

LIVEABLE CITIES – FOUR EXAMPLES OF THE URBAN REGENERATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper is devoted to urban regeneration in the context of increasing the quality of urban space and creating a liveable city. The paper consists of four parts. The first part contains general considerations regarding urban regeneration and highlights that regeneration is an important issue driving the creation of contemporary urban space in Europe. In the second part of this paper results of the OIKONET project will be described and discussed in detail. OIKONET – A Global Multidisciplinary Network on Housing Research and Learning was a Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission. During a workshop, an international group of students and teachers from European Universities worked on the urban rehabilitation of Kosančićev Venac in Belgrade. The third part presents an overview of the activities of the Urban Farmers movement, which aims to educate city residents on growing food in urban utilitarian gardens and on taking care of their neighbourhood landscape in an environmentally friendly way. In the fourth part of the paper, ways to improve the situation in Bialystok through small-scale urban acupuncture action undertaken by students on the Urban Design course are discussed. In conclusion, ethical land use patterns to reduce extreme economic disparities will be emphasized. The presented cases showed that many European countries have similar issues and highlight the need for bottom-up approaches to achieve sustainable communities. Making our cities liveable requires not only improving existing structures but it is also necessary adopting strategies that intertwine environmental, social, psychological issues in the dynamics of renovation.

Keywords: *urban regeneration, liveable city, participation, urban acupuncture*

INTRODUCTION

Every city has abandoned, no-man, degradable areas, both in the centre and on the outskirts. The reason for this may be the lack of ties in local communities, and the weakness of local governments. Poor management of the city's space evokes growing social conflicts. The advantage of private ownership of property over the public property or social raises the question - for whom does the city exist?

Important criteria for the assessment of contemporary public spaces is their quality. We can distinguish several criteria for the assessment: the degree to which space is inspired by its past; how space-friendly it is; how well it supports various activities; how well it is maintained and managed; the degree of social usage of the space. The problem facing architects is how to revive a deserted square in the centre? How to restore the neglected space of yards and streets to residents? How to include them in the process of integration with the city and with each other, which



would become a way to heal the surrounding area, but also to recover places that were previously empty, neglected, decaying, and often dangerous? How to make this process the beginning of conscious participation in the life of the city and thus contributed to limiting the clearly visible tendencies to privatize the urban space within closed settlements, shopping centres, guarded office buildings?

This paper is devoted to urban regeneration in the context of increasing the quality of urban space and creating a liveable city.

The problem of city regeneration is extremely complex. As Roberts writes: „it is important to emphasize that there is no single prescribed form of urban regeneration practice and no single theoretical explanation than can be used to analyse all urban problem situations and develop appropriate solutions. In the much-changed circumstances of the twenty-first century, time and place both matter, and urban regeneration has to reflect particular local circumstances which define it”. [1] Renewal, regeneration, reconstruction, restoration and redevelopment convey different balances between maintaining current spaces or creating new ones, between preserving or transforming the character of a place, and between reusing existing structures constructing new ones.

OIKONET PROJECT

OIKONET - A Global Multidisciplinary Network on Housing Research and Learning was a Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission. As part of this program, a workshop was conducted in Belgrade in 2016 with participants from 19 European Universities working together to identify ways to rehabilitating the urban area of Kosančićev Venac, the central district of Belgrade.

The topic of the workshop was defined as follows - *Renewing / Revitalizing. Creating liveable cities*. The historical part of the city chosen for revitalization - Kosančićev Venac - is a heterogeneous, multifunctional area, located between the banks of the Sava River and the main pedestrian route, in the vicinity of the Kalemegdan fortress. Despite the excellent location in the city centre, this area has been neglected for many decades. This area required careful redefinition of views on cultural, educational and tourist importance of Kosančićev Venac, taking into account the point of view of different social groups.

In connection with the above, the objectives of the workshop were: identifying the specific features of the area, which includes the potential for future changes; multidimensional analysis of the environmental, social and psychological aspects of a city that is resident-friendly as a basis for the remodelling strategy; proposing revitalization strategies that allow participation of representatives of the local community; defining the transformation processes of existing spatial structures for other uses. During the workshop, 10 projects were created. Among the projects were both ones that presented a traditional approach, as well as those in which social media played a key role. The group of traditional projects included the design of The Cultural Corridor - The City as a Gallery, which proposed the creation of a cultural trail through the district. (Fig. 1) Its aim is to inspire local artists and provide them space to present their work, to propose actions that will activate the local community, tourists and future investors. The project proposes to connect the

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district with the Sava waterfront by modernizing the paths and adding elevators so that the district becomes accessible to everyone. In the project the identity of the place was analysed, and then important historic buildings that define the cultural and artistic character of the area were selected. The Cultural Corridor proposal is an attempt to connect selected points, and through doing so force a specific type of



