

Permanent Impermanence

Concepts for a city in transition

Permanent Impermanence

The city constantly changes. It adapts to new times, to new wishes and new demands. Buildings are being abandoned, demolished, rebuilt, renovated or adapted.

In general, politicians, planners, developers and architects are mainly focused on the end result and seem less interested in the process of transformation.

Moreover, urban design / development is mainly presented in text and pictures that usually present a simplified view of reality:

- the actual and unwanted situation
- the plan with the desired situation
- the new situation.

Of course, in reality there is an extensive period of time between the present and the future. This is the period of transition, the interim.

The interim is the time during which land or buildings rest empty, awaiting a new designation. In most cases this temporary period between what was and what will be, is regarded as a loss: There is no revenue of the land or the building, offices stay empty and abandoned houses are boarded up and fenced in. Especially in times of economic setback, this occurs on many locations and can last many years.

During this period these buildings and areas can temporarily be used for another function. But the refunctioning of existing real estate for example, has proven to be quite difficult. Apart from regulations, different functions have differed demands. Shops are not easily adapted to houses nor are offices to schools. Especially if you bear in mind that this refunctioning is only temporary.

Architecture and the art of building are quite literally cast in concrete what makes that our cities are planned and built in a static way. With a focus on new development and the so much desired end result.

We want to explore the idea that nothing is permanent and that the transition is more interesting than the end result. That in a world where developments are alternating increasingly faster, everything is always temporary.

This calls for initiatives that exploit the full potential of it, economically as well as socially. The awareness of a **Permanent Impermanence** offers new possibilities and the creative use of the interim can enrich our cities. Design should be flexible to any new given situation and, instead of hindering it, accommodate it.

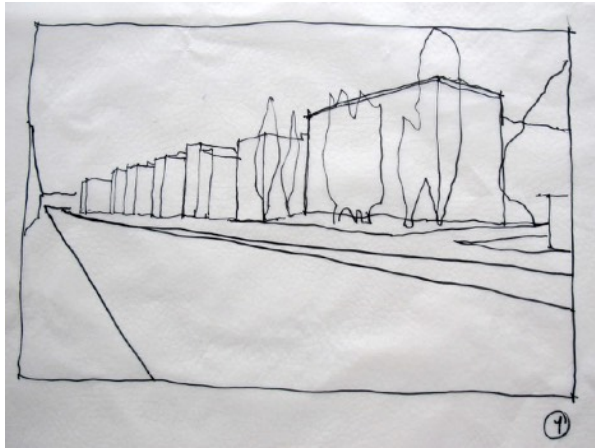
Knowing and admiring Łódź as a city with a rich and at the same time troubled history, we expand the discussions over the borders of our own country. Isn't it more interesting to develop ideas and concepts for a city where the consequences of the interim, this Permanent Impermanence, are visible at a much larger scale?

A selection of these ideas and concepts are presented in this document.

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1: Restoring the plinth

On the northern part of al. Kościuszki, the front of a typical housing block has been demolished to widen the street. This also took away the street plinth, leaving the sides of the courtyard exposed as blind walls (in red on the picture).



