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Revitalization of Cities in the Absence of Legislative Support: the Case of Poznań

Abstract: The article describes the problem of revitalization in a central and eastern European context as an element of the picture of social change. The article recapitulates the social and the spatial experiment which started in 2005 when one of the first processes of revitalization in Poland began. The idea of the revitalization was anchored in two places. The first was the socially rooted idea of the participation of inhabitants in urban planning, based on East German experiences (support in the original context by low dedicated particularly for revitalization processes). The second was that of improving the “touristic portfolio” of the city rooted in the multicultural history of the place, and the local identity. Actions which mainly relate to communication, cultural and social initiatives turned on processes which the author called “unsuccessful gentrification.” The article attempts to identify what happened and why it happened. The investigation is based on the quantitative data from the social survey (researchers asked mostly inhabitants of the revitalized area questions), and qualitative in-depth interviews. The contextual data was taken from urban observation, the local real estate market, and public statistics.

Keywords: urban revitalisation, Śródka, Poznań, Central Europe, unsuccessful gentrification.

Introduction

This article describes the problem of revitalization in a central and eastern European context. The theoretical framework used here defines *late or post-systems transformation* as the period following radical social change. The main challenges relate to the overlapping factors or processes (from the past and from the present) of the legal and organizational “refolution”¹ (both revolution and reform) of managing urban spaces.

The first challenge concerns the original construction of the socialist city, or more precisely, the real socialist urbanization processes, which were essential in the construction of the Soviet socialist society during the late post-war period. The main concept of that vision was the “socialist modernization” of social relations, in a class sense. It deconstructed as a result the “traditional” relations typical of the western urban public sphere (see: [Habermas 1989](#)), and made room for more equal participation

¹ “Refolution:” a neologism ascribed to Timothy Garton Ash, which shows the specificity of systems transformation processes as both radical (revolutionary) and formally bounded, since they constitute a part of a legal process of reform (see: [Constitutional “Refolution” in Ex-Communist World: the Rule of Law, 1997](#)). The word was particularly used in the context of the systems transformation in Poland and Hungary, but is also useful in describing the overall institutional changes that the social dynamics of Central Europe are currently undergoing in the EU.

of the working class in the urban landscape. The consolidation of the constructivist vision of the city (as a vehicle of mass production) was the outcome of that emancipation effort.² One of the Polish sociologists who specialized in the urban subject has claimed that, “the urbanizing role played by industry” (Gorzelak 2009: 87). This was true not only in the Polish case, and particularly in the case of the “green field” industrialization which was relatively most common in the 1950s, 1960s, and even in the 1970s (the same was observable in the DDR). A different picture crystallized in the context of older medieval locations. The processes of changing the face of the city concerned at least two observable tendencies (which affected the problem of revitalization in the contemporary sense): first, designing and developing the Le Corbusierian idea which, from the 1930s onwards, connected the system’s complexity of industry to separate areas of low-quality residential districts, now associated with their locations near city centres, from East Berlin to Ulaanbaatar³.

The second process was the marginalization of the old parts of cities. In the German experience for example it was the process of rebuilding infrastructure after the disaster of the Second World War which was spontaneous, and resulted in decreasing quality in the older tenant districts (which was simply damaged, see: Bryx, Jodach-Sapiełło 2009). In the more universal context, this was called a “filtering process”⁴, which is an element of the market regulation mechanism (see: Skaburskis 2006). It could be explained as a concentration of investment practices in the less demanding new areas, which reduced interest in older residential districts (Billert 2006B). This tendency might have activated a destructive feedback between (de)valorization, outflow of capital, and outflow of inhabitants. In the Polish example, the impact of this feedback was used (because of ideological reasons), and even catalysed by the administrative practice of relocating poorly educated migrants from the countryside, and the underclass to “council flats” in the old town. The practice of displacing inhabitants was particularly easy and effective because of the absence of the original owners (often of Jewish or German descent in the aftermath of the Second World War). Both processes changed the social and cultural status of the centres.

In the case study, a similar “social experiment” (and here I mean the often intentional marginalization of the old town by the real socialist authorities) was aimed against the institutional position of the Catholic Church as present in the landscape of the old city from the Middle Ages onwards. This was seen in Poznań in the transportation investment of the 60s or 70s, in cutting off historic areas by dual roadways. The processes of “modernisation” ultimately “ghettoized” the areas in the 1980s and even in the 1990s (see the map of Śródka area in a case study part of the text).

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² In the real socialist case, this was mostly the emancipation of the means of production (not for individual consumption).

³ Cube-shaped buildings made of concrete slabs.

⁴ The “filtering idea” was inspired by discussion about urban change, and is relatively old. The main publications on the subject in the Polish contemporary professional literature of revitalization date back to the 1950s and 1960s (compare: I.S.Lowry 1960).

The second factor influencing the urban *status quo* nowadays is more strictly its correlation with the process of systems transformation itself (similar to the example of East Germany, see: Bryx, Jodach-Sapiełło 2009). In relation to revitalization, it lead to many interesting and original contexts of macro processes⁵. All of these (kept status of hypothesis) could be accused of acting as “devalorization factors,” and all could be treated as “inferential witnesses” on the crisis of the Central European City (see: Polanska 2008; Kabisch, Haase, 2012). Finally, all of them could explain the difficulty that would be involved in the project of turning back the destruction of the city, and how complex the idea of revitalization would be in the context of the new market-oriented social regimes in both the west (historically beginning in the 1960s context) and in the east (following 20 years of capitalist development).

Here I want to discuss in more detail a single aspect, which concerns both the contemporary demographic picture of large Polish cities and, indirectly, the intensity of the “devitalization” of old cities described by the word “suburbanization,” as well as factors of urban sprawl. The investigator who analysed the levels of migration from (and to) cities in the official statistics clearly noted the absence of the largest cities from the top of the rankings. The most dynamic increase relates to small cities close to main urban centres, and the size of the increase in one year (2009) even reached 5% (in Siechnice near Wrocław), and between 2% and 3% in the case of 6 cities located near Warsaw (in the Masovian Voivodeship). At the other end of the scale, there are no big cities either, but the decrease is less than -1.8% of the city population (GUS statistics), and is not concentrated in any particular region of Poland. It did not seem to be an under-developmental accident, but a systemic tendency, which has had a tendency to increase in the last few years. In the literature, we find that

