

Urban development and regeneration in Poland – contemporary issues

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Abstract

Contemporary Urban development issues in case of Poland include a number of phenomena, based on rapid change of socio-economic and political system. These include development of suburbanization and regeneration processes. Among the latter ones one can distinguish both physical redevelopment of built structures and complex socio-economic revitalization of neighborhoods. In these cases key issues are associated with inclusion of cultural activities and public participation, which – in many cases – decide about the success of these projects.

Key words: urban landscape; development; regeneration; suburbanization; Poland

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1. Introduction

This article is intended to summarize current trends and problems in urban development and regeneration in Poland – a 38 million inhabitant's country, located in the central part of Europe, just in the east to Germany. In the enlarged European Community Poland represent one of the largest nations, which suffer many problems. The same relates to its cities and towns, as nowadays they have to adapt to the globalization processes. One of the major issues in this respect is urban regeneration, perceived as an opportunity to retain urbanity by many its cities and towns, as well as a serious challenge for urban

management workshop in times of liberal approach to development processes.

2. Situation of Polish cities and municipalities after the political and economic transformation of 1990-s

Urban system in Poland during last twenty years was facing major changes, which were deeply rooted in both the history of the country and needs of the modernization. The so-called “socialistic city model” (adapted during the post-war communist regime) was not able to meet the requirements of the new economic order. Therefore, it had to evolve and adapt its structure to the demands of the market economy, and be transformed into the

“capitalistic city”. In result, we can observe the emerging model of the “post-socialistic capitalistic city”, with problems characteristic to both systems, and with the domination of market forces changing the physical structure of the urban organisms. Unlike in case of the majority of other European countries, all this is not accompanied by any major effort of the central government, and with very limited attention given by newly created regional self-governments.

In effect, many new phenomena occurred in the spatial situation of the Polish cities. Many of them can serve as the bad examples of urbanization processes, but one can regard some of the as the positive ones as well. One of the most interesting ones is associated with parallel development of the suburbanization and re-urbanization processes, and – in result – development of the urban regeneration projects. This process is not really well developed by now, but one can already note a change in thinking. This happened due to fact that municipal planners started to see the local problems, not only the general ones, common for the entire cities.

Along with the political and economic transition the Polish state decided to withdraw from most of the forms of governmental support to urban development. It was supposed to be replaced by local programs and policies, prepared and implemented by municipalities. The post-socialistic governments believed that the best decisions concerning local communities can be made only at the local level. This belief was followed by intended decentralization. But this process related only to duties, not to money distribution. Consequently many of the tasks were transferred to the local and regional governments, but the state did not provide financial basis for carrying them out. Certainly, the bigger cities with much broader economic basis and more opportunities to attract investors and capital had a better position in this situation than small urban and rural communities. But even in the case of big cities – as many tasks had to be financed – it was not possible to find enough money even for the

necessary infrastructure improvements. In fact, until now the municipalities are struggling with heritage of socialistic model of urban governance. Among the main problems one can find i.e. degradation of large amount of housing stock (as they were never renovated after the war), underdevelopment of infrastructure (especially in the field of water supply and sewage collection, but the main problem is associated with underdeveloped road network and very poor quality of many of roads) and many others.

According to these two processes – decentralization of power and struggling with the socialistic heritage – neither of the possible actors (which means the central government and municipalities) had interest and money to introduce any kind of support system for urbanization (or re-urbanization) processes. Therefore, they were left for the market, as some of the liberal politicians (and also – planners) believed that free market will do its job and clear the situation. But they forgot that free market looks for the cheapest and most efficient ways of fulfilling the economic tasks, and not necessarily takes into account the social and environmental aspect of the development process.

In result, for the whole period since 1989 there was no single state program aiming in influencing the urbanization processes. The best example is so-called urban regeneration act – the parliamentary initiative to support the urban regeneration processes. Works on these documents were conducted for over ten years by now, and still no one is able to predict when they will be finished. And – at the same time – local municipalities do not intend to influence the urbanization processes, which in many cases have the over local dimension. They are usually focused on providing the legal framework for developers, as new developments mean new tax inflows and all other planning principles are usually left aside.

