

THE STUDY OF REVITALISATION ILLUSTRATED WITH AN EXAMPLE OF SUBURBAN OBERAU

Abstract

The revival of European cities is increasingly dominated by a balanced and sustainable development. It stems from the need to preserve and feature numerous cultural and natural values, which are located both in city centres and their outskirts. The presented research methodology is related to the revitalisation project of the suburban village of Oberau. Its location in valuable landscape – with the simultaneous maintenance of high historical values – constitutes the uniqueness of the place as a recreational facility for the nearby towns of Meissen and Dresden. Well-documented analysis reveals that the suburban conditions of Oberau may be an attempt to carry out the comprehensive research to identify a tool for the revitalisation of place, and a revival in the region. This method applies to preservation of place identity and its development in different dimensions.

Keywords: suburban, place identity, revitalisation, revival, sustainable development

1. Introduction

The politics of sustainable development concern all areas of life connecting economic, historic, social, and ecological aspects of the economy. The cities as multi-functional centres (with a rich historical heritage) are irreplaceable assets that should be protected in accordance with these politics.

For the first time, the need for sustainable urban development in Leipzig Charter was addressed; attention was drawn to the necessity of the protection of cities because of their unique cultural, architectural, and social values, as well as their development potential, which influences the power and quality of life in whole regions.¹ Therefore the politics of sustainable urban development is the effect of an increase in the municipal awareness of how to prevent current problems, which may result from obsolete occurrences and demographic changes (aging population) – urban areas in Europe that require revitalisation are estimated at 21% and city centres at almost 52%.² Local heritage and needs of the citizens should be a starting point for revitalisation, but in the reality there is often a lack of sensible management.³ Fortunately, such thinking in cities and of regional development processes is even more popular in Europe and the world.

Conducted observations show that, first of all, revitalisation issues are applicable in cities of the countries with a high Human Development Index, according to the Human Development Report.⁴ This takes place with varied economic development being connected to different needs of the societies. In such a situation, it is not possible to provide one universal method of development, but there is (in all countries) the distinct need for further investment in infrastructure based on reasonable and active public and private politics in the economic sectors, especially further investment in society.⁵ The revitalisation of cities and suburban areas fits the series of activities, which could be undertaken for the benefit of – and in collaboration with – local communities.

Leipzig Charter focuses on cities as a driving force of regional development, whereas strengthening the suburban condition may cause development of the region and perhaps be consequence of that idea.⁶ It is important to find out how the revitalisation and development of suburban areas may influence cities' development, especially because the majority of residents in countries with a high level of social development want to live there. These spaces are often not within city boundaries, but maintain a strong relationship to each other, and are localized in suburban areas adjacent to the city. In fact, the sustainable urban development depends on related urban and suburban development.⁷

The first suburban areas of the type known today were built after World War II.⁸ Small villages near urban centres

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¹ *Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities*, 24-25.05. 2007 r., CdR 163/2007 EN-AW(ASZ)/ak, p. 1-2, 9.

² *Przegląd Krajowej Polityki Miejskiej OECD. Polska 2011*, Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego 2011, p. 124-128 [after:] E. Kipta, *Bariery systemowe rewitalizacji* (online): http://www.forumrewitalizacji.pl/uploads/file/rewitalizacja_o-barierach/E.Kipta-Bariery-systemowe-rewitalizacji.pdf, (date of access: 2014-04-20).

³ E. Kipta, *Bariery...*, *op. cit.*; (cf.) K. Hodor, J. Klimek, *Attempts and Methods for Revitalizing the Centers of Small Localities. Selected Examples*, *Journal of Sustainable Architecture and Civil Engineering*, No. 4(5) 2013, p. 13-14.

⁴ K. Malik (Ed.), *Human Development Report 2013*, United Nations Development Programme, New York 2013, p. 16-19.

⁵ *Human Development Report...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-7.

⁶ P. Laconte, *Towards Sustainability in European Cities Contrasts between the Overall Effects of European Union Policies and Achievements at the Level of Individual Cities*, [in:] *ISOCARP-REVIEV 08: Towards Sustainability in European Cities*, September 2012, p. 3-4.