⁵ Such as (1) the reprivatization, (2) the privatization, (3) the domination of private ownership (as a result of the polity-oriented process of taking property out of cooperative or state ownership), (4) the increase in “commodification” of the labour force (a consequence of the neoliberal vision of the welfare state), linked with (5) the increase in social inequality. From the broader perspective, we can see more universal processes which similarly give the opportunity for discussing the consequences of (6) late deindustrialization (which in eastern European cities started thirty years later than in the west of the continent, or in England) (Byrne 1991), and (7) suburbanization. In the theories of van den Berg, suburbanization is a type of period in urban evolution which follows after the urbanization period, and leads to the next phase; counter-urbanization. “During the urbanization phase, the loss of jobs in the agricultural sector leads to migration flows towards the city, especially to the core. In the subsequent suburbanization period, the economic restructuring of the city and the evolution of land prices induces a shift of population and jobs from the core to the ring. In contrast, the disurbanization phase starts when the total population of an observed functional urban region (core and ring) decreases, leading to the redistribution of inhabitants and jobs in favor of small and medium cities in the [urban region’s] hinterland” Panabianco, Kiehl 2003). Using the words of Panabianco and Kiehl (Panabianco, Kiehl 2003), suburbanization is the first phase in the erosion of the modern city, and regeneration (close to the current meaning of revitalization) foresees the opposing trend of reurbanization. “This reurbanization trend may be due to successful regeneration measures within the city centres, to a selective migration of (young) households in search of urban lifestyles” (Panabianco, Kiehl 2003). Result of the birth of the so-called new middle class of well-educated employees of the service sector resulted in post-socialist cities (Ourednicek) spatial differentiations and tendencies to sprawl. (8) The subsidiarization (as the increase of prerogatives of the urban communities managed by local elites) accelerates the spatial-developmental differences between cities and regions (Kazepov 2008, 2010). (9) The new migration processes involving increasing international mobility, in opposition to regional migration processes, which affect the largest urban centres less (CBOS 2010, 2011, Grabowska-Lusińska, Okólski 2009).

the motivations for outflow are mostly economic (Miazga 2010), and are even more intense in cases of cities with relatively high indicators of GDP. Poznań is one of the most significant examples of a city where its sustainable development could be open to interpretation (compare: Radzimski, Beim, Modrzewski 2010).

A comparison of the population of the biggest cities in Poland (in 2003 and 2009) demonstrates that the population has a tendency to grow only in the capital city (1.52%), while in all others there was a decrease (in Poznań, -3.90%). The outflow of inhabitants described in the official statistics is not concerned for the most part with either regional or even international mobility: what can be seen is the relatively unique strategy of the migration in the Polish case (CBOS 2010), particularly in relation to the population of the metropolitan areas of the biggest cities.

Table 1

Population, housing present in 2003 and 2009, and housing built in 2009
(official statistics, Central Statistical Office: GUS)

City	Popula- tion in 2003 (a)	Popula- tion in 2009 (b)	Increase (b-a)	Percent- age increase (b-a/a)	Housing stock, 2003 (x)	Housing stock, 2009 (y)	Increase (y-x)	Percent- age increase (y-x/x)	Housing built in 2009
Warsaw	1,688,300	1,714,446	26,146	1.52%	729,889	818,874	88,985	10.87%	19,482
Kraków	757,427	755,000	-2,427	-0.32%	285,093	321,496	36,403	11.32%	10,344
Łódź	781,932	742,387	-39,545	-5.33%	331,300	337,636	6,336	1.08%	1,800
Wrocław	638,459	632,146	-6,313	-0.10%	242,972	264,610	21,638	8.18%	5,889
Poznań	575,742	554,221	-21,521	-3.90%	216,365	234,806	18,441	7.85%	3,531
Gdańsk	461,482	456,591	-27,834	-6.09%	168,102	186,552	18,450	9.80%	4,276
Szczecin	414,685	406,307	-8,378	-2.06%	151,835	161,240	9,405	5.80%	1,810
Bydgoszcz	371,237	357,650	-13,587	-3.80%	135,163	139,442	4,279	3.07%	987
Lublin	358,079	349,440	-21,965	-6.28%	128,102	136,537	8,435	6.18%	1,250
Katowice	323,710	308,548	-15,162	-4.91%	132,169	135,648	3,479	2.56%	949

Source: Cities in numbers, Basic *Urban Statistics*, Warsaw 2011, Central Statistical Office, Poznań, available on the web: <http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus>

Another important indicator of the demographic evolution of the cities is the comparison of the quantity of housing in 2003 and 2009, and the number of houses built in 2009 (from the GUS official statistics). Increases occurred in all of the mentioned cities, but the low level of outflow (in Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław: see the table 1.) is more significant, which may suggest a stabilizing function of the investment in dwelling infrastructure, quite apart from its private or public character. Warsaw, Kraków and Wrocław illustrate a relatively successful evolution in the way of metropolization. A somewhat different situation holds in the case of Gdańsk, where there are smaller urban areas located in the neighbourhood (Gdynia and Sopot), and the growth in housing is significant. Yet at the same time we can observe a significant outflow (-6.09%—see table 1). The correlation between the measure of outflow and the increase in the amount of housing is statistically significant, though rather weak. It seems important to put revitalization in a developmental context, as a possible strategy which may improve the quality of life of the inhabitants, as it makes life in the “old

city” much more attractive, and is much less overloaded than the intense expansion of residential districts.

It should be emphasized that when we discuss the problems of central and eastern European cities, we should start a description from the special kind of unstable *status quo* there (namely the deregulation tendencies in policy, the constant pressure of the market to manage urban processes, etc.), to the deficit of coordinated planning,⁶ and public control. From the beginning of the first decade of new millennium in Poland, there has been a three-level planning system which is almost analogous to the system of state administration. Local “land development plans” (*plany zagospodarowania przestrzennego*) which are local spatial law need to be coordinated with the planning policies from the higher level of administration (see: Rydzik ed. 2009: 39ff). Because of the very frequent lack of such plans (as is the case in our case study on Śródka) legislators accept the administrative decisions of the district mayors, which give extra prerogatives to the local authority and decrease the role of planning and public control generally as tools of policy. In the practice, the weak coordination and special kind of neoliberal ideology of deregulation and marketization overlap with each other in a broader tendency to accept very aggressive developmental policies in the new areas based on private investment (i.e. developers), and “modernistic” expectations of those kind of businesses.⁷ Perhaps the “system” of organising investment policy which focuses on external resources decides on difficult issues by passing a revitalization resolution (revitalization law). Although a revitalization statute was drafted by specialists from the early 90s and later,⁸ and was made publicly available (we could find 11 such documents, see: Milczyńska-Hajda 2011), so far it has not been passed into a law.

