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# URBAN REVITALIZATION IN POLAND: PROBLEMS, DILEMMAS, CHALLENGES AND HOPES

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**Abstract:** The starting point of the study on the problems, dilemmas and hopes for effective implementation of revitalization projects in Polish cities was the conviction that revitalization is one of the processes affecting the development and changes in the spatial and functional fabric of cities. Revitalization is defined as a deliberate and purposeful process, the effect of which is to restore life in the dysfunctional and degraded parts of cities. Taking up such a topic required an answer to the question about the nature of revitalization and its aspects. The focus of the study was on the problems of revitalization that stem from the legal and socio-economic situation and the dilemmas faced by local government authorities of Polish cities. The introduction to these considerations is the brief outline of the revitalization of Polish cities in the period after World War II, while the conclusion deals with the fears and hopes related to revitalization activities that are presently initiated. The discussion takes into account the existing, critically assessed, legal regulations on revitalization.

**Key words:** cities, revitalization, gentrification, revitalization problems, revitalization dilemmas

**JEL codes:** R30, R52

## 1. Introduction

Revitalization is one of the processes influencing both the development and the changes in the spatial and functional structure of cities. The process, which is deliberately initiated and pursued, aims to lead to, as the very term implies, the restoration of dysfunctional life to the degraded parts of cities.

The term urban revitalization has recently entered literature and practice, although, in principle, this kind of process has accompanied cities since the beginning

of urban development. This is evidenced both by the processes of rebuilding war-damaged cities or cities affected by catastrophic events and other cataclysms, and the processes implemented purposefully by rulers, municipal authorities, urban planners, popes, the processes involving the reconstruction of the existing, non-functional development of cities improving their spatial and functional structure and beauty, occasionally discussed in detail in historical literature, especially in the field of urban planning.

It is obvious that nowadays the process called revitalization has a slightly different character, and the rationale behind it are, not only the tragedies of the inhabitants and the ideas of the world's powerful rulers and prominent urban planners.

The aim of this study is to present a concise retrospection of the revitalization processes of Polish cities and identify revitalization related problems, dilemmas or hopes. The study draws both on available literature and the results of the author's own research. In its character, it adopts a synthetic, general approach, presenting the author's point of view, not always shared by other authors<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Revitalization and the synonyms of the term revitalization

The process that is referred to as revitalization in Poland is called differently in foreign literature (Polish literature also sometimes uses different terms). The examples include: urban regeneration, urban renewal, rehabilitation, reconstruction, redevelopment, gentrification and, to a lesser extent, others (Mc Hoyle et al. 1994; Mc Carthy 1998; Kaczmarek S 2001, 2015; Kaczmarek T 2001; Parysek 2005a, 2006, 2015a, 2016a, 2016b; Jadach-Sepiło 2007; Roberst & Sykes 2008; Grzeszczak 2010). It might seem that the terms used are synonymous with the term revitalization, but in the light of revitalization literature this is not the case (Parysek 2015a, 2016b). The concept of reconstruction embraces the process of revitalization in the 1950s, revitalization – the same process in the 1960s, renewal – the 1970s, redevelopment – the 1980s, and urban regeneration – the development of the areas degraded in the 1990s and later (Lichfield 1992; Roberts & Sykes 2008; Tallon 2010; Couch et al. 2011; Parysek 2015a, 2016a, 2016b). Some publications also offer other classifications of the characteristic subsequent phases of the process referred to in Poland as revitalization, e.g. the era of bulldozer, the era of rehabilitation and the era of revitalization (Carmon 1999). Other terms that are used are protection and managing, as well as planning and conservation, in addition to the concepts primarily related to the development of urban areas with special cultural, historical, urban and architectural values, i.e. cultural heritage areas (Geppert 2015). Gentrification is understood slightly differently, the nature of this process, however, will be explained in the further part of the study. It should also be noted that the 2003 *Spatial Planning and Development Act*, in which the reference was made to revitalization, includes the provision concerning the *rehabilitation* of degraded areas. The term *revitalization* and

<sup>1</sup> The conclusion that may be drawn based on the reviews of the author's publications on revitalization and its importance for the development of cities.

its definition was included in the *Act of 9 October 2015 on Revitalization*, hence it can be assumed that it became, in a way, an officially valid term.

