URBAN REVITALIZATION AS A STRATEGY FOR CREATING A REGIONAL PRODUCT

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Abstract: Revitalisation is nowadays one of the most frequently used notions related to the renovation and reclamation of cities as well as restoration of splendour to areas and facilities. It should be remembered, however, that revitalisation is also a process of social renewal (social projects) and revival of the economic space of a city or a region. Well-maintained, original, historic urban space also becomes an inspiration for the development of many socio-cultural initiatives, enriching the offer of the city and making it attractive for both the residents and representatives of the creative class, on whom, to a large extent, the economic growth of the city is dependent.
This interdependence of caring for an attractive space and the development of other aspects of city life, including the economic one, also takes form of marketing activities that consist in promoting the cultural legacy of the city and region as a special "product" that distinguishes a particular area.

Keywords: revitalisation, cultural legacy, regional product, social area of a city, urban creativity.

Introduction

Restoration of self-governance in Poland after 1989 enabled cities and regions to develop again. It was soon realised that caring for the broadly defined **image** of the city was also necessary for its proper and balanced socio-economic development.

An attractive, interesting and original space creates a special atmosphere, often described as "genius loci". For this reason, nowadays, not only the big, distinctive cities with centuries-old traditions use the assets associated with their history or cultural legacy to build their image; smaller towns and local communities also use such forms of promotion, popularising everything that may seem interesting in any way, with particular attention to the material and non-material forms of cultural heritage of the city or the region.

Local and regional 'brands' are created ('branding' of the regional products) for the purposes of promotion and in order to raise interest in the city's offer.

Apart from the historical sites and legends referring to the city's history, such products can also encompass the elements that belong to the "culinary heritage" group – such as the oscypek cheese in Podhale – or longstanding traditions that characterise a certain region, for example celebrations of the Barbórka mining festival in Silesia. Post-industrial facilities referring to the specificity and history of industry-related regions are also becoming an increasingly "trendy" product.

Apart from the proper promotional activities, caring for the cultural heritage also requires considerable effort and investment in the ongoing maintenance and reclamation of historic facilities and urban areas; the process is defined as revitalisation.

1. The problem of revitalisation

According to the definition: "Revitalisation is a process of spatial, social and economic transformation aimed at bringing an area out of a crisis and leading to its development, which encompasses increasing the quality of life of the local community, improving the state of the natural and cultural environment and restoring the spatial order; It is also aimed at economic revival and restoration of social bonds. Revitalisation programs are most often carried out in downgraded districts, large-panel housing estates and in post-industrial areas" (Tyrybon, Ślęzak-Tazbir, 2011, p. 168).

"The term 'revitalisation' refers to the process of adapting the city development to the changing needs of urban communities and the individuals that form these communities. Revitalisation of also a social process [...]" (Bombelka, 2010, p. 184).

Other definitions also describe revitalisation as a: "complex program of renovations and modernisation of buildings and public areas, restoration of monuments in a given area, most often in an old district of the city, together with economic and social development. Revitalisation is a combination of technical measures, economic revival programs and initiatives aimed at solving social problems occurring in these areas: unemployment, crime, demographic imbalance" (Skalski, 2000, p. 1).

According to Andrzej Majer: "Revitalisation is a notion that is notoriously overused to describe all types of renovation, adaptation or modernisation, even those conducted on a minor scale. It is confused with restoration, adaptation, preservation and reclamation. It should refer to activities that are undertaken on a larger scale (districts, parts of the city) and in relation to many levels of urban space (architectural, social, economic and cultural one). [...] Construction activities are the most important components of revitalisation, but they cannot replace it;

this way, failure to understand that people whom this issue concerns are just as important as those activities is constantly revealed (Majer, 2014, p. 59).

For many cities, the period when it was possible to obtain European funds in order to launch and support the broadly defined revitalisation of urban areas was not only an invaluable chance to save the most precious urban areas or to restore their former order and aesthetics, but also an opportunity to turn the city into a certain product – a 'brand'.

