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Autor(en): **Pajak, Zbigniew / Slusarek, Jan / Kubica, Jan**

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Preservation of the State Oswiecim-Brzezinka Museum

Zbigniew PAJAK

Assistant Professor
Silesian Univ. of Techn.
Gliwice, Poland

Jan SLUSAREK

Assistant Professor
Silesian Univ. of Techn.
Gliwice, Poland

Jan KUBICA

Assistant Professor
Silesian Univ. of Techn.
Gliwice, Poland

Zbigniew Pajak, born 1950, received his civil engineering degree from the Silesian Univ. of Technology in 1973, PhD in 1981.

Jan Slusarek, born 1954, received his civil engineering degree from the Silesian Univ. of Technology in 1977, PhD in 1996.

Jan Kubica, born 1961, received his civil engineering degree from the Silesian Univ. of Technology in 1985. PhD in 1996.

Summary

There are various buildings and engineering structures on the site of the former Nazi biggest concentration camp Oswiecim-Brzezinka (Auschwitz-Birkenau). These structures gradually undergo deterioration and as far as technology is concerned they are being worn out as a result of use, exploitation, natural environment influence and physic - chemical processes which take place inside materials. The article presents actions which are being conducted in order to maintain the museum structures in possibly good technical condition.

1. Characteristics of structures, their technical condition, causes of deterioration and damage

Brzezinka - on 175 ha of Brzezinka Museum 500 structures are situated. All structures were built during the war and had temporary character. Predominant part of all the structures is wooden and brick. Fig.1 shows cross section of a habitable building made by timber and brick.

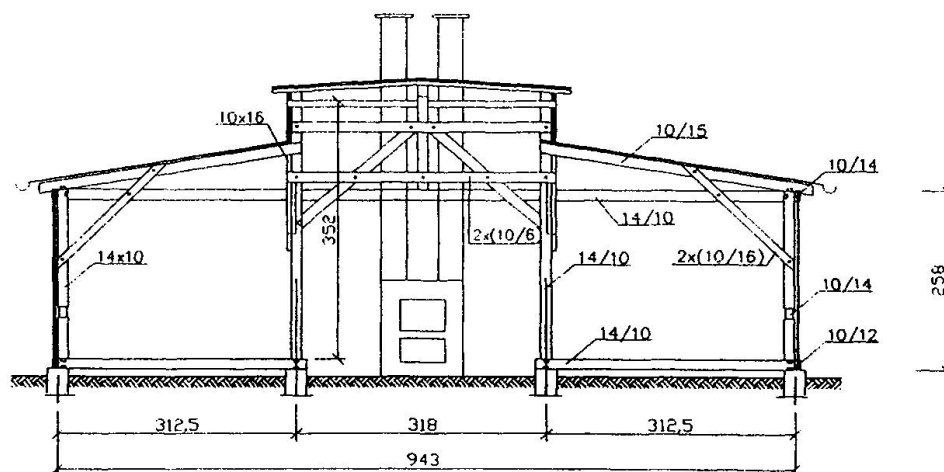


Fig.1 The cross section of a habitable timber building

The technical condition of the Museum buildings and structures in Brzezinka is differentiated. Most of them are in bad shape. Technically safe and in satisfactory condition are only a few of them, well maintained, repaired and renovated in recent years. They are: the Death Gate, the watchtowers, some wooden barracks. Parts of structures like chimneys, remnants of barracks, pieces of fences, engineering structures are in disastrous condition and irreversible destruction.

The basic cause of most observed damages and deterioration of structures situated in the museum area at Brzezinka is intense environment influence, i.e. precipitation, temperature and humidity changes, frost, insolation, and wind which cause erosion of materials and structures of which they are made as well as biological erosion of wooden elements, walls, mortars and concrete.

Oswiecim - The Museum in Oswiecim covers the area of about 15 ha where over 60 structures are situated. They are mainly two storey buildings without cellars which are made of brick with reinforced concrete floors and also timber or concrete loft floors. Buildings were built in 1918 and they were initially designed to serve as caserns. Some of them were built and rebuilt (the first floor was added) during the second world war.

The buildings in Oswiecim Museum are in far better technical condition than those in Brzezinka. Most of them undergo current repairs, are modernised and are relatively well maintained. However, in recent years also in these buildings one can notice growing damages, flabs and construction defects, particularly in less durable elements like roof coverings, wooden constructions, plasters, floors, joinery, etc.

2. Repair and modernisation works

In order to maintain the museum structure, repairs and modernisation, conservatory and protective works are being conducted. In recent years the following works have been accomplished on the site of Oswiecim Museum:

- Capital repairs of most roofs.
- A program of heating the museum consisting in making a heat distribution networks both inner and outer. At the same time the loft ceiling insulation was carried out, mainly with the use of mineral wool which was placed among wooden ceiling beams or in case of ceramic floors it was placed under wooden loft floors.
- Providing some of the buildings with air conditioning system. Air conditioning was introduced in some museum blocks which are to house archives and remembrances collections.
- Conservation of face brick façades by means of cleaning, filling, jointing and covering with transparent silicon hydrophobic preparations.

Part of the structures is being reproduced and reconstructed on the basis of archival documents or listing of similar ones still existing - it concerns for example wooden towers and guard platforms, some of wooden barracks and others.

It is separate issue to maintain the structures situated at Brzezinka on the area of 175 ha. Preservation of all of the structures there was not possible in the past and it will probably be not possible in the future. It should be decided which of them are to be maintained and which should be catalogued and liquidated.