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# Architect vs. Politician in the Game for Historic Urban Space: Six Models of Spatial Policy in Historic Areas

Architekt kontra polityk w grze o miejską przestrzeń historyczną. Sześć modeli polityki przestrzennej na obszarach historycznych

#### Abstract

Historic urban space, consisting of old towns and historic districts, is subject to a specific interplay between individual actors of the process of its planning. An architect, one of four major actors in the game for historic space, usually possesses a set of characteristic convictions, ideas, and values they believe in. There is a specific ideological profile of an architect as a creator, resulting from modernist revolution and greatly affecting the quality of architecture developed by them, especially when dealing with the problem of degraded space (e.g., as a result of warfare). On the other hand, a local politician (in the case of a city – an executive organ, i.e., a mayor or a president) does not always realize how much depends on their decisions shaping historic space in a particular model direction. Contemporary Polish law gives local authorities the ultimate power to create spatial policy in historic areas. In order to be able to act intentionally in the surrounding space, as well as to enter into a substantive dialogue with an architect, a local politician should possess certain models of shaping historic space - ready-to-use templates of political decisions. The main goal of

#### • Abstrakt •

Miejska przestrzeń historyczna, czyli tereny starych miast oraz zabytkowych dzielnic, podlega podczas jej zagospodarowywania określonej grze pomiędzy poszczególnymi aktorami tego procesu. Architekt, jako jeden z czterech głównych aktorów gry o przestrzeń historyczną, zazwyczaj posiada zestaw charakterystycznych dla siebie przekonań, idei oraz wartości. Jest to swoisty profil ideowy architekta jako twórcy, będący następstwem rewolucji modernistycznej i mający istotny wpływ na jakość tworzonej przez niego architektury, szczególnie gdy mamy do czynienia z problemem przestrzeni zdegradowanej (np. w wyniku działań wojennych). Z kolei lokalny polityk (w przypadku miasta - organ wykonawczy, czyli burmistrz lub prezydent) nie zawsze ma świadomość, jak wiele zależy od jego decyzji, kształtującej przestrzeń historyczną w określonym, modelowym kierunku. Współczesne polskie prawo to właśnie władzę lokalną typuje jako ostateczną instancję w kwestii kreowania polityki przestrzennej na obszarach zabytkowych. Aby móc świadomie działać w otaczającej go przestrzeni, a także wejść w merytoryczny dialog z architektem, lokalny polityk this article is to present models of shaping historic urban space – conservation, restoration, modern creation, traditional creation, retroversion, and reconstruction – as well as to present an architect's response to attempts at political implementations of each of these models.

winien mieć do dyspozycji określone modele kształtowania przestrzeni historycznej – gotowe szablony decyzji politycznych. Prezentacja modeli kształtowania miejskiej przestrzeni historycznej – konserwacji, restauracji, kreacji nowoczesnej, kreacji tradycyjnej, retrowersji oraz rekonstrukcji – wraz z prezentacją reakcji architekta na próby politycznej implementacji każdego z tych modeli stanowi główny cel niniejszego artykułu.

**Keywords:** spatial policy; local government; architecture; monuments; city

**Słowa kluczowe:** polityka przestrzenna; samorząd terytorialny; architektura; zabytki; miasto

# Introduction

Historic urban space often becomes an area of socio-political conflicts when the process of its renovation or reconstruction is initiated. Participants of this specific "game" over historic space are nearly always the same: architects and urban planners, conservators, investors, local community represented by cultural and historical associations, as well as local media. Due to limited space, this article will present only one actor – an architect. The above actors in the game for historic space and the conflicts they generate are then faced by representatives of public authority – politicians, who, thanks to legal instruments developed in independent Poland, have the real power to decide on historic space in a particular city. However, Polish politicians rarely use instruments of intentional spatial planning, let alone historic space planning (spatial policy is of marginal significance in Polish public life; it is hard to find it in both political parties' manifestos and election campaigns). They abandon this role, leaving it to specialists – architects and urban planners (Tomaszewski, 2000, p. 8). This passivity of politicians constitutes a serious limitation of public authority in shaping cultural heritage (Tomaszewski, 2000, p. 8). On the other hand, specialists are by no means indifferent to the matter they shape. On the contrary - over many decades they have developed their own set of ideological manifestos and detailed doctrines. Such doctrines often contradict ideological attempts of certain local communities – ones that are aware of their own cultural identity. Finally, even though politicians declare their lack of interest in making decisions concerning historic spaces, they are forced to make them.