The period of the last decades, starting from the moment of restoring the self-governance of cities and regions in Poland, throughout the accession to the European Union and the launch of the European Funds, set a new course for the development of Polish cities and regions.

Most Polish cities in the post-war era, especially those connected with various heavy industries, usually became merely a hinterland for the staff employed at industrial plants. The period when the socialist cities were being built was characterised not only by the lack of care for the aesthetic and spatial order or the negligence in the scope of development of certain aspects, such as culture or leisure, but also by the lack of care for the cultural heritage of cities.

It mainly concerned negligence in field of monument reclamation and development of historical urban quarters. Alas, irretrievable loss of the most important, historical areas of cities often took place – an example is one of the oldest Silesian cities, Bytom. Professor Jan Drabina, a historian from Bytom, mentions it in his publication on the city: "as early as in the mid-1980s, the entire quarter of 23 houses along the Northern frontage of Kościuszko Square, Piekarska, Jainty and Pokoju streets was being prepared for demolition. [...] All the townhouses were being systematically torn down in the following year" (Drabina, 2000, p. 320).

Pre-war Kościuszko Square is shown below.

Figure 1. Kościuszko Square – Bytom – archival photograph. Source: www.bytomslademwojny.pl.

Bytom was not an isolated case of such "practices" of destroying and tearing (for example with the use of modernist fillings) of the historic tissue of cities.

The period of the self-governance development, supported by the EU funds, not only made it possible to implement certain measures to recover from the period of destruction and negligence but also to use revitalisation projects in order to create the images of cities and regions.

2. City and region as a market product

The contemporary cities, functioning in the times of market economy as a specific type of enterprises, have to highlight their biggest advantages in order to clearly define their identity – the "brand" (*branding*).

Economic literature devoted to shaping the city image states: '[...] The identity of the city is a sum of elements that define it. It is a conglomerate of traits that are characteristic of a city and that distinguish it from others, and are expressed by all activities taken in a city, creating its own personality and character. [...] Identity is also a set of traits and attributes through which the city wants to be perceived by the environment, and which create a specific background, or a context for the process of communicating with others. [...] only the reception of the identity by others will lead to the emergence of a particular image of the city" (Stanowicka-Traczyk, 2008, p. 14).

It is obvious, however, that cities are a specific type of an "enterprise".

On the one hand: "Economically defined – as Max Weber wrote – the city is a settlement the inhabitants of which live primarily off trade and commerce rather than agriculture. In order for there to be a city, a regular exchange of goods must occur in its area; the city is, therefore, defined by the presence of a market" (Jałowiecki, Szczepański, 2006, p. 49).

M. Weber continues: "The city is a marketplace, one can say: the city is diversity, along with its architecture, the shape of space, the traits of social environment and the supralocal functions. The city, being a personification of diversity, creates a certain whole that constitutes the basis for **the cultural identity of its residents**". (Majer, 2010, p. 122).

Therefore, in addition to its physical dimension, the city has first and foremost social dimension and, when analysing its phenomenon, even in the economic and financial aspect, it is not possible to overlook the importance of urban sociology.

It was the Weberian analysis of the urban phenomenon that laid the foundations of urban sociology, especially in the humanistic and culturalistic areas of research, developed later and continued by an eminent Polish scholar, Florian Znaniecki.

Florian Znaniecki viewed space as a value that was a part of the non-spatial value system, and he believed that space was gaining substance and meaning with respect to that system.

Even though Znaniecki did not use the notion of the *social space*, he believed that it was clearly distinguishable from the physical space.

It is the social dimension of space that makes the city a specific type of a "product". Today, uniqueness and originality become the main assets of the city - this exceptional "spirit of the place", which makes some cities begin living at their own rhythm and creates a unique atmosphere and "magic" as well as a specific "identity of the place" that draws people to it.