⁷ P. Laconte, *op. cit.*

⁸ J. Mitchell-Brown, *Revitalizing the First-Suburbs: The Importance of the Social Capital-Community Development Link in Suburban Neighborhood Revitalization – a Case Study*, *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* Vol. 6 No. 2; (cf.) R. Steuteville,

were absorbed by the vibrant urban development. Although suburban areas often have a long history, they are still a kind of phenomenon.⁹ Their role in sustainable development is particularly important in light of recent trends in the development of the metropolis (that are not limited by strict boundaries), where suburbanization is dramatically intensified.¹⁰ Such areas should be the topic for numerous studies, because on the one hand, many structural and social problems are concentrated there, and on the other, their values determine the local identity of the cities.

The projects of revitalisation, often implemented with the support of external funding, should simultaneously consider the problems of local communities to satisfy all assumptions of revitalisation, as well as the opportunities and needs of suburban inhabitants. It was mentioned above that social problems such as poverty, unemployment, migration, underfunding, limited access to education and public services, uncontrolled building, and the lack of cultural events overlap very often in suburban areas.¹¹ The most obvious examples are the suburbs of the metropolis of Brazil, such as Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, and Curitiba. Brazil lacks basic conveniences in areas where poverty and crime have spread.¹² In the United States, the housing crisis and changes from traditional lifestyles also have caused people to be less likely to live in suburban areas.¹³ These areas in Europe are elements of a complex spatial and functional system, the transitional form between city and rural area. Unfortunately, many negative processes are visible in suburbia, such as the slow pace of political change, growing conflict between agricultural and construction land usage, high unemployment, the aging and migration of the population, degradation of the landscape, environmental, and spatial disorder.¹⁴

On the other hand, the suburban area is a valuable reservoir of local identity for the city, which can be a springboard for its development based on tradition and sense of community. It preserves its individual character.¹⁵ Small suburban villages are a kind of reservoir of values, such as preserved building structure, local architecture, used construction, and materials,

while partly obliterated, may be explored today.¹⁶ The place identity is indicated as a basis of emotional identification between users, place, and residents' sense of community. Suburban society often cultivates local tradition and uses the landscape in traditional ways. Deeply ingrained place identity distinguishes each city from other cities and regions. Some centres rebuilt and intentionally feature local traditions to attract new inhabitants and investors.¹⁷ The community living in a suburban area may be an important catalyst, which could stimulate the city to initiate new development initiatives.¹⁸ In addition, such areas counterbalance dense settlements in the centres. The quality of life may be improved by taking advantage of a variety of functions performed by suburban areas, which should not be commuter towns. Development trend in urban areas – where suburbia is equally as valuable as the city itself – the functions are well-thought-out, and values are applied; this should be the next step in achieving the sustainable development.

2. A Case Study of Oberau

Oberau is a small village in Eastern Germany, its inhabitants not exceeding 250 people.¹⁹ It is located in the community of Niederau on 3.5 ha in Landkreis Meissen, in a picturesque Saxony landscape of fields, meadows, and forests.²⁰ Its suburban locality has many advantages – first of all, it provides excellent opportunities for recreation, and it is also a rich reservoir of tradition and cultural heritage. However, there are many typical suburban problems visible in Oberau.²¹

The survey carried out during the meeting with residents confirmed the aging of society. Almost 30% of the respondents were over the age of 65, and 58% were between 35 and 60. Numerous local inspections showed that household standards in Oberau are significantly lower than in Meissen or Dresden, which is the result of lower wages and a higher unemployment rate. Daily commutes to nearby cities to work and study mean a higher cost of living for many residents. The population of the village appreciates the localization of Oberau's valuable landscape, and the resulting opportunities for rest and recreation. They value the area's numerous monuments, but the lack of satisfactory cultural offerings is visible (Fig. 1). Respondents confirmed the need to invest in cultural offerings in a questionnaire about investments; this information could improve the quality of time spent in Oberau (Fig. 2).

Postwar neighborhoods are key to suburban revitalization, Better! Cities & Towns, June 2013 (online): <http://bettercities.net/article/postwar-neighborhoods-are-key-suburban-revitalization-20239> (date of access: 2014-04-20).

⁹ K. Hexter, E. Hill, B. Mikelbank, B. Clark, C. Post, *Revitalizing Distressed Older Suburbs*, What Works Collaborative, Cleveland State University, November 2011, p. 5.

¹⁰ Scheffler N., Kulikauskas P., Barreiro F., *Managing urban identities: Aim or Tool of Urban Regeneration?*, The Urbact Tribune, November 2009, p. 1-2.

