
HISTORICAL RUINS - BETWEEN CONSERVATION DOCTRINE AND SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

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ABSTRACT: From the doctrinal take, ruin is perceived as a full-fledged historical monument representing autonomous values. Highly polemic against the doctrine and theory is the practice expressed in concrete interventions in the substance and surroundings of a historical monument. It can thus be stated that the entire post-war period was one of affirmation and praise of the Rebuilding/Reconstruction/Restoration project. The Rebuild slogan has taken root as a positive and creative idea. In order to implement the doctrinal concept of the protection of ruins, there is a purpose behind restoring the social skill of perceiving the beauty of historical ruins as signs in the landscape. And, there is a purpose in educating the community in terms of to what extent ruins, without a useful function of their own, may be useful or useable anyway – as a regional attraction, a imagination-inspiring magnet attracting tourists. This poses a considerable challenge to experts in cultural goods protection: not only should they demonstrate an in-depth recognition of restoration/conservation doctrines but also render themselves acquainted with information, educational, and negotiation techniques – in order to contribute to the decisions regarding the lot of historical monuments, historical ruins in particular.

KEY WORDS: Historical ruins, conservation doctrine, monument protection, castles, social value of a monument

If historical ruins are to be perceived in terms of the evolution of the monument restoration doctrine, one can find that while the subject has a long tradition behind it, while the problem is not serious in itself. One could say, in fact, that the issue has been resolved – many a time, indeed – in doctrinal terms¹. Obviously, it is just one of the doctrinal currents rooted in the nineteenth-century reflection – namely, that of the circle of John Ruskin's thought – that is being referred to; let us ignore, for the present purpose, the purist current represented by Violet le Duc and his continuators. However, the history of the doctrinal discussion admits such a choice because the purism as a concept was repeatedly rejected and deemed erroneous². As far as historical ruins are concerned, the evolution of conservators' attitudes takes us from the Romanticists taking delight in ruins in landscapes to the reflection that such ruins testify to (the) history. (Fig 1) From a literary fascination of the secretiveness of mediaeval relicts up to scientific understanding of the contents comprised in them³. We can find utterances explaining the essentials of ruins as an illustration of coexistence of Culture and Nature⁴. We come across statements or opinions where the condition of a ruin is deciphered as a peculiar and essential phase in the history of a given building or edifice⁵. By way of digression, let us state that such autonomous glance on the form of a building/edifice in ruin appeared in Polish history of art at a rather early stage. Marian Sokołowski, in his dissertation on the ruins at Ostrów Lednicki – which was essentially a study on Polish pre-Christian and early architecture and construction, published in 1876⁶ – was one of the first to express such an approach. Sokołowski contributed to the establishment of the first art history faculty in Polish lands (then under partition), which was set up in 1882 as part of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow⁷. (Fig 2) At a later date, Alois Riegl's considerations of the essence of the value of historical monuments, which were fundamental to the modern restoration doctrine, or the gradually developed idea of authenticity, clearly lead towards respect for Matter and Form as shaped by time⁸.

¹ Karta Ochrony Historycznych Ruin przyjęta Uchwałą Walnego Zgromadzenia Członków PKN ICOMOS w dniu 4 grudnia 2012 r. <http://www.icomos-poland.org/pl/dokumenty/uchwaly/130-karta-ochrony-historycznych-ruin.html>; Szmygin, B., *Protection of historic ruins - objectives for theory and practice*, Protection of Cultural Heritage; 6; 2018, pp. 191 - 200.

² Arszyński M., *Idea, pamięć, troska. Rola zabytków w przestrzeni społecznej formy działań na rzecz ich zachowania. Od starożytności do połowy XX wieku*, Malbork 2007, pp. 198 – 199, 215; Jokilehto J., *A History of Architectural Conservation*, York 1986, pp. 399 – 401.

³ Dettloff P., *Problem ochrony ruiny zamków w Polsce. Refleksje w kontekście dziejów konserwatorstwa europejskiego i współczesnych praktyk*, [in:] Molski P., Szmygin B., *Zamki w ruinie- Zasady postępowania konserwatorskiego*, Warsaw – Lublin 2012, pp. 64 – 75.

⁴ Kosiewski P., Krawczyk J., *Latarnia pamięci. Od muzeum narodu do katechizmu konserwatora*, [in:] Kosiewski P. (ed.), *Zabytek i historia. Wokół problemów konserwacji i ochrony zabytków w XIX wieku*, Warsaw 2012, pp. 37 – 41.

