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## **MULTICULTURAL CITY IN A UNITED EUROPE – A CASE OF ŁÓDŹ**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Łódź is the third largest city in Poland and is located in the heart of the country. Its unprecedented history, unusual economic development, but most of all, its multinational and multicultural population have been a subject of interest of different researchers e.g. geographers, historians, sociologists, for many years. Multiculturalism of Łódź resulted from the complex process that had a time spread of only a few decades. This process was conditioned by the history of Polish territories and led to the necessity of coexistence of different nations, religions and cultures in one city. It resulted in a varied cultural and urban heritage, which gave Łódź its unusual character. Nowadays, multiculturalism of Łódź is just a shadow of its former glory. However, as a testimony to the past, it became an inspiration which marked the city's presence at the European arena.

### **2. ORIGINS OF THE MULTICULTURAL CITY OF ŁÓDŹ**

The beginnings of Łódź date back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when it was a small agricultural and crafts settlement with Polish nationality prevailing. Łódź received its civic rights in 1423. However, the enormous development of the city took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was conditioned by the decision of the authorities of Kingdom of Poland<sup>1</sup>, who in 1820, included Łódź into the

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<sup>1</sup> Kingdom of Poland, formed in 1815 by the decision of the Vienna Congress, encompassed very poorly industrialized territories. Therefore, in order to develop textile industry, Kingdom authorities determined areas where industrial cities were to be

group of industrial settlements based on textile production. This event determined Łódź's further dynamic development in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Within a short period of time, Łódź developed from a small town to a main textile centre and the second largest city in Poland (after Warsaw). The beginnings of textile industry in the city were closely related, and in some respects fundamentally influenced, by the influx of immigrants from all over Europe. Initial spontaneous migration quickly changed into an organized one, when the authorities of the Kingdom of Poland introduced the policy aiming at attracting foreign settlers, mainly craftsmen<sup>2</sup>. As a result of this activity, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Łódź became home to Polish, German, Jewish, Czech, Silesian and not so numerous Russian population. Therefore, it can be stated that the development of industrial Łódź also marks the development of multiculturalism, for which the city was famous until the Second World War. Through many years, different nations living in Łódź have marked their presence in different spheres of urban life, e.g. by erecting sacral buildings, prominent factories, impressive tenement houses and institutional buildings with architectural forms and decorative details reflecting the origins of their founders. History of the mutual relations between different nations living in Łódź was marked by signs of aversion, antagonisms and rivalry, as well as by forms of friendly coexistence, assimilation, cooperation and symbiosis. Throughout the years, multinational and multireligious structures and various cultural patterns influenced one another in many spheres of life. In this way, Łódź became a kind of cultural and ethnic borderland, where mainly Polish, German and Jewish influences alternated one another. With time, the specific relationship between these nations formed. The Germans and the Jewish took over the dominant economic position in the city, whereas for most of the Poles hired labor was their main source of income. However, for all those nations, despite clear differences, the development of the city of Łódź played a very important

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founded. One of them was Łódź. The following factors decided about the conversion of Łódź into an industrial settlement: 1) existence of extensive areas in the possession of government, 2) convenient geographical localization with access to running water for technological purposes, 3) easy access to building materials, especially timber and brick, 4) attractive transport location, next to Łęczycza – Piotrków trail, 5) existence of recent colonists, 6) conscious aspirations for the development of backward areas.

<sup>2</sup> In order to attract foreign settlers, the authorities of Kingdom of Poland gave them a number of privileges, e.g.: free plots for development; six years of rent exemption; attractive, partly irreclaimable loans; exemption from the military service.

role. Therefore, it was able to turn into one of the strongest industrial centers in Europe, whose history was a proud testimony of people, art and cultural dialogue.

Among many different national groups in former Łódź, the Jewish were the first to arrive. They quickly became the second richest (after the Germans) ethnic community. Some of them have greatly contributed to the development of Łódź. They were mainly great industrialists like I.K. Poznański, who in the years 1872–1877, created an industrial empire of cotton manufacturing, with over 1000 employees (Pytlas, 1994), and others, like Silberstein, S. Jarociński or O. Kon. The famous Jews from Łódź included outstanding architects (D. Lande and G. Landau-Gutenteger), writers (J. Tuwim and J. Kosiński), bankers and numerous wealthy and medium well-off merchants. Before the Second World War Jews were monopolists in Łódź's commerce. After years of their presence, the Jewish have left a significant mark in a cultural landscape of the city. It is reflected in many impressive buildings, which up to this day enrich the material heritage of Łódź. These buildings include factories, residences, impressive tenement houses, but also sacral buildings (Fig. 1). However, out of many synagogues, only two have survived until today. Jewish history in Łódź is also present in the largest (42 hectares, 230 thousand buried) Jewish necropolis in Europe, established in 1892, with an impressive mausoleum of I.K. Poznański, who was the second most eminent (after Scheibler) industrial potentate in Łódź.

