

Agnieszka Jaszczak

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn
e-mail:agnieszka.jaszczak@uwm.edu.pl

Katarína Kristiánová

Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Slovakia
e-mail: kristianova@fa.stuba.sk

Alžbeta Sopiřová

Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Slovakia
e-mail: sopirova@fa.stuba.sk

REVITALIZATION OF PUBLIC SPACE IN SMALL TOWNS: EXAMPLES FROM SLOVAKIA AND POLAND

Streszczenie

Rewitalizacja przestrzeni publicznych na przykładzie małych miast w Polsce i na Słowacji

Zagadnienie rewitalizacji przestrzeni publicznej w miastach pojawiło się w krajach Europy Zachodniej na początku lat sześćdziesiątych XX wieku. Znacznie później idea odnowy została wprowadzona w krajach takich jak Słowacja i Polska. Początki programu rewitalizacji sięgają okresu po transformacji ustrojowej, a w szczególności po przystąpieniu tych krajów do UE. Od tego momentu odnowa stała się bardzo ważnym zagadnieniem w polityce rozwoju małych miast. Przestrzeń odpowiednią do rewitalizacji definiuje się i na Słowacji, i w Polsce jako zaniedbaną, pozbawioną funkcji lub niewłaściwie używaną. Obszary uwzględnione w rewitalizacji są najczęściej określane jako obszary poprzemysłowe i duże obszary miejskie. Jednak koncepcja rewitalizacji ewoluowała zwłaszcza w ostatnich latach w kierunku odnowy centrów miast i dzielnic miejskich, w których zlokalizowane są ważne przestrzenie publiczne. Obecnie wiele programów, projektów i działań odnosi się do kwestii odtworzenia, zmiany lub odnowy miejsc wspólnych. Rewitalizacja jest więc interdyscyplinarnym procesem, który łączy kwestie rozwoju miejskiego z planowaniem, ekonomią, socjologią, psychologią i innymi zagadnieniami. Celem badań była analiza procesu rewitalizacji przestrzeni publicznych na przykładzie małych miast w Polsce i na Słowacji. Głównym zadaniem było odniesienie się do problematyki zmian w przestrzeni w kontekście przemian społecznych i kulturowych oraz przestrzennych. W tym celu przeanalizowano projekty i realizacje obejmujące rewitalizację w małych mia-

stach należących do stowarzyszenia Cittaslow (Polska) oraz w miastach w regionie Koszyc, Preszowa i Nitry (Słowacja).

Słowa kluczowe: rewitalizacja, przestrzeń publiczna, małe miasta, Cittaslow

Abstract

The issue of revitalization of public space in cities appeared in the countries of Western Europe in the early 1960s. Much later, the issue of renewal was introduced in countries such as Slovakia and Poland. The beginnings of the revitalization programs date back to the period of political transformation, and in particular concern the accession of these countries to the EU. Since then, the revitalization has become a very important issue for the policy of developing small towns. The space suitable for revitalization is presented as neglected, left without use or not used properly. Areas which undergoing by revitalization are most often described as post-industrial, industrial, and large-scale urban areas. However, the concept of revitalization has evolved especially in the recent years towards the renewal of the city centers and satellite districts in which public spaces are important. Currently, many programs, projects, and activities refer to the concept of revitalization. Revitalization is an interdisciplinary process that combines issues of urban development with architectural planning, economics, sociology, psychology, and others. The work presents the problems of changes in public space related to the implementation of revitalization programs. Reference has been made to changes in the structure of public spaces, as well as areas and facilities of particular importance for residents of small towns in Slovakia and Poland. Finally, the examples of revitalization in both countries are presented. The aim of the research was to analyze the process of revitalization of public spaces on the example of small towns in Poland and Slovakia. The main task was to refer to the issues of changes in space in the context of social and cultural and spatial changes. For this purpose, authors analyzed projects and realizations involving the revitalization of small towns belonging to the Cittaslow Association in Poland and the small cities of the selected Košice, Prešov and Nitra region in Slovakia.