⁵ Kasperowicz R. (ed.), *Alois Riegl, Georg Dehio i kult zabytków*, Warsaw 2002, pp. 13 - 17.

⁶ Sokołowski M., *Ruiny na Ostrowie Jeziora Lednicy: Studium nad budownictwem w przedchrześcijańskich i pierwszych chrześcijańskich wiekach w Polsce*, Krakow 1876.

⁷ Kunińska M., *Historia sztuki Mariana Sokołowskiego*, Krakow 2014.

⁸ Czerner O., *Wartość autentyczności w zabytkach*, *Ochrona Zabytków* 27/3 (106), 180-183; Jokilehto J., *Considerations on authenticity and integrity in world heritage context*, *City & Time* 2 (1): 1, 2006; [online] URL:<http://www.ct.ceci-br.org>

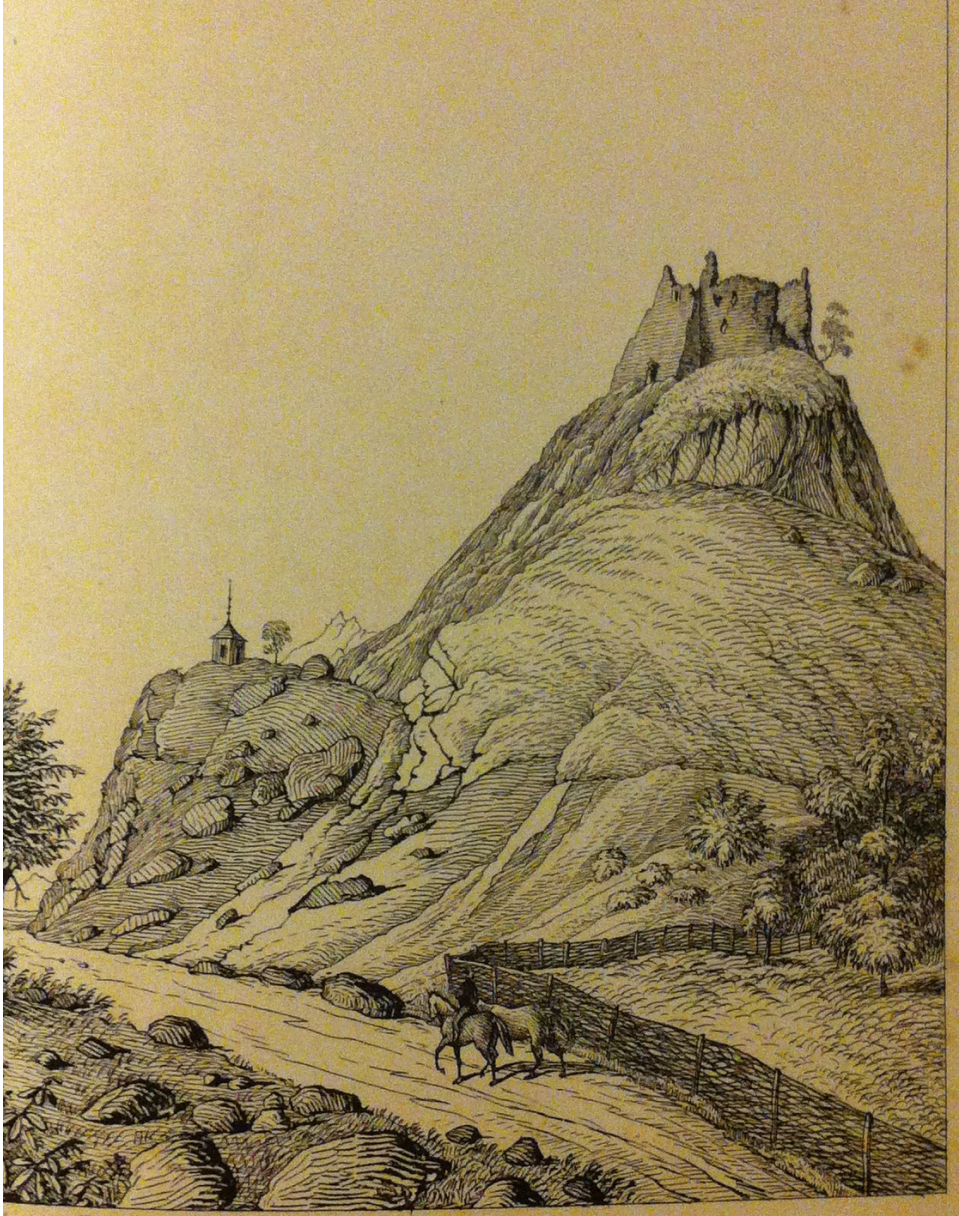


Fig. 1 Zygmunt Bogusz Stęczyński, Czorsztyn Castle from the south, from: *Tatry w dwudziestu czterech obrazach*, Krakow 1860