3. Trends in urbanization

Current urbanization practices are associated with domination – or even over-domination –

of the free market. At the same time, new products are required on this market – both in terms of housing and other types of urban program. But only in few cases they are developed in the inner-city locations. All these aspects describe the picture of the urbanization model we have to deal with in Polish cities.

Due to the policy of the Polish state and most of the local municipalities, the private sector activities are not influenced in any way by public sector. I mean, they are not influenced with financial participation that can change the program or character of the development – but of course each of the projects needs to follow the planning regulation concerning the size of the building or the complex of new dwellings, the type of land use and other building regulations. This situation is associated with the fact, that the public sector – again, thanks to the money shortage – is not able to play the active role in the real estate market. Unlike many west European municipalities, only very few local governments in Poland are able to develop and maintain a large amount of public housing stock. If they are able to do so, usually they focus on a hundred percent municipal housing, constructed to house the poorest and homeless families. At the same time, all public infrastructure like schools, roads and so on, are being built with the public money only. There is very little experience with public-private partnerships, and only in few cases private developers of the large-scale projects contribute some money for infrastructure improvement.

At the same time Poland is one of the few European countries with still huge housing needs. This relates both to the standard of existing housing and to the amount of flats available per capita. This means that both the quality and quantity of apartments need to be tremendously increased. Such a situation is the outcome of the not sufficient amount of housing constructed in the post-war times, and lack of major modernization efforts in the pre-war housing stock. Therefore, there is a market for all kinds of housing, but still the price of the square meter of new apartment plays the

key role. Besides housing, there is a whole variety of new types of urban program that appeared in Polish cities after 1989. The most important parts of these are new shopping facilities as well as new leisure and office complexes.

4. Problems with degradation inner urban areas

As the effect of the urbanization processes, and of the de-industrialization of the cities (which started to take place in the mid of the 1990-ties) – the inner cities started to suffer from some degradation and urban blight. But – what is interesting – this did not mean lowering the prices for the land. The market still indicates that inner city areas are most expensive ones, even besides the fact that most of them need major clean-up process. Also, in some cases the land titles are not clear, or the plots need major infrastructure upgrade. The best example of this is the Granary Island in Gdansk – the most attractive building site in the whole agglomeration, also very expensive – but nobody will invest there unless there is a new infrastructure connection to the plots.

Besides those post-industrial sites – there is a shrinking amount of the un-built areas, which are the effect of war-time destruction. The best case is the area around the Palace of Science and Culture in Warsaw, which – once a vibrant city district – is now a huge empty site. But this is one of the few sites like this left – all around one can see popping up new office and hotel towers.

5. Growing importance and notion of urban regeneration

As the societal needs get differentiated, so does the market offer – this is the old rule of free market. And in the pure market-led urbanization in Poland it is also true – in regard to new urban program. But at the same time there is a large portion of the society not willing to change their living standard, but to maintain the existing one. They are usually housed in the buildings developed before the

Second World War, which – in general – were not maintained properly during the post-war times, and were not undergoing any major renovation. Therefore, in last decades Polish cities started to face another problem – problem of decaying housing structures, which starts to be a general problem for the society and cities. During last few years many conferences, research works and seminars were devoted to analysis of this problems and search for the best possible solutions.

In general, this problem has three dimensions. One of them is related to already in bad technical condition pre-war structures. In these cases the renovation efforts should keep as a goal technical upgrade of the material substance, and solving some of the over-population problems. Second dimension is associated with the post-war housing, which – in majority – is the prefabricated large-scale housing. Usually it still does not suffer major technical problems (but they will appear soon), but is degraded morally and socially, with many social problems. Finally it is necessary to mention still waiting for redevelopment post-industrial, post-harbor, post-railway and post-military areas, which – as mentioned in the previous chapter – usually are ready for development, but suffer from underdeveloped infrastructure.