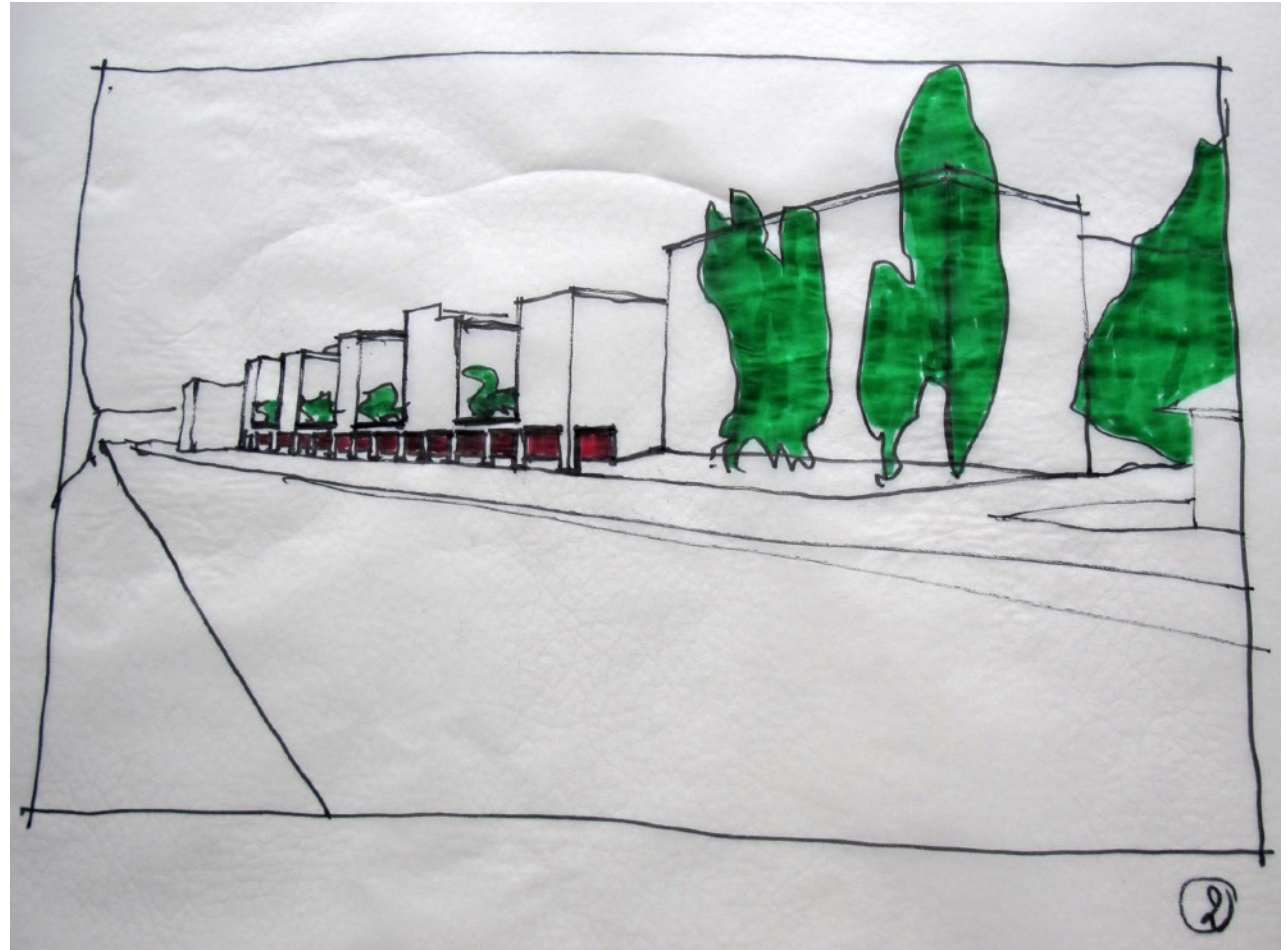
The former courtyard is not in use; the houses are abandoned, awaiting demolition. The overall image it provides is unpleasant and desolate.



Passages through the empty buildings and simple steel archways between the blocks restore the visual plinth.



Pedestrians enjoy an architectural route through the old buildings and underneath the archways that (also visually) close the courtyards. On top of the archways plants and trees add green to the "aleja" and divert the attraction from the buildings.



2: Chinatown on the move

In the 1990's Asian entrepreneurs started small take-away restaurants in the courtyard of an old factory on Piotrkowska. They were selling from kiosks with a small kitchen, a counter and a few tables.



Now, a real estate agency has bought the premises for redevelopment, a project called *Off Piotrkowska*, and recently the Asian restaurants have been closed down and demolished.



