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## THE ROLE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE IN THE PROCESS OF REVITALISING RURAL AREAS

### ROLA ARCHITEKTURY KRAJOBRAZU W PROCESIE REWITALIZACJI WSI

#### Abstract

The discussion contained in the paper highlights the relationship between the process of revitalisation and the specialisation of landscape architecture. This is an artistic, professional and scientific field that is focused on the theoretical foundations of shaping landscapes and the development of practical methods of designing them. Revitalisation, on the other hand, is defined as a process of the internal renewal of degraded urban or rural spaces. In order to develop a proper plan of action, it is necessary to perform various types of analyses with the aim of discovering the source of the crisis that has taken hold of a given area, as well as determining the natural and cultural values which define the identity of an area, on the basis of which, the right decisions regarding the composition of its space can be made. This paper also provides examples of rural areas in the west of Germany that have undergone multi-aspect renewal, as well as efforts that are being made in relation to rural areas located in Poland. These examples highlight the interdisciplinary nature of the process of revitalisation and its key issues: those of establishing spatial harmony and the preservation and highlighting of the heritage of the landscape.

*Keywords: landscape architecture, revitalization, renewal of rural areas*

#### Streszczenie

Niniejsze rozważania mają na celu wskazanie związków procesu rewitalizacji ze specjalizacją jaką stanowi architektura krajobrazu. Jest to dziedzina artystyczna, zawodowa oraz naukowa, zajmująca się tworzeniem teoretycznych podstaw oraz opracowywaniem praktycznych metod projektowych kształtowania krajobrazów. Rewitalizacja natomiast definiowana jest jako proces wewnętrznej odnowy zdegradowanych przestrzeni urbanistycznych bądź ruralistycznych. Do ustalenia prawidłowego programu działań niezbędne jest wykonanie różnego typu analiz mających na celu m.in. poznanie źródła kryzysu danego obszaru, jak również ustalenie wartości przyrodniczych i kulturowych, wyznaczających tożsamość terenu, na podstawie których podejmowane są właściwe decyzje dotyczące kompozycji przestrzeni. Artykuł przedstawia także funkcjonujące po przeprowadzeniu wieloaspektowej odnowy obszary ruralistyczne na terenie zachodnich Niemiec oraz działania na gruncie polskich wsi. Przykłady te podkreślają interdyscyplinarność procesu rewitalizacji, w którym szczególnie istotne są kwestie zaprowadzania ładu przestrzennego oraz zachowania i podkreślania dziedzictwa krajobrazu.

*Słowa kluczowe: architektura krajobrazu, rewitalizacja, odnowa wsi*

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## 1. Introduction

Professional education in the field of landscape architecture has a short tradition in Poland. The term itself was first described in Poland by T. Tołwiński, by referencing it to the two-dimensional process of planning: “Landscape composition, by rounding out the two-dimensional plan with a detailed layout of space and the forms of the elements that make up the landscape, shapes the landscape architecture out of the natural background, out of the works of engineering, the buildings, the housing estates, the cities, gardens and farm fields”. It became regarded as a separate artistic, professional and scientific field towards the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century in the United States of America [1, p. 5–6; 17, p. 192–193]. It was there that Charles William Elliot (1834–1926) defined it as an art, the most important function of which being “the creation and preservation of beauty in the surroundings of human dwellings and in the wider natural scenery of the country” [25, p. 27]. Ever since the period when the profession first began to be formalised, its field of interest greatly expanded [14, p. 27]. The specialisation that is being discussed can currently be described as interdisciplinary, which is also highlighted by the fact that landscape architecture at the Faculty of Architecture at Cracow University of Technology has been assigned to the educational areas: technical sciences, agricultural science and arts. The educational results refer to areas such as architectural and urban design, general design, construction, the shaping of the environment, gardening, the history of art, the science of cognition and social communication, as well as sociology [25, p. 36]. The development of the field of landscape architecture is visible in the rapidly expanding subject literature – this focuses on such issues as social participation, which is also an important element of the process of revitalisation.

By highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of landscape architecture, the specialisation seems to be the answer to the difficulties currently faced by modern rural areas. In the preamble to the *European Landscape Convention*, there is a passage that states that “the landscape contributes to the formation of local cultures and that it is a basic component of the European natural and cultural heritage, contributing to human well-being and consolidation of the European identity” [2, p. 564]. The problem tied to the exposition of the qualities of rural areas, which include their cultural value, is an important issue concerning the preservation of heritage and identity. Over the last five decades, there has been no emphasis on these types of efforts, and the changes that were introduced to spatial planning after the year 1989 have caused another wave of destruction of valuable rural structures. We are currently observing a state of chaos in rural areas, both in their architecture and planning, as well as the construction of new buildings that have no connection to the cultural context of their location – this leads to an irrevocable loss of cultural value. Around 70% of areas that are being built upon have no spatial plans in place, this worsens the problem of chaos [4, p. 44].