¹¹ K. Hexter, E. Hill, B. Mikelbank, B. Clark, C. Post., *op. cit.*, p. 1.

¹² *Jak naprawić miasto? Oryginalnych pomysłów nie brakuje!*, Bryła, 14.02.2014 (online): http://www.bryla.pl/bryla/56,85298,15281251,Rio_de_Janeiro__wyrywac_sie_z_szarosci,,9.html (date of access: 2014-04-20).

¹³ L. Gallagher, *The End of the Suburbs*, Time, July 31, 2013 (online): <http://ideas.time.com/2013/07/31/the-end-of-the-suburbs/> (date of access: 2014-04-20).

¹⁴ J. Bański, *Strefa podmiejska – już nie miasto, jeszcze nie wieś*, [in:] *Gospodarka przestrzenna w strefie kontinuum miejsko-wiejskiego w Polsce*, Jezierska-Thole A., Kozłowski L. (Eds.), Toruń 2008.

¹⁵ N. Scheffler, P. Kulikauskas, F. Barreiro, *op. cit.*, p. 1-2.

¹⁶ K. Hodor, J. Klimek, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁷ N. Scheffler, P. Kulikauskas, F. Barreiro, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁸ J. Mitchell-Brown, *Revitalizing the First-Suburbs: The Importance of the Social Capital-Community Development Link in Suburban Neighborhood Revitalization – a Case Study*, Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship Vol. 6, No. 2.

¹⁹ The community promotional materials. *Gemeinde Niederau mit den Ortsteilen*, Medienagentur Zeitnah, 2010, p. 2.

²⁰ *Landkreis* – district (author). The community promotional materials, *op. cit.*; (cf.) *Landschaftsrahmenplan Sachsen, das Verzeichnis die dem Bundesamt für Naturschutz gemeldeten Datensätze* [in:] *Bundesamt für Naturschutz Landschaftsrahmenplan Sachsen* (online): www.bfn.de/fileadmin/MDb/documents/themen/landschaftsplanung/sn_lrp.pdf (date of access: 2012-06-14).

²¹ The existing threats are discussed in the part outlining the general problem.

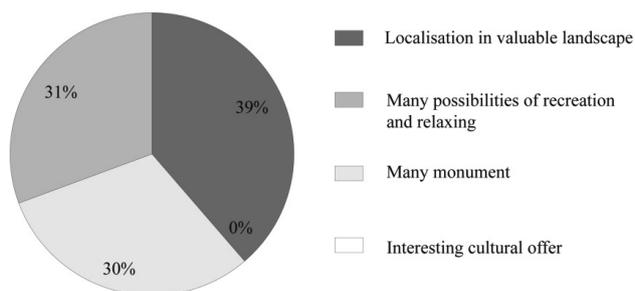


Fig. 1. The advantages of Oberau perceived by the people (study based on a survey conducted on a group of Oberau inhabitants in December 2013)

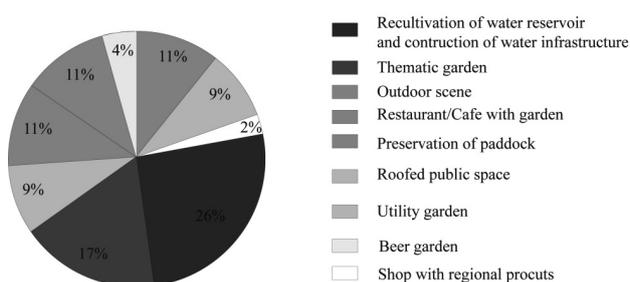


Fig. 2. Investments, which will improve the quality of time spent in Oberau (study based on a survey conducted on a group of Oberau inhabitants in December 2013)

Due to the disadvantages of Oberau's suburban localization, the quality of life was rated on average at 69% by Oberau inhabitants; 19% had no opinion, and 12% rated the quality of life high. This underlines the need to revitalize Oberau to avoid emigration and to prevent the further aging of population.