This Chinatown of Łódź was popular among many people and it gave the abandoned area in the heart of the center a new function. It filled the gap that was left after the closure of the factory and attracted a lot of visitors. Therefore it is a good example of successful use of the interim.

On the map of the city center many empty areas are marked as "car park" (in red on the picture), although most of them were never intended for this function. It is merely leftover, undefined "junk space" that could benefit from better use of the interim.



Chinatown has proved to be a successful concept. It can be used to focus the attention on areas that are now only left for car parking. A popular space becomes a *place*. The visitors add value to it and being there becomes an experience. Places have a positive effect on their surroundings and attract other entrepreneurs and investors. The places act as bridgeheads for new local development.

In the concept "Chinatown on the move", the city and entrepreneurs sign an agreement on impermanence. Łódź selects areas that need attention and provides the necessary infrastructure (water, electricity, sewage); the entrepreneurs agree to move their kiosks every once in a while.

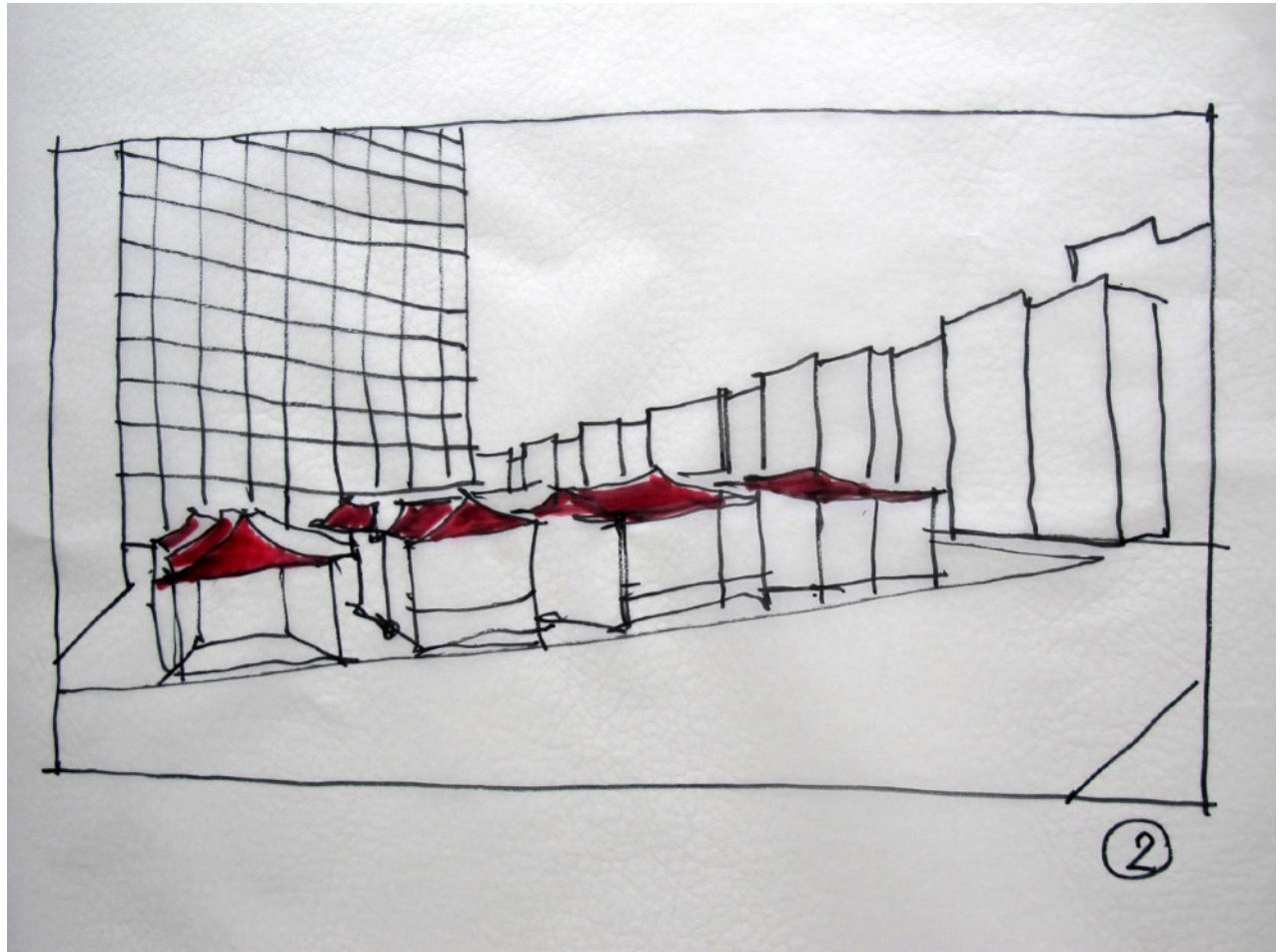
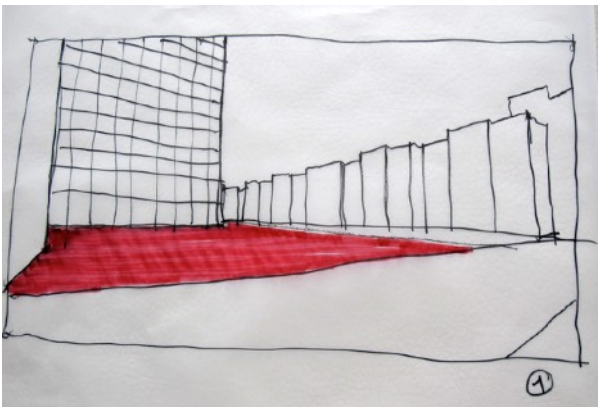
Almost like a market or a circus, Chinatown moves along the city center, from empty space to empty space. Not only Asian restaurants could help in this concept. Art- or book markets and specialized shops or craftsmen can participate as well. Like a medieval city with specialized districts and streets, but with one significant exception: it is mobile and flexible by design.