### 3. Revitalization and gentrification

In literature, both the definition of revitalization and the understanding of its nature and function are formulated and discussed in a number of different approaches. The understanding of revitalization appears to be clear, especially in relation to the conditions in which it is conducted and in terms of the experiences in the field (Kaczmarek S 2015; Parysek 2015a, 2016a, 2016b). Despite various points of view, no one seems to question the assumption that urban regeneration is a complex organizational and investment process leading to the revival of degraded, neglected or dysfunctional urban areas. The aim of revitalization is to reverse unfavourable processes that take place in some areas of cities, and which lead to a systematic physical, economic and social decline and deterioration of these areas. The reversal of this process is deliberate and purposeful activity leading to the revival of these areas, which means restoring dysfunctional areas to their former functions or giving them new ones. Each revitalization, as proven in foreign and domestic experience, leads to spatial and functional changes of an revitalized area, which may result in its socio-economic development, improvement in spatial order, aesthetics and functionality, as well as the elimination of pathologies, etc. (Kaczmarek S 2001, 2015; Kaczmarek T 2001; Parysek 2005a, 2006, 2015a, 2016a, 2016b; Lorens 2007; Billert 2010; Parysek & Mierzejewska 2014). These reasons are behind the social, cultural, historical, functional, financial, aesthetic and even health benefits or aspects of revitalization (Lichfield 1992; Mc Carthy 1998; Adair et al. 1999, 2000; Mc Gregor 2010; Lubecka 2010; Couch et al. 2011; Geppert 2015; Kaczmarek S 2015; Parysek 2015a, 2016a, 2016b). On the other hand, literature also quotes different reasons for which revitalization is undertaken. It has recently been emphasized that the revitalization process is fuelled by market forces, namely by the demand for well-located areas, existing facilities, spaces for development, housing for renovation, etc. This means that degraded areas are of particular interest both to private investors and local authorities. However, when market forces do not produce expected results, revitalization becomes in many cases a category of public intervention.

Foreign and, to a certain extent, Polish experiences show, however, that investors involved in spectacular revitalization processes are primarily private sector companies, albeit they often cooperate with the public sector, including local government (Loftman & Nevin 1995; Hubbard 1996; Adair et al. 2000; Couch et al. 2011; Parysek 2015a, 2016a, 2016b). Revitalization, which is often emphasized, is an important element of reurbanization, i.e. activities deliberately and purposefully undertaken by municipal authorities, aimed at reviving the declining and dysfunctional parts of cities, especially those located in their central districts, and preventing suburbanization, which is considered socially undesirable (Van den Berg et al. 1982; Parysek 2008, 2011, 2015b, 2016b; Parysek & Mierzejewska 2014).

Unfortunately, literature often defines gentrification in terms similar to revitalization (London & Palen 1984; Bourne 1993; Carmon 1999; Hamnet 2003; Redfern 2003; Philips 2004; Jadach-Sepioło 2007; Grzeszczak 2010; Slater 2011; Parysek 2015a, 2016b). Perhaps in some cases, revitalization can be equalled with gentrification, but not always. It will not be a mistake, however, if we assume that gentrification falls within the broader concept of revitalization or that it is one of the forms or categories of revitalization (Parysek 2016b). Often, however, gentrification is referred to the revitalization of the so-called inner city, without accounting for its structure and functions. Another view proposes that gentrification is: (1) the revitalization of low-income residential areas, inhabited by lower (poorer) social strata (Sassen 1991), (2) the revitalization of degraded, but central parts of the city, essentially performing housing functions (Ley 1982), (3) the revitalization of historical sites or (4) simply revitalization (Bardzińska-Bonenberg 2012). In another approach, revitalization is defined as the process of city renewal, while gentrification as the result of this process. The author of the study is inclined to adopt this particular point of view. However, some authors, while recognizing certain similarities, attempt to point out the differences between these two categories of rehabilitation activities (Kębłowski et al. 2012). The nature of gentrification embraces, above all, the fact that renovated (revitalized) city districts are inhabited by more affluent social groups, mainly by the middle class representatives, often at a mature or even advanced age. This means that gentrification is treated as one of the components of the life cycle of city residents, or even so-called social transition or a form of social succession (Smith 1982; London & Palen 1984; Bourne 1993; Hamnet 2003; Redfern 2003; Cameron 2003; Philips 2004; Jadach-Sepioło 2007; Grzeszczak 2010; Parysek 2016b). It is also agreed that gentrification leads to the recentralization of traditional urban functions (Berry 1980) and is therefore considered to be a component of the reurbanization process (Parysek 2008, 2011). When assessing the effects of gentrification, it is emphasized that it is, in fact, the negatively perceived process involving the rich taking over the place of residence of the poor. The process, triggered or aggravated by displacement pressure or even the planned invasion of potential inhabitants of revitalized areas over the poorer social strata, which is treated as the ruthless operation of market forces (Smith 1982; London & Palen 1984; Jadach-Sepioło 2007; Lees et al. 2007; Grzeszczak 2010).

In order to avoid the excessively comprehensive and incorrect interpretation of both revitalization and gentrification, it is proposed to apply different types of criteria that will help distinguish revitalization from other types of activities (Strzelecka 2011). However, this is not a widely accepted solution and the differences that are not clearly defined lead to the interchangeable use of the two concepts.