Fig. 2 Ostrów Lednicki - a testimony of history - ruins associated with the beginning of Polish statehood, photo by A. Siwek

From the doctrinal take, ruin is perceived as a full-fledged historical monument representing autonomous values⁹. The Romanticist tradition has yielded a positive aesthetic evaluation of ruin and a thoughtful attitude to its form or shape. It can be said that the sources of respect towards ruins are even deeper: they are grounded on what is essential about the Mediterranean culture which sprang out of the ruins of the Greek and Roman civilisation. It is already in the ancient Rome that we can point to instances of appreciation of Greek edifices impaired by time – like, for instance, in Pliny's letters from the first century AD¹⁰. The subsequent reveals of the Renaissance and the Classicism would not have been possible without the fondness on the beauty and might of ancient ruins. Hence, we can unhesitatingly conclude that positive perception of ruins is backed with a long cultural tradition and is confirmed by the development of the restoration doctrine. All the same, the issues of protection and handling of monuments referred to as 'permanent ruin' still remains one of the leading topics in the ongoing doctrinal discussion. On the Polish soil, the scale and thematic scope of the discussion has been determined by the publication series of the Polish ICOMOS National Committee¹¹. A role of importance in this

⁹ Karta Ochrony Historycznych Ruin, op. cit. § 1.

¹⁰ Arszyński M., op. cit., s. 45.

¹¹ Szmygin B., *Ochrona zabytkowych ruin - założenia do teorii i praktyki / Protection of historic ruins - objectives for theory and practice*, [in:] *Historyczne ruiny – ochrona, użytkowanie, zarządzanie : Historic ruins – protection, use, management*, Ochrona Dziedzictwa Kulturowego: Protection of Cultural Heritage. No 6, 2018, pp. 191 - 200; <http://bc.pollub.pl/dlibra/publication/13881/edition/13549/content?ref=desc>.

discussion is played by the attitude towards the ruins of historical castles and defence structures (fortresses etc.) – as is evidenced by a series of publications, focused conferences and milieu discussions, and interest from mass media.

It needs being emphasised that the confrontation of attitudes taking place is quite specific. Among the theoretical opinions, polemical opinions are rare. Even if expressed, their purport is hedged by a number of reservations or objections: they tend to refer to concepts such as sustainable development, or some other type of weighing and balancing of reasons. In contrast to this, journalistic or publicist statements are unambiguous and sharp in tone¹². In any case, the academic discussion is permeated by a conservative attitude as far as monument restoration issues are concerned. Rooted in the Charter of Venice, this attitude appears reconfirmed in programme declarations such as the *Programme for the Association of Monument Conservators – Branch of Silesia*¹³, or the countrywide *Historical Ruins Charter* of the ICOMOS National Committee of Poland. Even the international programme document entitled the *Warsaw Recommendation on Recover and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage destroyed in result of armed conflicts and natural disasters*, which essentially deals with rebuilding and reconstruction of historical urban complexes, we can find a significant doctrinal qualification: “Being cognizant of the relevant international legal instruments and established doctrine in the field of cultural heritage and, within the context of the *World Heritage Convention*, of the need to ensure that any reconstruction be undertaken only in exceptional circumstances, while protecting the Outstanding Universal Value of the concerned properties and meeting the test of authenticity and conditions of integrity”¹⁴. This sounds almost like the postwar afterthought of Jan Zachwatowicz, one of the theoreticians and practitioners of the reconstruction of Warsaw after the city’s World War 2 damage. This proves, once again, that the belief is prevalent that rebuilding of ruins may only take place in some particular cases, as an exception to the rule rather than the rule itself.