The destruction of the surroundings is accompanied by degradation on the social plane. It manifests itself through unemployment, crime and a lack of demographic balance; it is also tied to the phenomenon of depopulation, the cause of which lies in, among other causes, the population’s flight to the cities and emigration abroad in search of better paid employment [3; 16].

The Opolskie Voivodship has become an important centre for promoting the revitalisation of rural areas, pointing to the need for urgent action, and has become the site of the

establishment of numerous organisations that support these processes, for instance: Fundacja Wspomagania Wsi (The Rural Development Foundation) and the Polish-American Freedom Foundation [5]. These operate on the basis of experience gained in regions of Western Europe. Among these, the Rhineland-Palatinate region is especially worthy of mention, as it is the location of the cases that are going to be discussed later in this paper.

## 2. The state of the research

The definition of revitalisation contains terms that relate to internal renewal [24, p. 21–29]. It can be based on efforts aimed at the repair of both the architectural and spatial structure. It is necessary for these efforts to be integrated with the re-establishment of social and economic ties. Otherwise, it is simply not a process of revitalisation in the modern sense, but rather a revalorisation or renovation. In this context, the definition of revitalisation is explained by W. Kłosowski in his publication: *Wymogi wobec Lokalnych Programów Rewitalizacji pod kątem ich zgodności z wymogami ZPORR*.

Among the many publications on the topic of the revitalisation of rural areas, there is a large amount of that have been written by landscape architects. The problems and definitions associated with revitalisation have been discussed in detail in the doctoral thesis by M. Wilkosz-Mamcarczyk [24]. The aspects of spatial planning of rural areas and landscape architecture were discussed by I. Niedźwiecka-Filipiak & Z. Kuriata [8;9], M. Rzeszotarska-Pałka [19; 20; 21]. The general topics regarding participation have been described by K. Pawłowska and her team [10; 11]. The work of A. Staniewska is an important publication that discusses the complementation of renewal efforts using public participation, in addition to broadening the research on Stary Paczków [16]. A revitalisation project was discussed as a case study in a paper by K. Hodor & J. Klimek [3].



III. 1. *The revitalisation project of the village of Stary Paczków in the commune of Paczków:*  
 a) Existent state, b) Visualisation: the state after the carrying out of the parts of the project meant to reintroduce harmony to the landscape (prepared by M. Sawicka 2013)

Furthermore, the course of revitalisation efforts undertaken in the Opolskie Voivodship were discussed by R. Wilczyński & W. Idziak [5; 23], as well as by I. Solisz [15], who explored the topic of conservation. These works also clearly illustrate the importance

of the landscape, even though their authors are not members of the landscape architect profession themselves.

The intensity with which new publications in the Polish language on the topic of revitalisation are being published has been especially evident in recent years, ever since the danger of the irrevocable loss of the substance of Polish rural areas has been made widely known. The conservation offices of all voivodships have provided information that only 3% of Polish villages have well-preserved rural structures.

The currently enforced acts of law that determine the regulations regarding the process of revitalisation are: The Revitalisation Act of the 9th of October 2015, the European Landscape Convention, and *Narodowy Plan Rewitalizacji 2022. Założenia, Wymogi wobec Lokalnych Programów Rewitalizacji pod kątem ich zgodności z wymogami ZPORR* (National Revitalisation Plan 2022. Premises, Requirements for Local Revitalisation Programmes regarding their compliance with the requirements of ZPORR).

The currently employed methods of the revitalisation of rural areas are based on the concept of 'rural renewal'. The experiences gained in Western Europe show us the manner in which this process has evolved. During the second half of the XX century, a model called 'modernisation' was being implemented – based on the joining together of farmland which destroyed the original rural character. This model was subsequently replaced by the 'facade renewal', popular until the year 1975, which concentrated on the establishment of a professional cadre that would help in spreading awareness about the desired patterns in architecture and ruralism. Another step in the search for the answer to the problems of rural areas (depopulation, unemployment, the ageing of society) was the process of 'social and spiritual renewal', based on a stronger cooperation with the residents, motivating them and stimulating their creativeness. Thus, the latest model of the evolution of the search for a means of preserving rural heritage became sustainable development, which has been implemented since the year 2000 [5, p. 17–24].