The Question of the Definition of Revitalization, and its Implications

It is now necessary to define the subject of this article: revitalisation. The definition is a consequence of the way one understands the constructivist or sustainable vision of urban change. In Polish literature (published in the last decade) the process was understood in relation to its particular subject (a type of the urban space, see:

⁶ In the Polish case, it is very simply exemplified by the visual chaos present in Polish cities, and in planning policies which do not abate suburbanization or the tendency towards urban sprawl, particularly in the largest urban centres.

⁷ An example of the contemporary discussion of spatial planning can be found on professional websites for architects and administrators (see: Ł. Grzesik, P. Łopatka 2009) *Reforma planowania przestrzennego. Rewolucyjne zmiany czy ustawowe status quo* [The reform of spatial planning. Revolution or *status quo*?], 2009, [Urbanistyka.info](http://www.urbanistyka.info), www.urbanistyka.info) or in scientific investigation, see: Heurkens 2009.

⁸ Examples of such documents could be: “Założenia o rozwoju miast i rewitalizacji” (Principles of cities development and revitalization) prepared and commissioned by the “Association of the Polish Cities” (Związek Miast Polskich). In the introduction authors quote the UE document: The Lipzig Charter. Document available on the net: <http://www.silesia.org.pl/upload/Zalozenia%20ustawy%20rozwoj%20miast%20i%20rewitalizacja.pdf>; “Rewitalizacja miast — założenia ustawy o gminnych programach rewitalizacji” (The revitalisation of a city—the principles of the law of districts revitalization programs) written by Alina Muzioł-Węclawowicz. Document available on the net: <http://www.fundusze-strukturalne.gov.pl/informator/npr/2/ekspertyzy/rewitalizacja%20miast%20W%20C4%99c%20C5%82awowicz.pdf>.

Ziobrowski 2010; Jarczewski 2009) or in relation to the general goal of the action which was defined in a mostly intuitive way. Revitalization in this sense could be (as suggested by authors of the most consistent Polish concept) a “coordinated process, realised both by the local power, the local community, and other participants what is an element of politics of development directed against degradation of an urban space, crisis phenomenon, and accelerating progress and qualitative changes on the way increasing social, and market engagement [of people], improvement of environment of residence, and a preservation of community heritage and sustainable development” (Borys, Herbst, Jadach-Sapiełło 2010: 33). The leading concepts of subsidiarisation and sustainability are of importance, as they seem to be key for contemporary European revitalisation. The *quasi*-evaluation project of the revitalization of the Śródka area⁹ (analysed in the article) offered a much simpler definition, which strictly emphasise the goals of the process. Revitalisation here is “...a complex of actions which tends to improve the condition of a degraded urban area, and to solve its problems in correlation with improving the quality of life of the local community” (see: Kaźmierczak, Nowak, Palicki, Pazder 2011: 15). The meaning is more or less the same as the previous definition, and maybe closer to the idea of “sustainability” available in the political declaration of the EU cities (see the mentioned before Leipzig Charter from 2007),¹⁰ which is often used in Polish discussions of contemporary cities. Nevertheless, there is something more involved.

The word *degraded*, used in the definition of revitalization, refers to parts of cities where functions, or entire classes of functions, have disappeared (for example, because of the collapse of heavy or light industry, as in Silesia or Łódź, in Poland) or to the “underdevelopment” of old urban areas which lost their attractiveness to inhabitants and now act as a place for social pathology (such as crime and juvenile crime, drug use and so on). Finally the definition of revitalization joins at least two meanings which are close to the understanding of the city as a kind of system—or more simply as an urban community in the process of (I) sustainability (reproduction), and (II) change (looking for new functions), but also definitively (III) based on the infrastructural process of investment (mainly funded by public resources), which in the end “is an element of politics of development” (the first definition) or “improves the condition of a degraded urban area” (the second one). Revitalization is also (in both definitions) an active

⁹ Social scientists and architects from Poznań universities in 2010 made investigations into the pilot revitalization project in Śródka. The theoretical base of that study was twofold: Polish literature on urban change, and the German concept of revitalization undertaken in East Germany, which was fundamental to the project (Kaźmierczak, Nowak, Palicki, Pazder 2011).

¹⁰ This document linked developmental goals with a vision of the preservation of the city as a kind of community because as the authors of the declaration stated, “we increasingly need holistic strategies and coordinated action by all persons and institutions involved in the urban development process which reach beyond the boundaries of individual cities. Every level of government—local, regional, national and European—has a responsibility for the future of our cities. To make this multi-level government really effective, we must improve the coordination of the sectoral policy areas and developed a new sense of responsibility for integrated urban development policy. We must also that those working to deliver these policies at all levels acquire the generic and cross-occupational skills and knowledge needed to develop cities as sustainable communities” (Leipzig Character on Sustainable European Cities, 24 may 2007), available on the web: http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/download_docs/Mai/0524-AN/075DokumentLeipzigCharta.pdf

strategy (in opposition to, e.g., self-regulation through market competition or private investment based on the evaluation of individual risk), which could be understood as a “different kind” of rationality (much more communicative, see: [Habermas 1989](#)) used for managed social processes, which should be much more transparent and evaluated in the preceding time. Although the concept of revitalization is in fact very often used in scientific literature (particularly in Poland), it sounds different in different societal and cultural contexts. We can compare the different practices in different countries inspired by various types of public management (see: [Bryx, Jodach-Sapiełło 2009](#); [Guzik 2009](#); [Skalski 2009](#); [Cauch, Karecha, Nuissl, Rink 2005](#); [Reckien, Martinez-Fernandez 2010](#)). On the level of conceptualisation, investigators often discussed various types of urban improvements which focus not only on the different institutional background but also on different aspects of the urban process (infrastructural, social, economic, cultural, soft and hard, etc.).¹¹

In the particular case (which inspired the article), the meaning of revitalization was grounded in the German (not British-American or French) and Polish scientific conceptualisation (see: [Janas, Jarczewski, Wańkiewicz 2010](#)), and in practice was based on the East German experiences of the impact of the reunification on the cities, which was rooted in the German tradition of revitalisation, which began at the end of the 1960s (see: [Bryx, Jodach-Sapiełło 2009: 32–35](#)). I want to describe, explain and discuss the revitalization process using the words and particular point of view of Andreas Billert, the social scientist, practitioner, and *spiritus movens* of the process in Poznań. Revitalization in the German context implicates, in his view,

“revitalization planning,” both informal and elastic, [which] was introduced as a substitute for local plans, and which for 100 years has been the realization of the new spatial order in areas without urban infrastructure. The action was aimed at regaining the spatial and functional value of the degraded areas. It was put into practice through participation with inhabitants and with private property owners, experts, and the city administration. In this way, the revitalization programs inspired changes in urban planning culture, discovered new tools for planning, and developed the system of socialization of planning processes. From that moment on, planning was no longer understood as a single top-down managed process of making spatial law. The program [of revitalization], and the spatial planning for revitalization following social discussion [consultation] was approved by local authorities as a self-binding resolution ([Billert 2006B](#)).