Among all the nations in the city, the Germans played the most important role in creating its textile industry foundations. Their major influx took place in 1830s. Owing to generous financial assistance and concessions from the government, many of them established the first textile plants in the city and quickly became the largest group among Łódź's industrialists. Contribution of some of them was of huge importance for the city's industrial development. The most eminent German industrialists in Łódź include: K.F. Wendisch, K. Saenger, J.T. Lange, L. Geyer, T. Kopisch, T. Grohman and the later largest potentate K. Scheibler – the owner of the largest industrial plants in Łódź, with over 5000 employees (Baranowska and Kulesza, 2007). Among Łódź's industrialists, merchants, and local intelligentsia, German Protestants constituted the wealthiest group. Therefore, they had the largest influence on the architectural image of Łódź, especially its historical city centre. They were among the main investors of palaces and villas located next to the factories, the owners of numerous tenement houses, erected next to the representative streets of the city, and the founders of Evangelical churches (Fig. 2) (Koter, 2007).

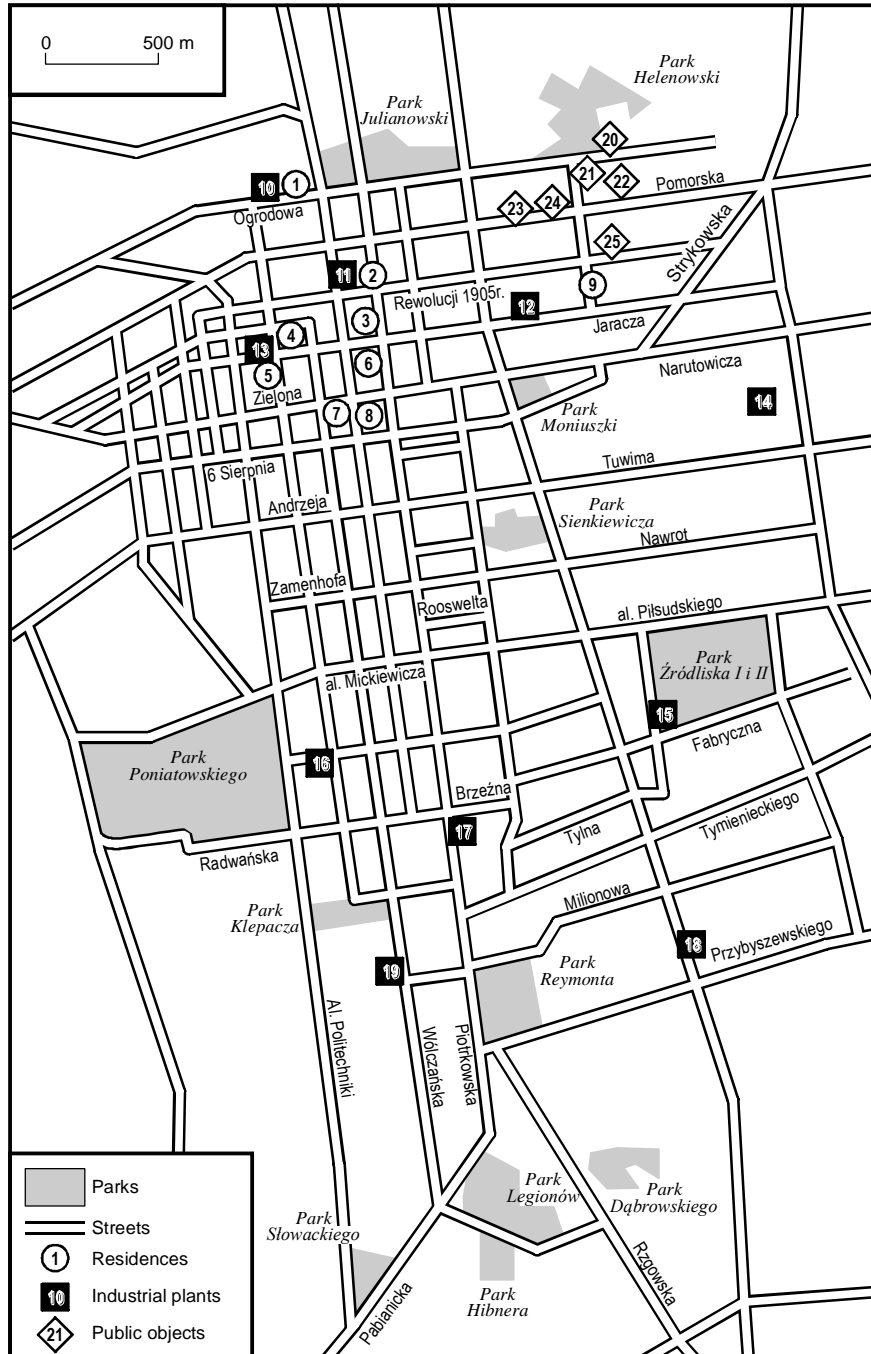


Fig. 1. Examples of Jewish heritage preserved in a contemporary townscape of Łódź  
Source: Authors' own elaboration