Highly polemic against the doctrine and theory is the practice expressed in concrete interventions in the substance and surroundings of a historical monument, and in the subsequent (re) construction/(re)building of structures which have fallen into ruin in a historical perspective¹⁵. Such practice oftentimes exceeds the limits determined in the monument restoration doctrine but it stems from the will and expectations of investors – or, in broader terms, of the social opinion. (Fig 3) In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we can identify a thorough change in the attitudes towards ruins in social perception. Should the problem of historical ruin be

¹² Ratajczak T., *Zamki na nowo. Blog poświęcony odbudowie historycznych zamków w Polsce*, <https://zamkinanowodotcom.wordpress.com/o-blogu/>; Chwał P., *Tarnowskie. Nad Dunajcem niczym w dolinie Loary. Odbudowywane zamki magnesem na turystów*, <https://tarnow.naszemiasto.pl/tarnowskie-nad-dunajcem-niczym-w-dolinie-loary-odbudowywane/ar/c15-7887553>.

¹³ Przyłęcki M., *Zabytki w trwałej ruinie: ochrona, konserwacja i ekspozycja*; [program Śląskiego Oddziału Stowarzyszenia Konserwatorów Zabytków], Kotórz Mały (Wydawnictwo Silesia), 2001.

¹⁴ Rekomendacja Warszawska w sprawie odbudowy i rekonstrukcji dziedzictwa kulturowego/ Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage, Manama 2018, p. 2, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1826>.

¹⁵ Janczykowski J., *Karta ochrony historycznych ruin - teoria a praktyka. Przykłady z Małopolski*, Protection of Cultural Heritage No 6, 2018, pp. 87–95.

viewed through the prism of documents, projects and press opinions expressed on a local level, among local-government politicians or regionalist activists, we will gain a picture that differs from the doctrinal one. It will namely appear that the rebuilding or, outright, building of a new solid in lieu of the former historical ruin is expected. A postulate of mass reconstruction of fourteen castles dating back to the time of King Casimir III the Great (Kazimierz III Wielki) in Poland's historical space, which would epitomize the country's historical continuity and power, has even been put forth¹⁶. Ruin tends to be perceived as an incomplete and useless structure, and one that is dubious in aesthetical terms also. Local or territorial governments, terrain hosts, social activists vie with one another to propose useful schemes for ruins, putting forward the reconstruction of the entire cubage, or a part of it, as the purpose of their action. The doctrinal considerations are not taken into account. It can be feared that they are not known or held in esteem at all, in fact. 'Managerial' care about property and possessions is what counts, instead: the purpose being to gain or increase a useable space where one might earn money or hold parties or events, at the very least. The idea of rebuilding or reconstruction evokes positive associations¹⁷. The loss of historical and scientific values is not perceived as an important obstacle. Tension arises between the well-meaning initiator of a reconstruction project and the deeply doubting conservator. How such tensions end is shown by numerous examples of advanced castle reconstructions and fanciful creations across Poland. Monument conservators and the doctrine are usually subjected to the pressure from the strivings to reconstruct¹⁸. (Fig 4)

The trend in question is overwhelming and long-lasting to the extent that it calls for diagnosing from the conservator's standpoint. It would not suffice to state that the doctrine, the Venice Charter, or the local ICOMOS National Committee's countrywide Historical Ruins Charter is all hermetic knowledge – a collection of texts written by experts and for experts only. Summing up the topic in this way would mean to overgeneralise and circumvent the essence of the problem. It is not lack of doctrinal knowledge but a different scale of values than that preferred in the restoration documents that has the decisive say here. Or, perhaps not even a different scale of values but a different manner of reading it. Overall, at the end of the day, it is the public perception of the action, and social acceptance, that matters highly. In terms of Polish laws and regulations, historical monuments are (to be) protected in public interest¹⁹. Public interest is an important command item in the restoration doctrine: it gives grounds for the rigours of protection. It is public interest, and for the sake of public recognition, that national and local/territorial politicians, and regional activists, (ought to) operate. Hence, whenever a historical ruin meets with a negative public response, representatives of a community will

¹⁶ Szarzyński P., *Kaczyńskiemu marzy się odbudowa zamków kazimierzowskich. Po co?* <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/1712454,1,kaczynskiemu-marzy-sie-odbudowa-zamkow-kazimierzowskich-po-co.read>.

¹⁷ Kulak K., *Rozpoczyna się odbudowa zamku w Muszynie*, <https://www.dts24.pl/rozpoczyna-sie-odbudowa-zamku-w-muszynie-zobacz-wizualizacje-zdjecia/>.