Depending on the local balance of power between particular actors in the game for historic space, a politician should have a few different models of taking decisions concerning the oldest parts of their home town. These models (conservation,

restoration, modern creation, traditional creation, retroversion, and reconstruction) will be based on theoretical knowledge of history of art, architecture, and urban planning. Each model presented here will correspond to one way of dealing with historic urban space, depending on initial conditions, namely, on the degree of development of this space. Decisions regarding fully preserved or only slightly damaged historic space will differ from those concerning largely degraded or totally destroyed (for example, as a result of warfare) space.

The presentation of the above models begins with ideological assumptions behind each of them, followed by potential reactions expressed by the community of architects, based on the previously defined ideological profile (hierarchy of preferences), in line with the rational choice theory. In order to define clearly an architect's attitudes and potential reactions, a numerical preference scale shall be used, in which total acceptance will be marked by 4, whereas total lack of acceptance by -4 (the author assumed intervals of 1 on the preference scale). This will undoubtedly constitute a reference to the game theory, understood as mathematical solutions to situations in which contradictory interests of particular sides in a conflict, having their own preference hierarchies and acting rationally, intertwine (Pietraś, 1998, p. 181).

Table 1. The Numerical Scale of Preference Hierarchy Adopted by an Actor in a Game for Historic Space

The scale of preference hierarchy adopted by an actor in a game for historic space											
number	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4		
reaction	lack of				neu-				acceptance		
	acceptance				tral						

# 1. An architect and historic space

Due to their specialist skills, architects are key people in planning all types of space, including historic one. In spite of heavy dependence on an investor's predilections, each architect has their specific ideological profile, determined by particular type of education, influence of professional community, their own esthetic predilections and, especially, by ideologies they believe in. The ideological profile of a contemporary architect was shaped by the modernist revolution that took place in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which gave architects a status (or, to be more precise, an impression of a status) of a free creator, independent enough to shape the tastes of their principal. In reality it looks quite different. It is an architect who is forced

to accept various compromises which may have disastrous consequences for the historic space.

The key (modernist) ideological document, still recognized by many architects, is the so-called Athens Charter developed by CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne, or: International Congress of Modern Architecture) in 1933 and published by Le Corbusier (Kotarbiński, 1985, p. 31). It contained philosophical foundations and rules for planning human settlements. It also referred to the issue of planning historic space, stating that "in historic centers of cities and in certain areas of industrial expansion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, population density is excessive" (Kotarbiński, 1985, p. 35), whereas "demolition of obsolete buildings surrounding particularly priceless monuments will be sad, but inevitable necessity to eliminate a certain historical whole" (Kotarbiński, 1985, p. 37). The above quote allows us to draw conclusions on how the modernist trend of idealism referred to cultural landscapes. In order to create a new human being it was necessary to reinterpret, in line with utilitarian values, the closest surroundings of the most important monuments to give them new, progressive nature and to show that old architecture is a thing of the past.

The criticism of modernism, which in the 1950s and 1960s developed into mass architecture of huge, gloomy housing estates and blended with the art of sub-conscience, turned out to be paradoxically salutary and purifying for the phenomenon of "avant-garde". It created a new trend in architecture, post-modernism (PoMo) and channeled the issue of art for masses in this direction, which demands certain folk, neo-historic, regional and pop-art elements to be used in construction (Bogusz, 1996, p. 186). As a trend in architecture, in spite of referring to history and tradition as well as local and ethnic elements, postmodernism mainly uses contemporary construction materials: steel, concrete, glass and aluminum alloys and plastics, used as components and whole structures (Bogusz, 1996, p. 187). It cannot be perceived as return to traditional architecture; on the contrary, it constitutes its modern (or post-modern) interpretation. The use of subtle allusions to ancient space, references sometimes understood only by an artist, must evoke questions concerning the ideological complementarity of postmodernism in its potential "work" to merge and shape historic spaces in Polish cities.