First regeneration programs are usually perpetuated by private sector, which is interested in developing the new market products in a form of lofts and/ or “stylish” offices or restaurants. But these initiatives are supplemented by “spontaneous” regeneration – like i.e. acquiring the old factory halls for the purposes of artists’ workshops. Due to such efforts the face of such the run-down districts like Praga in Warsaw and Młode Miasto (Young City) in Gdansk started to be altered.

At the same time one has to understand the difference between complex socio-economic revitalization and just physical regeneration of the urban structures. While physical regeneration means just putting new building and refitting the old ones, the complex revitalization also includes activities associated with societal improvements and economic

development. It is also worth remembering that revitalization should be understood in a slightly different way when it refers to housing areas (where improvement of physical structure is connected with social – economic revival, with special emphasis on improvement of the situation of the local community) and degraded structures connected with technical and industrial infrastructure (where creation of new physical structures is sometimes connected with restoration of historical buildings or historical technical objects, but mainly with bringing new economic activities to the areas and creation of new local communities) (see Zuziak 1998 for extended information).

6. Objectives and dimensions of revitalization

Objectives of revitalization efforts are different in each of the cases described in the literature of the subject. It is due to the different situation and problems of cities and centres taking up such activities. Very often, however, the objectives are similar, or touch on similar issues. So they can be grouped by problems and revitalization processes they refer to. The following revitalization groups of objectives can be distinguished:

Urbanistic and architectural – connected with repair and modernization (or sometimes restoration) of architectural complexes, including housing and post-industrial ones, and with conscious shaping of cultural landscape of the given area;

Technical – connected with upgrade of quality of urban structures – including technical and road infrastructure;

Social and economic – connected with economic revival and reversing negative social tendencies – including reducing development of pathologies;

Environmental – connected with improvement of condition of natural environment, reducing pollution and emissions.

The above mentioned four groups of revitalization objectives are interrelated. It results from mutual impact of e.g. improvement



of the condition of urban structures and enhancement of the quality of the environment or creating conditions for social – economic revival. It means that each of the actions taken up as a part of revitalization process is connected with effects in another area, and can also have a negative or positive impact on the area. Taking up large scale urbanistic – architectural activities not combined with activities in social and economic area is a classical example here. Despite great amounts of money spent on repairs and modernizations of individual objects and their complexes – such programmes led to subsequent degradation of these. That is why it is so important to initiate activities in all areas of revitalization processes – in social and economic area in particular.

Regardless of the adopted objectives of revitalization, preparation of the process is connected with the necessity to take up actions in different areas. It means that what is needed is interdisciplinary, multi-subject and multi-dimensional activity. The initiatives can be divided into three basic groups:

- planning and designing – connected with development of relevant action plans and strategies;

- organizational and financial – connected with forming organizational structures to handle revitalization process and with provision of necessary funds;

- promotional and informational – connected with cooperation with local community on specifying objectives and directions of revitalization process.

It is necessary to integrate all the dimensions of the activities mentioned above. Avoiding taking up activities in any of them may constitute a threat to the success of the entire project. For example – not conducting social consultations in time and neglecting real participation of local community (in particular in the case of revitalization of housing structures) can lead to tensions and conflicts, quickly spreading to local politics, which can paralyse the whole process. It is similar with organizational and financial activities; very

often the existing management structures are not able to prepare and implement such complex projects and programmes. Entrusting organizational and financial tasks to such incapable structures can lead to delays in implementation of the programme, its non-implementation or partial implementation. The same is true about financial issues: the operator of revitalization process must have the skill of combining various public budgets, assistance and private funds to provide for adequate level of financing individual projects. The planning and designing dimension is of some significance here as well. Only development of adequate action strategy and its transformation into programmes and operational projects can make the process a success.¹

7. Typology of areas under revitalization processes

Revitalization processes refer to a number of urban areas and structures. As mentioned before, revitalization of the existing structures often is an alternative to development of the city outside the existing structures. Each process, referring to a particular area or structure, has its specific characteristics. Each of them poses different problems, has different physical structures and different level of degradation, and finally – differently formulated objectives. These areas can be divided into many different groups. The best criterion for such classification seems to be the one also adopted in the literature of the subject – previous function and then historical period of forming the structures. Their size and significance in the urban structure can be another criterion. Both classifications are described below.