Thus, the urban space has a personal dimension that is peculiar to people (except for the so-called empty spaces), and it always belongs to "somebody".

The social dimension of the area is also related to the notion of place, contemplated by, among others, Bohdan Jałowiecki:

"A place consists of the landscape, [...] the environment physiology, but also of the faces of people, the specifics of the local community [...]" (Jałowiecki, 2011a, p. 9).

And further: "A place is always a part of space that is distinguished, due to some of its specific features, by the perceiving subject. It may be distinguished by historical landmarks or contemporary, unique buildings, statues, plein-air sculptures as well as traits attributed to some trivial element of space by its users, for example due to some exciting event. What makes a place unique is often a specific culture that consolidatesits exceptionality" (Jałowiecki, 2011b, p. 12).

The question arises: why we refer to the socio-cultural aspect of the city while discussing a local/regional product? It is because the economic success is very often determined by the ability to use and highlight the particular aspect which provides special value to the area, which consists in equal part of – apart from the heritage and the material value – the immaterial or the spiritual value, or, in short, the cultural value of the region or the city.

3. Revitalisation of space and promotion of cities

A city that does not highlight the (social and physical) qualities of its space that make it attractive, interesting and inspiring will not be able to draw the interest of potential investors, entrepreneurs and people who from the so-called "creative potential of the city". It was discussed by Richard Florida, the author of the notion of "the creative class": "[...] the creative class plays a particularly important role in the transformation and in the process of development – both social and economic one – of cities and communities" (102, 2011, p. 9).

Undoubtedly, revitalisation programs carried out in many cities contribute to the development of an attractive urban space. As we read in a publication describing revitalisation practices in cities: "an important rationale for many first revitalisation projects in Poland was the concern for the decaying cultural heritage. A common practice applied by the local authorities was establishing revitalisation areas within the historical urban layouts.

The accumulation of numerous culturally valuable sites under conservation protection constituted a significant potential of the revitalisation areas, even in spite of their bad technical condition. Locating the revitalisation process within the most precious urban tissue – in its historical centre – made it possible to use its tourism potential in order to restore the price-generating functions. Such approach was endorsed by the city development strategies that commonly assumed making use of the historical heritage in order to develop local economy. Interventions in the city centres usually encompass restoration of the urban and regional culture symbols, which makes it possible to implement the rule of spatial complementarity of the revitalisation process that consists in translating its effects into the remaining areas" (Jadach-Sepioło, Kułaczkowska, Mróz, 2018, p. 175).

Most cities recognise and implement projects related to reclamation, renewal or even reconstruction of historical buildings and urban areas, for example in the form of infills – an example of such actions in the recent years would be the reconstruction of the Royal Castle in Poznań (shown below).

Figure 2. The Royal Castle in Poznań. Source: www.pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zamek_Kr%C3% B3lewski_w_Poznaniu#/media/Plik:Zamek_Królewski_w_Poznaniu.jpg.

As Łukasz Skoczylas writes in his publication on the social memory of the city: "A medium can become a source of profits also as a tourist attraction. [...] In this case interfering in the medium or creating an infill become factors that support the economic growth and employment. Although the topic of commercialisation of the social memory and post-tourism has been discussed for years, the prevalence of this manner of perceiving memory media can be surprising. It is the effect of treating the media in a pragmatic and utilitarian manner, namely bringing their function in respect of the present to the fore.

[...] Using arguments related to profit is extremely helpful in acquiring the acceptance of memory recipients and even the support of other leaders, such as politicians or officials" (Skoczylas, 2014, pp. 278-279).

