

LOCAL IDENTITY, THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC SPACE: THE REHABILITATION PROCESS OF AZORY NEIGHBOURHOOD AS ONE OF THE POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE CITY OF KRAKÓW

A b s t r a c t

This paper deals with issues of local identity as an asset in creating and revitalizing public space. The example of the rehabilitation process of Kraków's district, Azory, was analyzed in comparison to other rehabilitation projects, mainly in housing environments across Europe. The results of a series of international and local participation workshops that took place during the realization of the USER project are displayed, as well as the author's studies. The nature and importance of the design consisting of local identity is stressed as necessary to address the process of revitalization and planning.

Keywords: public space, rehabilitation, public participation

1. Introduction. Expanding the Contemporary Meaning of Sustainability¹

Introducing measures corresponding to a broad concept of rehabilitation of urban areas, the city of Krakow, like other European cities, tries to prevent the problem of urban sprawl. The growing acceptance of such activity is related to the increasing awareness of the consequences of uncontrolled urban sprawl – with a simultaneous understanding of the need for sustainable development, understood as limiting interference with the natural landscape.

Revitalization of degraded regions of the city as a way of avoiding urban sprawl, introduction of sustainable transportation, and promoting healthy lifestyles were some of the principal presumptions of the Green Urbanism movement. In his 2010 book, *The Principles of Green Urbanism: Transforming the City Sustainability*, Steffen Lehmann presented 15 principles of sustainable urban development, similar to the concepts of revitalization and supplementing the urban fabric formulated by B. and R. Vale in 1991 – they promoted respect for the place and respect for man [1, 2]. These presumptions would apply not only to degraded, abandoned, or functionally converted areas, but also included the social problems associated with economic processes, the comfort of home, and demographic phenomena.

Visions of the future housing environment differ depending on the cultural area and the degree of economic or civilization development. They reveal various trends in the functional and esthetical formation of spaces, but share some features which fit the contemporary extension of the term *sustainable design*. On one hand, it's friendly towards the natural environment; on the other, it's attentive to the user's frame of mind and health, a humane approach to the design of housing adjusted to one's social and cultural needs [5].

Today we experience globalization processes – which, in design of public spaces – create a universal unification. Due to the fast information exchange in communication, society's widespread non-personalized aesthetics is commonly found in the new built surroundings that lead to the lack of identification and anonymity among users. This process results in degradation of common spaces, especially in the housing environment due to the loss of relationship between the user and his private space.

2. Processes of Urban Regeneration – Public Participation

A participative approach provides the humane expression of a new sustainability. In the 60s, Lewis Mumford described the connection between the machine and human social and psychological needs. Quoting Marx, he wrote: "Technology reveals the active relation of man to nature, the direct process of the production of his life, and thereby it also lays bare the process of the production of the social relations of his life, and of the mental conceptions that flow from those relations". He explains that there is a close connection between technology, contact with nature, and cultural context [3]. In *The Five Principles of Ecological Design*, Sim Van der Ryn and Stuart Cowan state, "Listen to every voice in the design process. No one is participant only or designer only: Everyone is a participant designer. (...) As people work together to heal their places, they also heal themselves..." [4]. The cityscape became more than just the physical image of the town's silhouette; it was also the social relations chart of its territory. One of those relationships is the feeling of integrity within a social group and its territory. That sentiment is expressed through local identity.

One of the most recent examples of urban regeneration processes involving future inhabitants is Lyon's neighbourhood, La Confluence. Following the success of Stockholm's Hammarby Sjostad, in 1999, the Lyon Urban Community assigned the SPL (or *local public redevelopment company*) to design and build the Lyon Confluence project.

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This involved organizing construction work, of course, but also conducting studies and promoting the project. From the outset, Phase One was envisioned as a showcase for tomorrow's city. This ambition was conveyed by a substantial scheme of homes, offices, and various businesses, as well as pleasant and generously-sized public spaces. The success of this revitalization area was based on communicating and consulting – explaining the project and involving residents (and, more broadly, users) – in its design. It resulted in creating a space with which the inhabitants could identify. All of the outdoor spaces in Phase Two, apart from the streets, are garden courtyards. They form a network of pockets of abundant vegetation. Openwork gates clearly separate the public and private domains, while ensuring visual continuity. The public garden courtyards are organized into a network of passageways. Providing an alternative walkway to the street, they give access to public amenities, services, businesses, and shops [7].

