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MERITS OF INTRODUCING REVITALIZATION IN PERSPECTIVE OF ITS COMPLEXITY AND LOCAL CONDITIONS – SPATIAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: The source of the work are more than 20 years observations of different activities, which has been called revitalization. Methods used, were: literature research and inference based on sharing at different boards, consultations and workshops of revitalization. The effect are conclusions that the possibility of popularization and using revitalization is idolized. Not each county is ready to lead revitalization program, not each area which such activity seems to be predisposed for or the authorities want to, is possible to introduce and legitimate with its complex intervention. Especially doubt are connected with agricultural regions, even if in some scale urbanized. Revitalization is the approach generally dedicated to urban or intensively urbanized areas with theirs large complexity of social, economic, spatial and technical problems. Parallel, even urban community, local authorities and other groups dispose of potential ready to take up the toil of complex process (even if there's need to use external operator).

KEY WORDS: urban space; spatial planning; degraded areas; revitalization

Introduction

The concept of revitalization is being introduced in Poland quite difficult. It has been heard about it since over twenty years, but low number of people, including professionals, in this period knew what really is revitalization. The precise legally interpretation has been given at last by the Act of 2015. Earlier, the author often used to hear that the brilliant example of revitalization is revalorization or even renovation of specific old building, don't even talk about 'revitalization' of streets during construction of the new road pavement or introducing of technical infrastructure. The aim of the author was to show, that keeping hope into a wide dissemination of revitalization programs understood as complex approach, is not legitimated and that revitalization activities should be reserved for medium and larger cities with its complexity of social, spatial and economic problems and also the adequacy of socio-institutional potential for bearing such the complicated projects as revitalization programs.

The essence of revitalization

Revitalization is a process of outputting degraded areas from crisis, led in a complex way, by integrated activities for local community, space and economy, territorially concentrated, led by people and institutions interested, based on a county revitalization program. Within this formula of revitalization its necessary ingredients are specified in the Act named above (The Act, 2015). Hence between required elements are: present a crisis condition of area for revitalization, its degradation, a complexity of intervention as integrated activities territorially concentrated. The formal requirement is county revitalization program.

Degraded area is defined by Act as being in crisis condition in cause of concentration of negative social phenomena, specially unemployment, poverty, crime, low education level or social capital, and also lack of enough level of participation in public and cultural life. The additional requirement results from the Act to indicate degraded area, needed to start revitalization, is appearance one or more of below negative phenomena in the analyzed area (The Act, 2015):

- economic – specially low entrepreneurship level, bad condition of local business;
- environmental – specially overrun of environment quantity standards, presence of wastes creating threat of life, peoples' health or environment wellbeing;

- spatial-functional – specially not enough equipment level of technical and social infrastructure or its' bad technical condition, lack of basic services access or their low quality, lack of adjustment of the urban design solutions to changing functions of the area, low level of transportation services, the shortage or low level of quality of public areas;
- technical – specially degradation of technical condition of building objects, including housing and also nonfunctional technical solutions allowing effective use of building objects, especially in scope of energy saving and environmental protection.

As we can see above, between requirements limit introduction of revitalization process based on the Act, probably the most important is spatial concentration of crisis symptoms. So revitalization process can be introduced according to area in which social crisis conditions are spatially concentrated parallel with additional other conditions. Such the rules practically eliminates countryside areas, in which human settlements and with them social phenomena are dispersed.

Even in urban areas social phenomena are not always spatially concentrated. Poverty or crime can be very prevalent, but dispersed over quite large area or multipoint concentrated, so to show and analyze them as spatial concentrated phenomena all over specific area can be impossible.

Revitalization complexity

Complexity of revitalization comes from its essence. It requires detailed forward planning of all tasks, activities and participants. It needs to include many participants coming from different groups who could be beneficiary (mostly inhabitants), supporters (i.e. NGO's), property owners, local entrepreneurs, different social groups (youths, elder, etc.). It need advanced mediation and cooperation moderation methods to be introduced. It usually need professional support of preparing revitalization program process, because local authorities has no real possibilities to held it by themselves. To increase chance of success of the program it need all the stages of it to be completed successfully step-by-step. Falling of one of the steps or denial of some of participants can cause in disturbs or even falling of the program.