This formula, which was a “cautious,” and social “self-binding resolution” because of the necessity of investing in public resources (in the process of revitalization), needed a special kind of legal support ([Bryx, Jodach-Sapiełło 2009: 93](#)). Why was it necessary? The main obstacles here were market driven tendencies used to very quickly redeem the benefits of the public investment, which in a more contemporary context can be called the risk of a kind of “privatization” (or exploitation) of value produced by public investment and generally by a public process. Speculation in the private commodity market could increase prices enormously and finally lead to gentrification, which in turn could be treated as a threat to the cohesion of the local community. Here the “integrity” of the community seems to become valuable itself.

¹¹ Let me suggest a few books which offered a different understanding of the “improve the condition of a degraded urban area:” urban regeneration ([Couch, Frazer, Percy 2003](#)); urban renaissance ([Porter, Shaw 2009](#)); urban preservation ([Mason 2009](#)).

This “preservation” ideology illustrates, in my opinion, the tendency to refute the late modern idea of “metropolization” as the deterministic direction of the evolution of cities. In this sense, we can ask the question: What if metropolization did not occur? The answer to this question could be revitalization, sustainability, and a local authority’s self-limitation policies, in a much more contemporary sense of the meaning of revitalization, coming from the picture of the consequences of the Le Corbusierian wave of urban modernization.¹²

“Revitalization permission” acts here as a temporary restriction on having property disposal reduce the opportunism of actors and participants in the project. “Restrictions,” because of their fundamental character (the public intervening to sell its own property), should be a part of the special revitalization law.¹³

These limitations arise from necessity of realization in the revitalization area very special public interest. The condition of degradation of the urban space is recognized in Germany as a serious threat to the public interest and [finally] is the way to use legislative roles similar like claiming “the state of emergency” (Billert 2006B).

The economic sense of the process of revitalization, which froze market mechanisms, relates to public interest and also to public investments which facilitate the economic position of the owners of the revitalized area. This happened particularly in relation to other business partners, such as banks, and finally eased access to investment resources (made bank loans cheaper) and “guaranteed” future increases in property value. The impact of revitalization is psychological: the impulse of growth in the business *interesement* in this kind of area, is not based upon real change in a short time, but on expectations of future surplus. This surplus (for the public administration and the main social actors) will result in “real difference” in 5–10 years, and will be coordinated by private investment logic. The benefits for the community relate here to the effectiveness of the defensive mechanisms, which guarantee the individual and social interests of inhabitants, particularly the interests of those staying in the revitalized area, who expect an improved quality of life under the influence of this process.

In summary, revitalization in the suggested sense is the process of “improving the condition of a degraded urban area, and solving its problems in correlation with improving the quality of life” of inhabitants, which in turn “switches off” market relations and “freezes” social differences. It only temporarily does this during the process, and is based on a consensus achieved among all of the main actors in the local urban (public) space. In addition, the main cause might be the understanding of public interest in terms of the “lively” urban space as a value close to the vision of the city, which is (or which should be), bequeathed from generation to generation (see the ideas of sustainability in the first definitions).

¹² Let us remember the “filtration” context, and the beginning of this idea in the late 1960s (which was associated with demolitions strategy).

¹³ The lack of “revitalization permission” blocked the reception of other investment permissions necessary for the property dealing. Permissions were necessary in signing a contract for selling properties. The price of properties was temporarily frozen (Billert 2006A).

In the Polish case, revitalization is much more top down pressure than the bottom-up demand for “(re)urbanization” (in the context of the city as a value). We could express it as the differences in perception of limitations on progress and the specificity (and necessity) of preserving the existence of the social backbone of the city.¹⁴ It is no surprise that the clue of the revitalization is differently understood by the new “city movements,”¹⁵ which took over the slogan “reclaim the city” from a different geographical context. The effort is directly against intensive urban investment, which catalysed the intensity of private communication and inspired investment policy outside of the city centres. What can be seen here is a political modernisation/anti-modernisation pivot of the conflict of revitalization (in the Polish contemporary discussion), which is ideologically somewhere between the left and the right, and is much less clear for western specialists who consider revitalization to be an obvious, theoretically well designed, quite clearly operationalised “closed book,” or moreover, an “old-fashioned” context of taking over the last vestiges of industrialism.

Śródka: the Subject of the Revitalization Pilot Project

Śródka is one of older areas in Poznań, located near the medieval cathedral complex, which is the oldest part of the city. This area was historically and naturally a separate organism and was a centre for small production facilities and services, functionally oriented toward the neighbouring old city centre with its state political functions. The process of the destruction of its specialized functional position began in the aftermath of the Second World War, and increased with the socialist expansion of the city (the previously described process of locating residential districts outside of the old centres), and as a result of the modernization of the layout of streets in the city, which cut away an important part of the area.

The idea of the recovery of Śródka included a project to rebuild the historic bridge (which joined together Śródka and the cathedral complex on its island in the river Warta, Ostrów Tumski) is relatively old. It was discussed for a long time, off and on, at the end of the 1960s, again at the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of the new millennium. An opportunity to rebuild the Jordan Bridge reappeared after discussions within the local community in 2006, and as a main part of the revitalization pilot project which would play a role in designing the city tourist route.¹⁶ It was one of the first revitalisation processes, as a surplus “underlining” the importance of the