3. Krakow – the Local Circumstances of the Project

Krakow is the second largest city in Poland, both in terms of population as well as area. In 2011, the city had 760,000 residents, of which 144,000 live in multi-family housing estates. According to the statistical data concerning real estate (published by the Polish Central Statistical Office in 2011), approximately 80% of housing in cities is multi-family housing. It can therefore be concluded that the technical, sociological, socio-economic, and political issues concerning the quality of life in neighborhoods affect a quarter of residents in the city. This is also reflected in the image of public space connected with the place of residence. Comfort, the state of maintenance, the condition of the common areas, and investment are expressions of contemporary conditions of housing estates. Improving the quality of public space (in the field of urban composition, understood as an aesthetical and functional issue, and as one of the topics of rehabilitation of the areas of the city) may, by facilitating the proper use of the space, initiate positive sociological phenomena.

The City Council of Krakow approved a resolution on the adoption of the Guidelines for the rehabilitation program of the block housing estates located in the Municipality of Krakow. On the basis of this document – a multi-criteria analysis of nineteen block housing estates which was developed in 2011 – the City Council of Krakow decided in July 2012 to launch the first programs, one of which will include the Azory housing estate [8].

The process of preparation for the programs was participatory in nature. The field experience of rehabilitation of housing estates, both domestic and foreign, clearly indicated that the widest possible participation of the citizens was a key to the success of long-term rehabilitation programs. Their specificity is closely connected with the impact on the individual citizen and the direct impact on living conditions.

In this process, the identification of the citizen – a user of certain public space – with the social group and its territory is crucial to improvement works in this area. The local identity needs to be located – either revealed or restored

– for the people to feel a part of a certain community. This relationship creates the basis for further actions and continued improvement, development, and maintenance of public space.

4. USER in Azory Neighbourhood as a Pilot Project for Rehabilitation Process

Past practice used various instruments of social dialogue: from surveys and public opinion polls; consulting and public debates; to the direct participation of residents in resolving local problems (such as social workshops and other forms of community activity.) The proposed formula is moving towards a full partnership between the initiator of the program – the city authorities and the local community. The participants not only present their problems, take part in the discussion, and propose solutions to specific problems, but contribute to and co-edit a strategic document, thus making joint decisions about the future of the housing estate. This document, after the approval of the Krakow City Council, will be one of the elements of the official policies of the city.

The USER project was the precursor, complementing the rehabilitation program of the housing estate. The Local Support Group is a forum similar to the Local Rehabilitation Forum, whose aim is to develop a program with the participation of a wide range of stakeholders. By working during theme-based meetings, members of the Local Support Group have the opportunity to actively participate in forming the Local Action Plan. It also fulfills the principle of partnership between the municipality and the local community.

5. Methodology – Participatory Approach

A method of project implementation is in line with the development strategy of the European Union. It assumes a participatory approach to the development of urban space, and is a consequence of social awareness of negative transformations in the modern urban environment. The URBACT methods assumptions have become an expression of increasing the role of the active user of public space who – according to the USER project – is also a co-creator. Conducted in the framework of this project's actions (for the rehabilitation of public space of the Azory housing estate) are one of a number of participatory initiatives undertaken by the Municipality of Krakow. It was also the subject of two close-themed events. The first was Future City Game organized under the auspices of the British Council, a continuation of the Active Citizens program; the other is an attempt to introduce participatory budgeting there. This is a new initiative of the District Council, currently at the proposal stage, where the Council allocates a part of their funds for the implementation of projects submitted by residents – the order of actions will be determined by the opinion of inhabitants.