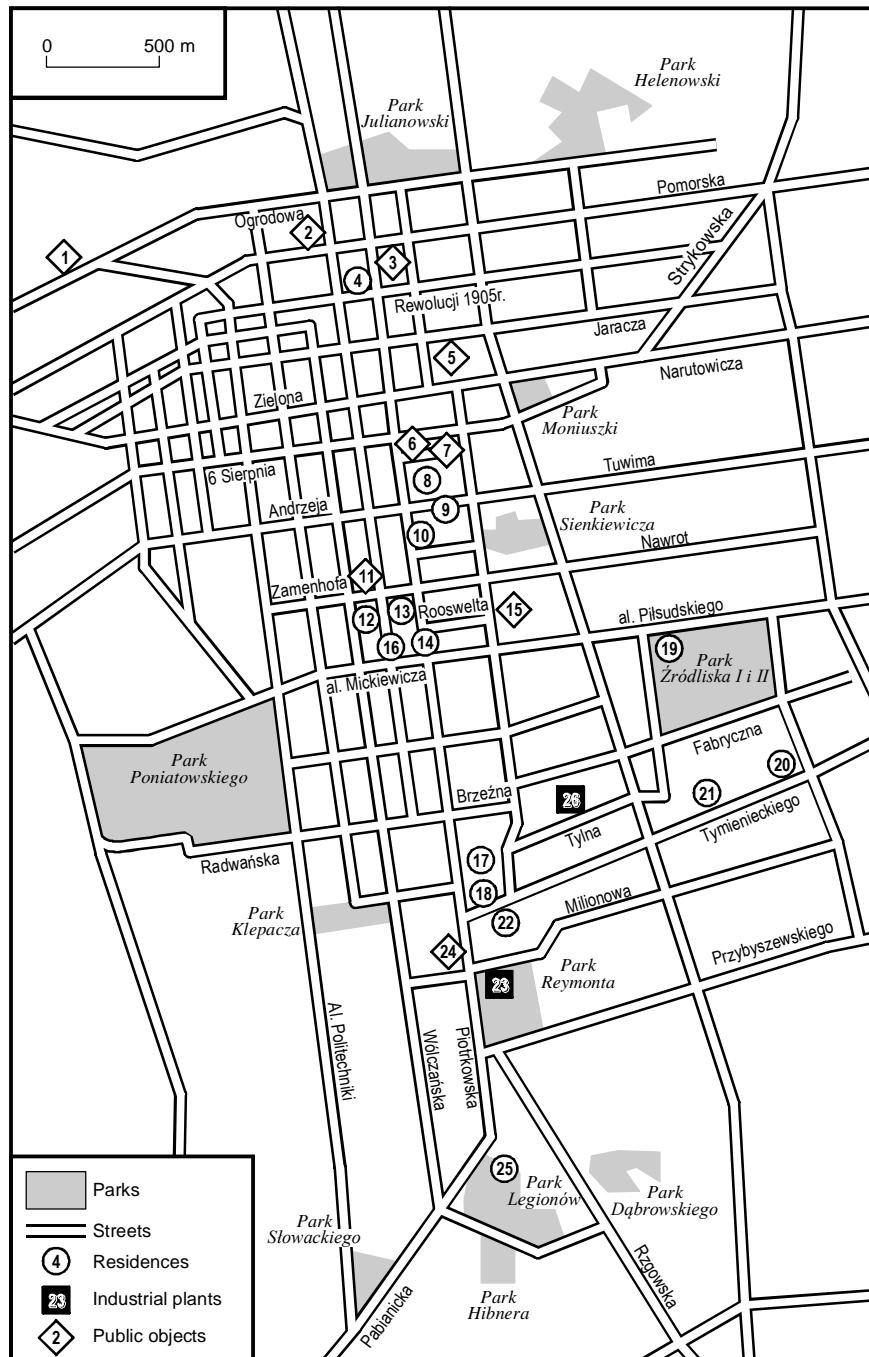


Fig. 2. Examples of German heritage preserved in a contemporary townscape of Łódź  
 Source: Authors' own elaboration

During the industrial development of the city, German and Jewish industrialists clearly predominated. However, despite their role in the economic development of Łódź, the Polish contribution to the development of industry also needs to be recognized. The Polish were the third largest group among the industrial plants owners (e.g. J. Wierzchowski, F. Górski, J. Jarzębowski, J. Paszkiewicz) (Baranowska and Kulesza, 2007).

However, the majority of Polish population of the city constituted the core of the working class and was living mainly in substandard buildings located in the suburbs of the city. Polish middle class, namely engineers, representatives of different professions and intelligentsia, was not so numerous, thus its contribution to shaping the architectural landscape of the city centre was insignificant. The Poles did not significantly influence the form of the city as investors, although their contribution was possible owing to a substantial group of Polish architects. The most eminent architect in Łódź, Hilary Majewski, designed 546 buildings (villas, houses, palaces and tenement houses).

The Russians have played a rather insignificant role in the history of Łódź's industry development. Also their contribution in shaping of architectural landscape of Łódź was the least visible. The Russians were represented mainly by members of administration and military personnel. Generally, they were not permanently related to the city, therefore they rarely undertook any building investments. They came to Łódź mainly on temporary basis, thus their influence on architecture was confined to administration buildings, military quarters and sacral structures (Koter, 2007). Russian heritage, preserved in the landscape of the city, consists mainly of Eastern Orthodox churches and chapels, buildings of former Russian institutions (e.g. banks) and preserved monuments of tombstone art in the cemeteries of Łódź (Fig. 3). The most famous Russian sacral buildings in Łódź include: Orthodox Alexander Nevski Cathedral, but also St. Olga Orthodox Church and St. Alexius Orthodox Church.

The representatives of different nationalities also influenced other economic spheres of Łódź, besides industry. Since the early 1870s, the wealthy upper classes were greatly involved in the creation of credit institutions, such as banks and joint-stock societies. Thanks to the development of its financial institutions, Łódź became the second (after Warsaw) domestic financial centre in the Kingdom of Poland (Pytlas, 2005).