Keywords: revitalization, public space, small towns, Cittaslow

Introduction

The problem of the development of small towns is often marginalized in relation to the areas of big cities, central settlements, where all attention is focused, in the planning, economic and social sense. It is assumed that small cities in Europe are those up to 50,000, but are inhabited by about 20% of the population [Knox, Mayer, 2009], which is a significant social and economic potential. In Poland and in Slovakia, small cities are treated as having a population of up to 20,000. Historical conditions and the origin of small towns have different backgrounds, while they have often been socio-cultural and economic, as well as commercial centers, for agricultural areas. Examples of small cities (from five to ten thousand and slightly above the population) with this function can be found in the regions of North-Eastern Poland and Slovakia. The authors decided to compare the process of revitalization in small towns in both countries due to similar socio-economic conditions after the transformation in 1989, but also due to the different

geographical and cultural specificity. It was also important to present the role of revitalization programs in the cities of north-eastern Poland, which are involved in the Cittaslow movement and Slovak cities that are not members of this organization, but may in the future become Cittaslow cities, in the Košice, Prešov and Nitra region.

Small cities fulfill important functions in the settlement structure in Slovakia. They serve as local centers for the rural hinterland and for villages in the settlement system, and as centers of micro-regions they play a key role in their prosperity [Vaishar, Zapletalová, 2009; Slavík *et al.*, 2016]. They provide for the inhabitants of micro-regions and marginal areas the city services of the primary level, the job opportunities, and the opportunities of for social and cultural contacts. Moreover, small cities fulfill the selected competencies which villages are not able to provide, for example, the agenda of building permit administration, the school agenda, or the agenda of the common strategic development and integrated infrastructural planning. Revitalization programs have become a very important issue for the policy of developing small towns in Slovakia, especially since the period of political transformation. Transformations and revitalizations of public spaces are needed because of changing requirements of society towards their functions, for example in the past the main squares in historic city cores were used as market places, later for car traffic and car parking functions, which were replaced by pedestrian zones, enabling pleasant and enjoyable stay, creating urban space for various social and cultural activities. However the main problems of Slovak small cities are: poor facilities and underdeveloped amenities for providing public services, lack of basic infrastructure, remoteness, poor accessibility, increased transport costs, lack of job opportunities, lack of investments, departure of young people and highly skilled workforce from the countryside, ageing of population, problems of human capital, stagnation of number of inhabitants, resulting then in a lack of funds and resources for necessary development [Novotný *et al.*, 2016; Gajdoš, 2009].

Similar problems related to demography (aging of the population and outflow of especially young people to larger cities), economy (lower income of residents), infrastructure, and space are concerned with the small towns in Poland, too. That is why remedial actions within the revitalization in general sense are important. The act on revitalization from 9th October 2015 states that revitalization activities may be subject to the area of the municipality which is in crisis state due to the concentration of negative social aspect (e.g. unemployment, poverty, crime, low education or social capital) and insufficient level of participation in public and cultural life as a consequence of the negative phenomena in addition to the economic, environmental, spatial and functional or technical situation. In Poland, in recent years, a number of institutions and associations which are known for the idea of landscape protection and improvement of the quality of life (at the national level, for example, the Association “Forum Rewitalizacji”) have emerged. A number of action plans and projects for the renewal of public space are being created. Revitalization including protection and sustainable management of space is one of the activities necessary to create a friendly space for city dwellers. It assumes sharing this space with people. Therefore, as part of the renewal, conscious planning

should be included to protect biodiversity resources, as well as ensuring accessibility to recreation and recreation for users [Trząski *et al.*, 2010].

The work based on the assumptions and effects of the previous initiatives in the field of socio-spatial development of small towns. The examples of activities in the sense of revitalization aimed at improving the quality of residents' life, as well as protection and management of landscape are also indicated. It was assumed that small towns together with the surrounding rural areas in the future may be an alternative form for metropolitan structures, as well as a kind of model which takes into account the spatial and social relations.