LOCAL IDENTITY - SPATIAL COMPOSITION - POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPRESSION

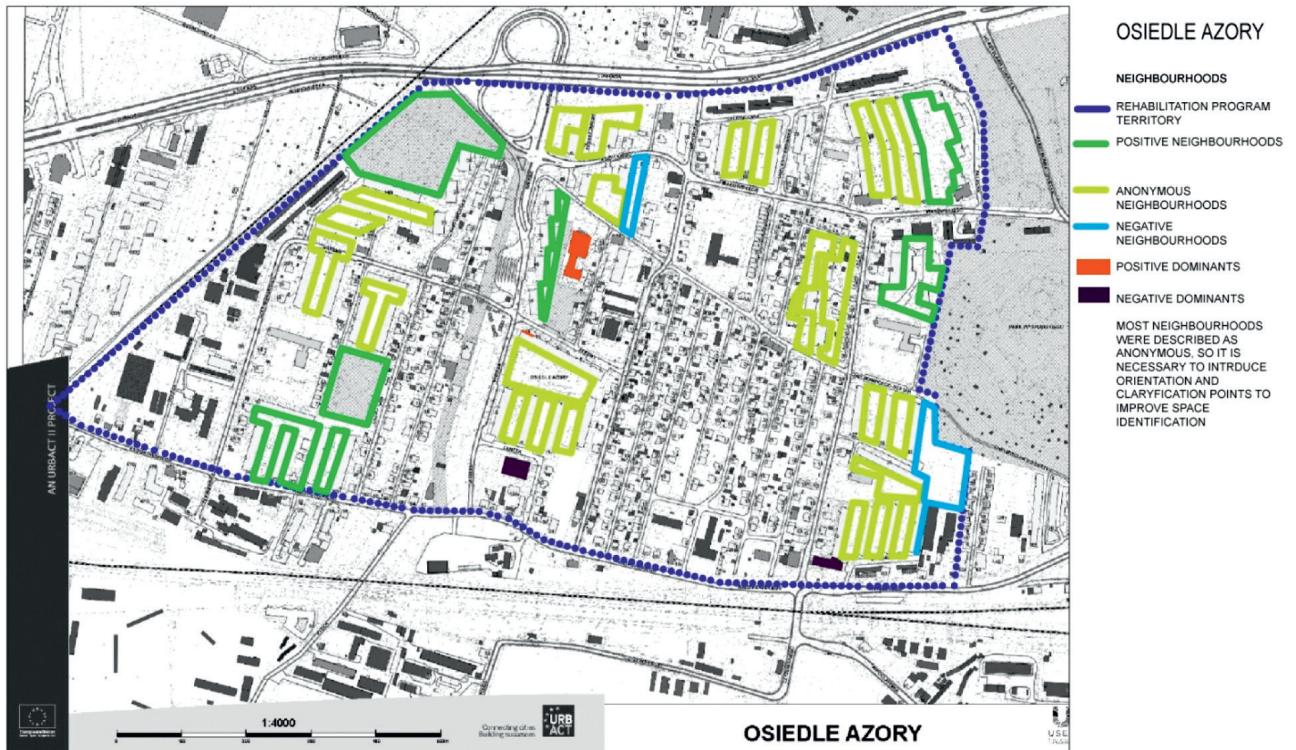


Fig. 1. Local identity issues in Azory

6. USER Project – Implementation

The USER project provides two levels of implementation: local and international, where the idea is to dynamically transfer information and experiences between them. In the case of the Azory housing estate, the first step was to select the members of the Local Support Group from residents active in the statutory bodies of housing co-operatives, housing associations, and social organizations operating in the neighborhood. The second step consists of the owners and property managers, representatives of city hall, district, cultural, and educational institutions, and various services and organizations. The core group is made up of people most involved in the work of the project; the other members shall be appointed for the duration of solving certain problems.

An important aspect of this approach is the ability to initiate the development of a network that, through cooperation based on the exchange of information, resources, mutual support, and opportunities (and led by mutual contacts), will contribute to the creation of the development of social communication; larger than in the past, this can help to achieve specific, widely-approved solutions.