Oberau is a place with many natural and historical values. It borders the protected landscape area, *Landschaftsschutzgebiet Nassau*, on the east and west, and the protected nature preserve on the north. Plenty of unique plant and animal species are preserved here.²² The towers of Lutheran churches from the XVIII century dominate the landscape, building the characteristic panorama of the whole region.²³ a historical building system of *forest village – Waldhufendorf* – is preserved in Oberau, and it is characterized by farms localized in the valley on both sides of the road; they are also surrounded by fields and forests.²⁴ Many valuable architecture and historical elements are entered in the registry of monuments. The water castle and former estate are special attractions in

²² *Verordnung des Landkreises Meissen zur Änderung der Abgrenzung des Landschaftsschutzgebietes Nassau und zur Festsetzung des Landschaftsschutzgebietes Elbtal zwischen Dresden und Meissen mit linkselbischen Tälern und Spaargebirge vom 31. März 2010*, [in:] *Sächsisches Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt* Nr. 5 vom 14 Mai 2010, p. 129; (cf.) GIS Database, Landschaftsplanung Technische Universität Dresden, 2012.

²³ R. Günter, *NiederaußOberau*, Seutter, Kirchenkreis Dresden, XVIII. Deutsche Fotothek (online): http://fotothek.slubddresden.de/fotos/df/rp-d_0160000_df_rp-d_0160_018.jpg, (date of access: 2013-11-20); (cf.) *Evangelisch-Lutherische Landeskirche Sachsens* (online): <http://www.evliks.de/landeskirche/geschichte/index.html> (date of access: 2013-12-09).

²⁴ *Enzyklo. Online Enzyklopädie* (online): <http://www.enzyklo.de/suche.php?woord=waldhufendorf> (date of access: 2014-01-12).

Oberau that build the cultural heritage of the place. Although there are many places for recreation in the community, Oberau's attractiveness is distinguished among them (Fig. 3). The place as a whole built a coherent testimony of former ages.

Despite the fact that both structural and social problems occur in Oberau, its residents are unanimous about the fact that Oberau has the potential to become a tourist attraction (Fig. 4). The identity of the village is built by both preserved testimony of history and local society, whose emotional relationship to Oberau is distinctly noticeable. It is a result of conducted social research.

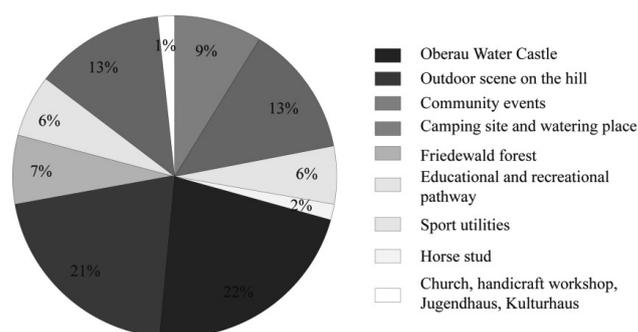


Fig. 3. The most visited places of recreation in the Niederau community (study based on a survey conducted on a group of Oberau inhabitants in December 2013)

The convenient communication links to its surroundings are crucial for Oberau's development. The important railway line linking Dresden and Leipzig have run through the village since the 19th century; the district road in Oberau is linked with national roads and highways, and has easy access to the airport. An additional attraction is the possibility to enter the suburb by steamboat from Meissen or Dresden.²⁵

Urban politics should take into account suburban cultural offerings in exchange for the possibility of recreation and relaxation in suburban areas. The uniqueness of Oberau, and the convenient location with Meissen and Dresden, enables the collaboration of these urban centres. The network of connections and relationships between Meissen, Dresden, and attractive places in their surroundings are shown in Figure 5. Oberau is the nearest base of recreation for Meissen, and it is an interesting completion of regional offerings.

3. The Characteristics of the Methods of Analysis

This work is a continuation of the attempt at finding a tool for revitalizing the village, and the revival of the region. The detailed historical study, work in the field, and social research were conducted for the purpose of analysis. While the landscape and historical analysis were made, particular attention was paid to the changes of the area, natural and landscape values, preserved building structures, historical and traditional farm buildings, used materials,

²⁵ *The commune of Niederau* (online): http://www.niederau.landkreis-meissen.de/gemeinde/chronik_oberau.htm (date of access: 2013-11-03).