Methodology

The work refers to the issues of the revitalization of small-town structures in Slovakia and Poland. There were analyzed the issues regarding the role of public space and the possibility of its renewal. The work is of a theoretical and analytical nature. Source materials studies consisted of collecting and interpreting information from monographic and cartographic documentation, both current and archival, as well as websites. Archival documentation includes old maps and photographs, as well as engravings showing public spaces in small cities of former East Prussia (Polish examples), as well as public spaces in the small Slovak cities in Košice, Prešov and Nitra region (Slovak examples). Information on revitalization projects comes from sites selected for analysis by Cittaslow (Warmia and Mazury) and the sites selected for analysis in Slovak small cities. The implemented revitalization projects in small towns were also analyzed. Spatial and landscape analyzes of selected places in Slovakia and Poland were carried out. An important stage of the research was to determine the role of social participation in the process of revitalization of public space in cities. Interviews with people associated with the local government, city authorities and city residents were an important stage.

The role of public space in social integration of citizens in small towns

An integral and natural part of urban development is the continuous process of spatial changes, combining civilization progress and technological innovations with limiting unfavorable social phenomena and taking actions in the field of protection of cultural goods and environment. Such activities are aimed at improving the quality of life of the residents. The public space is poised to respond to the changes and it tends to change frequently and in relatively short periods of time. In its design and equipment it tends to reflect the current aesthetic preferences of the society, but often the ambition to apply current trends of design in public spaces leads to globalization effects and homogeneity of landscape design

language [Ignatieva, Stewart, 2009]. Two types of revitalization are discussed by Strzelecka [2011]. She defines the principles of “implementing revitalization” referring to Kaczmarek [2001]. According to her,

the revitalization that some urban planners and architects recognize as an effective, sustainable instrument for introducing socially advisable and lasting changes in urbanized areas is not always carried out according to a model in a line to the philosophy and principles of sustainable development.

Further, the author gives a model that fits to the idea of sustainable development called “integrative revitalization”, and thus it takes into account the role of the local community in the process of renewal. The experience of many countries shows that the condition for good management is the participation of citizens in making public decisions and the conscious and active participation of residents in co-deciding on matters of public space. The integration and cooperation of a small community in which “everyone knows each other” seems to be easier to achieve than in big cities. The development of spatial standards, care for the landscape, establishing new green areas and the introduction of the principles of space aesthetic will give the opportunity to define a new regional quality. Public spaces that play the role of integrating the inhabitants of a small town can be divided in terms of their accessibility, location, and function. These include:

- town center, most often in the form of main square;
- squares that are not in the city center, places of events and meetings of residents;
- parks and green areas;
- recreational areas, boulevards, waterfronts;
- sport areas;
- areas with educational function;
- street space;
- transportation space.

Often the major nodes and the main public spaces in cities receive much attention and investment. Often forgotten, however, are the public spaces on the margins of the city, on the urban periphery, in the inner city, or in poorer neighborhoods. It is essential, therefore, to search also for an understanding of these public spaces, which are often excluded from the city marketing and public space improvement drives [Madanipour, 2004]. Aspects of social integration are significant for public spaces and as noted by Madanipour [2004], it is important to include also the most vulnerable groups, i.e., the poor, the elderly, children, women, ethnic minorities have been exposed to the risks of social exclusion, long term unemployed, or immigrants.

In the integration of residents, such activities in the public space are important, which also have an optional and festive character, but they take place regularly in urban spaces. Common celebration on the occasion of the New Year, participation in regional city festivals, as well as in religious celebrations, builds a sense of community and co-shapes urban identity [Bierwiczek, 2015; Carr *et al.*, 2009].