For this example we have chosen the corner of Piotrkowska and Zamenhofa. Here, mostly unused kiosks block the square behind it instead of using it.

When used well, squares are lively meeting points for the inhabitants of the city, adding quality to the urban fabric.





3. Building on blind walls

The real development of the city of Łódź (the "nowe miasto") started along Piotrkowska. Elongated plots of land were given out to farmers and craftsmen who build simple houses on them and worked the land. During time these long plots were built with very deep housing blocks with inner courtyards. Side to side, back to back. Because of several reasons parts of these blocks have been demolished, leaving so called "blind walls".



In the center alone hundreds of these walls can be found. Some of them are used to create artwork, but most are neglected or used to place advertisements. And in a few cases the occupiers have (illegally) placed windows to gain more light and air.

We suggest making use of these blind walls by giving them a new (and possibly temporary) function. To support a diversity of functions a simple steel self-supporting scaffold is placed in front of

the wall. Any new function will simply be bolted into the scaffold, making it flexible for adjustments or easy removal.

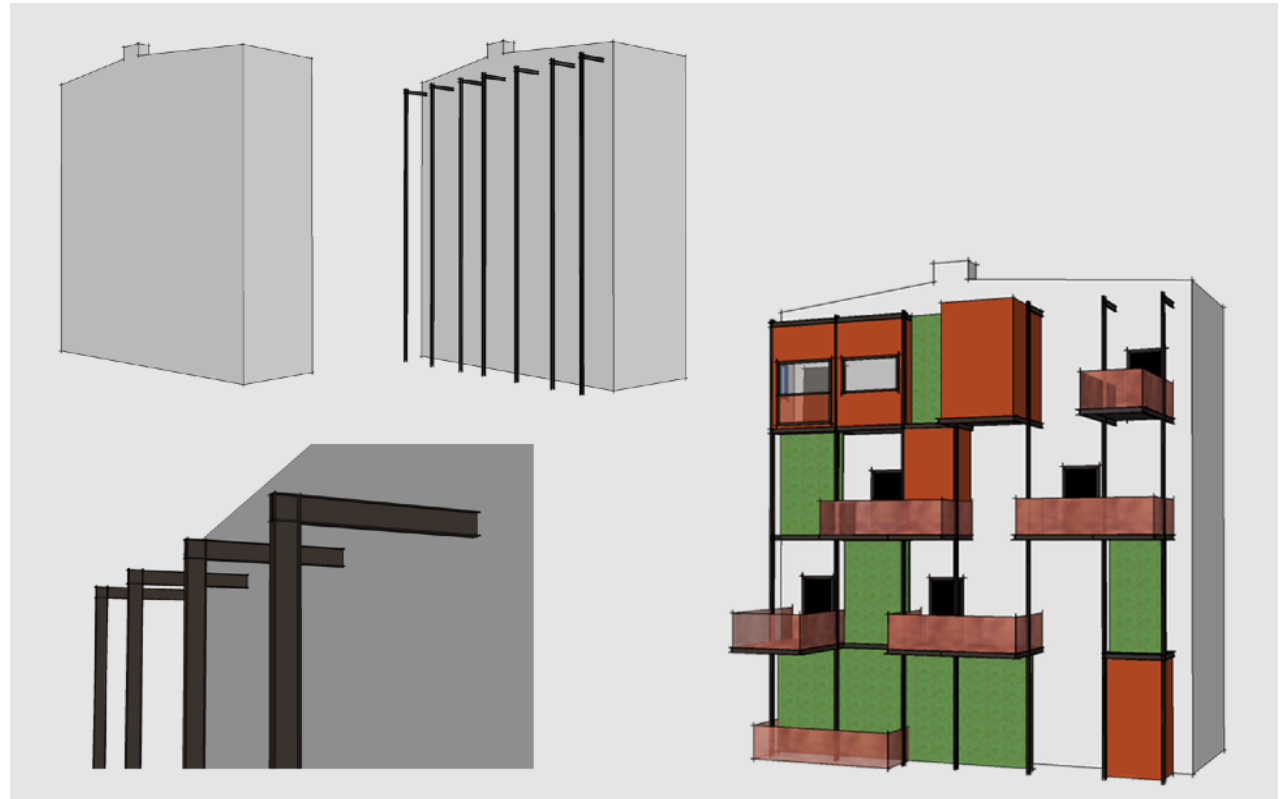
Holes are cut in the wall to give access to balconies, storage or the extension of the living room. Unutilized parts of the scaffold are used to create green walls that filter the air from CO2 and fine dust, improving the air quality significantly.

The initiative should come from the city, signing agreements with the owner(s) of the building and apartments. Most important is that every party must be aware that the scaffold is temporary,

awaiting new development. Mixed and unclear ownership of buildings, apartments and land make that the realization of this concept has many legal consequences.