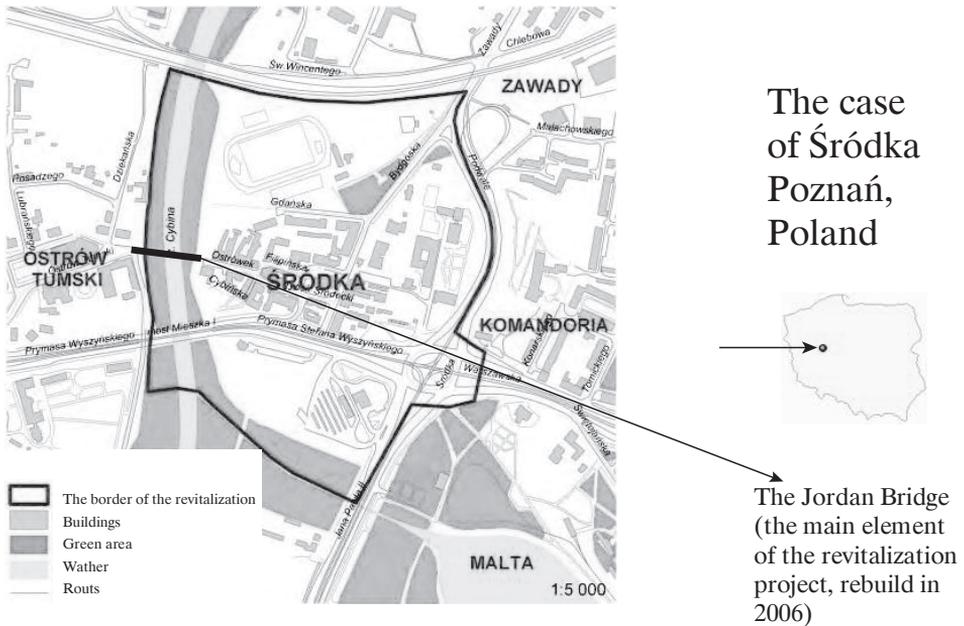
¹⁴ The (re)urbanization here equals the process of organizing public space, where the new middle class plays the first plan role, and can realize their interest and ambitions in the very complicated social context of the post-socialist city.

¹⁵ Now we can observe the process of consolidation of that movement. In 2011 in Poznań the Congress of City Movements took place, organized by one of the most influential organizations in Poland called, *My poznaniacy* (We Poznaners), after their success in the local election, in which the candidates they supported received 10% of the total number of votes. See <http://my-poznaniacy.org/>.

¹⁶ Information about the concept of The Royal-Imperial Route of Poznań can be found on the website VisitPoznan.info: http://visitpoznan.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=273&Itemid=134&lang=en&db2362c4a02242d4dedb01bb554efe3b=3bf2cfe7429058cab115eb68e526265 ← check citation format

project, realised in Poland. The local authority decided to use the span removed from the other bridge major reconstructed two kilometre on the east (Rocha Bridge).

The idea of revitalization (and its implementation) was an element of the city's new promotional strategy, and was aimed toward the anticipated expectations of guests (tourists). This became a part of the developmental goals.¹⁷ The process of investment was activated in combination with cultural and social projects, which introduced the historical legacy of the place. The majority of cultural projects were realized directly on the bridge, which introduced the view of the Śródka (from the cathedral complex side), but lay in fact outside of the area. A little before starting public investment local activists began to publish a magazine in which they discussed future changes, and began organizing integrative meetings for the inhabitants. From that moment, the external and internal social processes happened to catalyse each other. The clue to understanding the process and its success was related in that particular moment to the social reaction and cooperation inside the community and to the effectiveness of the preservation mechanisms which protected the community the aggressive external speculation, and from the temptation of the easiest, immediate economic surplus.



The social projects were directed particularly at the marginalized inhabitants, and tried to help them *via* participation in the discussions about the future of the place, and in collaboration with other city institutions, designed approaches for dealing with poverty and homelessness. As a consequence of actions, attitudes toward Śródka began to change. The pilot revitalization project became more widely discussed, the

¹⁷ That is, we could say that projects were oriented much more towards possible visitors and not towards the inhabitants of the city (Każmierczak, Nowak, Palicki, Pazder 2011).

place became more attractive and increasingly trendy. It became a kind of training ground for social experiments, particularly for the alternatively oriented young intelligentsia and social scientists. The “new left” organized quasi-artistic actions here to challenge against social exclusion, such as plays which were performed as a part of the local summer theatre festival (the Malta Festival). I would like to draw attention to the absence of supporting legal tools from the Polish case. The possibly risky implementation policies therefore become even more risky because of various “mentalities,” and the different gearing of the local administration and local authority toward micro-level relations. The strategy seems to make the authorities believe in an “invisible force,” which had to introduce guarantees as to the direction and effectiveness of the process.

Yet, in the end there was no upturn in the local economy. In fact, a decline in the quantity and quality of local services was observed, as well as a decline in the quality of the public sphere, owing to the influx of parked cars (belonging to people from both inside and outside of the area), and in the five-year period there was a significant outflow of the original inhabitants, and an increase in gentrification tendencies.

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The revitalization pilot project started in 2006, the scientific quasi evaluation of the “revitalization pilot project” began in 2010, and the entire investigation was finished in 2011.¹⁸

The Inhabitants’ Vision of Revitalization

In the quasi-evaluation project, we did the observation, conducted the social survey, and undertook interviews with inhabitants of the Śródka area. The main theme here concerned the problem of the perception of the changes which took place in the area as a part of the revitalization pilot project. Throughout the qualitative analysis, we found three main themes in the descriptions given by our interlocutors.

a) The first, which we called the *infrastructural* aspect, was initially emphasized in the urban renewal program in order to improve the “aesthetics” of the place. This was the most common, least reflective way of thinking about urban processes, and least embedded in local identity.

b) The second was the *conservative* approach, which could be located in opposition to the infrastructural one. According to this, the (de)valorization of urban space was just an episode in the long history of this part of the city. Revitalization was understood as a return to the past, to a particular moment in the history of the place, or in the

¹⁸ Within the framework of this research, we undertook three kinds of investigations: (1) 148 standardized interviews with inhabitants (constituting 40–50% of all flats (numbers) in the area). We did not employ a sample. The interviewees were sent to all households and decided whether to perform an interview with an inhabitant from the household. (2) We analysed the changes in the urban infrastructure and compared satellite imagery year by year during revitalization, and finally we (3) made standardized interviews with key speakers and active inhabitants, as well as organized a focus group interview. Interpretations of the revitalization were described at the end of 2011 (Każmierczak, Nowak, Palicki, Pazder 2011).

individual history of a person. Naturally this was much more often accepted by older inhabitants.

c) The third was the *progressive* approach, which was in opposition to the conservative approach because of its tendency to move toward constructivist thinking. It encompassed a vision of urban change which might be separate from the past, and from contemporary social relations. It tried to find solutions in active strategies, such as in investment and in designing new institutions. The discussed changes were more often top-down oriented, accepted by younger people and were closest to the technocratic vision of urban management, which dominate at the level of urban policy.