The important types of optional activities are those undertaken by groups of urban activists or urban organizations. They are important because they often show alternative ways of using urban spaces, e.g. Park(ing Day), Family Picnics, Street Festivals. Optional activities also indicate specific problems of cities that need to be addressed (e.g. introduction of cheap services in the city center, availability to specific locations) [Bierwiazzonek, 2015]. The author further emphasizes that the public space will have a social character when it becomes competitive against commercial spaces (entertainment centers, theme parks that have the character of private places commissioned for public use). Therefore, the sense of revitalization activities, as a stage of restoring already existing, but neglected public spaces, is when these can become a place of community and integration of residents. With the appropriate allocation of the function of such space, as well as the needs of its users and the determination of the identity of space, these can be effective actions.

Revitalization as a process of multi-directional renewal of small towns—examples from Slovakia and Poland

Public spaces of small cities play an important role in their ability to provide the functions of small centers and for the implementation of various activities. Often the process of revitalization of public spaces in small cities is required, as a process of multi-directional renewal that combines issues of urban development with architectural planning, economics, sociology, psychology, and others. According to Strzelecka [2011], revitalization involves overcoming of the socio-economic crisis in a given area and changes its “bad image”. From the point of view of sustainable development, revitalization is generally related to changes in degraded areas in three levels: changes in economic development (for example, new working places), changes in social development (prevention of social pathologies) and changes in infrastructure and spatial development (preservation of cultural heritage through modernization and conservation of historic buildings and public spaces, and improvement of the natural environment).

Public space, as a place of social contacts and as an element with the highest interest of public participation, is in the spotlight of the municipal policies in the revitalization processes, as processes of multi-directional renewal. The revitalization plans for the public spaces should be based on the conceptual strategy for the system of public spaces in the city [Kristiánová, Vitková, 2016]. This conceptual strategy could be included in the master plan of the city. The main aim of the revitalization strategies, based on social needs, interests and possibilities, is to create sustainable and resilient public spaces, bring livability and vitality in urban public space, and enhance social interactions. As mentioned by Vinarčíková and Bašová [2017], fun and relax are attributes of the vital contemporary urban public spaces, too.

In Slovakia, because of the slow urban growth, many of the small cities have preserved the historical heritage values of their historic city cores and became

centers of recreation, leisure, and tourism, as for example, the historic small city Levoča in the Prešov region, where the specific local identity of the public spaces in the historic city core has been successfully preserved in the revitalization processes already in the past. In other small cities the urban development during the historical development and during the socialist period resulted in losses of the historical heritage values and the neglected city centers fell in decay. The historic urban structure became deteriorated and has been on a large scale demolished for example in Snina or Stropkov (Prešov region). The forms of mass housing constructions suitable for the needs of large cities have been uncritically applied in the case of small cities. These processes often left unused, underused and fragmented public spaces in the urban fabric of small cities, which require revitalization, for example in Hanušovce nad Topľou in Prešov region, Sobrance and Rožňava in Košice region, or in Štúrovo and Želiezovce in Nitra region.

In order to be able to implement the large-scale revitalization activities, small cities in Slovakia often depend on funds from the resources of the state budget and the structural funds of the EU. For example in Gelnica (Košice region), the renewal of infrastructure and public spaces after floods in the years 2014–2015 has been supported by European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), through regional operation program, priority axis Regeneration of Settlements, guided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic. Through this program, the revitalization activities of the public spaces in the central zone of the city Svit and the central zone of the city Stará Ľubovňa in Prešov region have been supported. In Levoča in Prešov region, for example, the public space revitalization activities have been supported by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF).

Nongovernmental organizations or private sector, commercial subjects, or individuals are often active in the small-scale public space revitalization activities. In Stará Ľubovňa the area of the old fruit tree orchard have been revitalized as public space in collaborations with several partners, among them the Castle of Stará Ľubovňa, regional tourism agency Severný Spiš Pieniny and a secondary vocational school. Municipalities, in order to involve citizens in participation processes establish the so-called “participatory budgets”. The small-scale revitalizations of public spaces are often implemented according to the votes of citizens. In order to get various inspiring ideas for the revitalization concepts of public spaces, small municipalities often organize architectural competitions or use the possibility to collaborate with the universities as partners to obtain variant design solutions for the revitalization of public spaces made by students, as for example in Štúrovo in Nitra region. The design concepts are discussed and evaluated by inhabitants, and according their preferences the best selected ideas are often implemented. To make the public spaces in small cities active, various events, festivals or special programs are organized in collaboration of local, regional governments, non-governmental organizations and citizens, as for example the Danube Day is celebrated on the riverfront promenade in Štúrovo. The examples from the small cities in the examined regions show that the large scale projects of revitalization in public spaces are mainly revitalized using the European funds, but in the small-scale