The merits of undertaking revitalization and instrumental treatment of it

Experience of a history of revitalization in Poland shows that it was mostly instrumentally treated. It has been seemed as the way to get public subventions for modernization activities, but often much more simple than true revitalization. Previous rules of public (including EU funds) subventions distribution were liberal and allowed to finance with financial instruments oriented for revitalization even simple activities, mostly of spatial and technical spheres. The summary of first four years of EU funds in Poland shows (Siemiński, Topczewska, 2009), that large part, much more than 50% of declared revitalization activities financed with these funds were simple modernization of buildings or improving of streets or technical infrastructure. Examples can be a construction both of sanitary sewer in Stalowa Wola (Siemiński, Topczewska, 2009, p. 100) and of pedestrian bridge in Bieruń. So 'revitalization' often was only logo, without real activities oriented for social sphere and without real share of participants. It was a kind of strategy used by some of local authorities to get subventions for improving local infrastructure or housing estates. To be honest, local authorities used to be pushed by government to do so: revitalization was one of synonymous of western-style modernization and, additionally, the decision makers of subventions' distribution were interested in quick and quite easy EU funds consumption.

Since introducing the above mentioned Act (and earlier while introduced the Ministry of Development's guidelines for revitalization programs) the criteria have become much more precise, clear and close to a complex revitalization idea. Now all the revitalization programs which are expected to be supported by public subventions (except own funds of local authorities) must represent complex approach to the problem and meet requirements of the Act. So, it can be seen that local authorities works over such programs. Often they expect professionals preparing revitalization programs, that they will find areas in crisis, but some other expect, that it will be areas that they indicate.

Next tool to limit relativism in preparing revitalization programs is limit of possibilities of public financing. Each kind of administration unit can get funds to support preparing process of revitalization program, but regional authorities' subventions for revitalization as real activity based on EU funds are limited. In Podlasie Region for funds can apply only authorities of the capital of the region with its functional area, two sub-regional cities and department towns. Critics says, that it's discrimination od small towns and countryside communities, but it allow to orient public support to areas of complicated structure (social and physical) and, in the wake of this, with

advanced problems, not only bad equipment, but complicated problems of relatively large social groups.

Spatial tools of revitalization

Revitalization, as mostly social intervention, use tools of social sciences origin as basic, usually. Although, we can show tools close connected to spatial sphere: functional or strait spatial ones. Sometimes, an important factor of revitalization of degraded areas can be changes in functional sphere or in spatial structure, in fact.

Functional changes

Intervention in functional sphere can be observed mostly, if an area has lost its previous, especially main, function. In such cases there is need to introduce a new one. It's the most obvious in areas of previous industrial or military function. We can show many cases of such an intervention (figure 1 and 2), although it is usually quite simple activity, because in such cases it is often an activity of one actor – an investor, so such revitalization doesn't need more advanced, specially based on social participation, tools.



Figure 1 and 2. New commercial function allowed to create attractive popular places of shopping and in some aspect of social interactions and functional activation of surroundings. Alfa Shopping Center and Biala Shopping Centre in Bialystok

Different example is postindustrial area of London: Docklands, where many actors, functions and investment projects has been introduced to. Similar area, but so far without success, is former Gdańsk Shipyard area. Extremely attractive, close to city center zone, except of few still working enterprises, wait for introducing of effects of many years' urban and revitali-

zation studies. There used to be presented propositions to locate a modern multifunctional district of both housing and business offices as well as additional services and high tech industry there. New functions has expected to be connected to high quality seaside public spaces. But it's still unknown future of this area.

Activity generators

Areas which lost its social well-being need an intervention. Some ways of intervention in such cases is introducing a public use function – an building object which will be an activity generator. It activate surroundings introducing external activity, movement from abroad of the area and don't connected straightly to basic activities of the area (being in crisis). It can be local administration offices, police station, other administration facilities, cultural facility, education, NGO's office and many others. Good example is an intervention during revitalization of central area of Venlo Old Town. There the local authorities headquarter was incorporated into the center of the area and additionally the former small service facility office at neighborhood was adapted for urban planning department. The presence of local authority officers and customers of these facilities introduces an activity and social surveillance of the public space which supports revitalization activities of area in crisis.



