



REVITALIZATION – DEFINITION, GENESIS, EXAMPLES¹

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Summary

In the paper a definition of revitalization and the term's origins in practical use are presented. The examples of cities, districts, post-industrial areas are given, which, thanks to revitalization processes, have been changed from vacant places and wastelands into objects with new, attractive functions. Among the objects described in the article are: Berlin's districts Kreuzberg, Nature Park Schöneberg Südgelände, Promenade plantée of Paris and American: High Line Park, Brooklyn Bridge Park and Freshkills Park. Moreover the paper addresses the issue of Detroit, the city which is being subjected to comprehensive revitalization. The presented examples have confirmed that urban centres are degraded by manifold factors, mainly social and economic, and that their revitalization requires the use of specific, individualized solutions compatible with the need of a given object.

Keywords

revitalization • social participation • green areas in the process of revitalization

1. Introduction and definition

The term “revitalization” has become especially popular in recent years. It is used not only in reference to changes in urban planning and landscape, but also in everyday life to describe various forms of revival (spiritual, fitness, material situation). The idea itself and definition of “revitalization” arose in the United States (in the middle of nineteenth century). A.F. Clarke Wallace, an anthropologist specializing mainly in studying the culture of American Indians, was the first to propose the term “revitalization movement”, which he defined as efforts of members of a society to construct more satisfying culture by inner revival [Wallace 1956]. The theory was put into practice under the influence of events that took place in the USA and were related to problems of black Americans minority, inhabitants of poor districts and slums with high crime and unemployment rates.

¹ The article is based on a doctoral thesis of Magdalena Wilkosz-Mamcarczyk supervised by Prof. A. Mitkowska and Dr K. Hodor, prepared at Faculty of Architecture (now in review).

The term “revitalization” has been used in various meaning depending on the discipline (architecture, social sciences, economics etc). This flexibility was the result of gathering new experiences and the development of more conscious society increasingly interested in co-deciding about their environment was still growing. Today the revitalization is defined as a many-sided effort including revalorization, restoration, reconstruction, modernization, and actions aimed at revival of a building, district or a town devastated in various aspects, also economic and social [Pawłowska and Swaryczewska 2002]. K. Skalski, moreover, determines the factors, such as society, local and state authorities, and other institutions, that can initiate and shape the developmental processes of a given area [Skalski 1996]. However each definition stresses the special importance of social participation (also as a distinctive element of revitalization, and not of other forms of activity related to conservation or renovation) as an indispensable tool to carrying out the process (which is often decisive of its final success).

The European Union policy plays the leading role in supporting the revitalization (also financially) in Europe. The EU legal framework regulating the process has been in force since a few decades. The revitalization activity have become particularly important for states in view of the existing arrangements and ideals of sustainable development, including those written in such documents as the Territorial Agenda and Leipzig Charter. Hence in the revitalization processes the attention is drawn to revival of already inhabited (urban) areas, which with the passing of time have lost its functions. To summarize the currently used definition of revitalization, one might say that it is a form of action, being a part of urban policy, effecting the whole life of a city, the action combining respect for the past and local traditions with solving local problems of inhabitants.

2. Goals and methods

The goal of the study is to present the methods and possibilities of applications of a revitalization process in Berlin and Paris and American cities. The selection of examples is justified by pioneering successful efforts (e.g. Berlin) and the American case (Detroit) shows the reasons of degeneration of urban fabric and identifies the moment in which revitalization is necessary. Moreover the approach of the Western countries can help the countries of Eastern Europe to use their experiences related to renewal and revitalization of post-industrial areas, neglected districts and wastelands often being the aftermath of the communist era (it applies especially to Bulgaria, Romania and Albania). The research method include the study of the literature about revitalization and studies *in situ* carried out by the authors in Berlin.

