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Research paper

Adaptation and redevelopment of the Warszawa Wileńska railway station into a commercial centre with a covered terminal

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Abstract: Contemporary cities are facing the challenge of integrating public spaces, transport systems, and commercial functions, which is reflected in the revitalization processes of historic buildings. In the transformation of urban spaces, it is essential to preserve cultural heritage while respecting the historical value of architectural monuments and adapting them to contemporary needs and the principles of sustainable development. These include improving energy efficiency, employing renewable energy sources, and implementing circular economy practices. This article presents selected issues related to the comprehensive redevelopment and revitalization of the Warszawa Wileńska Railway Station – a historic facility originally constructed in 1862 as the Petersburg Station. The project, carried out under challenging conditions involving continuous passenger traffic, dense urban development, and proximity to historic tenement buildings, required the development of non-standard design, logistical, and fire safety procedures. Moreover, the construction process necessitated close cooperation with Polish State Railways (PKP) and numerous other institutions. This investment serves as an example of an innovative approach to the revitalization and integration of railway infrastructure with a multifunctional and commercially oriented shopping complex, becoming a symbol of modern revitalization efforts.

Keywords: urban revitalization, redevelopment, commercial centre, railway station, public-private partnership, project management

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1. Introduction

The revitalisation of historic buildings constitutes a key element in the preservation of cultural heritage and social identity. This process often requires balancing the authenticity of architectural structures with the need to adapt them to contemporary functional and technological demands. The revitalisation of heritage buildings typically involves the restoration of damaged structures or entire urban districts [1]. However, within the framework of sustainable development, it also encompasses a range of measures aimed at minimising environmental impact. The Warszawa Wileńska railway station, located in the Praga-Północ district, possesses significant historical and functional characteristics. It was constructed in 1863 as the terminal station of the Warsaw–Petersburg Railway. As a strategic facility, it served as a crucial link connecting the Kingdom of Poland with the Russian Empire. The original location of the station was determined by its role as a border terminal – playing a vital role in both passenger and freight transport. During the period of partition, the station was situated within the area known as "Russian Warsaw". After Poland regained independence in 1918, the function of the station evolved it ceased to operate as a customs and border checkpoint but continued to serve eastern routes, particularly to Białystok, Vilnius, Grodno, and Saint Petersburg. Figure 1 presents an archival photograph of the Warszawa Wileńska railway station building, most likely taken during the interwar period.

Fig. 1. The Original Structure of the Warszawa Wileńska Railway Terminal [6]

During World War II, the facility was partially destroyed, and its operations were significantly limited. Over the following decades, the station played a key role in servicing both passenger and freight traffic in the eastern part of Warsaw as well as in regions located along the east – west axis. Figure 2 presents the entrance to the former building of the Warszawa Wileńska railway station in Warsaw, prior to its modernisation and redevelopment in the early 2000s.

In the 1960s, due to extensive post-war damage, a new station building was constructed. It was characterised by limited functionality and an architectural style typical of the socialist modernism of the Polish People's Republic era, lacking aesthetic value. Throughout the 1970s

Fig. 2. The original entrance of the Warszawa Wileńska railway terminal in Warsaw, with its characteristic stone exterior still intact [7]

and 1980s, the technical condition of the infrastructure steadily deteriorated this applied both to the station building itself and to the adjacent railway tracks. Despite its poor technical condition [2–5], the station, located in close proximity to the main transportation hub of Warsaw's right-bank district, continued to serve an important role as a transfer point for residents of the Praga district and nearby localities.

By maintaining a high volume of passenger traffic, the facility clearly demonstrated the urgent need for comprehensive modernisation and adaptation [8–11] to meet the contemporary demands of a large and rapidly developing city. Figure 3 shows an archival photograph of the platforms of the Warszawa Wileńska railway station from the 1980s.

Fig. 3. The platforms of the Warszawa Wileńska railway station in the 1980s [12]

In the following years, the station's ticket offices, waiting areas, and buffet were relocated to a newly constructed building of similarly low standard, situated on the Białostocka Street side of the site. This facility, remaining largely unchanged in form, continued to operate until the development of the investment project discussed in this article.