Therefore, we can expect that an architect will propose some neo-modernist or post-modernist designs (though admittedly using modern materials and loosely connected with the context of a particular place) for historic space. In architectural contests it is almost certain that there will not be featured any traditionalist proposals, let alone reconstructions of monuments. This can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, the specific education received by a contemporary architect – according to

Maciej Loba, for over half century architecture education in Polish universities has not provided future architects with the minimum of knowledge needed to create a correct traditional building and to use classical language of forms and details properly (2008, p. 186). Secondly, to the specificity of contemporary conservation doctrine which, paradoxically, in an attempt to protect the monument promotes designs that shape historic space in a very modern way (*The Venice Charter*, 1964, Article 9).

# 2. A politician and historic urban space

According to theoretical assumptions behind this article, a local politician is a key player who weighs up the voices of participants of the game for historic space and takes the final decision. The concept of a local politician, however, needs to be clarified, because based on current legal analyses we may venture to say that the real decision-making power in issues concerning historic space belongs only to a politician who is a member of a regulatory or executive authority in a given local authority unit, in our case – in a municipality. Due to dispersed nature of the municipal regulatory authority and personalized nature of the executive authority (a mayor or president of the city), it should be emphasized that it is this politician who has the real power of determining directions for development of particular historic space. It is in his or her surroundings that local spatial development plans are made. The decision-making competencies of an executive authority may be further strengthened when a city conservator is appointed, directly reporting to the mayor or president of the city.

The process signaled in the introduction to this article, namely, the authority withdrawal from spatial policy, stems from two major phenomena. Firstly, it is a specific counter-reaction to the period of communist rule, when spatial planning had strongly ideological nature. Legal changes implemented after 1989 drew politicians away from active participation in spatial development (Raport Krajowego Sekretariatu "Habitat", 2003, p. 4). Another significant phenomenon is the lack of proper social awareness of the significance of well-developed space for harmonious human development. One should also add here the issue of legal conditions for social participation, which is very formal in Poland (Długosz & Wygnański, 2005, p. 32), thus discouraging potential participants from taking any action aimed at proper development of space. The authority elected by such unaware community will never consider spatial development as a major political problem. However, "in order to become fully-fledged citizens of Europe and the world in the 21st century, we need

to create conditions for creation and development of [...] «homo responsabilis» — a human being capable not only of thinking, but also aware of national heritage preserved by our ancestors, national heritage which we can fully use. Through our intentional actions we will protect it and prevent it from destruction" (Barański, 1999, p. 65). Spatial policy should, therefore, be not only an attempt at ensuring spatial order and harmony of spatial systems, based on optimal shaping and use of space. Spatial policy should also be understood as actions taken by local authorities, consisting in anticipating and "solving problems resulting from conflicts which may be generated while implementing its assumptions" (Feltynowski, 2009, p. 11). Currently, particular emphasis is paid to social and cultural development of developed areas. Therefore, in the case of historic space, intentional spatial policy should focus on how inhabitants perceive and want to perceive their "little homeland" and at the same time on shaping regional identity using objective elements of city development, constituting its cultural landscape (Skorowski, 1998, p. 59).

The role of a political decisions, once we know who will take it, will be demonstrated in the next part of the article, which presents various (often contradictory) options of deciding on historic urban space. It also gives examples of policy towards developed spaces as well as degraded spaces which require supplementation or even total reconstruction.

# 3. Preferences of an architect and actions of a politician in models of shaping historic space

#### 3.1. Conservation

According to its definition, conservation of monuments can be understood generally as protection and maintenance of monuments in unchanged shape, and more specifically – technically – as conservation of the material substance of a monument without interfering and changing its structure or form (Majewski, 2009, p. 11). The above definition of conservation clearly demonstrates awareness of responsibility towards the original creation, awareness that developed at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with criticism of numerous supplements and transformations of original monuments in historical styles (Szmelter, 2006, p. 15). Currently, the usefulness of technical progress and scientific methods is emphasized, as they guarantee better results of conservation work, making it objective without the need to resort to deepened subjective interference in works of art (Szmelter, 2006, p. 26). In the case of architecture it is also worth paying attention to the concept of renovation, which

complements the phenomenon of conservation of a monument and which consists in improving the esthetics of cultural properties in a way that prevents damage to any layer of the original work (Szmelter, 2006, p. 28).