Revitalization (as well as gentrification) is undoubtedly a difficult, expensive and time-consuming process, therefore it requires appropriate knowledge and caution, the involvement of major capital outlays and the adequate timeframe. This often means that in order to ensure the efficient implementation of the process and accomplish the expected effects, revitalization in its entirety is commissioned to specialized consortia, which is a practice common both in Western European countries as well as in the USA and Canada (Roberts & Sykes 2008; Adair et al. 2000; Tallon

2010; Kort & Klijn 2011). Unfortunately, Poland does not follow such practice, nor do such companies operate here.

#### **4. From post-war reconstruction to revitalization of Polish cities**

As mentioned above, although the term revitalization has been used in literature for more or less 40–50 years, the processes of urban renewal have taken place since ancient times. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the beginning of the contemporary revitalization of Polish cities is assumed to be post-war reconstruction (Parysek 2006). During World War II Polish cities were severely damaged, especially those on the front lines in 1944 and 1945. The estimates of how severely the cities were damaged during the war were different, however, the most devastated cities were located in the so-called Recovered Territories (Kołobrzeg, Kostrzyn, Gubin, Lubin, Głogów – destroyed in more than 90%, Wrocław in more than 80%, Szczecin – in 65%) and Gdańsk (50%), the capital of the country Warsaw (85%), the Polish port of Gdynia (90%), the Prussian Poznań fortress (55%), Wieluń – the first Polish city bombed in 1939, Żory in Upper Silesia (85%), Jasło in the Podkarpackie Province (95%), Braniewo (85%) and many more. 180 out of the 640 historical Polish cities that were within the Polish state borders after 1945 had been destroyed in at least 50% (Stępkowski 1993; Dziewoński 1967). After the war, the problem was not only the reconstruction of the destroyed cities, but the choice of a reconstruction model. The choice involved either the reconstruction of a city in its historical shape and form, or the development of the areas with new construction projects. The reality turned out to be that different conceptions of reconstruction were adopted for different cities, including the mixed concept, which combined the reconstruction of historical sites with new urban planning. The process of the post-war reconstruction of cities, however, was not free of major errors, including one dictated by ideological and political reasons, which involved failure to rebuild many historical cities, especially those located in the Recovered Territories. As a result, not only were the historical old cities not fully reconstructed, but the heavily damaged, yet antique, buildings and urban layouts were irreversibly destroyed (e.g. in Wrocław). The difficult economic situation of the country, still affecting the dynamics and scope of revitalization activities (Parysek 2005a), was not conducive to the reconstruction of the cities. At different rates and to different degrees, however, all the cities were rebuilt and their life was restored (Dziewoński 1967).

In fact, revitalization as it is understood today only started in Poland after political transformation and it involved activities aimed at the renewal of the degraded parts of Polish cities initiated at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, the first attempts were made to undertake comprehensive actions to restore functionality to some problematic city areas. It was not an easy task to conduct such activities, as cities were faced with a variety of problems. There was no “revitalization law” that would provide the framework and methods for the entire process. Revitalization initiatives were conducted based on various legal acts that could be adopted, including those concerning local governments, spatial management, environmental

protection, etc. Local authorities did not have any funds for this purpose, while private entities were reluctant to take the risk involved in such projects. Despite a number of setbacks and obstacles, however, revitalization schemes were undertaken and today they constitute the first, more comprehensive (apart from the ones conducted as part of the post-war reconstruction) projects involving the revitalization of Polish cities in the strict sense. Obviously, the scale and scope of the work undertaken varied and the projects dealt with different urban matters. This stems from the local specificity of the initiatives, although they had many elements in common. In the first period of post-war revitalization (in fact, reconstruction), the reconstruction of the pre-war Old Town districts came to the fore of the first revitalization tasks, although the pursuit of this goal was particularly difficult and expensive. In many cases, this involved rebuilding the old towns that had been completely destroyed by the acts of war, although not all old town districts were rebuilt as part of the post-war reconstruction of cities. The old town in Warsaw, Wrocław, Poznań and Gdańsk were recreated very quickly, while other cities took many years to rebuild the historical buildings. The examples of such cities are: Kołobrzeg, Głogów, Lubin, Polkowice, Elbląg and Szczecin (the old town near the castle). The revitalization of the later city centre buildings was also undertaken: Kraków, Gdańsk, Tarnów, Lublin, Dzierżoniów, Lubań Śląski, Wołów, Jawor, as well as Bielsko-Biała, Płock, Sopot and Szczecin. The revitalization of concrete-block housing estates (Warsaw, Kraków, Tychy), industrial sites (cities of Upper Silesia, Łódź, Poznań, Kraków, Gniezno), port areas (Gdańsk, Szczecin) and post-military areas (Legnica, Borne Sulinowo, and Słubice) was also commenced. On the other hand, certain areas, such as the ones located close to the railway stations in Kraków, Poznań, and, to a lesser extent, Wrocław, are still waiting for revitalization initiatives. They are extremely attractive, as they offer an opportunity to build modern city centres, alternative to historical old towns, which will – by nature – be multifunctional complexes (housing, services, culture, transport, urban greenery). In many cases, the revitalized areas take on various new functions (Handbook of revitalization 2003; Karczmarek 2001; Parysek 2005). Good examples of the extensive revitalization of degraded, dysfunctional parts of Polish cities that have been implemented over the past few years include: “Galeria Dominikańska” in Wrocław, “Manufaktura” in Łódź, “Stary Browar” and “City Park” in Poznań, “Silesia City Center” in Katowice, “Papiernia” in Konstancin and a ‘student town’ in Słubice<sup>2</sup>.

