

Attempts and Methods for Revitalizing the Centers of Small Localities. Selected Examples

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crossref <http://dx.doi.org/10.5755/j01.sace.4.5.4829>

In Poland the issue of revitalizing areas in small localities is becoming more and more popular. Recent research along with established methods based on traditions of a given place will be described taking into account the ecological aspects. Such actions are of crucial importance as they deal with shaping the landscapes which are linked with the local heritage and at the same time they improve the quality of the inhabitants' lives. The aim of revitalization is to create harmony in the area so that the place identity is preserved or restored. Theory confronted with practical application does often pose difficulties. Bearing this in mind, the examples suggesting a possible solution as well as development and improvement of public space will be presented.

Keywords: *cultural heritage, rural landscape, revitalization of the village, local tradition.*

1. Introduction

The problem of the preservation of the Polish countryside undergoing constant changes and transformations is important for the preservation of local identities. The article presents two examples showing different methods. The first case concerns the village nearby Opole, the land of rich cultural resources based on intensive activities of the provincial governor of Opole and the National Heritage Board of Poland. The main objective of the action is to extract the existing historical values and to activate the village, with the aim to become an attractive tourist product, while simultaneously improving the standard of living. The second case from the Lesser Poland is a reflection of the activities associated with obtaining funds for revitalisation of small town centres from Lesser Poland (Małopolska). The solutions implemented are often detached from the local tradition, striving to unify without a local expression. The prestige element becomes the most important and leads to blurring of cultural identity.

2. The present state and problems

Case 1. There is a work in progress taking place in Poland which is aimed at revitalising villages listed in the monuments register with territorial registration. The aim of these actions is to create the rural network of exceptional historical and landscape values. Relying on experiences from Western Europe (including the Rhineland, Bavaria, Baden-Wintenbergi, Provence) the work heading towards a regional development strategy and the model of conduct has been done (Wilczyński 2003). A detailed history of

the movement for the village renewal is described by M. Kłodziński (2008) and R. Wilczyński (2003). The main activities have been carried out in the Opole province, located in the south-western part of the country. In 2001 it joined the European Association for Rural Development and Rural Renewal (ARGE) in St. Pölten.

Case 2. The second case concerns a small town in southern Poland, nearby Kraków. This is an industrialized village which has 4.6 thousand inhabitants. For these reasons, it can be referred to as a small town. There are taken some efforts to establish a Market Square in the village to provide a traditional function of the administrative and commercial center. It has a status of municipality village. There is a district road passing through it with intensive traffic. The village founded in the 13th century was owned by the Norbertine sisters in Zwierzyniec. There are few places of interests (the parish church from the beginning of the 20th century, the 20th century villa, chapels). The advantage is that in the scale of the commune there appear to be rich natural and cultural resources.

Since the 80s of the 20th century rapid development of the settlement occurred and the buildings had spread chaotically. New buildings, introduced very intensively, have a variety of roof forms and colours. There is a lack of any uniform guidelines. This is a phenomenon occurring on a large scale in Poland. Intensification of the building, its diversity increases comfort of living by reducing the aesthetics of the whole collection of rural systems.