3. Genesis

The first signals for the environmental protection and improving the standard of living of present and future generations came from the speech of the United Nations Secretary General S. U Thant given in 1969. The industrial development in cities (in nineteenth and twentieth centuries) gave rise to conflicts and created contrasts related

to scale and form of urban development. These processes have influenced in turn the excessive demographic growth and contributed to creating two social groups: capitalists and workers (coming mostly from rural areas and moving to cities in search of a job). As a result of great inflow of rural population to cities many low quality flats (of small living area, without bathrooms, toilets, sunlight). As a remedy to this situation new ideas and plans of functional arrangement of increasingly dysfunctional urban structures were created. After the Second World War, as a result of deurbanization and destruction, many cities were rebuilt on the basis of various design concepts. In Great Britain, Germany and France special instructions were accepted on the principles of rebuilding urban areas while taking into consideration the needs for creating communication networks and introducing green areas into cities. In post-war years, apart from the efforts to rebuild the cities, an idea of constructing the so-called block of flats gained popularity, reinforced by the approach of socialist realism and functionalism policies. Their originator, Le Corbusier, wanted to make decent place of residence (surrounded by greenery) for workers. And to meet that demand the “machines for living” or block housing estates were constructed – and the concept was greeted with approval especially in highly industrialized cities where this kind of buildings perfectly met the housing needs of workers. Unfortunately block housing estates failed as an idea, which was proved by the American urban housing project Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, Missouri, designed by Minoru Yamasaki. The estate was built in line with the Le Corbusier’s principles, the houses were well lit and surrounded by large spaces designed for nurseries, playing fields and greenery. These more “comfortable” living conditions, that did not take into account communication networks with work places, together with high social benefits for members of the community that lowered their incentive to find a job and encouraged the reactions of vandalism, crime and aggression. It was mainly the black American population that devastated their flats and the surroundings, which led to a decision to destroy the housing project. And it was realized that new and better solutions are needed, including preparing the social programs [Jencks 1987].

The first example of proper and successful revitalization in Europe can be found in Berlin. As a result of the war the city was divided into zones influenced by the Soviet Union and Western Allies, and for that reason, after political transformations, the city faced challenge to harmonize the urban tissue. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was preceded by two permanent architecture exhibitions (1979–1987), international (Internationale Bauausstellung, IBA) and the Berlin exhibition (Bauausstellung Berlin GmbH), which were intended to introduce new standards, integrating the urban substance, and improving the standard of living. The area of IBA covered more than twenty architecture and urban planning complexes. Among the areas subjected to revitalization process was Kreuzberg.

4. Examples

The district Kreuzberg and its quarter Block 103 (Figure 1) before the fall of the Berlin Wall was a densely populated area with low standard architecture. The project of the

revitalization was based on the idea of participation of inhabitants, maintaining the technical standards, environmentally friendly solutions and open process of taking decisions. In view of that principle the nineteenth century model of quarters' housing development was adopted, consisting, in alternate use, of residential functions and service facilities. The process of revitalization was realized in consultation with the local community (participatory design) and each of the building was treated individually. During the renovation activities local economy was supported – local services were used and building materials were provided by local suppliers (twelve commandments of mild revitalization)². Due to the concerns of inhabitants about the costs of using the apartments, the principle was established “you pay for what you have used”, and economic and ecological solutions were adopted in line with the principle of sustainable development [Drapella-Hermansdorfer 2005].



Photo by M. Wilkosz-Mamcarczyk 2014

Fig. 1. Housing development of Kreuzberg district

² The mild revitalization included: using local services, inhabitants participation in decision making (including financial ones), maintaining the district character, changes in the function and spatial structure of a building adjusted to modern lifestyle; staging of works; introducing of greenery; paying attention to public spaces; spatial planning; decision should be agreed on with the community; systematic financial aid; new institutional arrangements; all principles should be respected long after the renovation is carried out [Wołoszyn 2008].

New housing development, using recycling, solar systems and prudent water management produced the expected results and was the successful example of revitalization not only to other German cities but also to the whole Europe. Today the decades-long history of Kreuzberg and its Block 103 is presented in a museum located in the district, and its multicultural nature and its specificity are celebrated at the annual Carnival of Cultures during the Pentecost weekend.