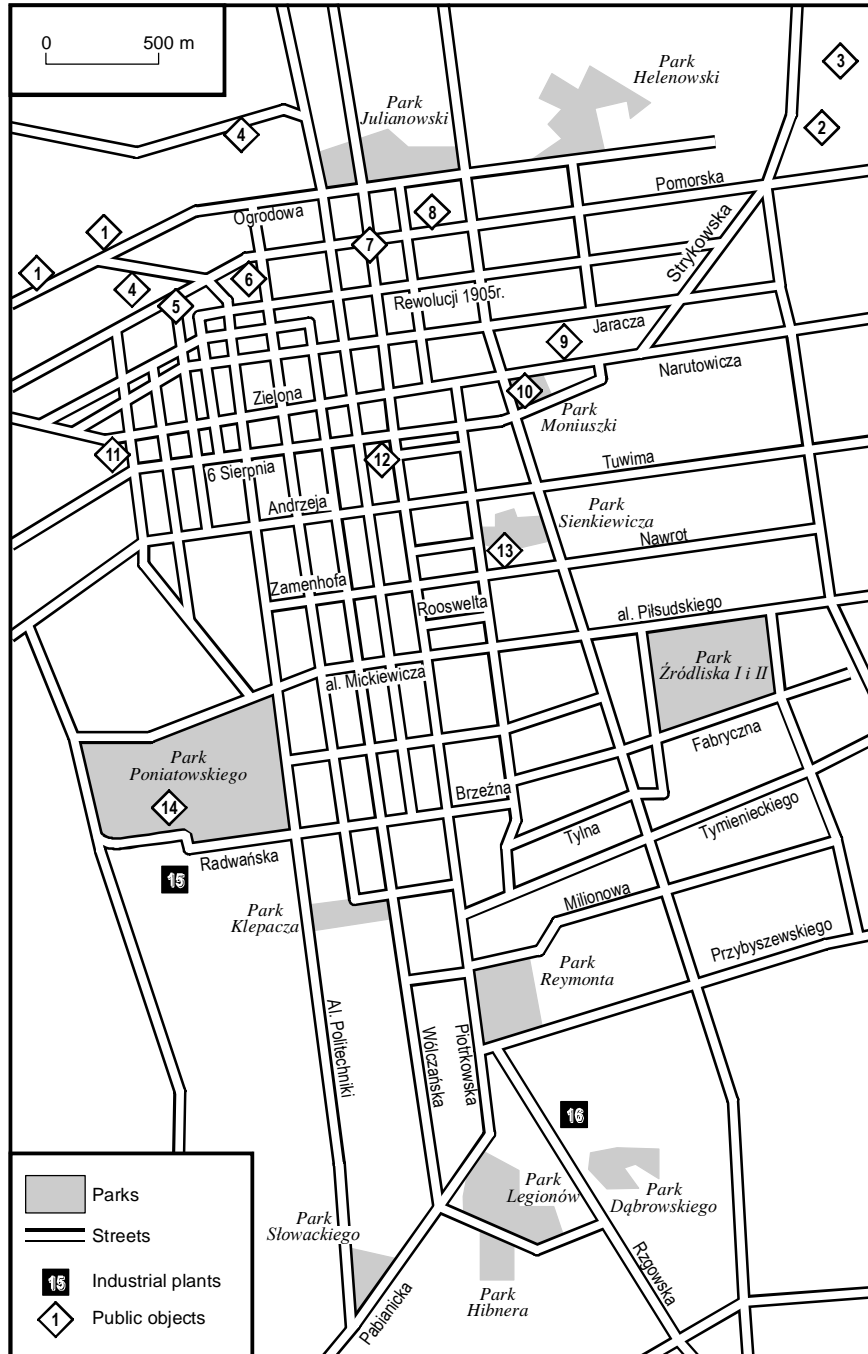


Fig. 3. Examples of Russian heritage preserved in the contemporary townscape of Łódź  
 Source: Authors' own elaboration

The outbreak of the First World War largely reduced the economic development of Łódź. As a consequence of restrictive occupational policy of German authorities, the textile industry suffered heavy losses, deepened by the loss of its traditional market in the East. To compensate this loss, the expansion to the domestic market was undertaken. Despite many difficulties, the textile industry began to rebuild quickly. The decisive role in its development was played by German and Jewish companies. However, during the interwar period these proportions were changing systematically. The contribution of German and Jewish representatives started to decrease, while the Polish influence increased. The Second World War changed the statistics drastically. The war resulted in Łódź becoming almost a nationally monolithic city. The city maintained only a symbolic margin of foreign minorities. The Jewish population was almost entirely exterminated by the Nazis and most of the German population, who cooperated (voluntarily or under compulsion) with the Nazi during the occupation, had decided to leave the city before the Red Army entered it (Koter, 2007). The Second World War destroyed the common output of all nationalities living in Łódź, although some of the multicultural traditions along with monuments of material and spiritual heritage were preserved.

Today, this multicultural heritage is an unquestionable evidence of openness and positive coexistence of different nations' and religions' representatives, for whom Łódź was not only the "promised land", but also home that they could identify with. The history of this period survived in the urban landscape in the form of buildings, monuments but also in the cemeteries of the city. One of these necropolises, a testimony of a mutual positive coexistence, is the "Old Cemetery" – a common burial place of the Catholics, Protestants and Eastern Orthodox Christians. It contains impressive mausoleums (K. Scheibler, J. Heinzl, L. Geyer, R. Biedermann), tombstones and sepulchres of those, who created the industrial Łódź, despite their nationality and religion.