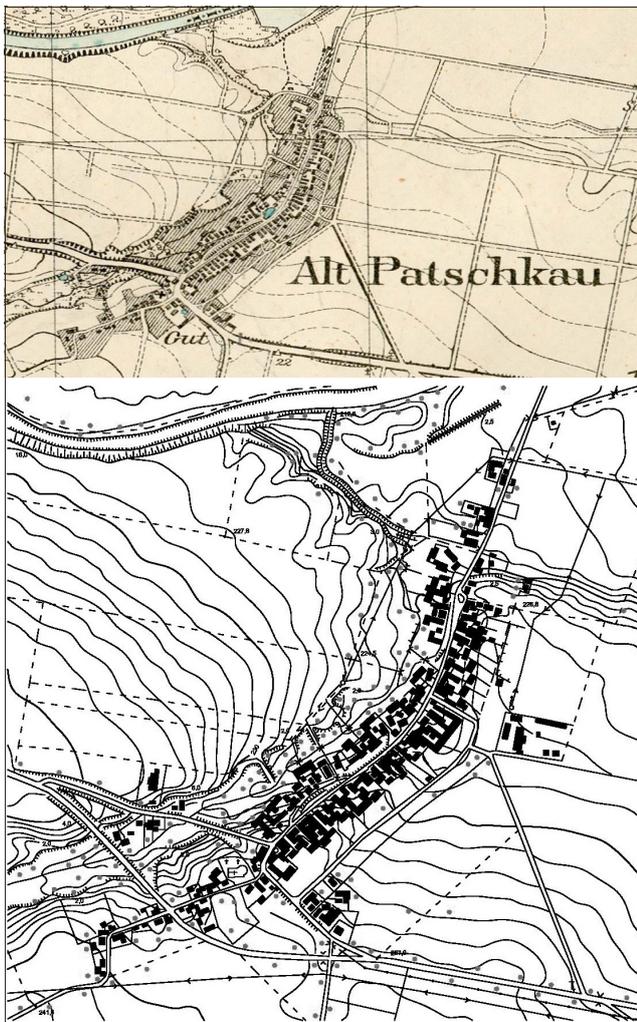


Fig. 1. Preserved historic arrangement of the village Old Paczków: the map from 1933 and the present state map (Old... 2013)

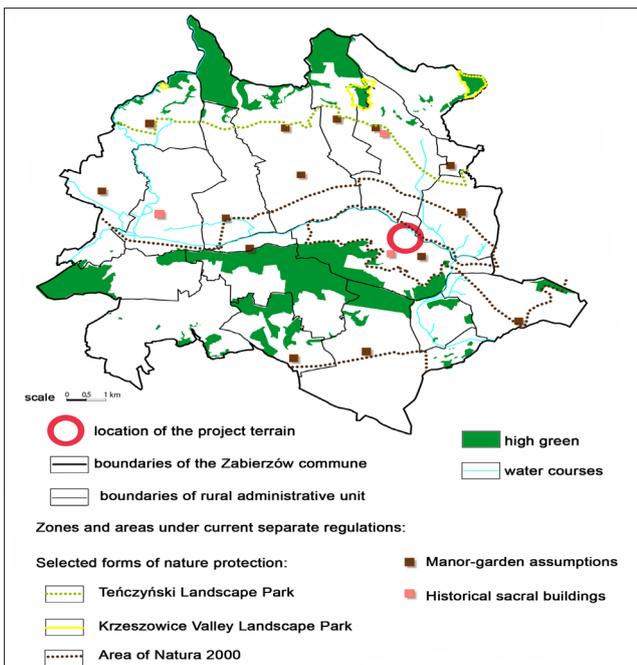


Fig. 2. Cultural and natural values in Zabierzów commune (Sych et al. 2013)

3. Methods

Case 1. The analysis is based on historical and social research and field work. The described area has an extensive range of vital areas that have been particularly valorised, from a group of more than 150 villages – 9 villages were determined to have outstanding values, very high – 15 villages, and high – 38 villages. Historical spatial layout, facilities, elements of style, architectural details, and natural values were evaluated (Solisz, 2012).

Rural-historical studies were carried out for village mentioned above, describing in detail the changes happening, scenic and natural values, built-up structures that have remained until this day, historic buildings (churches, palaces, guest-houses, etc.), roofing material, colour, woodwork, overall condition, surface area of homesteads. Disrupting elements of historical systems are: shop buildings, technical buildings and pavilions. Architectural qualities include: local architectural details, farm building layout, construction, remains of granaries, porches “lauba” and other small architecture elements typical for the region – an important resource for preparing guidelines and procedures. They should be based on the information and evaluation of the state and maintenance of the place.