The revitalization processes covered also post-industrial areas. At the site of the old railway hub *Schöneberger Südgelände* in Berlin, destroyed during the Second World War. I. Kowarik and A. Langer designed there a nature park, while maintaining the elements that previously marked this landscape: railway tracks, water towers and other fragments of railway of infrastructure (preserving the identity of the place) [Drapella-Hermansdorfer 2006]. The *Schöneberger Südgelände* Nature Park is now an extremely interesting element of the city's landscape, serving as a place of leisure and recreation, as well as educational garden with almost 400 plant species. In the buildings of the old steam engine depot workshops for children are organized that focus on the flora and fauna of the site (Figure 2).



Photo by M. Wilkosz-Mamcarczyk 2014

Fig. 2. The *Schöneberger Südgelände* Nature Park

The Paris linear park Promenade plantée established at the end of the nineteenth century was an inspiration to later High Line Park in New York. The walking trails are situated 10 meters above the ground and are meant for passive and active way of recreation. There are cycling routes as well as the art centre (Figure 3).



Photo by M.Z. Wilczkiewicz 2014

Fig. 3. The park Promenade plantée in Paris

Other examples of successful revitalization of post-industrial areas are some of the American parks. As a result of efforts of New York inhabitants to revitalize wastelands in 2003 a contest for High Lane Park was arranged³. In 2009 the first and in 2011 the second part of the park was opened. The composition refers to the old purpose of the site by paths constructed of railway ties, and the materials used emphasize the post-industrial nature of the place and its tradition. The visitors, surrounded by greenery, can watch the streets of New York and buildings situated along the Hudson River (Figure 4). There are also such attractions as grass platforms and amphitheatre [Wilczkiewicz 2012].

³ The project of the park was realized by DillerScofidio + Renfro and JamezCorner Field Operations, a firm specializing in landscape architecture, and a gardner Pier Oudolf [Bighorse 2010].



Photo by M.Z. Wilczkiewicz 2013

Fig. 4. High Lane Park

Brooklyn Bridge Park is located on the 35 hectares area of East River waterfront (Figure 5). Many elements of the park are meant for leisure and recreation purposes: beaches, playground for children, water sports, and angling facilities. The project was realized by a firm Van Valkenburgh Associates, with the involvement of local community. In the constructed bay one can practice canoeing and enjoy the surrounding from a beauty spot [Wilczkiewicz 2013].

Another park in New York, Staten Island – Freshkills park is being created at the site where from 1984 till 2001 was a landfill. Moreover since 2001 the debris from Ground Zero were brought here and only in 2004 a rehabilitation project of the site started. It is about to be almost three times the size of Central Park and meant to become a symbol of large scale revitalization [Freshkills Park]. The hills created as a result of heaping of rubbish would be used as observation points, with a view of the centre of Manhattan, and the methane emitted in the place is to be used to illuminate the area. Adequate habitats for plants and animals are going to be created. The works to create the park are going to be carried out in stages, and each consecutively finished section is going to be open to visitors [Wilczkiewicz 2012].



Photo by M.Z. Wilczkiewicz 2014

Fig. 5. Brooklyn Bridge Park

A special example of a city which as a whole would be subjected to the process of revitalization is Detroit. The city condition was worsening since the 1950s. There were numerous attempts of reviving it, but these projects failed. Once the automotive industry power, today the city with high unemployment and low number of inhabitants. As a result of financial problems the city declared bankruptcy in 2013. The reasons of the city demise are attributed mainly to lack of industry diversification and existence of strong unions. The situation was worsened by the competition of Japanese and Korean car manufacturers and government policy. The greatest problems are experienced by the black population of Detroit (about 82% of all inhabitants), who with the expansion of car industry arrived in Detroit to look for jobs. The landscape of the city are desolate factories, ruins of churches, schools, apartment buildings.

The discussed example is of particular importance because at present the ideas emerge (“Detroit Future City”) to revitalize Detroit by means of deliberately shaped systems of greenery and renewable energy resources in line with the principle of sustainable development. Around the centre two rings of green of great natural value are going to be created. The first one would be located in post-industrial areas, the second one formed of forest areas. This system is to contribute to a change of housing development style (changes in spatial development plans). In the future the city of Detroit is meant to become a centre of scientific, educational and cultural centre [Trębacz 2013].

5. Conclusions

The presented examples confirm that the issues causing the degradation of city centres are diverse and depend mostly on social and economic factors, which means that there solutions must be individualized, adjusted to the needs of a place.

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