Four basic groups of degraded areas can be distinguished with reference to the first criterion: housing areas, multifunctional

¹ The problem is often underestimated in the process of planning revitalization processes. At the same time proper development of process implementation management system is a key to the success and attainment of expected objectives. Examples of solutions in this respect are presented, *inter alia*, in: Lorens (2005).

complexes, areas connected with technical and industrial infrastructure of cities and the areas often called “urban wasteland”. Each of them is divided into a number of subgroups, presented below.

Housing areas often have diversified characteristics, both as it refers to the type of structures, ownership structure, technical condition, and intensity of technical, social and economic problems. Their four main groups can be distinguished here as:

- of 18th century origin and earlier (dating back to pre-industrial period),
- of 19th century and early 20th century origin (relicts of city of early industrial epoch),
- of interwar origin,
- of post World War II origin.

Multifunctional complexes constitute a separate big group of degraded areas. Two big basic groups can be distinguished here: city centre areas, landscape complexes (including sports, recreational ones as well as cemeteries, etc.

The areas connected with technical and industrial infrastructure of cities constitute yet another group. Their distinguishing feature consists in total abandonment by the users and resignation from their active use for technical or industrial purposes, consequently meaning – total loss of significance. We can distinguish their four basic categories:

- post-industrial areas, including: *areas of storage places and warehouses, connected with light industry (including objects and areas connected with municipal services), connected with heavy industry,*
- post-harbour areas, including: *objects of medieval origin, of 19th century and early 20th century,*
- post-military objects, including: *complexes of old city fortifications, complexes of military barracks, military training grounds,*
- post-railway areas, including: *around still functioning railway stations, areas of*

stand, cargo and junction stations and railway infrastructure, areas of railway lines and stations closed down or to be closed down.

Urban wasteland of various types constitutes the last category of degraded areas. Generally speaking, the areas can be characterised as temporarily accommodated or not all accommodated areas, which can be due to a number of reasons. Their analysis indicates existence of the following groups:

- areas devastated during the war and not rebuilt,
- areas left to themselves during processes of contemporary development of cities,

The typology presented above is of universal character, which means that it may not cover various specific areas in a given urban centre.

All the area groups mentioned above can be divided by the second adopted criterion – that is scale and significance in urban structure. Three basic categories can be distinguished here:

- single buildings and the plots connected with them, constituting an element of the city tissue – that is complexes constituting an element of continuous city tissue that are not an independent element of city structure;
- distinguishing urbanistic and complexes and arrangements, consisting of many types of structures, being, however, an element of continuous city tissue, including entire city quarters;
- intricate complexes, consisting of a number of various arrangements, of various composition and original functions, constituting entire city districts.

Each of them can be interesting for various institutions of culture. Such institutions can also contribute to the success of the transformation programmes implemented there.



8. Cultural activities and projects as elements of revitalization processes

Cultural activities – including artistic ones – often become elements of revitalization programmes of degraded urban structures. In many cases, implementation of such programmes is connected with creation of new elements of city programme – including centres of culture, concert and show halls, museums, centres of artistic activity, etc. They are of great significance to the success of entire revitalization processes, as they contribute to building programme and social diversity of the areas under transformation. It is, *inter alia*, due to the fact that the objects – in particular the historical ones adapted for artistic activity, that is often degraded objects in the areas under revitalization – usually attract people involved in various types of activities – including e.g. avant-garde groups. At the same time, due to the contemporary tendencies in artistic activity, assuming active participation of the audience – local community is involved in implementation of such projects. It can refer both to the people living in those objects, and e.g. employees of industrial plants under liquidation or restructuring. Such projects can also contribute to revival of local traditions, giving the revitalized areas a special identity.