Having outlined ideological assumptions of conservation-renovation of monuments, we should investigate to what extent these assumptions are consistent with the ideological profile (hierarchy of preferences) of an actor in the game for historic space, namely, an architect. Conservation and renovation of a work of art constitute a domain of the conservation community and there are no creative elements involved in it. Designers, thus, do not actively participate in the conservation of the work of art, though they undoubtedly have their own views on this matter – in this case, their views are irrelevant, therefore the community of designers should be treated neutrally, giving it the hierarchy of preferences of zero (0).

The actions of a local politician in the model of monument conservation consists only in creating supportive framework for such initiatives taken by various public institutions, private entities, or non-governmental organizations. A good example of this model is the renovation of the synagogue in Zamość, performed by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland.

#### 3.2. Restoration

The definition of restoration states that it is technical interference in a historic monument, allowing replacement and completion of some deficits, as long as there is credible foundation (usually in shape of photos or archival documents) for conducting such work (Majewski, 2009, p. 11). According to the theory of restoration developed in the 1960s by Italian conservator Cesare Brandi, "restoration must aim at restoring potential unity of the work of art, possibly without any artistic or historical falsehood and without eliminating the passage of time in the work of art" (1996, p. 231).

Thus, in spite of clearly formulated conservation postulates concerning contemporary restoration of a monument, particular conservators differ, especially in works of architecture, as to what constitutes historical falsehood. Therefore, a certain gap appears in the conservation doctrine; a gap eagerly entered by the community of architects, in Poland partly present in the offices of conservators. An architect will strive for such interpretation of the concept of monument restoration which would give the possibility of distinguishing visually the restored part from the old one, for example, by using contemporary construction materials. This brings us closer to changing the form of restored fragments from those resembling old elements into fragments evoking modern elements. In this situation we have a small area in

which we can creatively interpret the missing elements of the work of art, which is consistent with the ideological postulates of the community of architects, as presented earlier. In this approach, the hierarchy of preferences for an architect may be assigned a high score. However, for the purpose of this article, we will adopt an undistorted definition of restoration, boiling it down to supplementing the missing elements of the monument in line with preserved archival materials, using traditional construction techniques. In this case, the community of architects will not participate in the above-mentioned venture, but due to the possibility of taking part in it (as described earlier), the community will express their slight disapproval of such conservation work. Therefore, the hierarchy of preferences for architects and urban planners should be determined here as minus 1 (-1).

As a model that interferes with the monument, restoration requires greater involvement from a local politician. A good example can be found in Zamość, again, where frequent restoration of monuments, manifested in restoration of some ornamental elements – attics of historic tenements, tops and little bells of churches (Nowak, 2010) – is aimed not only at improving esthetic value, but also at increasing city attractiveness for tourists.

#### 3.3. Modern creation

An empty place that was previously occupied by a destroyed historic building might be filled with the aid of a creation tool. The concept of creation stands for creating something new in place of a historic building. What needs to be specified is how this creation is performed. A politician must realize that in order to intentionally shape an undeveloped historic area, they first and foremost need to cooperate with architects and urban planners. In modern creation we have a new building which is clearly distinguished (in its form and content) from the surrounding historic buildings.

Taking into consideration the ideological assumptions of contemporary architects, modern creation must be seen as the best method for presenting an architect's creative powers. Therefore, in our hierarchy of preferences it is given a high value: four (4).

An example of the modern creation model is undoubtedly the concept of developing Granary Island in Gdańsk, which adopted its final form on October 28, 2010, when the City Council passed the new spatial development plan for the northern part of the island. Previously, the Council rejected all comments to the plan made by interested inhabitants and non-governmental organizations. The rejection of all comments to the plan was announced before the voting, in the press, and it was justified with the need to hurry, as the new investor might change their mind if

the spatial development plan was not passed on time (Włodkowska, 2010). The need for rapid development and commercialization of the area on Granary Island led to taking a decision allowing the modern creation model as it was allegedly the most accessible to potential investors. Thus, the opinions of local community were rejected as, according to local authorities, they did not have significant influence on the course of potential investments.