Thus, the implementation of this type of projects is by definition aimed not only at restoring the aesthetics and the order of cities as well as protecting the heritage and the material value. Increasingly often the added value in the implementation of such project is attributing functional value to them. They are used for organizing prestigious cultural events, perform representative function in the city, and, often, the newly-obtained, attractive historical sites become an inspiration for new social and cultural initiatives as demonstrated by, for example, the Historic Guido Mine in Zabrze in the Upper Silesia, which was opened for tourism several years ago. Along with the increase in the number of tourists and the increased interest in the object, the original, underground mine interiors began to function as a thriving cultural institution. Suffice to mention that in addition to award-winning theatrical performances and organization of jazz concerts, the mine is the place where the Krzysztof Penderecki International Festival of has been held for several years now (picture below).

Figure 3. The Historical *Guido* Mine – Zabrze. Source: www.kopalniaguido.pl/index.php.

The example of this type of actions implemented in Zabrze shows the process of preserving and reconstructing the memory of a post-industrial city throughout activities that combine "saving" the elements of the bygone era in the landscape and promoting them as well as acquiring a group of recipients in a commercial way, which, however, is consistent with the character and the specificity of the place (organisation of cultural events that also refer to the culture and the heritage of the region).

Lack of competent (entrepreneurial) approach to the possibility of promotion and to drawing the recipients' interest to the captivating urban areas by functional use of the important symbols of the bygone era is, however, still a weakness of other Silesian cities, such as Bytom or Ruda Śląska.

Such actions, carried out in original and cult post-industrial facilities (not only in Silesia), prove how interesting and inspiring the urban areas can be. Reviving the space, namely making it a place that is functional and used by people, and, therefore, one that inspires to take

interesting social and cultural initiatives is one of the key assumptions of the revitalisation activities.

[...] *the cultural area* functions properly for its group (community) only when the group can use it freely, intensively and systematically. Only in such conditions this area can be a place and a catalyst for vital cultural processes. [...] in favourable conditions, specific areas can become areas of culture, and, in unfavourable circumstances - they may lose this role (Wallis, 1980, p. 7).

4. Summary

The strategy of sustainable development of cities and regions increasingly often assumes not only caring for ecology and the economic growth, but also takes into account the necessity to care for the cultural heritage (both material and immaterial) on the basis of which the so-called "regional/local products" are created.

The original, or, perhaps, even unique value of these products builds a brand that makes cities or regions appealing, attracts the tourists, and causes places to become noticeable, which, obviously, translates into economic profits. Creating attractive spaces in cities has one more function – it draws creative people whose presence is necessary for the effective development of cities and regions.

Increasingly often regions notice the need to jointly promote their cultural heritage according to the principle "where there is unity, there's more strength". Incorporating separate entities with their own, distinct potential into one, jointly-functioning organism enriches the whole. Moreover, for organisationally and territorially greater entities it is easier to stand out in comparison with the others.

Mutual support for actions that serve the common interests (by definition stripped of the former element of rivalry between municipalities) also constitutes an opportunity for much more reasonable management of budget funds.

An example of a very effective form of undertaking such activities is the emergence of an initiative in the form of joint promotion of cultural heritage in the Upper Silesia, which is important from the perspective of awakening the cultural identity of the region.

This initiative is *the Industrial Monuments Route of the Silesian Voivodeship created in 2005.* As we read on the websites of the *Route*: "The Industrial Monuments Route of the Silesian Voivodeship is a thematic, automobile tourist and cultural route that interconnects the facilities related to the culture of the industrial heritage of the Silesian Voivodeship. It currently consists of 42 sites. The Route is a branded tourist product (a network product of the region) that presents the most important and the most interesting industrial facilities in the Silesian region – in terms of their tourist, historical and architectural qualities. The Route comprises existing museums,

open-air museums, residential workmen colonies, operating workplaces. The owners of individual facilities are local authorities, private persons, private and state companies. (29.05.2019)

The example of the effectiveness and efficacy of this type of jointly-taken actions proves that the chance of succeeding is much greater if actions are taken collectively; promoting similar products under one brand is significantly more effective than individual actions that often require constant struggle against numerous competitors.

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