2. Origins of the revitalisation project

The initiative to redevelop the Warszawa Wileńska railway station emerged in the early 21st century, when the authorities of Warsaw recognised the need to revitalise the eastern part of the city, particularly the Praga-Północ district. The planned extension of the second metro line rendered the area around Wileński Square a site of strategic urban importance. A detailed assessment [13, 14] of the existing station infrastructure revealed that it was inefficient, technologically outdated, and failed to meet contemporary passenger service standards.

Following public consultations, the municipal authorities of Warsaw, in cooperation with PKP S.A. and private partners, decided to implement the revitalisation project in the form of a public-private partnership (PPP). A consortium of companies – Radex S.A. and Warbud S.A. – constructed a retail and service centre integrated with the PKP Warszawa Wileńska railway station. The investors in the project were European Retail Enterprises Group and Carrefour Polska Sp. z o.o., which signed appropriate land lease agreements with PKP Polskie Linie Kolejowe S.A., the manager of the national railway network. This arrangement enabled the reconstruction of the station area without relying solely on public funding [15–17]. A sample visualisation of the Warszawa Wileńska Shopping Centre is presented in Figure 4.

Fig. 4. Visualisation of the Warszawa Wileńska Shopping Centre [proprietary materials of RADEX Corporation]

The implementation of the investment was in accordance with the General Spatial Development Plan of the Capital City of Warsaw, approved by Resolution XXXV.199/92 on Spatial Development dated 27 September 1992. The concept of integrating railway station functions with commercial and service-oriented functions was aligned with international trends in the design of transport spaces as multifunctional hubs, aimed at enhancing user comfort while generating economic value. A key priority was the full integration of transportation infrastructure – rail, bus, tram, and metro – with a modern commercial structure. The

development process of the new investment involved not only architects and investors, but also sociologists, designers, and representatives of civil society organisations. The most important needs of local residents were identified [18], along with potential spatial challenges. The architects from AMC Studio prioritised clarity, functionality, and aesthetics. The design incorporated extensive glazed surfaces to illuminate the interiors with natural light and to provide visual lightness to the structure. The concept included the construction of a three-storey shopping mall with direct access to the railway terminal hall and underground metro platforms. A key architectural element was the roofing of the tracks and platforms, along with the design of shared public spaces, such as plazas, arcades, and pedestrian walkways.

The project also included designated rest areas for families with children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities, as well as information and dining zones for passengers and customers of the shopping centre. The architecture of the building was intended to symbolically connect the past with the future – its contemporary form, enriched with industrial elements, was designed to reflect the historical character of the Praga district.

3. Progress of revitalisation works within the investment project

The primary objective of the revitalisation of the railway station facility was the modernisation of the railway infrastructure namely, the upgrading of platforms, tracks, and technical facilities to improve passenger service and increase the capacity of the railway line leading to Wołomin and further toward Tłuszcz. Additionally, the integration of transport and commercial functions was of key importance, resulting in the creation of a "station-mall" type facility. The project also aimed to enhance the urban environment – through a modern architectural form, glazed façades, and comfortable interiors – designed to attract residents and improve the image of an area that had previously suffered from urban neglect. The revitalisation plan included improvements to public space quality through the reorganisation of transport layouts, the introduction of urban greenery, lighting systems, and elements of small-scale architecture.

In the project preparation phase, urban and functional analyses were carried out, project documentation was developed, and the necessary administrative permits were obtained. The outdated station building from the 1960s – failing to meet any modern functional or aesthetic standards – was demolished. Construction works began in 1998. The first step involved the demolition of the old station building while maintaining the operational continuity of the railway station. Earthworks for the foundations of the new building were then undertaken, along with the preparation of underground infrastructure for the future metro tunnel and car park. One of the major challenges was coordinating construction with the development of the metro station, which required precise scheduling of operations [19, 20] and close cooperation with the contractor responsible for the second metro line. The construction of the shopping mall progressed in parallel with the station infrastructure. Modern prefabrication technologies were applied, along with environmentally friendly solutions, such as energy-saving systems, ventilation, and rainwater retention installations.