Figure 3. City hall as activity generator in Old Town, Venlo, The Netherlands

Additional, accompanying functions

Similar to above are additional functions (building objects) which support activity and introduce 'eyes-on-the-street' supporting with human presence

the excluded, isolated places or even crime hot spots. Such places are often trespassing paths, open gates, underpasses, isolated inner yards. According to their spatial isolation, there often can be met fears of crime or other behaviors against the social order (Czarnecki, Siemiński, 2004, p. 145-148, 157-162).

Accompanying functions can serve as a tool which can support activity and thanks that a social surveillance over such places. Such functions often are small facilities like fast food services, small shops, other kinds of small services like a hairdresser, a cobbler or the optician.



Figure 4. An example of accompanying function at the trespassed gate, Bialystok

Meeting places and pedestrian/bicycle paths creation

The hospitality of places for people in the city is quite new idea of almost independent tool of revitalize and create urban vitality. The main theoretician but also great practices of this is prof. Jan Gehl (Gehl, 2009; 2014). He uses simple and often quite traditional human outside activities to create people's presence in urban structure. That can be: usual activities in surroundings of buildings, interpersonal contacts in public space, sitting, standing, walking and cycling what makes public space active and vital. In such approach there's need to prefer pedestrians and cyclists than drivers and their cars. It need humanized places, pedestrian paths and urban furniture. Two main aspects of such approach are:

- to make public space, specially specific places in it, attractive;
- to create possibilities for activities we need.

Intervention in spatial structure

It's the deepest spatial tool supporting revitalization activities, if keeping up the existing spatial substance at an area is planned, of course. The aim can be remodeling a spatial structure, to cancel undesirable places or to introduce expected ones. Examples of the first of ones can be hot spots, isolated spaces (urban interiors), spatial connections introducing undesirable transit traffic (car or pedestrian). The second ones can be traffic connections vitalizing spaces or the mentioned above places of human activity. Some of them can be seemed as be against one to one of others, but the choice of the tool depends on specific of a situation.

These and also other specific tools (Mularz, Prokopska, 2015) can be used even as independent tools of intervention in areas in crisis.

The specificity of North-East Poland and revitalization

Although the north-east region of Poland (Podlasie Region) is one of the poorest regions of EU (49% of EU GDP medium level, www.portalsamorzadowy.pl), it is also one of the lowest inhabitants density (less than 59 inhabitants per square km – ca. half of the medium level of Poland; author's analysis based on data of: www.bialystok.stat.gov.pl and www.wrotapodlasia.pl). It means that poverty in the region isn't rare thing (see also www.swaid.stat.gov.pl), however it may not be easy to indicate areas of concentration of poverty and other aspects of social crisis what is the main requirement to introduce revitalization program. Of course, main points where we can expect such areas of crisis are the biggest cities. The scale and number of them are not very large in the region (Hajnówka, the sixth according to scale town is only 23 045 inhabitants large (2009), (www.bdl.stat.gov.pl) with peasants' farms within its borders). So, revitalization may not be the main tool of improving social and spatial condition in this region. It is important to concentrate revitalization activities to make them more effective and addressed to areas in true crisis.

Conclusions

Revitalization isn't suitable for each kind of area or place. It may be difficult to introduce this tool in large scale according to expectations of many counties (their authorities) at the region with low level of concentration of spatial and social phenomena. Specific during last few years, especially with

the 2015 Act of revitalization, tools for better targeting of public funds for revitalization programs have been introduced in Poland. They better target these funds for urban areas with much complex spatial and social problems. In other places, where complex revitalization isn't suitable for, some kinds of spatial interventions usually used during revitalization and mentioned in the article, can be used as independent tools. Such the region is Podlasie Region with urban structure and inhabitants' density typical for agricultural, rural areas. They should serve for simple modernization and slow development of specific places, towns and areas.

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