Stocktaking of the natural resources accompanying buildings will help to determine the species in the village, which are divided into: harmonious, associated with tradition of this place and conditions as well as disharmonious, associated with temporary new fashions. Defining the resource of historical plants will create a directory for the people together with the suggestion of preferred sets. In the public spaces, often associated with the system of the village’s streets, it will help to mark the trees to be removed, i.e. alien species, trees obscuring valuable views.



Fig. 3. Blue spruce in the Centre of Old Paczków village

Activities aimed at the improvement of the technical infrastructure of the village are also important. Some of them have only electricity and running water. Terrestrial Energy Network is a destructive element influencing view points. Visible defects such as the gas and sewage network adversely affect the quality of the residents’ lives. There are few means of transportation (limited to passing buses and coaches, no stops nearby). There are no sidewalks and lighting. In order to fulfil specific guidelines for rural revitalisation project, the

meetings with the residents are organised. The sociological research using questionnaires was also carried out. The goal is to raise awareness, preparation, acquisition of knowledge about rural problems and possible expectations. Raising awareness concerns rural values, the values of historical buildings, memorials, preparing them for possible changes, and an analysis of the social problems that exist in the village. The analysis of the social problems that exist in the village has been made and the scale of these problems and their impact on living standards determined. A tool to mobilise the community, among other things, is Beautiful Opole Village Competition organised by the Governor of Opole. It is considered in four categories: for the village, for the farms, for the Rural Renewal project, for villages joining the project (during the last 4 years).

The results of research show the importance of the problem of the gradual reduction of the age of the inhabitants. Summing up, the Old Paczków becomes less and less attractive place to live and since that a lot of young people decide to move to other towns. On the other hand, the research also showed great awareness of people about the village and its monuments. However, despite this awareness, they have relatively negative attitude to the proposed changes.

Case 2. Revitalisation in this case relies on demarcation of a new public space, created in the former industrial plant areas, located close to the train station. The potential area was characterised by the availability of communication (concerning the described village as well as Krakow), proximity to the commune office, school and swimming pool.



Fig. 4. Buildings of Zabierzów village



Fig. 5. Preserved historic arrangement of Zabierzów village

At the end of one of the streets adjacent to the designated market area there is a 19th century church. The basic activities before the project started included getting acquainted with the cultural and natural resources that allow the extraction of local values. (Hodor 2011).

Social research in the Old Paczków is important because it relates to the revitalization of private buildings. There is a post-industrial space in Zabierzów and this is the reason why this place is going to be transformed into the Market Square as a place of meetings for inhabitants. The acceptance ratio for this idea is 70–80%.

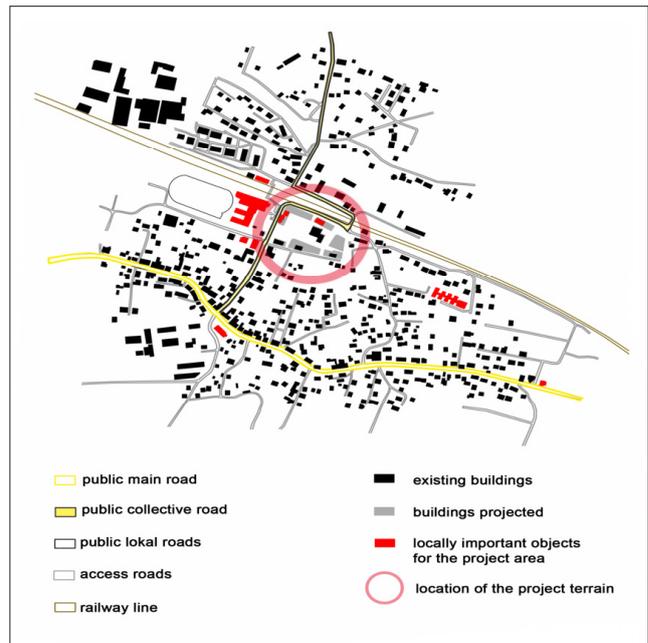


Fig. 6. Structure of Zabierzów village (Sych et al. 2013)

