarczyk.

The renovation of such a large historic area was unprecedented in Poland. Therefore, it quickly became the subject of detailed academic analyses covering various aspects of this complex undertaking. As early as 1963, the Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with the Municipal National Council, organized the first national conservation conference in Krakow that had historic districts as its subject. The conference’s goal was “to obtain general guidelines for the directions of work aimed at adapting the historic fabric to new frameworks and changing social conditions.”¹⁰⁴ However, both the Presidium of the Municipal National Council and the District National Council of the Old Town (the latter was the lowest organ of local administration, directly responsible for the execution of the renovation program) did not always respect expert opinions con-

100 Resolution of the Council of Ministers of 1961-10-10 (no. 402/61) concerning the preservation of housing resources in the Old Town district, in: AAN, 2/290/0, inv. no. 104/14, p. 41.

101 Materials for the Municipal Conservator of Monuments’ report on the protection of Kraków’s monuments [1969?], in: ANK, 29/1312/0: Komitet Wojewódzki Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej w Krakowie [The Provincial Committee of the PUPW in Kraków], inv. no. 12/KW PZPR 1366, p. 181.

102 SKIBA, pp. 117–118.

103 For a detailed description of the works that followed the 1961 resolution, see: *ibid.*, pp. 107–151.

104 ANDRZEJ KRZYŻANOWSKI: Referat wprowadzający [Introductory Paper], in: *Zabytkowe ośrodki staromiejskie na przykładzie Śródmieścia Krakowa*, Kraków 1963, pp. 3–4, here p. 3.

cerning even individual buildings.¹⁰⁵ The local authorities wanted to have the ultimate authority on this matter. Even when the Ministry of Culture undertook to verify the official register of architectural monuments and classify them according to historical or artistic value, the local government did its best to change those decisions that directly affected the renovation program. The ministry's experts intended to save some buildings that the local government had already earmarked for demolition.¹⁰⁶

The Council of Ministers originally assumed that the resolution of 1961 would be effectively implemented over a period of five years. However, it took into account a possible extension of this period until 1970. Eventually, the works continued well into the 1970s, in accordance with the new resolution of the Council of Ministers of 1967.¹⁰⁷ The fact that there were different, conflicting organs (the Presidium of the District National Council, the Municipal Conservator, and a special Plenipotentiary of the Presidium of the Municipal National Council) responsible for the renovation's management and supervision proved to be a source of controversy at a local level. Eventually, after a decade of restoration work, the situation changed to the benefit of the municipal rather than district authorities. It was especially the initiative of Wiktor Zin, former chief architect of the city and chair of the Kraków Conservation Commission, who sought the support of the ministry and the local party executive.¹⁰⁸ The government adopted a new resolution concerning the protection of historic architectural complexes of Kraków in 1974. As a result, the renovation process became subject to the Directory of Revaluation of Historic Complexes in Kraków (Zarząd Rewaloryzacji Zespołów Zabytkowych Krakowa), subordinate to the president of Kraków (an administrative reform of 1973 reestablished this old office). This decision, crucial for the further progress of the works in the Old Town, also concerned other areas of historical significance lying outside the Old Town.¹⁰⁹

105 Materials for the Municipal Conservator of Monuments' report (as in footnote 101), p. 183.

106 Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Kraków to Minister of Culture Tadeusz Galiński, 1963-02-13, in: ANK, 29/1312/0, inv. no. 12/KW PZPR 1332, pp. 389–393.

107 Resolution of the Council of Ministers of 1967-07-14 (no. 169/67) concerning the comprehensive renovation and rebuilding of buildings in the Old Town district of Kraków, in: AAN, 2/290/0, inv. no. 104/84, pp. 211–214.

108 President of the Commission of Culture of the Municipal National Council to the First Secretary of the Provincial Committee of the PUWP, 1972-05-15 in: ANK, 29/1312/0, inv. no. 12/KW PZPR 1366, p. 463.

109 Resolution of the Council of Ministers of 1974-08-02 (no. 186/74) concerning the protection of the historic architectural complexes of Kraków, in: AAN, 2/290/0, inv. no. 104/187, pp. 112–120; see: SKIBA, p. 151, and also: JAN ADAMCZEWSKI: S.O.S. dla Krakowa [SOS for Kraków], Kraków 1977.