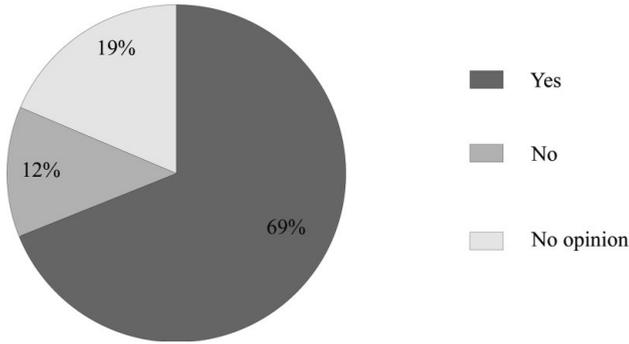


Fig. 4. The opinion of inhabitants, whether Oberau has enough potential to become a tourist attraction (study based on a survey conducted on a group of Oberau inhabitants in December 2013)

colours, details of construction and architecture, and the general condition of the complex. The detailed visual analysis became the basis to find out the elements that are not in harmony with the valuable landscape. Plants were inventoried; it was determined which plants naturally occurred in the area, or are part of the historical planting.²⁶ The following describes in detail the focus on the conclusions and analyses, which were used to establish guidelines for revitalisation project.

The historical study – based on documentation, cartography, and iconography – shows the rich past of the village and the palace, and historical connections in the region. The uniqueness of the Niederau community is emphasized by its identity, one that is visible in spite of being directly adjacent to Meissen (and could become a commuter town).

The analysis of cultural and natural resources proved that the village is destroyed; the bad condition of architecture and plants is the result of war damage in parcelled estates. The renovations of architectural objects are still ongoing, but their surroundings are neglected; an attempt at renovating them omits their historical background and precious value, which are obliterated by the passage of time.

The scenic analysis showed that there are not many newly created objects in Oberau. There is also a lack of elements which are not in harmony with the traditional landscape. Despite the devastation, Oberau still has a high value in the inhabitants' consciousness. As mentioned above, according to the respondents (69%), the village has enough potential to become a tourist attraction, although the vast majority of residents (70%) deem the quality of life in Oberau as an average.²⁷

The main aim of the project was to use the obliterated valuable place elements, and to base its revitalisation on landscape, architectural, and historical values. The guidelines were to preserve and use the most valuable elements, protect the cultural heritage in the whole village, restore the historical character of gardens, emphasize landscape values of the place, and use Oberau's dormant potential to meet the needs of its inhabitants.

²⁶ The study method refers to the one applied in Stary Paczków (author's comment), K. Hodor, J. Klimek, *op. cit.*, p.14.

²⁷ The questionnaire carried out on a group of inhabitants in December 2012 (author's comment).

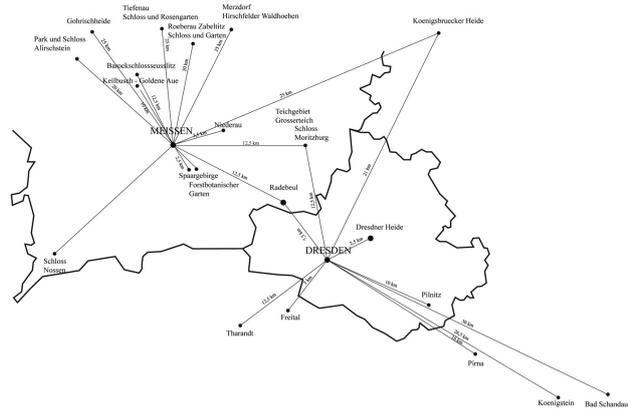


Fig. 5. The network of connections between Meissen, Dresden, and their surroundings

It was important to analyse village resources, and the water castle ensemble, in detail to preserve the most valuable elements. The elements with high historical value were inventoried and distinguished, and the elements in the water castle complex were appraised on the basis of the information on its value and condition of preservation.²⁸ Due to the high degree of devaluation, there is now a method of indexation based on three categories of values – aesthetic, historical, and functional. It forms the basis for selecting the elements, which are worth preservation in the project. This comprehensive method to evaluate the resources allowed the elements to be compared thoroughly, even if they have intangible value (hard to evaluate). The results of these analyses are shown on Figure 6.

The plant project for old estate is preceded by a detailed inventory of vegetation, as well as some recommendations, which enable one to determine the species and its condition; it also offers some guidelines on how to take care of them. The historical values (due to its compliance with the local habitat vegetation) are distinguished. As a result of analysis, 45% of vegetation should be preserved, 22% transplanted, and 33% allocated for removal. The vegetation mainly consists of self-seeding, and the former composition is obliterated. The recommendations were directed by the interests of the local community, in addition to the information gathered in the field. There is arboretum, spontaneously created as a result of the inhabitants' initiative. It is a kind of memory garden made from a variety of species that deny the historical character of the place. There was a proposition to replant trees from an arboretum in another communal area, especially since the inventory showed that many of the new plantations have been destroyed by grazing horses and need to be replaced.