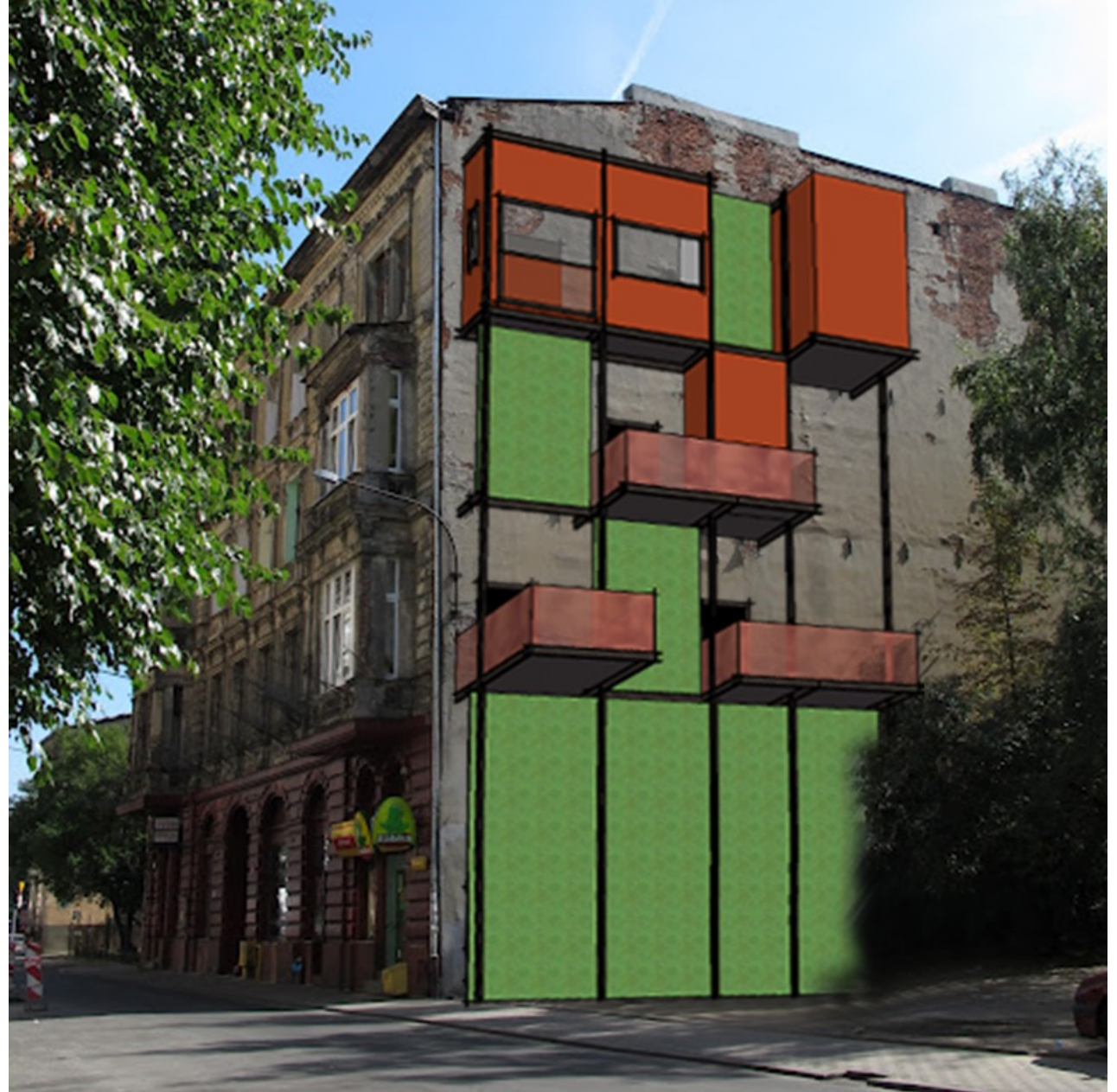
Knowing that, we believe that the effort it takes to realize this concept is more than compensated by the improved appearance and the better quality of life for the occupiers and the neighborhood.

To show the visual impact of this idea we have chosen not to "renovate" the walls in the examples.





This corner has a low visual quality and the rest space is used to park cars. By adding, for example, a vertical garden, 3 balconies, a storage and a living room extension, the blind wall adds quality to the apartments while at the same time improving the appearance.



This large wall is not visible from the street but is found inside a block at the schoolyard of "Gimnazjum #4". It offers a great opportunity to extend the apartments behind it, increasing the access of daylight and fresh air while the vertical gardens improve the acoustics of the schoolyard.



4. The Piotrkowska strip

Ulica Piotrkowska is the main street of Łódź. It measures 3,6 km in length and in general some 20 meters in width. North of Pilsudskiego the street is closed for motorized traffic with the exception of residents and supply for the shops.



The street used to be open for traffic, which can still be seen in the different (color of) pavement that is used to indicate sidewalks.



Bars en restaurants use the width of the profile for semi permanent terraces that stay out during the season, making Piotrkowska a very lively entertainment area.