*Figure 1. The Cultural Corridor - The City as a Gallery, source:
<http://oikonet-belgradeworkshop.blogspot.com.es/search/label/Group%203>
(20.05.2018)*

circulation for both residents and tourists. The proposal was developed based on the analysis of functional zones, pedestrian and vehicular traffic as well as existing connections to the city centre, the Kalemegdan seafront and fortress. This allowed to determine the places of introduction of new complementary functions. [2]

Another interesting project, named In Between, suggested the usage of a digital platform for documenting ideas and valuable public spaces created on their basis. (Fig. 2) As the authors write: “We have prepared proposals for spatial and architectural activities based on the ideas of the residents. We organized a sequence of events to announce them. During the meetings you can get all the information you need about the proposed activities”. [3] For this purpose, the program Think Link was used, as it allows you to

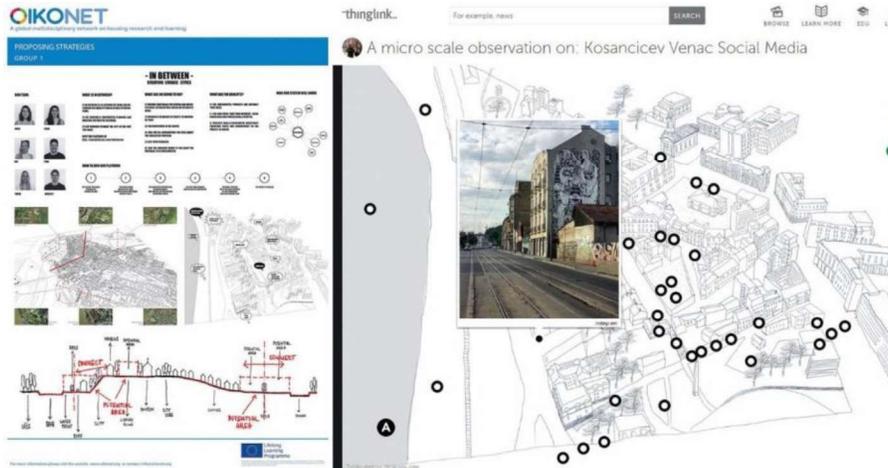


Figure 2. In Between,

source: <http://oikonet-belgradeworkshop.blogspot.com/search/label/Group%203>
(20.05.2018)

complete graphic materials (photos, drawings, maps) with additional notes, photos, audio files, video and other multimedia content. Communication is based on a digital story and is available on any device (computer, tablet, smartphone). The end product is a multi-layer map which shows places where interviews with residents were carried out. Each photo or movie file corresponds to a location. In the next layer of the map, historical objects and those which, according to the authors, have great potential are marked. Each point leads to the photo database (Instagram). The third layer contains design proposals for various areas of the district. One of the most important elements of the project is a blog, where all interested parties can add comments and their proposals for revitalization activities. [3]

URBAN FARMS

The way cities are transformed affects the quality of urban life and its public spaces. The importance of social movements, whose aim is the enhancement in the quality of the environment, improvement of living conditions, recovery of public space and place identity reconstruction, should be emphasized. People, through living and working in a space, produce it, giving it meaning. Lefebvre, assessing the contemporary city, draws attention to the participation of citizens who can contribute to the recovery of the city through collective actions and "gatherings". [4]

The activities of the Urban Farmers movement, presented in this chapter, include teaching city residents to take care of their neighbourhood landscape, through growing food in urban gardens which ultimately improves the quality of urban areas.

An example of the revitalization of degraded urban space, carried out by the city council, with the participation of the inhabitants is the project "Bruggen naar

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Rabot” in Ghent. The Rabot-Blaisantvest district in Ghent is the most densely populated district of the city, with a high proportion of foreigners and is one of the poorest areas of the city at the same time. It is separated from the centre by a large communication artery, and there is little public space or green areas within its territory. In 2007, a revitalization project was started, the implementation of which would to improve the quality of life of the residents. The aim of the project was to raise the level of socio-cultural engagement of the local community and create conditions for economic growth. The non-profit association established in 2006 together with the Department of Planning and Development created a meeting centre - De Site, which became a space for implementing projects for the benefit of residents. The experimental site for action was a 1.5-hectare plot, located in the central part of the district, which was created after the demolition of the Alcatel electronics factory production hall. The city council, in consultation with the community, decided to use the empty space to organize temporary communal spaces, in partnership with the residents. [5]

One of the elements of the project was the organization of the neighbourhood space: temporary “allotments”, a football pitch, a small “zoo”, and barbecue places. (Fig. 3) The area has become an active meeting place for residents, who have started to identify with this space and are responsible for its development and management. These projects can be successful only when the residents are fully involved. This is possible when the local coordinators play a key role in the district and are a “bridge” between the city authorities and other local entities. Participation and involvement are key aspects of the activities undertaken. [6] Unfortunately in 2016, a development company commenced the construction of a housing estate in this area and the Site project was discontinued.



Figure 3. The temporary “allotments”, “Bruggen naar Rabot” in Ghent, source: authors photo.