Summing up the above considerations, it should be restated that revitalization is a purposefully initiated process, aiming to give cities a new development incentive, improve their functioning, revitalize city buildings or improve aesthetics, which requires substantial financial means. In the near future, this may become possible through funding obtained from the European Union (Parysek 2015a, 2016a, 2016b).

The analysis of the features of post-war urban revitalization in Poland revealed five characteristic models, namely: (1) reconstruction, (2) neointegration, (3)

<sup>2</sup> The future of the last project, implemented in the post-military area, is, however, uncertain in the face of the problems of the Collegium Polonicum, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, caused by a decrease in the number of students and the termination of study programs.



retroversion, (4) modernization restitution and (5) functional succession (Parysek 2006, 2015, 2016a, 2016b). Tables 1 and 2 briefly characterize these revitalization models and provide examples. It should be emphasized, however, that the tables present the revitalization models in the time order in which they were adopted, at least until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Currently, however, we usually deal with the adoption of mixed models (if one can use such a phrase). Nevertheless, in a variety of situations, revitalization activities can be aligned with the models described in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Contemporary revitalization models – general classification

Not involving a change in the function of an area	Involving a change in the function of an area
Reconstruction Neointegration Retroversion	Reconstruction Restorative modernization Functional succession

Source: own elaboration based on: Przyłęcki 1998; Szmygin 1998; Lubocka-Hoffmann 1998; Parysek 2006, 2016.

Table 2. Models of the revitalization of Polish cities

Model	General characteristics	Examples
1. Reconstruction	the reconstruction of the historical buildings of cities, preserving the old urban layout; the return to the old forms of buildings, with the removal of objects that do not fit stylistically to the old architecture or contribute to irregular functioning; maintaining the former functions of the area	old town complexes: Warszawa, Wrocław, Poznań, Gdańsk, Toruń, etc.
2. Neointegration	on the one hand, reconstruction was based on preserving the historic building fabric, and on the other, on supplementing it with new elements; the contrast achieved in this way was to emphasize the value of historical buildings; maintaining most of the former functions of the area	old towns in Szczecin, Lubin, the market squares in Słupsk, Jawor and Wołów
3. Retroversion	the model was the effect of the criticism of modernist solutions, reflected in <i>neointegration</i> , and the result of the search for the effective use of the destroyed old towns in some Polish cities; maintaining old functions	old towns in Elbląg, Kołobrzeg and Głogów
4. Restorative modernization	maintaining the old architectural form with the change in the functions of the area with its organizational and functional modernization	“Stary Browar” in Poznań, “Manufaktura” in Łódź, “Papiernia” in Konstancin
5. Functional succession	intensive land development with the adoption of new functions (possibly supplementing existing ones)	“Galeria Dominikańska” in Wrocław, the railway station shopping mall in Kraków

Source: own elaboration based on: Przyłęcki 1998; Szmygin 1998; Lubocka-Hoffmann 1998; Parysek 2006, 2015a, 2016a.

## 5. Problems and challenges of urban revitalization in Poland

The implementation of particular revitalization projects involves solving many problems that emerge in the process. Although their character may be clear and unambiguous, the classification of such problems is of universal nature and may apply to any revitalization. The typical classification includes, among others, legal and ownership related problems, social, economic, and cultural issues, ecological, technical, urban and architectural matters, functional, aesthetic and many other difficulties. In the author's opinion, none of these problems can be solved without first eliminating the degradation of the physical fabric of the area that is going to be revitalized. In this context, it should be remembered that revitalization, although directly or indirectly, can lead to solving many different problems, but it cannot be treated as a panacea for solving all problems that occur in a given area. In particular, such problems involve housing, unemployment, poverty, health and hygiene problems, sanitation, social deprivation and pathologies, lack of economic activity, cultural collapse, etc<sup>3</sup>. After all, these problems can be solved in a number of different ways, more appropriate than revitalization. Here again, the conviction comes to the forefront that social problems, especially those strongly emphasized in revitalization, in the vast majority of cases are of secondary nature in relation to the degradation of physical fabric, especially housing. Evidence exists that physical degradation leads to the abandonment of housing by people who – for many reasons – cannot continue to live in previously occupied apartments. However, there is also a lot of evidence that abandoned flats become occupied by other tenants, primarily by poor people or families, pathological groups, ethnic minorities, various subcultures etc., which, fortunately, is not so frequent in Polish cities, not as common as in other cities (Berry 1980; Ley 1982; Smith 1982; London & Palen 1984; Toelle 2007; Grzeszczak 2010; Parysek 2015a, 2016a, 2016b).