### **3. THE ROLE OF MULTICULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE PAST IN CONTEMPORARY ŁÓDŹ**

Nowadays, the vision of contemporary Europe is being created. It is a Europe of different nations, religions, cultures and languages. These days, the city of Łódź, as a historical witness to all these aspects, uses its history to mark its presence in United Europe. As a city erected on the tradition of four



languages and four religions, it proves that multicultural dialogue is possible and necessary. For Łódź, its fascinating blend of former cultures and religions serves as an inspiration for many festivals and cultural events. One of the most significant events is the Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures which has been held in Łódź since 2002. It is a unique festival, both on Polish and European scale. It presents the output of four cultures that created the industrial power of city of Łódź at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, namely Polish, Jewish, German and Russian. The festival includes concerts, exhibitions, theatre plays, movie projections and happenings, which attract artists and audience from all over the world. Łódź, together with its personal experience of openness and dialogue between cultures, plays a very important role in Europe, as it is a perfect example of the practical coexistence of different cultures. The Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures became one of the most important trademarks of Łódź on the cultural map of Poland. In 2004, it received the certificate of the Polish Tourism Organization as the best Tourist Product.

On the initiative of the European Union, the year 2008 was announced as the European Year of Dialogue of Cultures. Its aim was to support the development of coherent, but also open cultural environment, where different ethnic, religious and national identities coexist on the level of the entire European Union but also within individual EU countries. The “Łódź European Meetings”, organized by the European Commission in Poland and Łódź City Hall as part of the European Year of Dialogue of Cultures became an opportunity for the exchange of views about cultural variety, art and dialogue, not only on a regional scale, but also in the entire European Union. Multiculturalism in Łódź and its long tradition of dialogue can be a good foundation for further development of the society characterized by openness, tolerance, and curiosity of other cultures.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial Łódź, besides the erection of many magnificent factories, also witnessed a major development of cultural institutions. Contemporary Łódź is still one of the major cultural centers of Poland. To a large degree, its cultural activities and events are based on the multicultural aspects of the past. The cultural variety, offered by Łódź, became an inspiration to aspire for the status of European Capital of Culture in 2016. This aim is not only a part of a distant vision, but also a cultural development strategy of the city for the next seven years. It should result in international promotion of the city, development of the tourism, but it should also strengthen the image of Łódź as a city of culture and art. Most of all, it should consolidate the entire cultural community of the city. The aspiration

for the European Capital of Culture is not only prestigious, but it also brings new perspectives and long term results (architectonic innovations, development of cultural infrastructure, profits from tourism). Łódź is the first city which has presented its campaign in Brussels. Its biggest advantages include multiculturalism, tradition, exceptional cultural and artistic heritage (museums). Łódź is also perceived as a city of other festivals (e.g. Łódź Biennale, Explorers Festival, Photography Festival), city of movies (Film School, Camerimage) and as a city of modern cultural centers arranged inside postindustrial buildings.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Nowadays, multinational structure of cities' population leads in many cases to the emergence of conflicts and feuds of ethnic, religious and cultural background. In case of Łódź, thanks to its unusual history and unique factors that had influenced the development of the city, multiculturalism became a stimulus for its dynamic economic growth and survived until today in the form of numerous sites of cultural heritage. It survived also in the memories of Łódź's citizens and became the inspiration for activities aiming at using the heritage of the past in contemporary promotion of the city. Apart from the organization of cultural events based on multiculturalism of old Łódź, the use of material heritage inherited from different national groups for the purpose of various investments, is nowadays becoming a common phenomenon. It is worth to mention two foreign investment projects, which use revitalization of the former factory buildings and their adaptation for new purposes, e.g. residential, commercial, and recreational. These crucial investments are: Manufaktura (French investor Apsys – shopping and recreational centre in the former I.K. Poznański factory complex) and Scheibler lofts (Australian investor Opal Property Development – residential lofts in the former K. Scheibler factory complex). These investments are not only a tribute to the past, but most of all, they are examples of ideas on how to revitalize a multicultural heritage in a contemporary townscape.

Through many activities that take place in Łódź, its example proves that it is possible to combine both, the tradition and the present day. It is possible not to forget about local values, but at the same time to think about the European integration in a global way. These are the ideas that contemporary Europe needs. These are the values that many of the European cities can and should promote.

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