These aspects refer to the different definitions of phases of urban change, and significantly relate to the different social and demographic characteristics of the inhabitants. “Material” orientations in defining the urban process (in opposition to economic, social, or cultural aspects) dominate. The other variable, which influences attitudes toward urban change, concerned the embeddedness in the place, that is, the “contextualization” of interpretations of the revitalization process. This context is commonly deeply rooted in a vision of the past, but its “attractiveness” (as a possible improvement) depends on the demographic structure (age, education, etc.) of the place, which gradually changes, and seems to be in inverse proportion to the gentrification tendencies that become active in the case of Śródka in the late 90s.

The Quantitative Picture of Revitalization after 5 years (Results from the Social Survey)

One of the main questions asked by our investigation concerned the demographic tendencies of the inhabitants of Śródka that resulted from the revitalization processes. In particular, we asked them, “How long have you been living in the Śródka area”? The answer demonstrated the extent of the transformation, which could be interpreted as a consequence of the revitalization process, but at the same time, could also show the deeper demographical tendency of older parts of the city. Based on the data collected, we noticed an almost 50% (46.3%) turnover in inhabitants in the five-year period (see [table 1](#)). It is interesting that there was a deep difference between the intense movement of the last 5 years and the period before, in which outflow seemed to be stable and much lower (6% and 12% respectively in the period of 10–20 years of living in the Śródka area). Despite this “fluidity,” a significant part of the local community was connected with Śródka for a long time (36%).

While analysing the same survey data, we saw two pictures of a local community in the process of changing: the fast-growing number of new inhabitants, particularly young, and the stable minority of old inhabitants who had spent a significant part of their life in Śródka. Both suggest two things: (1) that the process of “exchange” may be ongoing, but is not yet finished, or (2), that there is tendency to retain the social identity of the place, in spite of the observed gentrification tendencies.

When we discuss the question of gentrification, this difference in the number of inhabitants may make it possible to assume an interesting generational context, but

Table 2

Inhabitants' answers to the question, "How long have you been living in the Śródka area?"

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Answers	Less than 1 year	24	16.2	16.3
	From 1 to 5 years	44	29.7	46.3
	From 5 to 10 years	9	6.1	52.4
	From 10 to 20 years	18	12.2	64.9
	More than 20 years	53	35.8	100.0
Total		148	100.0	—

Source: Data from the questionnaires survey (N = 148).

in another sense there may be a possible sphere of conflict in terms of cultural and economic aspects. As we know from in-depth interviews, the difference in attitudes of the inhabitants related more or less to pragmatic argumentation and attitudes to the identity of the place. When discussing contemporary changes, the inhabitants who had lived in Śródka for a longer period of time unsurprisingly very often allude to the identity arguments having to do with functional differences between the contemporary location ("peripheralization") of Śródka, as opposed to its location in the past. The new inhabitants used arguments related to, for example, pub transport, cultural attractiveness, and the future much more often. Although they generally agree on what the weakest aspect of the accommodation in Śródka was, they had different perspectives when thinking about this place, including different expectations for the revitalization process. This difference seemed to be significant, and the perspectives of the older inhabitants were naturally much more community or socially oriented than those of the younger inhabitants, who thought about the perspective of the whole city, or considered their living in Śródka to be just a minor part of their identity. In that sense, expectations of the younger inhabitants are significantly lower (and more materially oriented), their temporal perspective is shorter, and the process of revitalization (whether successful or not) is much less important in itself. From that point of view, the "switching on of revitalization" by the local authority, (which does not necessarily fully implicate even gentrification) may follow mechanisms which involve smaller amounts of political pressure, and decrease the tension for the evaluation of the process, which as we remember was defined as socially oriented.

The implications of the outflow of the more embedded inhabitants could be analysed as involving tendencies towards a decrease in social engagement and participation in public discussions concerning the revitalization during the process. At the beginning, this participation was relatively widespread, but subsequently gradually decreased. In 2011, we found that 25% of inhabitants had experiences participating in neighbourhood meetings.

Somewhat more inhabitants stated that they had participated in less formal discussions on local topics. A significant majority of inhabitants said that they had been involved in passive participation in cultural events organized in the area. We cannot really follow the fluctuations in the kinds of participation over time, but it is clear that the observable changes decreased the tendency towards bottom-up activism, as well

Table 3

Respondents' participation in neighbourhood meetings

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Yes	37	25.0	25.2
No	111	75.1	100.0
Total	148	100.0	

Source: Data from the survey questionnaire (N = 148).

as the previous very enthusiastic “predispositions” to public investment and generally to the urban authority’s attempts to make Śródka visible. The negative social atmosphere concerning the strategy of revitalization became visible in 2011 in four ways: first, in the repeated negative responses toward our efforts to obtain interviews about revitalization, and second, in the lack of deeper knowledge about what was going on, and about what the main goal of the process was, and, for example, for whom the project was undertaken. In the new or newly renovated dwellings there were many students, who during the investigation returned to their family homes outside Poznań. In the end, we observed a significant number of flats which were uninhabited.

The Economic Aspects of the Revitalization Process (data from the real estate market)

The processes of changing the image of the place could be seen in the number of real estate transactions and in the prices of properties that were sold in the Śródka area, as compared to similar neighbouring areas of the old part of the city.

Table 4

Number of real estate transactions in similar areas of Śródka, Wilda, and Dębiec (all old housing districts), 2006–2010

Area	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	From 2006 to 2010
Śródka	29	106	17	23	8	183
Wilda	93	124	100	100	54	471
Dębiec	65	65	42	48	19	239
Total	187	295	159	171	81	893

Source: analysis by S. Palicki based on data from Centrum Wyceny Mienia (Property Valuation Centre).

A significant increase in the number of transactions can be observed in 2007, one year after the start of the pilot project (106 transactions), then a very significant decrease in comparison to the following year (17 transactions) (see: [tab. 3](#)). A similar tendency towards radical increases and decreases was observable in the other areas, but in Śródka it was slightly more radical, and decreased to the lowest level in following years.

When we observe the prices of residential property per square metre in Śródka, Wilda, and Dębiec, the dynamic increase of prices in Poznań in 2006, 2007 and 2008

Table 5

**Average transaction prices per metre squared of living property in Śródka, Wilda, and Dębiec, 2006–2010
(in Polish złoty. 1 złoty = EUR 0.25)**

Year \ Area	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Average 2006 to 2010
Śródka	2604.96	4328.08	4741.11	4532.36	5683.88	4172.40
Wilda	3133.98	4125.76	4600.50	4329.37	4909.34	4196.61
Dębiec	2965.63	3749.31	4513.16	4410.37	4727.58	3889.68

Source: analysis by S. Palicki based on data from Centrum Wyceny Mienia (Property Valuation Centre).