During the construction phase, residents of Białostocka Street expressed concerns that the air conditioning systems of the shopping centre under development might lead to noticeable acoustic deterioration. In response, a series of meetings were held between the investor's representatives and district authorities. A consensus was reached whereby the investor agreed to finance the replacement of windows with soundproof ones in the residential building located adjacent to the delivery ramp and in the building directly opposite. Following the completion of the facility, noise control measurements were conducted at heights of 1.5 m, 6 m, and 16 m for daytime levels, and at 1.5 m, 16 m, and 22 m for nighttime levels. The results confirmed that the permissible noise thresholds defined by the 1998 regulation – 60 dB during the day and 50 dB at night – were not exceeded in the vicinity of the residential buildings. Currently, no complaints from residents have been reported. The investment was completed in 2002, and the facility was opened to the public. The official inauguration of the Galeria Wileńska shopping centre and the new railway station took place with the participation of city officials, representatives of PKP (Polish State Railways), and residents of Warsaw (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5. The renovated Warszawa Wileńska station building, Praga-Północ district, viewed from the east side of the railway tracks [proprietary materials of RADEX Corporation]

As a result of the revitalisation works, a modern, multi-level transport and commercial complex – the first of its kind in Poland – was constructed on the site of the former railway station. The new facility comprises a station hall equipped with modern ticket counters, passenger information services, and waiting areas; the Galeria Wileńska shopping centre, which includes office space and retail-service units; as well as technical infrastructure and a three-level underground car park (Fig. 6).

The investment project incorporated architectural solutions aligned with the principles of transparency and accessibility. These included glazed façades, an open spatial layout, modern finishing materials, and vertical transportation systems (elevators and escalators) ensuring full accessibility for persons with disabilities. The railway platforms and tracks were also modernised, equipped with new canopies, benches, signage, and lighting. Additionally, advanced visual and auditory passenger information systems were installed. The entire facility was prepared for integration with the future metro infrastructure, which would be constructed several years later.

Fig. 6. View of the Galeria Wileńska commercial complex and Warszawa Wileńska railway station from the Targowa Street side [proprietary materials of RADEX Corporation]

A critical aspect of the project that required the development of innovative procedures was the fire safety certification process for each stage of construction. Every decision related to fire protection had to be granted an exemption from applicable regulations by the Provincial Fire Chief. All fire safety solutions applied in the building were subject to evaluation by the Building Research Institute – Fire Testing Department. The construction was carried out within a densely built-up urban area, surrounded by historic residential tenement houses, which were structurally secured and continuously monitored throughout the entire construction period. Cooperation with PKP and its numerous subsidiaries required exceptional coordination of all project components.

The main challenge during the construction of the Warszawa Wileńska Retail and Service Centre was that the "technical conditions for buildings and their location" regulations did not foresee the implementation of such integrated facilities in Poland. Trains entered directly into the shopping centre building, and since the station was a terminal one, the tracks ended with buffer stops. It was therefore necessary to ensure the safety of both the commercial centre and the railway station building (Fig. 7).

The initiated investment was developmental in nature and, in many respects, represented an innovative project due to the following factors:

– It was carried out on land owned and managed by Polish State Railways (PKP) and the State Treasury;
– The facility was developed without direct municipal budget funding. The City of Warsaw participated in the project through the reconstruction of streets and the modernisation of electrical, water supply, and sewage infrastructure;

Fig. 7. Interior view of the roofed platform hall at Warszawa Wileńska station [proprietary materials of RADEX Corporation]

– The station continued to operate throughout construction, maintaining service for approximately 10,000 daily passengers at the Warszawa Wileńska terminal;
– The project site, located on the boundary of two administrative districts (Praga-Północ and Śródmieście), required coordination and approvals at the level of the Mayor of Warsaw and municipal infrastructure management companies;
– The scope of work included modernisation of the station infrastructure while preserving uninterrupted railway operations;
– The investment was carried out adjacent to a residential area. Due to the increased vehicular traffic related to construction logistics, local residents raised objections. This necessitated negotiations with the local community concerning the redesign of access roads, the provision of safe pedestrian routes to nearby schools, the allocation of parking spaces for residents, and the implementation of acoustic protection measures. As a result of these consultations, noise barriers were installed at delivery entrances and soundproof windows were fitted in neighbouring residential buildings;
– The investors and PKP adopted a tight implementation schedule dictated by passenger service requirements, the business plan, and bank agreements, with adherence to the timeline being a condition for the final remuneration of the Radex S.A. and Warbud S.A. consortium. An additional challenge was the need to prepare the full set of project documentation in both Polish and French;
– The project covered an area of 3.6 hectares, including 0.87 hectares of PKP-owned land;
– As a result of the investment, a six-storey multifunctional complex was developed, comprising over 40,000 m^2 of retail and service space and 14,100 m^2 of office space – together forming the primary commercial hub of right-bank districts of Warsaw.