4. Results

Case 1. Work on the revitalisation of the village of Stary Paczków was made at the request of the Office of Provincial Conservator of Monuments. Collected cartographic and iconographic materials allowed for familiarisation with the historical values of the buildings. The study of historical and rural architecture has laid the foundations to explore the history of the village. All the residents are the displaced persons from Southern Poland, native people were displaced after 1945. Slow adaptation of the inhabitants took place during the rule of temporary Soviet authorities, which hindered post-war situation. Currently, for the community of nearly 500 people the fundamental problems are: insufficient technical infrastructure in the village, social problems such as unemployment (the largest number of respondents), alcoholism, migration of young people to places with better access to work. Living in rural areas was rated generally positively and the majority rated positively also the family atmosphere. 16 people out of 28 surveys described the standard of living as poor, in other surveys as average. Young people (under 25) doubt the legitimacy of any changes in the village. Awareness of the historical resources at the site can be described as good. Mostly church, chapel and layout of the buildings were listed as valuable elements. The principal activities which would affect the quality of life of the

inhabitants are the reparation of the road as well as creation of sidewalks and a sewage system. The respondents also identified ways to improve the attractiveness of the village, such as renovation of the buildings and development of a tourist path. The localisation of the village close to the Nida river flowing in Otmuchowski Reservoir was considered as important. Studies have revealed the original concepts of the inhabitants to increase the attractiveness of the village such as cultural events and a foundation of stud farms. Location of the village near the Nida river tributary into the Otmuchowski tank was recognised as important. Currently severe traffic in the direction of attractive fishing grounds is visible in the village.

Guidelines related to the activation of the revitalisation of public spaces are based on a layout typical to the village located along the road with an elongated interior and a church surrounded by a cemetery as dominant. One of the design guidelines was to emphasize the central place for the village that once stood near the pond, now in this area there is a shop pavilion of disharmonious cubature. The historical value is also given to a guest house, which is listed as a monument. Now greatly neglected, it used to be a building around which life of the local community was centered.



Fig. 7. Homesteads requiring repair work from the area of the village Old Paczków