public space revitalization activities usually nongovernmental organizations, private sector, commercial subjects, and individuals are active.

Recently, the revitalization efforts of the small municipalities in Slovakia focus not only to improve the quality of the main public spaces in the centers, but to wide typology of public spaces – improvement of the quality of parks and green spaces, children playgrounds and sport grounds in residential areas, or establishment of new cycling routes. Today, the important focus in the design of urban public spaces is given also to the aspects of adaptation to climate change, enforcement of green infrastructure, and utilization of vegetation elements to enhance the attractiveness of public space [Marcinková, 2016]. Attention is given also to the revitalization of watercourses, which were channeled in the past, not only in the contexts of the stormwater management and protection against floods. Today they are often transformed and rehabilitated to fulfill their new contemporary roles in the urban environment, most often to fulfill recreation, aesthetic, and ecological functions [Kristiánová *et al.*, 2015]. Unlike in Poland, the Slovak small cities have not joined the Cittaslow movement, yet, and do not use the opportunity of promotion of their qualities and specific local identities on a global scale through this network.

Meanwhile, the revitalization of public spaces in the Polish Cittaslow towns in Warmia and Mazury has been taken into account in the Regional Operational Program of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship for 2014–2020, as well as other EU documents related to the financial perspective 2014–2020. The range of projects responses to specific problems of degraded areas identified in the Revitalization Program and is also possible to be financed. The projects will be implemented as a part of the Integrated Investment Projects. The aim of the Cittaslow Urban Networks Revitalization Program is a parallel, coordinated and targeted revitalization of cities, comprising the network in Warmia and Mazury, so that to preserving its specific nature and values could also offer residents quality of life. Common and parallel actions in all 14 cities will be much more visible and identified than the single processes.

The revitalization process in the Cittaslow towns began earlier, even before the development of the Supraregional Urban Revitalization Program. Renewal of places and objects in the Warmia and Mazury is done in a systematic way. At the beginning, investments included the most important historical objects, which were adapted to the new function. In many towns of Warmia and Mazury, projects are being carried out to revalorization and renewing of historic buildings (for example Warmian Bishops' Residence, High Gate and historical Walls in Lidzbark Warmiński, the historical tower in Dobrze Miasto, the water tower in Gołdap, churches in Olsztynek and Barczewo). Information systems about monuments and places related to history (e.g. information boards in Biskupiec) were also designed (educational function for residents). In the next stage, the revitalization of public spaces was addressed. Among the tasks involving the creation of the urban space (social aspect), the implementation of projects in the field of the revitalization of squares and city centers could be distinguished. The “new” squares were built in Barczewo, Biskupiec, Gołdap, Olsztynek, Lidzbark Warmiński and Lubawa. The