¹⁸ *Zamek w Gostyninie*; http://www.studiovr.pl/spacery_wirtualne/Gostynin_Zamek/.

¹⁹ Ustawa z dnia 23lipca 2003r.o ochronie zabytków i opiece nad zabytkami /t. j. Dz. U. z 2020 r. poz. 282, 782, 1378/, art. 3.1.

(or, should) endeavour to eliminate such response; namely, to replace the ruin with a 'real and complete monument' that would assume useful or useable functions of importance to the local community. (Fig. 5) In case that the local community can see no public interest in the maintaining a permanent ruin, the conservator is put in a weak position and has to seek gaps in the imposed doctrinal restrictions.



Fig. 3 Gostynin - a historical reconstruction of the castle on the initiative of the local government, photo by A. Siwek



Fig. 4 Czchów - doubling of the castle's cubature as a result of reconstruction initiated by the local government, photo: A. Siwek



Fig. 5 Bydlin, fragment of the castle ruins - perceived by the landowners as a security threat, photo: A. Siwek

What are the actual reasons behind such social attitudes? The answer to this question may provide a more efficient weaponry in fighting excessive reconstruction that booming indignation or legal barriers. Analysis of journalistic/publicist texts and quotes from the press, and the circumstances of numerous castle reconstruction projects, points to certain trails or prospects of relevance. Poland has been severely affected by the experiences of the First and the Second World War: both cataclysms have left innumerable damages, with a number of historical monuments destroyed. One of the important restoration studies that came out after WW1 was entitled *Ruiny Polski* [The Ruins of Poland]. It was penned by Tadeusz Szydłowski, a historical monuments conservator, who summarised in it the losses in the historic fabric within the Polish lands between 1914 and 1918²⁰. The prevalent tone of this publication unambiguously pointed to the need to set in an order what had been left and add new structures wherever practicable – all in order to remove the traces of the Great War from the Polish cultural landscape. Mr. Szydłowski was not the only one who thought about the ways to remove the wartime damages after the war. Paweł Dettloff described the struggle for, and with, the reconstruction and rebuilding of historical monuments in Poland after WW1²¹. What appeared essential then, came to the fore after WW2 with extremely immense severity. The damage and destruction was historically unprecedented. The capital city of Warsaw destroyed; the cities of the north and west of Poland in ruins; numerous small towns and villages through which war had swept. A number of historical monuments were in ruins, or extremely devastated. To reconstruct and/or to rebuild became the *raison d'état* and part of national interest; also, a measure of the State's and its society's post-war success. Rebuilding/reconstruction/restoration gained support in the theoretical thought of the aforementioned Jan Zachwatowicz and a number of other conservators or restorers active at the time²². In the state propaganda language of the time, rebuilding/reconstruction/restoration became associated with the success of the State. It was established as a measure of success and efficiency of the 'people's' (i.e. communist) country that permanently needed to prove its superiority over the countries and nations of other times and systems²³. (photo 6) This actual need to reinstate the living conditions, to regain monuments which had been lost for a rather short time, and to reconstruct the cultural landscape, yielded, in combination with the endeavours of the state propaganda, strong and positive associations – all the more that the rebuilding/reconstruction/restoration was a long-lasting process. It did not end in a one-off action after the war came to an end. Suffice it to mention that the Royal Castle in Warsaw was rebuilt, as part of a 'national act' project, in as late as 1971 to 1988²⁴.

²⁰ Szydłowski T., *Ruiny Polski*, Krakow 1919.

²¹ Dettloff P., *Odbudowa i restauracja zabytków architektury w Polsce 1918-1939. Teoria i praktyka*, Krakow 2006.

²² Zachwatowicz J., *Program i zasady konserwacji zabytków*, Biuletyn Historii Sztuki i Kultury, VIII, 1946, no 1-6.

²³ Sigalin J., *Warszawa 1944-1980. Z archiwum architekta*, Warsaw 1986; Barański M., *Odbudowane Stare Miasto i zabytki Warszawy w ocenie zagranicznych konserwatorów*, *Wiadomości Konserwatorskie* 13/2003, pp. 55 – 61.

²⁴ Rottermund A., *Zamek Królewski w Warszawie*, Warsaw 2002.