It is important to preserve the cultural heritage and character of the whole village. It was observed during the site visits that the testimony of transforming the economy contributed to the creation of the tourist trail *Schloss und Rittergut Oberau* beneath the former estate.²⁹ It is possible

²⁸ The study method refers to the one applied in Stary Paczkow (author's comment). K. Hodor, J. Klimek, *op. cit.*, p.14.

²⁹ The castle and land estate in Oberau (author's comment).

to find here the traces of the feudal economy, typical Protestant organization, and the remains of industrial economy.

In addition to this, the touristic trail, *Bicycle trail through the water castles in Saxony* (which includes all water castles in the region) was also developed. It complements the existing trail *Schlösserland Sachsen*³⁰ of previously unknown objects, which increases the attractiveness of the village as more than a suburban area.



Fig. 6. The evaluation method of preserved elements

These social studies were a very important step in analysis due to the exceptionally strong relationship between inhabitants and the place. The role of the population in the restoration of the water castle is invaluable, because in their consciousness, it has a significant value despite

the destruction of plants and architecture. The numerous discussion and meetings with authorities and residents that were held – and the survey and participation in communal events – allowed everyone to examine the local customs and needs of Oberau’s population.

A shortened SWOT analysis was made as a final part of the research, and it is considered a useful tool in the revitalisation process.³¹ The opportunities and threats are shown in Table 1. to help analyse the Oberau’s potential.

Due to the high landscape and historical potential of the village, it is recommended to create the protection zone. Oberau is an example of a place that is attractive with regards to nature, culture, and history. Due to its localization (Meissen, Dresden), Oberau has offerings for city residents; however, it is necessary to manage this village in an appropriate way in order to introduce new varied functions, which increase its attractiveness and prevent possible conflicts.

4. Summary

The Case of Oberau shows the high potential of suburban areas. Unique cultural and architectural values are preserved in suburbia, as well as a strong emotional link between the inhabitants and the place. This determines its identity, even if these qualities are very often obliterated. This work is an attempt to find a method in which an appropriate set of analyses could allow the examination of the place’s value – and use it for its revitalisation, which would have a positive influence on its surroundings and remain strongly connected with the place. The method used in Oberau will preserve the heritage and local development potential to make visible change, not only in the suburban area, but also improve the quality of Meissen and Dresden inhabitants’ lives.

Table 1

Shortened SWOT analysis for estate in Oberau

Opportunities	Threats
Active society and authorities	The lack of spatial order and coherence of landscape interiors
High touristic and recreational potential (the touristic destination for residents of municipality and surrounding areas)	Bad technical condition of buildings, facilities, and parks
Good communication links with Meissen and Dresden	The complicated ownership issue, and the results which change of use of old buildings (brewery, cottage, gardener)
Localization in valuable landscape	Lack of funds for the restoration of the water castle
Localization in the municipality with high touristic and recreational potential	The created plan with recommendations on how to take care of estate do not include sufficient historical values of the estate, and adherence to them can affect their preservation in a bad way
Preservation of relics of high historical value	The surroundings of the castle are only partly used
Preservation of traditional landscape and lack of elements that are not in harmony	Negative social processes are visible and affect the development of the village (aging population, average wages)

³⁰ The land of Saxon castles (author).

³¹ K. Hodor, J. Klimek, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

The results of the research pointed out that it should be possible to develop the idea of sustainable development of the city as a driving force of regional development (from the Leipzig Charter. In the era of strong urban development, when the relationship between cities and suburban areas is very strong (work, housing, recreation, obliteration of boundaries) this idea could take into account the development of suburban areas as reservoirs of cultural heritage, which will influence sustainable urban development. What is more, the suburban areas, which act as a counter-balance for crowded city centres, should be protected in a specialised way.

In exchange for the possibility of recreation and relaxation in suburban areas, the cities should make a proposal of cultural events, education, and jobs for suburban residents. At the same time, the identity of the place is firmly established, and thanks to local traditions, cultivated in the suburb; traditional use of landscaping will increase the uniqueness and thus the competitiveness of the whole region. The role of the suburbs in the sustainable development of cities is particularly important due to the unrestricted development of the metropolis observed there (which offer even less places of recreation); as a result, its local identity and heritage of tradition are even more obliterated.

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