old townhouses, which now have important educational and cultural functions, were renovated in Dobrze Miasto. A space was created here for services and craft workshops, including photography, tailoring, shoemaking, hairdressing, baker's house, exhibition, and museum. Revitalization of squares is one of the ways to consolidate the bond between the place and the inhabitants. Main squares can be important in creating the image of the entire urban structure. Renewed centers not only improve aesthetics of city but also regain the role of a meeting place. Festivals, holidays and social ventures are organized here (e.g. annual festivals of Cittaslow cities, Christmas markets and fairs, concerts and artistic meetings). The next group of activities within the city renewal includes the recomposition of parks and areas with a recreational function. Until now, a number of city parks (e.g. in Gołdap, Biskupiec, Olsztynek, Górowo Hławeckie, Lubawa, Lidzbark Warmiński) has been restored or improved. In addition, in the Gołdap health resort, projects related to improving health, physical and mental condition of residents and patients were implemented. The city beach and the spa and therapy park have been developed. Integration of disabled people with the of-disabled residents is becoming more and more important. In the implemented projects, attention was drawn to the necessity to adapt a space and eliminate architectural barriers, as well as to develop a utility program for all age groups and people with diverse physical and mental condition. What's more, there are initiatives in the social space resulting from the involvement of disabled people, an example of which is the activity of the Association for People with Mental Disabilities in Biskupiec. In the town, are organized artistic and therapeutic classes, exhibitions, markets of works of persons with disabilities, theater, happenings and so-called "Marches of Dignity" are organized [Jaszczak, 2015; Jaszczak, Antolak, 2015].

Small towns in Warmia and Mazury, thanks to individual renewal programs, can gain a distinctive space. Belonging to the Cittaslow network gives wide opportunities for promotion on a global scale, but also obliges to improve the quality of the environment, the aestheticisation of the surroundings and to create a social space, based on landscape features and the identity of the place. It is extremely important to involve residents in this complex process, as well as an attempt to identify (especially the younger generation) with the place of birth.

Conclusions

1. Public space in a small town is a meeting place of various types: formal and informal, group and individual. It is characterized by equal access for all residents. Common access to public space is its unique value for the city's community, whose structure consists of places with different functions and destinations and varying degrees of accessibility. Due to the nature of public space, it is important to prepare or renew it based on revitalization activities.

2. So far, also thanks to EU funds and the efforts of numerous involved organizations, many positive effects in revitalization activities have been achieved

in Poland, but also in Slovakia, and gained experience in the planning of public spaces is very important. However, there is a need for further multi-sectoral and more integrated thinking for the recovery of degraded areas from crisis states.

3. For the implementation of ambitious and complex tasks in this area, close cooperation and coordination of all institutions involved in the development policy of regions and cities is needed. Therefore integral revitalizations are projects that sign into sustainable development. Effective and efficient revitalization with the participation of the residents require special commissioning process in which the local community is not only addressed but also is the co-founder of the generated proposals for changes. This approach will allow to rebuild or to create community linkages and a sense of belonging to a given place.

4. This work presents examples of revitalization in the Slovak and Polish regions with a different approach to the issues of public space renewal. In Slovakia, there is no one central program for revitalization, the revitalization of public spaces is supported through various schemes, and at the national level, it is in the responsibility of several ministries. For example, the environmental resort, the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic leads the Program of Village Renewal, focusing on small rural settlements, the agricultural resort, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, for example, leads the calls focused on green infrastructure improvement in cities. The main objective of the Integrated Regional Operational Program led by this ministry is to contribute to the promotion of quality of life and to ensure sustainable provision of public services, beneficial for a balanced and sustainable regional development. It is intended to support the regions in the field of transport, helps to increase the capacity of the kinder gardens, to improve the equipment for primary and secondary schools, and also supports the social and cultural development. One of its priorities is the community-led local development. To achieve the goals of revitalization, small municipalities in Slovakia often band together, the inter-municipal cooperation presents the effective way to solve the common problems. Current trends show the growing involvement of citizens and various associations in public space revitalization activities.

5. The projects of the revitalization of public spaces carried out so far in small towns in Warmia and Mazury indicate the need for greater involvement of the community in the planning process. Most of the investments brought positive results, and the places gained not only a new function or aesthetic values but are also used by the residents. In the case of Polish cities associated in the Cittaslow association, the implementation of the Supra-local Revitalization Program will be important in the following years. The Revitalization Program presents solutions to specific problems identified in degraded urban areas, affecting directly or indirectly the improvement of the existing state. Planned projects will be financed from various sources (EFRR, EFS, own funds). However, in addition to the financial security of the implemented tasks, it seems necessary to include the process of integrating local entities and residents into the continued use of public spaces.

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