Fig. 6 Warsaw, Old Town - an example of reconstruction of exceptional social and historical significance, photo by A. Siwek

It can thus be stated that the entire post-war period was one of affirmation and praise of the Rebuilding/Reconstruction/Restoration project. There was no room at the time to subtly semantically differentiate between ‘historical ruin’ and ‘wartime ruin’. Reconstruction or restoration was the state’s driving force. Monuments or structures remaining in ruin put the area’s hosts in a bad light, causing shame to them²⁵. After the year 1989, in the period referred to as transition, the role of the state as the initiator of restoration/conservation projects temporarily weakened. The initiative was taken over, in a number of cases, by the new – now, private – proprietors of historical areas, buildings and edifices. Negative attitude towards ruins became combined with commercial and use-oriented needs in respect of individual buildings/structures.

Resulting from such historical processes, the difference between ‘modern ruin’ – a building or structure destroyed in the dramatic circumstances of a war or disaster – and ‘historical ruin’ which has lasted in such a form for centuries – blurred in the public awareness. The Rebuild/Restore/Reconstruct slogan has taken root as a positive and creative idea. It can be said that the monument restoration doctrine and the awareness of the value of historical ruin has lost, in terms of broad public opinion, to the pressing need and the propaganda vision of the world. Hence the positive association with ‘building of historical monuments’, and a weak position

²⁵ Friedrich J., *Odbudowa Głównego Miasta w Gdańsku w latach 1945-1960*, Gdansk 2015.

of the Ruskinian idea of protecting ruins as picturesque works of history immersed in the landscape and the laws of nature.

Becoming aware of the reasons behind the state-of-affairs is a first step in finding the way to rectify the situation. In the event that actions, whether erroneous or contrary to the doctrine, ensue to a significant extent from public consent and expectations, taking up the fight in the sphere of information, education, and public or social emotion, appears purposeful. There is a purpose behind restoring the social skill of perceiving the beauty of historical ruins as signs in the landscape. It is expedient to teach the historical values of historical ruin viewed as a document. And, there is a purpose in educating the community in terms of to what extent ruins, without a useful function of their own, may be useful or useable anyway – as a regional attraction, a imagination-inspiring magnet attracting tourists²⁶. (Fig. 7) Therefore, protection of historical ruins should cease being the object of cabinet fighting between restoration/conservation officials, or a matter of industry periodicals discussion; instead, it ought to become part of public information, of what is debated in mass media. It should be made an object of education and popularisation. A ‘public bank of good conservation/restoration practices’ would certainly be useful²⁷.



Fig. 7 Czorsztyn - a ruin in the landscape, a tourist attraction invariably since the 19th century, photo by A. Siwek

²⁶ *Guidelines for elaboration of plans of management, use and protection of historic ruins*, Compiled by: Szmygin B., Fortuna-Marek A., Siwek A., Lublin 2020, pp. 28 – 30.

²⁷ Szmygin B. (ed.), *Transnational model form of socially useful use of historic ruins : Best practices handbook*, Lublin 2020, pp. 7 – 9.

A reversal of the negative perception of ruins among local communities, local governments, and investors would be the only thinkable means of rejecting and removing the existing adverse reconstruction trends. This is one of the situations where efficient protection of a specified type of historical building or edifice (historical ruin, in this particular case) calls for taking action that exceeds the classical repertoire of restorer's/conservator's actions. It requires addressing the community, the stakeholders, the local leaders. It calls for taking action in the field of social communication. It requires broadening the idea of historical monument protection into social/public awareness. Limiting oneself to applying the law in protecting the historical-monument matter as appropriate with the monument protection system still binding and prevalent in Poland has proved insufficient. To efficiently implement the doctrinal indication in the restoration/conservation pragmatics, crossing the discipline's traditional framework appears necessary. Highly recommendable is a re-'socialisation' of historical monument protection, particularly when it comes to comprehending the purpose of action and the related public interest²⁸. This poses a considerable challenge to experts in cultural goods protection: not only should they demonstrate an in-depth recognition of restoration/conservation doctrines and understanding of the essence of historical monuments but also render themselves acquainted with information, educational, and negotiation techniques – in order to contribute to the decisions regarding the lot of historical monuments, historical ruins in particular.

²⁸ Wijesuriya G., Thompson J., Young Ch., *Managing Cultural World Heritage*, Paris 2013, pp. 13 – 30.

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