The work of the Local Support Group takes place during workshops prepared by the project manager and local project expert, and run by the moderator. The subject of meetings is prepared under the guidelines of the main project expert. During the workshop with the residents, the program is implemented according to a Roadmap – a document drawn up by the project expert. Based on the

Roadmap, a diagnosis is made, and an action plan is prepared, implemented, and tested. The solutions obtained in this way are the basis for the creation of the document: a Local Action Plan, which is to be the result of the final work. It will be used as the basis for the creation of local development plans, strategies, and actions in order to apply for funding under the program of rehabilitation and social initiatives (within participatory budget, relatively community-based initiatives).

The work of the Local Support Group is supplemented by survey research conducted in schools, and art competitions for children and youth in most educational institutions at the housing estate. These activities are designed to involve the greatest number of people in the activities of the project, as well as obtain the maximum amount of information from a large sample of the population. In addition, an active civic participation is created, and the possibilities of the impact on the appearance of a present and future place of residence are realized.

The proposed formula uses a wide range of workshop techniques, and in addition, test the participation of university students and academic staff – people with diverse specialist knowledge that could provide the participants on the spot answers to questions about solutions to specific problems (as well as co-create individual projects).

The work at the local level is supplemented by international workshops, during which the teams implementing similar projects in their cities visit their partners. During the discussions, they exchange views with one another and with the members of the Local Support Group. They also

have the opportunity to hold a site visit, and post their findings and remarks concerning the local project implementation, in an observational report.

7. Diagnosis – Guidelines, Assumptions, and Methods

The diagnosis of the Azory area was made on the basis of several documents of different levels and is mainly a result of the meetings of the Local Support Group.

The main goals of the diagnosis were:

- identifying the most significant public spaces for the inhabitants, those needing most urgent intervention,
- determining the area that inhabitants identify with,
- identifying the current use, conflicts, and dysfunctions,
- determining the needs of the specific area users.

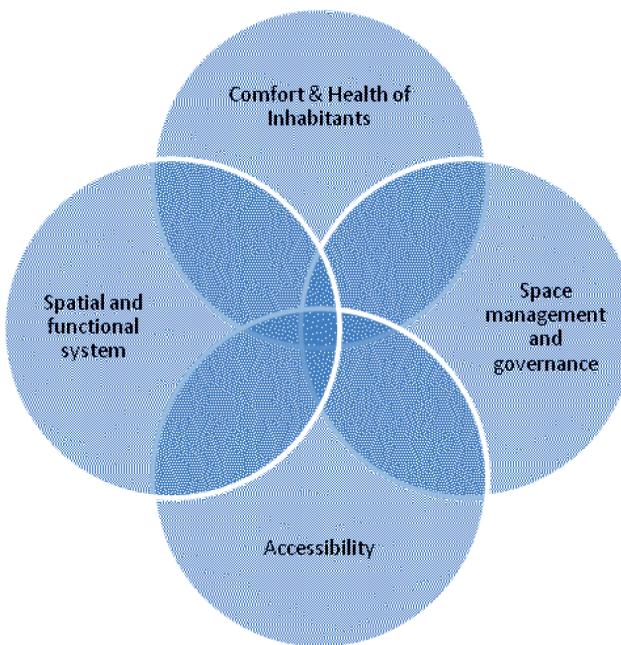


Fig. 2. Main problem fields of the diagnosis

The analyzed area of the housing estate is home to 15,295 residents, which constitutes 2.05% of the Kraków's population. The sex and age pyramids indicate that the society in the housing estate is aging; the participation of children below the age of 10 is 6.2% of the general population, while simultaneously, the high participation of population over the age of 70 is 14.3%.

7.1. Shape, Function, and Layout of the Public Spaces at the Azory Housing Estate

The housing estate was designed in the 1960s, in accordance with contemporary standards, as a typical urban "sleeping district". Consequently, as an expression of the functionalism popular at the time, it is a mono-functional, homogeneous, hard linear composition which lacks zoning and attention to architectural and urban details. Realized at minimal costs, the housing estate prepared a space between the blocks of flats, as a green area, though mostly without any design. The space does not have any axes, focal points,

left or right sides, nor does it have a beginning or an end. It is mostly due to the weakness of the binding legal system of managing space, in particular spatial zoning. The area of the housing estate is not included in the local zoning plan. The results include: functional shortages, spatial and information chaos, ineffective and uneconomic use of space, improper amounts, and the structure of grid and commercial services.