## 3.4. Traditional creation

The ideas of the movement promoting traditional architecture and opposing modernity, as if modernism had never existed, are quite popular, mainly in Western Europe and the United States. However, the overwhelming majority of the community of Polish architects prefer to give new buildings modern forms and do not have positive attitudes towards traditional creations. We need to remember, though, that it is creation, or creative act, which is consistent with an ideological profile of an architect as an artist. Some Polish architects, in order to satisfy private tastes, try to create traditionally but due to poor technical preparation (as already discussed) do it rather ineptly. Therefore, we can assume that moderate lack of acceptance for traditional creation, expressed on the scale as minus two (-2), would be an accurate diagnosis of the designers community.

An example of this model can be found in the development of the gap in the south-west frontage of the Market Square in Kazimierz Dolny, which was left after a tenement destroyed in the World War Two. As the destroyed 19<sup>th</sup>-century tenement house had low artistic value, it was decided to erect a new building, based on 17<sup>th</sup>-century cellars, designed in 1996 by architect Lech Kłosiewicz (Ryndziewicz, 2005–2006, p. 3). The building was erected in the spirit of traditional creation, implementing this model of historic space development to make this building fit or even blend in with the surrounding development. The new tenement building respects the context of the place by, inter alia, its traditional form and use of local construction material.

## 3.5. Retroversion

Another model of shaping destroyed historic space in a city, probably the most popular one in Poland at present, is the so-called retroversion. The author of this term, Maria Lubocka-Hoffmann, a conservator from Elblag, describes it as: "complex actions taken in destroyed old town areas, which respect historical conditions but do not reproduce old development. Retroversion is an arrangement of the "new"

old town, based on profound knowledge of this town. [...] It consists, most of all, of the new development which offers contemporary interpretation of a historical tenement building, which – located on the old plan – draws a traditional outline of the town and performs functions that are similar to the old ones" (2000, p. 200). Retroversion is thus an expression of a post-modernist approach to a destroyed historic city, restoring the buildings in the contemporary re-interpreted form.

For the architecture community, retroversion, despite certain conservation limitations, offers a lot of space to present creative powers of a designer, obviously within the framework of postmodern esthetics, which is neither accepted nor practiced by some architects (supporters of neo-modernism). However, the way of complex design, which was used, for example, in Elblag (Lubocka-Hoffmann, 2000, p. 207), provides architecture offices with opportunities of large commissions (to design several tenement buildings) and is a tempting factor as far as prestige and finance are concerned. Therefore, on our preference scale it is given the value of two (2) by the designers community, which reflects the level of moderate acceptance.

The implementation of this model may be conducted by conservator and architect communities with almost passive attitude of local politicians. The Old Town in Elblag is an example of mass implementation of this model. However, it is not a model supported by local community, who would rather see an exact replica of the monument than its poor, post-modernist substitute (Kaszubska, 2011).

## 3.6. Reconstruction

Reconstruction of a particular historic building is the most radical of all methods of restoring the destroyed building. It means creation of an exact replica of a non-existent monument in a 1:1 scale, made only from non-original material. In the event when a small part of the monument was saved, its recreation is known as restitution. Discussion on the value of reconstruction – erecting from scratch a building which looks like a historic building, but which is deprived of any original substance of the monument and thus deprived of any historic value – has been held at least since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The value of the reconstruction of a historic building is seen mostly by members of local community, for whom the reconstructed monument is as valuable as the original one. This is confirmed by philosophers of culture and researchers of esthetics (Gutowska, 1999, p. 54). This phenomenon points at a fundamental difference between architecture and, for instance, painting: "Contrary to a painting which was made by the hand of an artist, which is irreplaceable, a building [...] is not a totally personal creation" (Krier, 2001, p. 73). In this case, the artistic value of architecture is divided between the design of

the building, i.e., the work of an artist's hands, and its actual implementation, made by his peer builders and craftsmen. In reconstruction only the second type of creative work is subject to personal change, while the main creative idea of an artist-architect, included in the archive design, remains relevant within the new building.

Unfortunately, ideological views of contemporary architects (based on modernism or postmodernism) account for the fact that most of them perceive reconstruction quite critically. It is in the best interest of architecture community to promote creative and individual approach to the given space (including historic one), therefore the value of reconstruction in the hierarchy of preferences must be assessed as very low, minus four (-4).