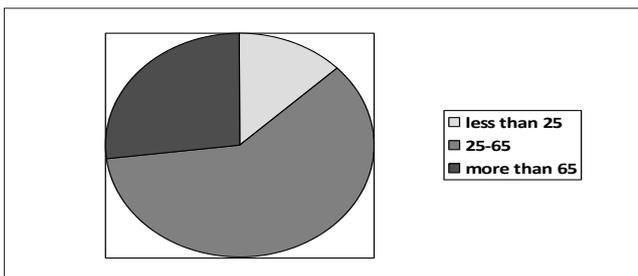


Fig. 8. Analysis of inhabitant's age

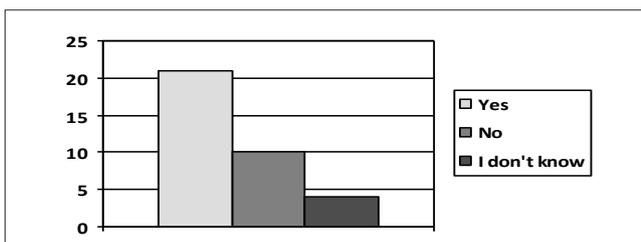


Fig. 9. Exceptionality of buildings of the village

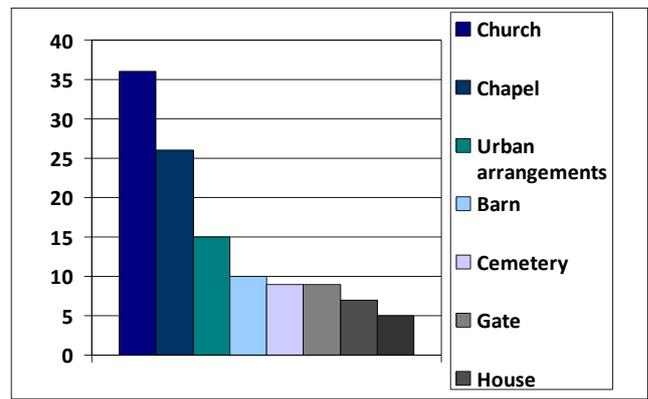


Fig. 10. Historical buildings indicated by the residents

Case 2. The basic principle was to create the man-friendly space with a strong visibility of the values and traditions of the commune (the genius loci – the spirit of the place). The market was historically the centre of urban and rural life. It was created here on the new ground as an initiative of the commune authorities. The reference to the medieval practice was related to the prestige and trade functions, integrating the local community. In addition, an important element will be the aspect of tourism. In the overall concept the reference to local conditions as well as the natural and cultural values of the community was made. The analysis of the selected objects is important locally for the proposed site and supralocally (natural and cultural). Making tourism and teaching as well as education more legible and using local heritage became the basis of the follow-up concept. Vegetation in the public market is an important but not a dominant element. Greenery accompanying the entrance, in the form of the quarter systems, is a representational and attractive frame directed toward the dominant – the town hall. Colourful quarters, referring to the existing here centuries before all'italiana systems beside manor houses (Bolechowice, Więckowice, Niegoszowice, Aleksandrowice, Balice) possess a unique value. Therefore, they are worthy of emphasis and should be accessible for tourist activity (Hapanowicz and Piwowarski 2009). The proposed vegetation fully matches the native species (synanthropic varieties). Xerothermic plants were also exposed. They are characteristic of these areas and occur in the nearby Kraków Valleys Landscape Park (Sych *et al.* 2013).

The idea of the town square, planned to be a central place for local community as well as numerous tourists visiting this picturesque region was based on the analysis of the local values enabling to accentuate the most interesting elements of the microregion.

5. Conclusions

1. The broad issue of restoring the small town is an important and challenging task. The examples of two settlements, which are presented here, represent different problems. Old Paczków, thanks to being located away from big cities, has been largely preserved. However, it is slowly destroyed. Zabierzów is a bigger town located at the medieval transportation route, which does not have a clear and uniting center, which would raise its attractiveness. The creation of such a new place can improve the quality of the

inhabitant's lives and become a representative place and also a point of information about the qualities of the commune.

2. In the first case, the essential problem concerns a reserved attitude of the local people regarding our actions, namely a fear of enlisting as a historical monument in a given town. The work based on the social participation, the first truly positive example showing the value and potential owned by the town's inhabitants, might enable the implementation of the changes and revitalisation more efficiently. Working on a project of revitalisation to activate people is one of the key elements in a sequence of steps preceding the actual work. Raising the awareness of the inhabitants about the potential and possibilities is not enough to stimulate these areas for action, without a grassroots initiative. This article presents only one stage of work. Let us hope that collected heritage will not be lost.

3. The second case is an example of a typical municipal town which has a favourable location (near Cracow) as well as landscapes and resources within the region which are worth mentioning. Good communication links and tourist attractions beyond the region are the reasons why there is a potential for emphasizing existing values in the area of the newly created market.

4. The importance of the actions aimed at revitalising villages should be emphasized. There are many places in Europe which (thanks to their activity) contributed to the development of regions with low economic and industrial potential. Prospection and extraction of tradition of the place together with the active work of the population and the authorities supported by the SWOT analysis can help in the development of revitalisation (Lipińska 2011). Strong points are the unique elements of the landscape, both cultural and natural. Weak points are related to the neglect of buildings and incompetent repairs. Opportunities can be seen in the tourist potential. Threats are related to the abandonment of agricultural crops and the high costs of maintaining the buildings. In conclusion, the risk associated with the loss of individual landscape features of small towns

may be irreversible and may lead to the loss of tangible and intangible landscape values.

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Received 2013 07 23

Accepted after revision 2013 10 30

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