The spatial structure of the housing estate is complemented by sports and recreation areas, which occupy almost 3.5% of the area. Despite a relatively large area allocated for recreation area (2.4 ha), due to a high number of residents, the area per one resident is very low ($1.5 \text{ m}^2/\text{M}$); therefore, access to these areas is difficult. In the structure of the buildings, there are not recorded sport and recreation facilities.

The organization of pedestrian traffic depends on the roads (areas of public and internal roads constitute approximately 16% of the spatial structure):

- no traffic dividers causes safety hazards,
- no independent transit for pedestrian and bicycle routes,
- lack of parking places causes appropriation of the common spaces and green areas for this purpose.

Service areas (public and commercial) occupy nearly 13 hectares, or close to 19% of the analyzed area. This indicator confirms good service in the field of public infrastructure, as well as good access to basic commercial services.

There are the following space categories within the housing estate, ones influencing the process and the results shaping them:

- public spaces – public (managed by the public entities – Municipality) – public roads and communication devices, yards, and greenery are managed by the municipal units,
- common public spaces – the space between buildings, internal roads, communication devices – managed by the housing cooperative and association,
- closed spaces – private, managed by private persons and entities (e.g. single-family development).

Management includes maintaining proper technical condition, current maintenance, keeping order and tidiness, managing and equipping the required devices and fixtures, conducting investment processes, and financing.

In the majority of cases, the planned management concerns the areas subject to common management. There is no sufficient coordination within the whole housing estate, as well as at the junction of the administrator – the City. Therefore, the regeneration program is the first such comprehensive, multi-aspect undertaking intended to improve the current circumstances.

The abovementioned information was in fact the basis of the following actions undertaken to design Azory as the first area to be regenerated and become the pilot site in the framework of the USER project.

8. Diagnosis results

The four meetings of the ULSG (which took place in 2013) collected a large amount of information which allowed the elaboration of a complete diagnosis of the

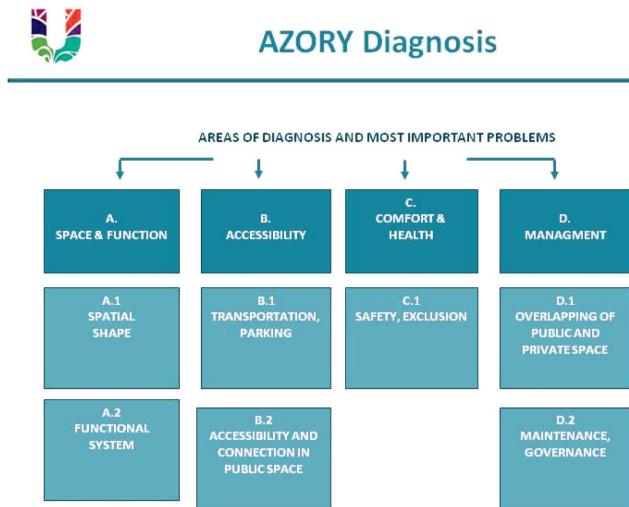


Fig. 3. Areas of diagnosis and the most significant problems

district. The information was divided into concrete problems which are identified in the analyzed area. Secondly, a map of crucial public spaces was made and ULSG members defined places where pilot actions should be undertaken.

A. Shape, layout of the space

The housing estate is homogeneous, and lacks zoning and attention to architectural and urban details. As a consequence, there is no isolated *local center* and commercial services are dispersed and generally limited to a few grocery stores, a second-hand clothes shop, and a small catering business. The need to go outside the housing estate for the purpose of shopping or socializing at the pub makes sleeping the Azory's primary function.

Another problem is the hostile use of space to the elderly and disabled. This concerns both the same blocks that are not equipped with elevators, as well as public spaces between the blocks, ones which do not address the needs of the elderly.