Furthermore, the successful completion of the Retail and Service Centre together with the revitalisation of the Wileńska Railway Station – while maintaining uninterrupted passenger rail traffic – was made possible by several key factors, including:

– exemplary partnership-based cooperation among all stakeholders involved in the project,
– the development of a detailed construction technology and work organisation plan, characterised by flexibility, continuous verification, and iterative improvements,

– the transfer, three months prior to the planned commissioning date, of full construction coordination responsibilities to Korporacja Radex S.A. by BEG Ingénierie Polska, including the management of all contractors and subcontractors – both domestic and international.

Toward the final stages of construction, the project team encountered a significant technical challenge. The installation of large air-handling and climate-control units, each weighing approximately 2–3 tonnes, was still pending. All tower cranes had already been dismantled in accordance with the roofing schedule, as they had been located within the building footprint. The solution involved the use of a helicopter lift – a technically demanding and costly, yet highly effective and time-efficient method. The HVAC units were successively hoisted from a specially designated staging area and precisely positioned on the rooftop by helicopter. This operation marked the first documented use of helicopter-assisted installation of heavy equipment in the central area of Warsaw.

Following the completion of all construction works, some architects and designers, in their multi-criteria evaluation of the investment [21–24], regrettably highlighted the absence of preserved historical elements from the former station, which could have been integrated into the new architectural form. The project was also criticised for the excessive commercialisation of public space and the dominance of retail functions over the transport function.

Concerns were raised regarding the potential increase in car traffic and the risk of gentrification in the surrounding area. Some local residents expressed dissatisfaction with the intensity of the new development and the limited influence of the local community on the final shape of the investment.

Nonetheless, from today's perspective [25], the project is generally assessed as both an urban and functional success. As a result, the city gained a new, fully functional railway station and a modern shopping centre, while this part of the city acquired a contemporary image, replacing a degraded railway zone characterised by dilapidated and obsolete infrastructure.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The revitalisation of the Warszawa Wileńska railway station in 2000 constituted a significant component of the broader process of transforming this part of Praga-Północ into a modern and functional urban space. As part of the investment, the existing railway station was redeveloped and integrated with the newly constructed Warszawa Wileńska shopping centre.

The revitalisation of the Warszawa Wileńska railway station has undoubtedly contributed to increasing the investment and residential attractiveness of the district, leading to further revitalisation projects, the restoration of historic tenement buildings, the expansion of commercial and service infrastructure, the development of educational and cultural institutions, and the overall improvement in residents' quality of life. Moreover, following the opening of the second metro line in 2015, Wileńska Station has served approximately 10,000 daily commuters travelling to work from towns such as Małkinia, Tłuszcz, Wołomin, and Wyszków, establishing itself as one of the key multimodal transport hubs in Warsaw.

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Adaptacja i przebudowa dworca kolejowego Warszawa – Wileńska w centrum handlowe wraz z zadaszonym dworcem

Słowa kluczowe: centrum handlowe, dworzec kolejowy, partnerstwo publiczno-prywatne, przebudowa, rewitalizacja, zarządzanie projektem

Streszczenie:

Rewitalizacja obiektów zabytkowych jest kluczowym elementem ochrony dziedzictwa kulturowego i tożsamości społecznej. Proces ten niejednokrotnie wymaga balansowania pomiędzy zachowaniem autentyczności budynków a dostosowaniem ich do współczesnych potrzeb. Rewitalizacja zabytków to odbudowa zniszczonych budynków lub dzielnic miasta. Natomiast w kontekście zrównoważonego rozwoju, obejmuje szereg działań mających na celu minimalizację wpływu na środowisko, a w tym poprawę efektywności energetycznej i zastosowanie odnawialnych źródełenergii oraz implementacje zasad gospodarki o obiegu zamkniętym. W artykule zaprezentowano wybrane zagadnienia odnoszące się do kompleksowej przebudowy i rewitalizacji Dworca Warszawa Wileńska – obiektu historycznego, pierwotnie wzniesionego w 1862 roku jako Dworzec Petersburski. Po przeprowadzeniu szczegółowych konsultacji społecznych, władze samorządowe Warszawy, wspólnie z PKP SA i prywatnymi partnerami, podjęli decyzję o realizacji projektu rewitalizacji dworca Warszawa Wileńska w formule partnerstwa publiczno-prywatnego (PPP). Konsorcjum firm: Radex SA i Warbud S.A. zbudowały Centrum Handlowo Usługowe zintegrowane z Dworcem PKP Warszawa Wileńska. Inwestorami projektu były firmy Grupy European Retail Enterprices oraz Carrefour Polska Sp. z o.o. które podpisały stosowne umowy dzierżawy terenu z PKP Polskie Linie Kolejowe S.A. – zarządcą narodowej sieci kolejowej. Umożliwiło to przebudowę przestrzeni dworcowej bez konieczności finansowania inwestycji wyłącznie ze środków publicznych. Sprecyzowano najważniejsze potrzeby mieszkańców oraz zidentyfikowano potencjalne problemy przestrzenne. Architekci z biura AMC postawili na przejrzystość, funkcjonalność i estetykę. Prace budowlane rozpoczęto w 1998r. Pierwszym krokiem była rozbiórka starego budynku dworcowego, przy jednoczesnym utrzymaniu funkcjonowania stacji kolejowej. Następnie wykonano prace ziemne pod fundamenty nowego budynku oraz przygotowano infrastrukturę podziemną dla przyszłego tunelu metra i parkingu. Szczególnym wyzwaniem była koordynacja prac z budową stacji metra, co wymagało precyzyjnego harmonogramowania działań i ścisłej współpracy z wykonawcą II linii metra. Konstrukcja galerii handlowej wznosiła się równolegle z budową części dworcowej. Zastosowano nowoczesne technologie prefabrykacji oraz rozwiązania przyjazne środowisku – m.in. systemy oszczędzania energii, wentylacji i retencji wody opadowej. Projekt ten, realizowany w trudnych warunkach ciągłego ruchu pasażerskiego, zwartej zabudowy miejskiej oraz wśród zabytkowych kamienic, wymagał opracowania niestandardowych procedur projektowych, logistycznych i przeciwpożarowych. Ponadto, budowa obiektu wymagała ścisłej współpracy z PKP oraz wieloma instytucjami. W 2002 roku inwestycja została ukończona, a obiekt oddano do użytku publicznego. Kluczowym aspektem wymagającym opracowania nowatorskich

procedur stały się odbiory pożarowe kolejnych etapów inwestycji. Każda decyzja dotycząca ochrony przeciwpożarowej wymagała udzielenia przez Wojewódzkiego Komendanta Straży Pożarnej odstępstwa do obowiązujących norm, a wszystkie rozwiązania związane z ochroną pożarową budynku podlegały badaniu przez Instytut Techniki Budowlanej – Zakład Badań Ogniowych. Budowa była realizowana w gęstej zabudowie miejskiej, wśród zabytkowych kamienic mieszkalnych, które zostały zabezpieczone przed uszkodzeniem, a także były monitorowane przez cały okres budowy. Współpraca z PKP i jej wieloma spółkami wymagała doskonałej koordynacji całej inwestycji. Rewitalizacja dworca kolejowego Warszawa Wileńska w 2000 roku stanowiła istotny element szerszego procesu przekształcania tej części Pragi-Północ w nowoczesną i funkcjonalną przestrzeń miejską. Inwestycja ta, stanowi niewątpliwie przykład nowatorskiego podejścia do rewitalizacji i integracji infrastruktury kolejowej z obiektem handlowym o charakterze wielofunkcyjnym i komercyjnym, stając się symbolem nowoczesnej rewitalizacji.

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