The discussion of the problems of revitalization should always account for the frequently confused problems of revitalization, i.e. the problems that accompany the implementation of projects and the problems that revitalization is supposed to solve. This study is primarily concerned with the former, of which the essential ones are briefly characterized in Table 3. The scale of the emerging problems is obviously much larger than the concise list presented in Table 3, but the synthetic nature of the approach and the limited volume of the text do not allow the author to discuss these matters in greater detail (Kaczmarek S 2001, 2015; Kaczmarek T 2001; Parysek 2005a, 2015a, 2016a, 2016b; Billert 2010; Lubecka 2010; Parysek & Mierzejewska 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Such problems, in line with the Act of 9 October 2015 on revitalization, are to be solved by revitalization.



Table 3. Major problems of urban revitalization in Poland

Category of problems	Specification
Legal	lack of a comprehensive “revitalization law” (the 9 October 2015 Act of on revitalization does not concern revitalization, but the development of communal revitalization programs); unclear ownership status of real estate areas designated for revitalization; lack of unambiguous regulations allowing local authorities to manage real estate
Economic	high costs involved in the completion of revitalization projects; lack of necessary funds in municipal budgets; poor interest of private investors in revitalization; high risk incurred as a result of joining a revitalization project
Social	problems of evacuating residents from revitalized buildings and areas and finding substitute housing for the time of a project; reluctance to change the place of residence temporarily and permanently; lack of social approval of the revitalization of inhabited area; lack of financial resources for the return of former residents to revitalized apartments; problems related to the change in the social fabric of a revitalized area
Organizational	problems of adapting the model of the revitalization process to existing conditions and capabilities; problems involved in the coordination of revitalization works; lack of units specialized in comprehensive project completion; low level of development of public-private partnership
Spatial	difficulties in adjusting the development concept to a specific area; problems with the adequate incorporation of the planned development into the existing spatial and functional fabric of the city
Technical	a significant degree of land degradation; technical difficulties in implementing comprehensive revitalization projects; difficulties in applying innovative technical and technological solutions (construction, energy, heating, communication) and difficulties in adapting them; problems with ensuring good accessibility of the area
Urban and architectural	difficulties in working out the concept of land use that would be accepted and its adaptation to the technical condition and the value of the material fabric; problems with adapting projects to the location, future functions and neighbourhood of a site; the problem with choosing the character of the entire project, the scale of changes, architectural style, materials, references to the past, local landscape, etc
Functional	the inclusion of a revitalized area in the city’s technical infrastructure and public transport system; overcoming conflicts stemming from functioning in the new quality of space
Ecological	difficulties related to improving the quality of the environment and the functionality of municipal infrastructure; problems with the organization of green areas; removing existing threats
Aesthetic	problems with working out or maintaining the appropriate style of revitalized material fabric, the right harmony and coexistence of natural and material elements; individual and sometimes specific understanding of beauty and harmony by architects and urban planners

Own elaboration based on: Parysek 2005a, 2015a, 2015b, 016a, 2016b, Parysek, Mierzejewska 2014

## 6. Revitalization from the perspective of the 9 October 2015 revitalization Act

The author has long presented the view that significant progress in the field of urban revitalization (revitalization in general) will be obtained after overcoming two barriers: legal and financial. Accordingly, high hopes were associated with the adoption of the act on revitalization. Unfortunately, the act, at least in the author's opinion, fell short of the expectations (Parysek 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b). The adequate assessment of the effectiveness of the 9 October 2015 Act may be possible after about 10 years from its adoption, but its numerous shortcomings can already be identified (Parysek 2016b). The weaknesses of the bill had already been pointed out before it was adopted, but, it seems, to no avail (Rogatka et al. 2015)<sup>4</sup>. Although the country had been waiting for the law for many years, the pace of the final proceedings came as a surprise. The probable reason for the sudden interest of the state authorities in adopting the "law of revitalization" was the new financial horizon of the European Union, which allocated substantial financial resources for revitalization, which could be obtained under the existing law by submitting relevant program documents.

The overall assessment of the Revitalization Act (of 9 October 2015) was conducted elsewhere (Parysek 2016b). Here only the most important, obviously subjectively perceived, deficiencies will be discussed. These shortcomings cause that revitalization entities have to face many dilemmas and choices.