"Occupying an Important Place in European Art"

As the social and economic character of the Old Town was changing during the 1960s and 1970s, the position of this part of Kraków as a tourist attraction was strengthened. It proved attractive not only to Poles. As a result of the greater opening of the Polish People's Republic to the West after 1956 (even before Edward Gierek's rise to power in 1970), more foreigners started to visit Kraków to admire "the beauty of the relics of the past."¹¹⁰ Foreign tourists generally could not travel individually in socialist Poland. Instead, they visited it in groups under the special control of the Supreme Committee of Physical Culture and Tourism (Główny Komitet Kultury Fizycznej i Turystyki). In the 1960s, Kraków was placed on a route promoting Polish architecture (together with Warsaw).¹¹¹ In the late 1960s, seven hotels in Kraków were seen as commendable for foreign travelers. Note that the biggest two had been built quite recently, namely the Tourist House (Dom Turysty) (finished in 1963) and the Cracovia Hotel (finished in 1965). Together, they accommodated 1,500 guests at a time. All other hotels in Kraków, built before 1945, had a total capacity of only 850 guests.¹¹² It was a good illustration of the quick development of Kraków as a tourist destination during the 1960s.

Among those who visited Kraków during the post-Stalinist period were official delegations, including heads of states and other officials from not only socialist but also capitalist countries. Among the latter were France (Prime Minister Maurice Couve de Murville in 1966, President Charles de Gaulle in 1967, Prime Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas in 1970, and President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1975), the United States (Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in 1964 and President Gerald Ford in 1975), Belgium (Queen Elisabeth in 1961), Austria (Chancellor Bruno Kreisky in 1973), and Finland (President Urho Kekkonen in 1964, Prime Minister Kalevi Sorsa in 1973). Kraków was also visited by heads of international organizations such as the United Nations (Secretary General Kurt Waldheim in 1972) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (President Samuel Gonard in 1966). During their stay in Kraków, such high-ranking guests visited Wawel Hill (there was a special apartment for state guests, located in one of the castle's nineteenth-century out-buildings), Collegium Maius or the Czartoryski Museum. They also walked

110 JAN GARLICKI, JERZY KOSSOWSKI, LESZEK LUDWIKOWSKI: *A Guide to Cracow*, Warszawa 1969, p. 45.

111 PAWEŁ SOWIŃSKI: *Wakacje w Polsce Ludowej: Polityka władz i ruch turystyczny (1945–1989)* [Holidays in People's Poland: The Official Politics and Tourist Traffic (1945–1989)], Warszawa 2005, pp. 152–153.

112 GARLICKI/KOSSOWSKI/LUDWIKOWSKI, p. 170; JERZY KOSSOWSKI, LESZEK LUDWIKOWSKI: *Ulicami Krakowa* [Down the Streets of Kraków], Kraków 1968, p. 27; MAŁGORZATA WŁODARCZYK: *Architektura lat 60-tych w Krakowie* [The Architecture of the 1960s in Kraków], 2nd ed., Kraków 2014, pp. 103–105, 141–143.

around the Main Market Square.¹¹³ In the case of the visit of the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and his wife, Farah, in 1966, the historical heritage of Krakow openly served to emphasize the mutual ties between both countries in the distant past.¹¹⁴ The Chairman of the Presidium of the Municipal National Council, Zbigniew Skolicki, remarked in his welcoming speech that “our city was the capital of the Polish state in those times when Persia and Poland established diplomatic relations for the first time in the history of our nations.”¹¹⁵ According to an old royal tradition, the shah entered the historic center through St Florian’s Gate, riding later in a car down the streets of the Inner City and ending at Wawel Castle. There, he visited the permanent exhibition “The Orient in the Wawel Collection.”¹¹⁶ His visit was an example of how the history and the heritage of the former royal capital could legitimize the development of the contemporary international policies of the socialist republic. It was arranged due to the desire to develop trade relations between Poland and Iran.

This international and diplomatic context is crucial for understanding the direct genesis of the candidacy of the historic center of Kraków for the World Heritage List during the Gierek era. The People’s Republic of Poland eagerly identified with the idea of World Heritage, to which a special convention of UNESCO was dedicated already in 1972. The Polish state was among the first signatories of this document in 1976.¹¹⁷ It was also among those few countries (only 8 out of 40 eligible states) that submitted nominations to the very first World Heritage list two years later. The Polish authorities appeared to be very determined to internationalize the country’s heritage. Poland was one of only two European countries (the other one was the Federal Republic of Germany) and the only one from the Soviet Block to submit nominations at that time. Apart from the historic center of Kraków, the socialist republic put forward the reconstructed historic center of Warsaw, the salt mine of Wieliczka, and the former Auschwitz concentration camp.¹¹⁸ Note that the post of the General Conservator of Poland, the central-level government official responsible for the national policies concerning architectural heritage, was occupied then by

113 On the official visits to Collegium Maius, see: KAROL ESTREICHER: *Muzeum Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego* [The Jagiellonian University Museum], Warszawa 1980, p. 91; see also: CHWAŁBA, *Dzieje Krakowa*, p. 111; CHWAŁBA, *Collegium Maius*, pp. 204–206. There is a rich collection of photographs of international delegations, visiting monuments in the Old Town, in the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków.

114 On the general context of this visit, see: WALTER LAQUEUR: *The Struggle for the Middle East: The Soviet Union and the Middle East, 1958–68*, London 1969.