(see [tab. 4](#)) is very typical. Yet prices in the Śródka area were significantly higher and stayed at the highest level in following years.

The specificity of Śródka as a “revitalized” place is more clear when we analyse the average surface area of residential properties sold in Śródka, Wilda, and Dębiec again. The average is lower than it is in other similar residential areas (see: [tab. 4](#)), which suggests that the residential properties in Śródka may be of a somewhat lower quality. This low quality counters the location, which was one aspect of the image of the revitalized area.

Table 6

The average surface area of living properties sold in areas of Śródka, Wilda, Dębiec, 2006–2010

Year \ Area	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Average 2006 to 2010
Śródka	44.38	40.80	43.58	46.35	40.66	42.29
Wilda	50.67	60.56	57.29	55.21	49.92	55.63
Dębiec	44.82	45.88	48.69	45.33	40.97	45.56

Source: analysis by S. Palicki based on data from Centrum Wyceny Mienia sp. z o.o. (The Property Valuation Centre).

It seemed to be clear that the noticeable difference in prices and the quantity of transactions was inspired by external influence and directly linked to the revitalization process. A similar picture was drawn by the evolution of the local service and production sectors, which however do not match the decreases in quantity (during the revitalization pilot project), but reorient to the needs of the general citizens of Poznań and lose their local character as the suppliers of Śródka inhabitants.

Based on the in-depth interviews and the quantitative data, we could draw a few less self-evident conclusions, which may be economic or social interpretations, and which suggest an explanation for the possible logic of the process of “misaimed” revitalization.

Conclusions

The first conclusion suggests that the revitalization became misaimed as a result of too much intensive exchange of inhabitants, which contradicts the previous idea

(mentioned in the “Germans” view) of revitalization, which was—let us repeat—to protect the “native” inhabitants. Relatively poor inhabitants were replaced by a few new middle class inhabitants, and a significant group of students temporary settled in the Śródka area. The change, although relatively intense, was inconsistent and unsuccessful in the sense of the real urban change that was expected by that particular community in that particular urban environment.

The gentrification stopped in the middle of the process not for policy reasons (because of the idea of revitalization which—as previously mentioned—was to defend the original inhabitants), but as a consequence of the lack of mechanisms, to preserve the appropriate (i.e. accepted by the local market) level of prices of residential properties in the area. The revitalization which turned into an “incomplete gentrification” finally could not irretrievably change Śródka in a way suitable for the anticipated new inhabitants. In the same sense, Śródka preserved its previous social (deprived) character without any necessary activation, and without the necessary social “facelift.” I would like to suggest that social projects “doesn’t hit the target,” which could at least potentially make a more liveable community that could help itself and make room for a new kind of open, urban, and socially diverse community.

The second conclusion is related to the observation of the more obvious tendencies in the old city centres which lost competitions with the new infrastructure build in the suburbs areas, where offered quality of life is better, differences are smaller (because social environment is more homogeneous in the new build residential areas), and prices of living properties are comparable. This observation needs another reflection of the Le Corbusierian fate in the context of Central European capitalist transformation.

The third originally social motion refers the kind of social relations which “re-organize” the processes of ineffective revitalization. The significant outflow of original inhabitants partially disturbs the identity of the place, and increases social tension. The process of change was gaining speed and losing the direction because of the break of continuity in the “playing rules of an actors,” and finally disrupted social trust as a “binding material” of the community in the process of the deep deconstruction. Originally, the high level of emotional involvement evolved in time into distrust. It undermined, in the end, the belief in the clearness of the intensions of the “designers” of the project of revitalization, and resulted in the conviction about the high cost of being active as a supporter of the process in the context of the only declarative social project of revitalization.

A few Statements about East German Inspirations and Polish Realisation

The idea of the “sustainable city” seems to be a clue to the concept that Andreas Billert tried to realize in the Polish social and political environment (Billert 2006A, 2006B, 2007). At the same time, it seemed to suggest the necessity of a kind of radical reorientation in the ways of thinking about city management (much more

integrated, and communicative), which comes into existence in the disastrous atmosphere of East German unemployment and depopulation.¹⁹ However, it should be clear that the case of East Germany after reunification is from one side a very special one because of external investment gaining control over developmental policy (see: Richter, Brandt 2009), and generally because of the political dynamics of the process of systems transformation itself (Offe 1999).²⁰ Similarly, as Mathias Berent suggests, because “the absence of strong partners at the local level encourages both public actors and a range of private actors to look for partners in the supra-local public sphere. As a result, national and supra-national funding policies gain importance in the local policy game (Bernt 2009: 755–6).” What is either typical for Polish cities, “both [mentioned] contexts generate local political dynamics that are different from entrepreneurialism and growth coalitions. Public–private partnerships indeed flourish, but more in the form of grant, rather than growth, coalitions” (*ibidem*).

Finally, the reasons for the shrinking of cities in the Polish and East German context in the new millennium are different, not only because of incomparable demographic tendencies (more intensive outflow of inhabitants to the west part of Germany), and developmental positions (for example, shortage of public resources on the Polish side), but either because of the ideological context of management (both from the national government, and local side), and in my opinion, the attitudes of elites which, in Poland, seemed to be even more market oriented.²¹ From that point of reference, the German vision of revitalization might still be attractive as a tool which is assumed as the much more formal and transparent process, with a (socially) inclusive character (see: Bryx, Jodach-Sapiełło 2009: 142ff), which is either embedded into the concept of public-private cooperation (see for example: The Urban Restructuring East, Ger.: *Stadtumbau Ost*), which for some may sound like a voice from the other (partly less-pure-liberal or even socialistic) side of the “ideological wall.” And what is particularly intriguing (for the same anticipated liberal orthodoxy): the process inspired and forced by external institutional pressure, is based on legislative support and dialogue. Let us suggest that some statements compare facts from Lipsk’s revitalisation process (2000–2006), and Śródka’s experiences (2006–2010) from the very general perspectives.