The second example is garden at Moritzplatz in Berlin. This garden is a result of an action taken in 2009 by Nomadisch Grün, a non-profit organization, where a plot of land was leased near Moritzplatz to create a mobile urban farm -

Prinzessinnengarten. (Fig. 4) In the 1960s, the Moritzplatz, at the end of the famous Berlin street Oranienstrasse, was a popular place for walks. Unfortunately, the policy of the Berlin municipal capital during the reconstruction in the 1970s resulted in the loss of attractiveness of this area. A modernist housing estate with high buildings (6 - 10 storeys) was built there. In the devastated Moritzplatz, director Robert Shaw and photographer Marco Clausen started the project of urban gardening. A trapezoid-shaped plot was chosen, located between the streets Oranienstrasse and Prinzenstrasse. 150 volunteers signed up for the works on the plot, preparing the area for cultivation and removing 2 tons of rubbish. Currently, the



Figure 4. The Prinzessinnengarten.

Source: a) <http://prinzessinnengarten.net/fotogallerie/>, CC license, b) authors photo.

Prinzessinnengarten is a public space for both people working in the garden and visiting a café. "... the garden doesn't belong to anyone," explained Shaw. "We manage it, but anyone who wants to can participate, because the goal is to provide locally produced organic vegetables to the people who live in the district and promote community work and the revival of organic agriculture traditions that have been forgotten in cities like Berlin". [7] It is a place where residents can experiment together and learn more about organic food production, climate protection, planting techniques or just relax and enjoy an oasis of greenery in the middle of the city. Around 20 people work permanently in the garden, which are responsible for different areas of cultivation. In winter, mobile vegetable patches are transferred to the building located in the garden, which also serves as the centre of the community. All products are grown without pesticides and fertilizers and are available for purchase. Every Thursday and Saturday meetings are held in the garden, the goal of which is learning to grow plants. There are also organized community suppers, for the preparation of which amateur cooks use products from the garden. The Prinzessinnengarten was created not only to turn the wasteland into a garden, but also to create a stimulus for the development of the poor neighbourhood. Nomadisch Grün, working with schools and immigrant organizations, intends to increase biological, social and cultural diversity in the district and become a pioneer of a new way of life in the city. In 2010, the Prinzessinnengarten received the Utopia Award.

DESIGN ON A SMALL URBAN SCALE

Raising the quality of public space does not have to be the result of comprehensive large-scale planning undertaken by municipal authorities. These can be activities based on simple ideas. “This is the end of the big investments, we want to start making little changes” said Marlena Happach the Director of Architecture and Spatial Planning in Warsaw at the reSITE Conference in Prague in 2017. [8]

As part of the 4th semester Urban Design course, students at the Bialystok University of Technology have worked on identifying small-scale urban acupuncture actions in order to improve areas of Bialystok. (Fig. 5)

The aim of the project was to find small degraded areas in the city and develop a project around them. The process of searching was very important, as according G. Cullen a designer will start to understand the city only when they grasp the art of observation of the relationship of space, form and function. [9]

The identified areas should be useful for the local community, and spur further activities on a larger scale. The effect of these activities may be a revival of empty or misused spaces or an increase in the attractiveness of neglected but popular places, such as underpasses and downtown squares. The guiding idea accompanying the formulation of a design solution should be striving to create a high quality urban space. The students analysed devastated spaces, defined existing conflicts (functional, compositional, aesthetical) and then prepared a complex solution for the chosen area. As a result, a number of interesting propositions were created. These projects had only one drawback - they were very good from a formal point of view but did not take into account the opinions of the residents and thus did not ensure their future participation in the management of the created spaces. Such a course of action can be classified as top-down action, which is the least effective in solving social problems.



Figure 5. Urban acupuncture project, student M. Lodzinska, IVsemester

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as it can be seen from the presented cases, many countries in Europe face similar issues, showing the need to implement bottom-up approaches in order to achieve sustainable communities. Urban design decisions that are undertaken in the small scale may transform the city as a whole and will make our cities and suburbs more liveable for children, elderly and the poor.

The revitalization of urban areas requires a comprehensive and integrated vision and actions that will lead to solving problems by permanently improving the economic, material, social and ecological condition in the area that is being revitalized. It should be remembered that although we live in an increasingly globalized world, the local situation still has a strong impact on the shape of everyday life.

In the process of urban revitalization, it is important to maintain a balance between existing structures and new solutions. The city, being a multi-layered structure that harmonizes with the collective memory of its inhabitants, is also an organism that requires new stimuli to stay alive. Maintaining the balance of existing and new spaces within the city, which can preserve or transform the character of a place, is made possible through renewal, regeneration and revitalization actions. Making our cities liveable requires not only improving existing structures but it is

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also necessary to adopt strategies that intertwine environmental, social, psychological issues in the dynamics of renovation. An interdisciplinary, inclusive and participative approach is necessary to develop strategies to achieve liveable cities that take into consideration physical, social and psychological realms. The presented examples show that the participation of representatives of social sciences in the processes of revitalization is necessary to better understand the aspirations of people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research has been completed within the research project S/WA/1/2017 and financed by public funds of Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

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