The 9 October 2015 Act is not an act on revitalization, but rather on planning or preparing revitalization activities in a commune, because its provisions do not refer to revitalization, which is the process of lifting a specific area out of the state of degradation, but to the procedure of developing a communal revitalization program. Moreover, a communal revitalization program does not determine anything, as it is not an act of local legislation. Local legislation only includes resolutions of communal (city) councils, designating: degraded areas, areas and sub-areas of revitalization and special revitalization zones, but this does not have any legal implications for revitalization initiatives. Revitalization projects may or may not be implemented in such designated areas. A completely different matter is that such a resolution eliminates, as it seems, other areas in a commune from potential revitalization activities, which is particularly unfavourable in the situations when an entity emerges that might be interested in conducting revitalization activities in such areas. Additionally, it does not matter whether and when the process of adopting communal revitalization programs will be treated as a continuous process. This situation, however, does not seem to relate to the essence of planning, especially spatial planning, the

<sup>4</sup> The fact is that before the enactment, various drafts of the revitalization act were the subject of opinion and criticism, but it is not known to what extent they were included in the adopted version of the law. In this context (but also in other contexts personally known to the author), the view can be expressed that reviewing draft legal acts is, in Polish conditions, only the fulfilment of certain formal requirements, not the way to rethink the proposed provisions in the light of the comments and proposals in order to introduce meaningful corrections into a bill.

scope of which, undoubtedly, embraces revitalization and principles of efficient operation. The Act also stipulates the procedures for the development of a communal revitalization program, which are complicated and bureaucracy riddled. Moreover, it specifies neither revitalization entities nor the scope of their competences and responsibilities or beneficiaries of the activities undertaken. The Act is an extremely regulatory document, but the regulations do not concern such important issues as: the implementation of specific projects and their financing or the solutions to emerging problems (social, ownership related, organizational, technical, infrastructural, ecological, spatial-structural, functional, sanitary-hygienic, health related, cultural and other). The concentration on the revitalization of housing areas is a serious limitation of its material scope. The pro-social orientation of revitalization, which is specifically defined in this document, can be perceived positively. The practicality of taking such actions and the achievement of the expected results will, however, in the light of international experience, be very limited, mainly due to financial reasons. Almost every revitalization project that lacks public funds (which are, in fact, scarce in Poland) and is carried out by private entities, is in fact an example of gentrification, which solves social problems to a negligible extent. Under the provisions of the act, social participation (though the wider and more appropriate term is the socialization of the revitalization process) is a highly formalized process and as such does not ensure the actual participation of a local community in the development of a local revitalization program. The activities of theoretically many possible revitalization committees, with no specific tasks, roles, conditions and timeframe of their functioning, will be doubtful in this respect (Parysek 2016b). Ideally, the problem of revitalization should be included in the much needed act on land use, whose regulations will lead to the improvement in the spatial order and the sustainable development of a revitalized area, pursued in the general public interest, instead of individual interests of investors, housing developers, property owners, land speculators, architectural and construction companies or the representatives of political, economic and social life. In the legal document adopted on 9 October 2015, the legislator seems to have missed the nature of revitalization and overlooked revitalization related problems, focusing on the determination of various areas of revitalization, the appointment of various committees and the preparation of communal programs (Parysek 2015a, 2016b).

Neither does the Act provide the solution to another problem of revitalization, already identified here, namely the financing of this process. However, it remains a binding legal act, the provisions of which burden local authorities with many dilemmas that call for specific choices. Dilemmas, which, despite the current law, will be difficult to solve. Table 4 outlines major questions and dilemmas of revitalization that are faced by the authorities of Polish cities in the existing conditions.

Table 4. Selected potential dilemmas faced by municipal authorities in relation to revitalization tasks

Dilemmas	Description
How to understand revitalization and define its material scope?	the existing law defines revitalization as a tool for solving almost all problems of the commune, especially social ones; it does not take into account the gentrification-like nature of revitalization, especially in the absence of necessary resources; it does not take into account the fundamental importance of the regeneration of physical fabric to achieve other regeneration goals
What place should be given to revitalization among a municipality's own tasks?	the scope of a municipality's own tasks, supplemented with the implementation of revitalization programs, significantly exceeds the financial capacity of a municipality, so it is important to determine the place of revitalization in the hierarchy of its objectives; it is crucial to define the role of revitalization (effects) as a factor of the attractiveness and development of a municipality
How to ensure the development of effective communal revitalization programs?	the development of such a program by a commune often exceeds its capacity and creates the need for an external involvement. The problem is the choice of a contractor and the selection criteria. If it is to be a viable program, it is important to choose a reliable, professional contractor, which cannot be achieved with a low price as a selection criterion
To what extent do plans and revitalization programs go beyond the provisions of the current law?	the Act primarily indicates housing development areas as subjects of potential revitalization, which in many cases may not relate to the existing state and the needs and possibilities of municipal authorities in this regard
How to treat communal revitalization program – in formal or realistic terms? What is the effect of its adoption?	the activities of local authorities in this respect indicate a formal approach to a communal revitalization program, i.e. as a document necessary to apply for EU funds. This is evidenced by the fast and cheap way of acquiring programs (implemented by entities that are not always reliable), which do not take into account the multifaceted nature of revitalization, meeting only the general statutory requirements
How to ensure funds needed for revitalization?	funds may be ensured by the possession of a communal revitalization program, which neither guarantees the acquisition of EU funds nor the amount they need; in this situation, the acquisition of external funds (private investors, public-private partnership) is required
How to deal with the need for the regeneration of the material layer of an area revitalized for other purposes?	it is not a commonly accepted point of view that the regeneration of the material layer of a specific area is of fundamental importance for the implementation of other goals, e.g. social. Such a position is probably supposed to protect the actions taken from the “gentrification” effect, which may be an obstacle to achieving social outcomes; this position leads to a departure from the complexity of revitalization, which is its characteristic feature
How to solve social problems within revitalization activities?	the social aspect of revitalization is extremely important, but its inclusion in revitalization projects is difficult, especially in the absence of own resources and the business approach of private investors to the implementation of such projects; public-private partnership, the multi-functionality of a revitalized area and EU funds allow for some optimism; in many cases, however, this cannot be done without changing the social fabric of the future residents of a revitalized area