Among the projects connected with cultural and artistic activity, implemented in degraded areas, their two basic groups can be distinguished: the so called “hard” and “soft” projects. The division is based on the type of undertakings implemented under the projects. And so, “hard” projects are usually connected with building some type of new infrastructure to serve artistic activity, e.g. creation of new exhibition spaces, workshops, auditoria and performance halls. The efforts result in new spaces for activities of various persons and institutions in the areas under revitalization, which increases the attractiveness of such areas. On the contrary, “soft” projects mean implementation of various artistic activities in the degraded areas – such as festivals, performances, outdoor workshops, etc. Such activities contribute to the local community’s

“domestication” of the areas under revitalization, whose biggest problem usually consists in alienation from urban structure. At the same time, such activities often constitute an avant-garde of the “hard” projects described above, or of investments of commercial character.

9. Examples of linking urban structures revitalization programmes with activities in the area of culture

In Polish cities urban revitalization programmes are still at the preparation stage or have just been launched. That is why – discussing the role of culture in revitalization processes of cities – references should be made to revitalization in Western Europe (Colquhoun 1995; van der Meer and Otgaar 1999). Only with this background is it possible to describe Polish examples and the potential significance of cultural projects in implementation of revitalization processes.

In Western European cities implementation of practically speaking each revitalization project was connected with preparing activities in the area of culture. It refers both to activities of regional impact and the ones connected with renovation of single objects.

Restructuring the German industrial zone – the so called Ruhr Area is one of the best known programmes of comprehensive revitalization on a regional scale. Many projects have already been implemented under this year long programme, e.g. turning the old mine Zeche Zollverein in Essen into a design centre and museum of the history of the region, and the creation of LandschaftsPark Duisburg Nord in Duisburg. The latter project is connected with development of a culture park based on an area of an old steel mill, adapted for cultural and recreational purposes.

And as for single objects, one can mention a number of examples, of which the following can be of the greatest significance to revival of adjacent areas:



- Tate Modern Gallery in London – that is turning the old power plant into an exhibition centre, constituting at the same time an element of revival programme of the South Bank of the Thames;

- Harborlights Center concert hall in Boston – a concert and performance hall of temporary character, constituting an element of transformation process of post-harbour areas in Boston (the so called South Boston Project);

- Kaiserspeicher concert hall in Hamburg – a planned new concert hall built up on an old port granary, constituting an element of revitalization program of the HafenCity area.

There are numerous examples of this kind. They prove the significance of presence of cultural activities in the process of urban revitalization of cities. They also constitute a good base for implementation of similar projects in Poland, where revitalization undertakings are still at preparation stage. It is not often either that transformation of entire urban complexes is considered – rather single objects and their small complexes.

As for Poland, there are a few examples of pilot projects including activities in the area of culture – of both “hard” and “soft” projects. Quite a few of them are being implemented in Gdańsk. Beside Outdoor Gallery, there is also the project of transforming post shipyard areas (“Young City”) and city fortifications (the so called “Hewelianum”).

Gdańsk “Young City” project covers revitalization of the complex of post shipyards areas (of the total of 70 ha). It is assumed that the area will become a new centre for the entire Tri-City metropolitan area, with a wide range of function proposals, mainly of commercial character (e.g. Kochanowski and Kochanowska 2005). The interesting thing is that the project includes a number of cultural undertakings, artistic ones included. Projects and undertakings are already being prepared, before the process of commercial investing has actually started. The list of the projects to be implemented includes, *inter alia*, construction of European Solidarity Centre and extension of