At first, the economic, and social position of Lipsk (which is similar in scale, and regional specificity to Poznań) illustrated a long process of declining (which

¹⁹ The Polish situation and the condition of the Polish city seemed to be different from the German one, but the reason for revitalization is similar, on account of the tendency towards suburbanization (though not to depopulation). The suburban tendencies in Poland increased following the gradual improvements in the economic condition of the new urban middle class particularly since 2006–9. The problem of the declining or shrinking city in the comparative perspective has been analysed in Nowak and Nowosielski 2008. The German context is discussed there by Jörg Dürschmidt (Dürschmidt 2008), as well as by Katrin Großman, Annegrete Haase, Dietrich Rink, and Anett Steinfürer (Großman, Haase, Rink, Steinfürer 2008).

²⁰ The local political dynamic implicates the “population decline and capital flight cause political and planning agendas that are aimed more at adjustment than growth” (Bernt 2009).

²¹ Let us suggest that the main ideas of the German concept of revitalization could be analysed as an element of the Welfare State idea, bound to the post-war period of the twentieth century.

began before the unification).²² In Poznań, the decline of the amount of inhabitants was a relatively new phenomenon. It was relatively lower. The revitalisation was in the German case the variant of adaptation to the lower scale of post-industrial city. In Poznań it was rather a kind of “growth-oriented adjustment,” inspired by the culturally driven municipally vision of making the city more attractive for guests and tourists (see the concept of “The Royal-Imperial Route of Poznań” in the first part of the text). The process of revitalization started in Lipsk in 2000 as a complex of action, based on the “Plane of the Development of the City” (*Stadtentwicklungsplan Wohnungsbau und Stadterneuerung*, STEP). The scale of action in Poznań was much more narrow (at first directly to particular parts of the city as a kind of “pilot project”), and in relation to the particular Śródka case, much more oriented to the selected sphere of communication, social and cultural-identity (anticipated *genus loci*). This difference in complexity of action could be crucial for understanding of the divergence of processes. In Lipsk it was one of the key projects (because of the previous historical experiences in West Germany, and still observable problems with the consequences of the reunification), whereas in Poznań it seemed to be rather an experiment inspired by the coincidence of technical capability (major overhaul of the Rocha Bridge near by), the new concept of city image management, and the idea of revitalization which started to be discussed as an answer to the questions of the decline tendencies observable from the beginning of the new millennium. The costs of the action in both cities were incomparable. The main elements of the revitalization budget in the Poznań was the cost of rebuilding the bridge, designing the local revitalization plans, and organizing socio-cultural actions, performances and discussions. In Lipsk, organizers nominally had much more money, and a large quantity of that money was spent for the development of areas after demolitions (Bernt 2009), for improving the quality of the space for investment, and for support of the privatization in the older part (Bryx, Jodach-Sapiełło 2009: 178). In the light of data from 2006, in comparison to the beginning of the process in Lipsk, the number of inhabitants increased from 276,659 (in 2000) to 298,192 in the revitalized area (see Bryx, Jodach-Sapiełło 2009: 185). In Poznań, in a similar 6 year period, the amount of inhabitants in the revitalized area decreased (see the table 2). Summing up, the compared processes were different. The reason for differences concern both the demographic factors, differently answers question: for who is the action, and the specificity of management.

Finally, despite of the existing local revitalization plans in Poznań (which should be appraised as a step forward), the revitalization seemed to be still in the beginning stages of articulation. Particularly because of occupied marginal positions in local budget policy, but paradoxically not in the local discourse. The situation in the case of Lipsk looks different, in terms of a strategic kind of difference.

²² The amount of inhabitants declined from 5,450 inhabitants in 1961 to 4,254 in 2006 (see: Bryx, Jodach-Sapiełło 2009: 152).

Five Statements about “Structural” Barriers of Revitalization based on the Śródka Experience

In the Polish case, the process of decline of the postindustrial city seemed to often be analyzed as a kind of marginal phenomenon (or “natural” tendency), which could be observable in the strategic documents of Poznań.²³

The discussion about “structural” barriers of revitalization, where Śródka experiences could play the role of the inspiration, needs (macro)social and socio-political interpretations.

(1) The first explores the inconsistency of concepts of urban processes in different societies, different normative orders, and *praxis* of managing the social processes. The “imitating modernization” of the urban relations (compare: Ziółkowski 1999) which is the kind of strategy, metaphorically, of “taking a shortcut,” can lead to an increase in social costs, and can be politically risky. This happened in Śródka. The main obstacle, related to revitalization itself, concerns the undermining of trust in the public authority as a constructive *spiritus movens* of social change. The philosophical problem constructivism *versus* realism is dramatically found here. The reason is related to the market processes which need to be partly replaced by the kind of tools which are more often associated with the state management vision of regulation, and need a much more “reflective” attitude toward the market as an allocation. This helps one become aware of the fact that there is a necessary discussion about legislative mechanisms as a frame of revitalization, and revitalization outside the specialised regulation is almost impossible.

(2) The second is related to the problem of urban planning in the context of the post-socialist systems transformation of the economic and social environment. The local authority in the Śródka case shows oneself as an incapable for managing process, and evaluating its consequences. The absence of activism in the advanced stage of revitalization weakens public control mechanisms. The lack of the local spatial regulations do not support the effective revitalization, and leave the main prerogatives to the administration, which tended to substitute the community interests. This last statement suggests the general absence of tools for (3) protecting public interest. The next obstacle relates to the problem of (4) coordination of action which can help join together the investment and cultural policy with social tools designed for the defence of the marginalized inhabitants with attention to the quality of the public sphere as a vehicle of communication and social dialog. The problem of realistic revitalisation increasing position of inhabitants what is underlined in the offered by specialist models of the process (Janas, Jarczewski, Wańkiewicz 2010: 53ff). In reality the public participation still be seen as the kind of trap, and had to compete with vision which seemed to be (for the local politicians) ineffective. The last statement is more general and concerns the urban investment policy. (5) The old urbanized areas of the

²³ Where it exists almost only as the challenge of a decreasing population, and the challenge of social exclusion, see: “The Main Challenges,” as a part of “Strategy of Poznań City 2030” (Główne wyzwania, in: Strategia 2030), available *via* Internet on the city portal: Poznań*: <http://www.poznan.pl/mim/main/glowne-wyzwania,p,14886,15543,16879.html>.

city are much less attractive for intensive external investment. This fact coincides with the much older tendency expressed by the Le Corbusierian concept which still have had effect on the urban area. The contemporary tendency of the shrinking of the city in Central and Eastern Europe is partly a consequence of the mentioned coincidence between the new and the old. The revitalization in this view seemed to be the crucial problem, and in my opinion, the main challenge for post-communist citizens, not only in the urbanised environment.

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