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What functions should be assumed for a revitalized area?	a choice is to be made between maintaining old functions and adopting new ones as well as between multifunctionality and homogeneity
What revitalization model to adopt?	the comprehensive approach to revitalization requires the adoption of a specific model, one from those discussed in this study or still another, but clearly defined so as to the nature of a revitalized area and its future functions
How to make revitalization processes socially inclusive?	the implementation of revitalization projects and programs should include many entities, primarily investors and local communities, and assign the coordinating role to local authorities; it is important to build social climate conducive to revitalization and recognize revitalization as a factor contributing to the development of a city and the way to improve the living conditions in the local environment; revitalization, however, is not the way to solve all local problems

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Own elaboration based on: (Parysek 2008, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b)

## 7. Prospects of Polish revitalization in the near future: hopes and uncertainty

In the current legal and economic conditions under which local governments operate, the future of revitalization of Polish cities is not promising. Undoubtedly, the degradation of the material fabric of Polish cities – both the old and historical and the relatively new (post-war blocks) – advances and is often accompanied by the process of social deprivation. This situation requires to recognize revitalization as an important task for municipal authorities. It is important because the state of the physical fabric of cities determines the living conditions of the inhabitants and the image of cities. It can, therefore, be assumed that the launching of the revitalization process is an urgent necessity in many cases. Revitalized areas open up new spatial conditions for urban development, preserve the values of material culture and landscape, improve the living conditions of the population, improve the quality of the urban environment (natural and social) and increase the level of population security (*Podręcznik rewitalizacji* 2003).

Urgent and extensive revitalization is primarily required in: (1) old-town areas of historical buildings, (2) residential buildings of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, (3) workers' housing estates from the same period, (4) housing estate blocks from the 1950s and 1960s, (5) brownfield areas, (6) degraded warehouse and storage areas, (7) unused land and transport facilities, (8) degraded port areas and riverbanks, (9) post-military areas, (10) areas of substandard housing estates, (11) other areas, unsuitable for the internal structure of the city. A large number of areas are waiting for revitalization, which, as it has been mentioned above, is a complex, multifaceted, costly and long-term process and should therefore be conducted in a comprehensive and prudent manner.

There are many indications that the authorities of Polish cities recognize and appreciate the importance of revitalization for the development and modernization of the spatial and functional urban fabric, the improvement of spatial order, living

conditions of residents and an increase in the attractiveness and competitiveness of cities. However, they face serious difficulties in initiating and conducting the revitalization process. The most important obstacles include: (1) the lack of a comprehensive law covering all issues related to urban regeneration<sup>5</sup>, (2) limited municipal budgets, (3) relatively low interest of private capital in revitalization, (4) complex ownership structure of real estate (buildings and land) or unclear ownership relationships in the areas to be revitalized, (5) high costs of revitalization projects, especially in the areas of historical value, (6) social problems stemming from revitalization, requiring the solution of many difficult problems (e.g. the need for re-housing, resistance of residents, problems involved in returning after revitalization), (7) lack of specialized companies capable of completing regeneration projects in a comprehensive manner, (8) lack of coverage of revitalization in land use policies and local development strategies (assigned marginal importance), (9) absence of good social climate for revitalization. These problems will hinder or prevent the responsible undertaking and implementation of revitalization projects. By fortunate coincidence, these obstacles may diminish the strength of their impact. This will probably happen when: (1) a new, proper, comprehensive law on revitalization or a law on land use, including legal grounds for revitalization, is passed, (2) a sensible financing system, encouraging investment in the revitalization process, is passed, (3) the level of economic development of the country and the wealth of citizens increases substantially, (4) ownership is regulated, (5) municipal budgets are larger, (6) appropriate planning tools, organizational solutions, techniques for implementing revitalization projects, methods and techniques of conducting negotiations and achieving social agreement are adopted and implemented, (7) the national revitalization support program is adopted and implemented, which will be separate from the EU funds that can be obtained for this purpose, (8) revitalization will be included in urban policy, which is now practically non-existent as autonomous policy, (9) a public-private partnership model appropriate for Polish conditions is developed, (10) consortia specializing in the comprehensive implementation of revitalization projects are established, (11) an incentive system encouraging various entities to participate in the implementation of revitalization projects is in place, and when: (12) revitalization becomes deliberate public intervention in urban development processes, taking into account social, economic and environmental aspects, (13) revitalization is taken seriously as a commune's own tasks, (14) it is the result of market and public sector cooperation, (15) it becomes a significant component of re-urbanization (Parysek 2008, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, Parysek & Mierzejewska 2014; Billert 2010). In the current situation, it is difficult to formulate any sensible forecasts regarding the course of revitalization of Polish cities in the near future, especially when the two main barriers, i.e. the legal barrier and the financial barrier, have not been overcome. Revitalization is not the determination of the areas of potential revitalization and the development of communal revitalization programs (which do not have any legal force). These activities are at most its elements (Parysek 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b).