B. Transportation layout and parking spaces

The housing estate, designed at the time when a car was not a commonly available tool, does not meet the current requirements in terms of transport facilities. The outcome is the failure to adapt the transport layout (road sections, technical parameters, traffic management) to real needs, resulting in exceeding the traffic parameters for the particular transportation routes; this impacts the whole layout multiple times, a problem that is particularly visible during traffic peaks. Due to the stream of traffic generated by commuters going through the Azory to the city center and back, merging with traffic during the peak hours of the morning (and in the afternoon) is very difficult (particularly evident in the area of the railway viaduct). Inability to isolate the bus traffic causes public buses to experience significant delays. The housing estate is not currently connected to a collision-free cycle path from the city center, which makes it impossible to use this means of transport for most of the residents of the housing estate.

Particular attention needs to be paid to the catastrophic lack of a sufficient number of parking places, and the resulting appropriation of the common spaces and green areas for this very purpose. In the area of the housing estate, there are about 90 garages (most stand-alone), and around 650 public parking spaces; this gives 0.06 parking spaces per capita.

C. Safety, exclusion

Another problem identified in the area covered by the plan is the deteriorating condition of the buildings and municipal infrastructure. This mainly concerns the former school building, which, after the liquidation of the school, is no longer in use. It is decaying and neglected, and belongs to the municipality building, in which the Polo store is located. Such space is vulnerable to various pathologies and conflicts that originate in social issues. This is an example of negative local identity leading to the rejection of the responsibility for the overall image of the district. There is a lack of community interest observed in the decision-making process in this area. Negative local identity is also a reason for deterioration and devastation in public spaces that "belong to nobody". Therefore, issues, such as the hooliganism of football fans, abusive parking, and the exclusion or limitation of elderly access arises from the aging of the local community.

D. The intermingling of public and private space

Due to historic reasons, the progressing reprivatization of ownership, and the existing spatial layout, we see the mutual intermingling of various ownership forms, which – in the context of lack of proper mutual coordination – results in a conflict visible in the space, arising from various methods and possibilities of administering the area. This mainly affects the investment potential (common, planned undertakings), the quality and method of maintaining order and tidiness, and proper fitting with utility infrastructure: playgrounds, sports and recreation devices, fittings, composed greenery, etc. This results in a lack or negative local identity, and separation from common spaces. Here the conflict of interest is visible, arising from the fragmentation of various ownership forms concerning public spaces. The existing space of the housing estate – its shape, functionality, perception – shows the conflicts existing in the relations between the stockholders. It concerns the management of common space, usability economics, as well as local communication or identity. The conflicts are particularly visible at the junction of various ownership forms, management methods, or visible functional shortages, e.g. shortage in parking places or structure and grid of commercial services. Poor technical condition of the space, the facilities, and devices located there; infrastructural solutions that are not fit to our times; and inefficiency in managing and using the space require involving significant funds, both in terms of investment and current maintenance. Limited capabilities in obtaining external funds leads to charging excessive, exploitative costs from residents. It is accompanied by the lack of an effective financial management system at the level of the urban unit – the housing estate.

During the meetings of the Local Support Group, participants paid attention to the conflicts regarding the use of space for recreation, and the lack of cycling and walking connections between recreational areas. Also mentioned as an important social problem were conflicts between football fans, and grouping resulting in the exclusion of proper use of the space. Public places were defined as dangerous, inactive, and inanimate.

9. Conclusions

Participation projects such as USER in Azory form a proper background for the rehabilitation process. Conducting a rehabilitation program starting with a neighbourhood's public space is a user-oriented, humane approach. But the identification relationship between the user and his area is necessary to conduct changes and preserve their

results. It may form a basis for a large scale redevelopment of Polish cities with large block areas. Nevertheless, inhabitants' expectations go beyond the public space. In order to follow the European examples, a large scale refurbishment would be needed, including deep interventions into urban, as well as building, structure. Is it possible to conduct changes as radical as those observed across the continent without losing the original neighbourhood identity, or extracting the positive issues? Perhaps the new image of the area would attract more permanent residents that would identify and care for their infrastructure and public space; this would result in creating a new local identity. Due to financial, administrative, and ownership problems, the realization of such an enterprise is not yet possible, so it leaves a field for speculation. In the meantime, realization of redevelopment programs such as USER appears to be a forecast for a change to come in the future.

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