the already existing Road to Freedom – a public project of symbolic character, to commemorate the events connected with decline of communism and regaining freedom. And those activities, important for the entire Tri-City as they are, are accompanied by creating a new image of purely artistic dimension, including the so called “colony of artists”, grouping artists of various types, and location of the Institute of Art “Island” in the building of an old vocational school. At the same time, many events of public character, such as concerts and open air events are organized in the Young City, the most famous being Jean Michel Jarre’s concert organized to mark the occasion of 25th anniversary of “Solidarity”. However – from the point of view of the success of the entire revitalization programme – it is also important to take up activities aimed at involvement of the local community of the areas in the direct vicinity of the shipyard areas, including artistic activities by which various social objectives crucial to the success of the whole process are attained (Sebastyański 2005).

The complex of old city fortifications, the so called Grodzisko, is another revitalization project in Gdańsk. The complex is located in the direct vicinity of the Main Railway Station. It covers the area of ca 20 ha, most of which are fortifications from the Prussian period, now under renovation (Lorens 2005). At the same time, they are being transformed (with assistance of European Union funds) into Pomeranian Centre of Science and Technology “Hewelianum”, which is to become the first in the Pomeranian region *Science Park*. Presentations of “living history”, connected mainly with the history of the place, are to be an integral part of the project. The fort area also hosts, *inter alia*, associations cultivating military traditions of various epochs – e.g. knights and Napoleonic. The cubature of the old fortification is being renovated as a part of the programme “Promise of the Minister of Culture”, and also financed from non-central budget sources.

Similar projects and undertakings are also being implemented in other Polish cities.



One needs to mention the Warsaw “Fabryka Trzciny” [Cane factory] (centre of cultural and artistic activities located in a renovated factory in Praga district), or the Poznań “Stary Browar” [Old Brewery] (shopping centre developed in an old brewery, including a number of functions, cultural ones including) of the Łódź “Manufaktura” [Manufacture] (similar to the Poznań project, although of a bigger scale).

10. Issues in public participation

Urban regeneration has become an important part of the planning agenda for the Polish cities already two decades ago. Since a few years it has also become important for rapidly developing countries, including the post-socialist ones. This process is accompanied by growing awareness of the local communities, which intend to actively participate in the decision-making process regarding the urban development and redevelopment of numerous sites. Besides conflicts and protests regarding localization of different developments, one can also note the growing interest in urban regeneration and revitalization as well as in including cultural activities in these processes. In these cases the local communities are interested not in stopping the development, but – on the contrary – in spurring it. But still they intend to control the development and select the best solutions from their point of view. This has accelerated the transition in the approach to the participatory process – from the “accepting” mode to the “getting ahead” one. The first one is usually based on preparation of the development proposal by the investor and/or local government and submitting it to the public, usually expecting its acceptance with little or no adjustments. The other one is based on starting the public discussion on the development problem without prior preparation of the specific proposal; on the contrary, the outcomes of the public discussion serve as the basis of preparation of the specific proposals, submitted again to the public for further discussion. Present situation in Polish cities already proved the development of the latter approach and its superiority to the first one in

regard to the acceptance of the local communities to the final result of the discussion on the selected sites. Also, the “getting ahead” methodology allows discussing serious development problems, defining the real conflict areas, possible solutions to it and – finally – public consensus on the final proposal. In the paper two specific cases are discussed: the Korfanty St. in Katowice and Old Town Market Square in Starogard Gdanski. In both cases two described participatory methods were used, which proved superiority of the “getting ahead” one. In both cases it allowed defining the core of the conflict and developing the possible scope of solutions. In result, it allowed achieving results more comfortable for the local community and meeting its basic requests.

11. Conclusions

Urban regeneration seems to be established as one of the key themes of urban planning in Poland nowadays. But it is deeply rooted in the market processes, which – on one hand – allows market-oriented development solutions, but – on the other side – can effect in social tensions and problems. At the same time urban regeneration processes are frequently associated with the development of the cultural activities and actions, which brings benefits to all involved actors of this game.

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