115 Kraków gości Szachinszacha Iranu [Kraków Hosts the Shahanshah of Iran], in: *Gazeta Krakowska*, 1966-09-17/18.

116 JERZY STEINHAUF: *Szachinszach Iranu Reza Pahlavi w Krakowie* [The Shahanshah of Iran Reza Pahlavi in Kraków], in: *Dziennik Polski*, 1966-09-17.

117 See: RÖTTJER, p. 58.

118 Advisory Body (ICOMOS) Evaluation, 1978-06-07, <https://whc.unesco.org/document/153136> (2026-01-12).

Wiktor Zin, who had been previously engaged in the process of the Old Town's restoration.

Among them, the Kraków candidacy was especially framed to justify the universal significance of Polish national heritage.¹¹⁹ The Polish delegate, Deputy General Conservator Krzysztof Pawłowski, underlined in a candidacy application form that the historic center of Kraków "occupies an important place in European art by virtue of its geographical location and its role as a center of western art, which was in contact with cultural influences coming from the East during the Middle Ages and in the 16th and 17th centuries."¹²⁰ Although the idea of Kraków as a cultural crossroad between West and East was originally popularized by Tadeusz Dobrowolski's book *Sztuka Krakowa* [The Art of Kraków] in 1950 (later republished multiple times), it had not been so far politically exploited. In 1978, Pawłowski made use of Dobrowolski's concept because of its direct correspondence with the contemporary foreign policy of socialist Poland. Eventually, the committee decided to accept Kraków's historic center together with the Wieliczka mine.¹²¹ The decision of UNESCO was very warmly received by the Polish government. The Social Committee for the Renovation of Monuments in Kraków (Społeczny Komitet Odnowy Zabytków Krakowa) was inaugurated soon afterwards. It was presided over by the chairman of the Council of State, then an official head of state, and its activities were directly financed from the central budget.¹²² The establishment of this central-level body, existing to date (after the collapse of the socialist regime, under the patronage of Polish presidents), heralded a new era in the history of the conservation of Kraków's architectural heritage.

Conclusion

The winding road of the historic center of Kraków to the World Heritage List is a useful illustration of how the socialist authorities in Poland generally understood the political role of material heritage throughout the period. In the 1970s, the historic center of Kraków became the showcase of the compatibility of socialism and pre-socialist history on an international scale. Previously, the

119 RÖTTJER, p. 64.

120 Cracow's historical and architectural urban centre—World Heritage List Nomination Form, 1978-05-02 (date of submission), <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/29bis.pdf>, [p. 10] (2026-01-12). See also: RÖTTJER, pp. 63–64.

121 RÖTTJER, pp. 64–65.

122 Ogólnopolski Komitet Odnowy Zabytków Krakowa [The National Committee for the Renovation of Monuments in Kraków], in: *Ochrona Zabytków* 32 (1979), 2, p. 156. See also: *Problemy odnowy Krakowa: Materiały z narady konsultacyjnej w sprawie odnowy zespołów zabytkowych Krakowa* [The Problems of Kraków's Renovation: Materials of the Consultation Meeting Concerning the Renovation of Historic Architectural Complexes in Kraków], Kraków 1978; BOGUSŁAW KRASNOWOLSKI: *Społeczny komitet odnowy zabytków Krakowa: Geneza, doświadczenia, program* [The Social Committee for the Renovation of Monuments in Kraków: Origins, Experiences, Program], in: *Ochrona Dziedzictwa Kulturowego* (2017), 4, pp. 7–14.

local authorities wanted it to be a showcase of such compatibility at a national level. The shift in the state's policy toward Kraków's monuments was not seen then as a tribute to one city or region, but to the entire nation, whose centuries-long history was symbolized by the center of Kraków. The process of growing recognition for the historic center as an area deserving special treatment and comprehensive conservation took place in accordance with the logic of political centralization, one of the main foundations of the socialist regime. The idea of the restoration of the historic center, originating in the 1950s, was a direct response to the advancing centralization of the state, affecting the cultural and, above all, symbolic role of Kraków in postwar Poland. The central government's initial focus on reconstructing Warsaw and building Nowa Huta (the new Kraków) evidently compromised the needs of old Kraków and urged the local socialist elite to develop specific heritage preservation strategies to draw the attention of their political superiors. However, the success of the idea was possible only after its takeover by a centralized state. The urban heritage of the former capital proved attractive at the beginning of the 1960s due to its connection with the history of the Polish state. The preserved material heritage of Kraków was a symbol of the centuries-old state, a kind of historical equivalent of the rebuilt Warsaw, which was a symbol of modern (socialist) Poland. The conservation history of the Kraków historic center in the postwar period essentially reflects the influence of centralization on the politics of history in socialist Poland.

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