<sup>5</sup> It seems that the best solution would be, as it has been postulated, to incorporate revitalization issues into a necessary new law on land use, which would replace the existing one and prevent those initiatives to solve the spatial development problems of the country that are insufficiently well thought out.



## 8. Conclusion

The observation of social life may lead to the conclusion that the need or even the necessity, to undertake revitalization activities is articulated by the growing number of Polish city dwellers. Revitalization is also increasingly understood correctly as a multi-faceted process of restoring functionality to the degraded parts of cities. It is clear that revitalization cannot be limited to the restoration of functionality of degraded housing fabric in cities or central urban districts, as suggested by the existing revitalization act. The projects that have already been completed attest to a different character of Polish revitalization. Regeneration activities should include all categories of degraded urban areas as far as financial and other possibilities allow. Thus, in addition to degraded or dysfunctional residential areas, it should embrace historical city centres (markets and adjacent streets), other historical urban-architectural complexes, post-industrial post-transport (railway, port) areas, post-military areas, storage and warehouse areas, and post-mining areas, palace and park complexes, farm sites, sacred architecture complexes with their surroundings, etc. It is worth emphasizing that revitalization of uninhabited areas does not cause serious social problems and for these reasons its implementation may be less problematic (Gasidło 1998; Kaczmarek S 2001; Kaczmarek T 2001; Parysek 2005a, 2015a, Parysek & Mierzejewska 2014).

It is essential to remember that despite the fact that the revitalization of dysfunctional urban areas is, by nature, a social process despite its business character, and should be part of planned activities undertaken for the development and reconstruction of a given settlement (city). Therefore, revitalization plans, projects and programs should be related to the strategy of socio-economic development, the assumptions of spatial policy pursued by municipal authorities and the spatial development concept. Accordingly, revitalization may become one of the ways to develop a given town and its effects should primarily benefit its residents, but also tourists and, in a sense, investors. Individual, business-oriented activities of investors should, however, be included in the pursuit of general objectives, which should be the responsibility of municipal authorities. This point of view justifies the undisputed role of municipal authorities in revitalization. It is the city authorities, or rather the inhabitants, who hold planning authority not only over the revitalized area, but also upon the entire urban area. Therefore, being in charge of urban areas, they are responsible both for socio-economic development and land use and for revitalization (Act on communal self-government; Niewiadomski 2002; Parysek 2005c). The paradox lies in the fact that these authorities do not possess organizational or financial resources that would allow them to initiate revitalization activities and conduct them effectively in the general public interest. The removal of these restrictions will add to the dynamics of revitalization projects implemented in a relatively modest scope now, but it will also help initiate and pursue them all together. In the situation when high costs involved in the implementation of revitalization projects, especially those in the historical old town districts and post-industrial and post-transport sites, are taken into account, the hope of achieving specific effects is in attracting the participation of private investors or even in

the independent undertaking of such initiatives by private capital. Financial support for revitalization activities of municipal councils may also be constituted by PLN 25 billion from the EU funds, on condition, however, that these funds are not absorbed by bureaucratic procedures required for creating revitalization programs and the functioning of their environment. It is obvious that in order to reach its social objectives, revitalization should be a socialized process. This objective will not be achieved by the appointment of numerous committees and other bodies, as it is assumed in the revitalization act, but through gathering the widest possible circles of residents, entrepreneurs, social organizations, media, and other groups around revitalization. The social rationality of revitalization can only be ensured by means of its well-conceived and factual socialization, not just token and formalized socialization. The completion of revitalization projects also requires the effective solving of emerging social problems and spatial conflicts, which will be supported by the recognition of revitalization not only as a task within remit of municipal authorities but also as a responsibility of the local community.

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