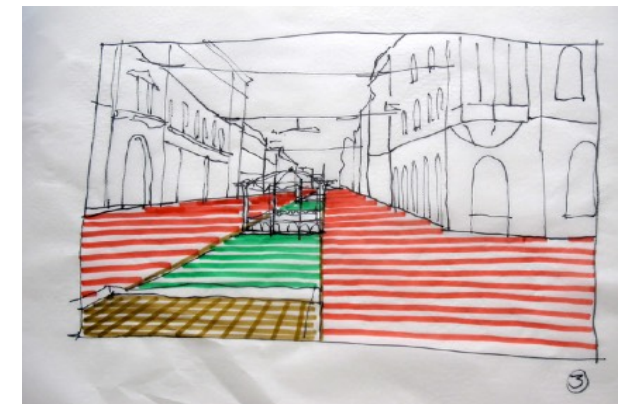
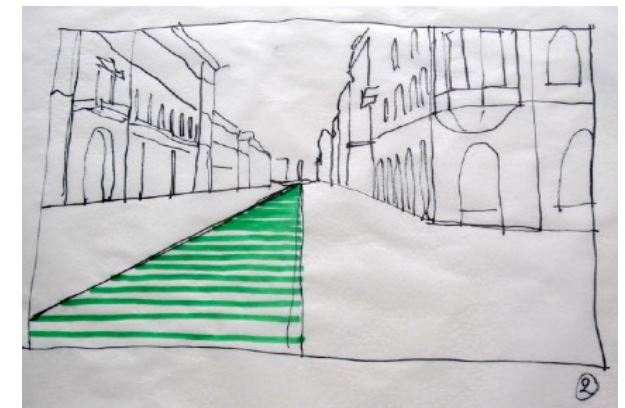
However, because of the width and the indication of a sidewalk, Piotrkowska doesn't have the feel of a pedestrian zone. Pedestrians only have one visual connection, to the shops either to their left or their right.

Piotrkowska's disadvantage (it's width) can be used to visually improve the street by introducing a new activity zone, *the strip*, in the middle. The difference between sidewalk and road is leveled and paved in the same pavement. The strip is marked by a different color of pavement.

Because of the new layout of the street, all terraces, light posts, works of art, benches or bicycle stands must be placed in the 6-meter wide strip. Lighting can be hung on overhanging cables, which are also used for flags, banners or other decoration.

Making Piotrkowska a "real" pedestrian zone does not mean that bikes or (by exception) motorized traffic are forbidden. Examples from other cities, for instance Den Haag, show that they can mix very well as long as pedestrians have priority.

The layout of the strip always changes; every object can relatively easily be moved along its length. To fit a new terrace, a temporary dance floor, stage, artwork or green zone, existing objects move some meters to the north or south. Making that Piotrkowska can supply for any given need, now and in the future.





Tango in the night on Piotrkowska. On the strip a temporary dance floor has been constructed. Loudspeakers and chandeliers hang from the cables above the street. Next week the dance floor will be replaced by a new plantation.

This example shows that the floodlight, plantation and bench have been removed. Cars can easily access the courtyards and trucks won't hinder the circulation while (un-) loading.





Sunbathing in Łódź: A girl arrives by bike at *Off Piotrkowska* ("Chinatown"), puts down a towel on the concrete slabs, takes off her dress and enjoys the sun.

Urban sunbathing, the strip also provides in this need. Today a piece of grass, next summer an urban beach with beach chairs, a tropical bar and the European Championship beach volleyball?



5. Park or alley?

Aleja Schillera has the potential of a park, but the layout appears random. To the left is the terrace of Spółem with a fence and 2 large trees, to the right a large blind wall with a grassy area. Left from the middle the statue of Leon Schiller and to its right some trees surrounded by benches.

By only arranging the functions, a park-like area arises. In this case not per se flexible, this idea shows that with a few small but clever interventions a more attractive urban environment can be achieved.