The political implementation of the reconstruction model causes a lot of problems, as currently the conservation community is generally against these types of buildings (The Venice Charter, 1964, Article 9). We may even venture to say that without a clear political decision the reconstruction model cannot be implemented. As an example here we can consider the unsuccessful (so far) attempt at reconstructing the western frontage of Piłsudski Square in Warsaw, and, above all, the Saxon Palace. The ceremonial ending of the tender procedure for this investment (in May 2006) was seen as the crowning of the political efforts of the city authorities led by Lech Kaczyński – who was at the time the President of Poland and who decided to provide his personal patronage for the contracts between the Warsaw Commissioner and an investor, which were signed at Piłsudski Square on June 21, 2006. Lech Kaczyński emphasized his political involvement in the project, claiming that "the decision to restore the past splendor to Piłsudski Square was mine" (Bartoszewicz, 2006). In the end, due to the discovery of historic cellars of the old building, growing investment costs and lack of political will to continue the project among new authorities of Warsaw, the idea of reconstruction was abandoned (PAP, 2008).

Nevertheless, we have seen various initiatives, taken mainly by local community, who demands full reconstruction of the whole western frontage of the square: the Saxon Palace, Brühl Palace, and tenement buildings in Królewska Street. This idea was presented by a non-governmental organization – the Warsaw Development Forum (Polish abbreviation: FRW).

Also, the "Saski 2018" organization was lobbying for the reconstruction of the Saxon Palace (until its activities end in 2021). On November 11, 2018, to commemorate a hundredth anniversary of Poland's independence, the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, signed a declaration for restitution of the Saxon Palace in Warsaw. The declaration contained, inter alia, the following words: "Taking into account the fact that the Saxon Palace, along with the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, has found its permanent place in the collective memory of Poles and represents an

integral element of our national heritage, I consider the fulfillment of the postulate of restoring this building, demolished in World War Two, to be a special act of remembrance, which will remain a permanent trace of the celebration of Poland's One Hundred Years of Independence, a manifestation of Poles' care for material heritage of independent Homeland, as well as a visible sign of bonds between Poland today and Poland that regained independence in 1918" (Stowarzyszenie "Saski 2018", 2018). Currently, after the change of government in Poland in 2023, this investment (as one of the few) is being continued and its completion is planned for 2030 (PAP, 2024).

## Conclusions

Summarizing the analysis of the attitude of architects towards particular political models of shaping historic urban space, we should point out that the most preferred models are: modern creation and retroversion, connected with neo-modernist and post-modernist trends in architecture. The above models are characterized with low political value, which means that they can be implemented without active and intentional participation of local politicians. In retroversion, however, one should pay attention to the lack of social acceptance of such solutions, which might generate potential conflicts concerning historic space. A similar situation, though conflict here is more probable, concerns modern creation (Mącik, 2008; Kobyliński & Paczuska, 2007). Both in retroversion and modern creation, a local politician acting in line with the above models, but against local community, may expect that their decision will be defended by a strong coalition formed by other main actors in the game for urban space, led by architects, whose interests are generally satisfied by the above models.

In the event of a rejection of retroversion and modern creation by a local politician, undeveloped historic urban space has only two options: traditional creation and reconstruction. Both models are highly preferred by local community, but have a low or very low acceptance rate among specialist communities, especially architects. Costs of a political decision supporting reconstruction or traditional creation are, therefore, high, and only a politician who is well aware of the rights and rules governing the game for historic space may take this challenge responsibly. A decision to reconstruct a historic monument – in the prevailing conditions in Poland – has become a synonym of a political decision.

The architect community is rather neutral to conservation and restoration models, which allows local politicians to implement such approaches without any fear

of generating conflicts. One must remember, though, that these models refer only to developed space, the one where historic buildings have been preserved until the present day and occupy all (or nearly all) urban historic tissue.

The full picture of the hierarchy of an architect's preferences for particular models of policy towards historic space is presented in the table below:

Table 2. Architect's Preferences (on the -4 to 4 Scale) for Particular Models of Policy towards Historic Space

Policy model Actor	Conser- vation	Restoration	Modern creation	Traditional creation	Retro- version	Recon- struction
Architect	0	-1	4	-2	2	-4

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