### **3. Theory and practice on the example of the area of rhineland-palatinate**

The need for the revitalisation of the rural areas of Europe is the result of civilizational changes, tied with the gradual decline in the importance of agriculture, which in turn leads to changes within the spatial structure [8, p. 11]. The renewal of rural areas in the Rhineland-Palatinate area has been ongoing for 30 years – it has been introduced in stages and has a support system often based on the grassroots initiatives of its residents and the members of community councils and government offices. Its basis was the inventory of the existing substance and the development of spatial development plans. The evaluations were made taking into account the: determination of areas for housing and industry, the phases of the evolution of the built environment, the local materials, as well as an evaluation of the development of the population, based on an analysis of the age structure of the population. A community profile created in this manner made it possible to pinpoint problems and identify future repair programs. The outlining of the phases of the evolution of a community makes it possible to establish zones of high quality aesthetics, determine the number of abandoned buildings and those which are likely to become abandoned in the subsequent ten years. The monitoring of the built environment along with its accompanying structures is based on expertise regarding their

technical condition, demographic analyses and questionnaires which aid the identification of the ownership structure of an area, allowing negative changes to be avoided. Attention is focused on the centres of rural areas so that the bulk of the construction efforts would be in those locations. There are also optional changes of forms of use and the modernisation of road infrastructure. The quality of life of the population is also a part of the evaluation, for instance, in the form of an assessment of the amount of public spaces, the technical condition of infrastructure and other elements. In terms of social issues, depending on the age structure of the inhabitants and their needs, different forms of support become involved. Important efforts in this regard include specialist care for the elderly, organising access to basic products and occupational therapy. Apart from these efforts, numerous associations work on providing elderly persons with free meals, as well as initiating neighbourly help in the form of providing carers for senior citizens. Such a robust network of support has been developed in the village of Rumbach, located in the association community of Dahner Felsenland in the Südwestpfalz district of Rhineland-Palatinate, numbering around 480 inhabitants who are mainly employed in agricultural tourism. Historical buildings gain new importance after having their exteriors renovated, providing inhabitants with day care centres, kindergartens, schools and meeting places. Numerous efforts are based on public and private initiatives. Another example is the village of Heinhofen, in the Dudenhofen association community in the Rhein-Pfalz district, which stands out thanks to its well-developed support for families with children (day care centre, kindergarten, school) as well as for a group of immigrants who reside in the village (language learning, speech therapy). Senior citizens, on the other hand, convene once a week at a communal diner, for which there is only a symbolic fee. The organisation of community life is the responsibility of the office of the mayor. The villages that were outlined above receive financial support directed towards the most important projects, depending on the peculiarities of local conditions. Some of the rural communities of the area are focusing on the expansion and the receiving of new inhabitants. The connection between social problems and issues regarding the landscape is thus made visible. The connections include: meeting the needs of the inhabitants through the use of valuable buildings and providing them with new forms of use; the establishment of public spaces – the creation of places and opportunities for inhabitants to meet each other; the shaping of the residential environment in accordance with the principles of sustainable development – spatial planning in the context of a controlled expansion of the built environment, taking into account the *genius loci*.

#### **4. Theory and practice on the example of the villages of the Opole region**

The large amount of experience obtained in Western Europe constitutes an important complementation of the methods used in the revitalisation of Polish rural areas. The problem of depopulation and loss of value had earlier been identified there – this led to the development of various methods of approaching both reconstruction and preservation. For instance, the processes of rural renewal were already implemented in Germany, this occurred around the year 1950.

One difficulty in the introduction of foreign models of revitalisation on Polish ground is the processes of participation, which are key to the achievement of success. As mentioned in the introduction, this is a field which is also being explored by landscape architects.

The work of the Landscape Architecture Cultural Foundations Laboratory of the Institute of Landscape Architecture of the Cracow University of Technology deserves a mention here as the experience of its staff has led to the establishment of a social activity stimulation program focused on the historical renewal of rural areas, as well as a program of social participation for the protection and shaping of the landscape, devised under the supervision of Professor Krystyna Pawłowska [10; 16].

Another important publication on the topic that is being discussed is the Stary Paczków revitalisation project, developed at the Gardening and Green Area Design Laboratory of the Institute of Landscape Architecture of Cracow University of Technology [4]. A sizeable part of the text is comprised of a description of the natural, cultural, spatial and socio-economic conditions of the area, as well as analyses of the value of its built environment, its social sphere, the village's development plans, surveys designed to identify the problems of the community and landscape analyses. The rank of the landscape of this village, the historical layout of which has been evaluated as outstanding, is highlighted in the publication *Waloryzacja zabytkowego zasobu wsi województwa opolskiego. Cele, metody, praktyka*, developed in 2010 in order to increase the degree of protection of the cultural heritage of rural areas of the Opole region and improve the state of its preservation [12]. The revitalisation project is based on efforts leading to exposing the value of the area in question. It was important to highlight the details (for instance, those of road and pavement surfaces, spaces of front gardens, timber gates, chapels) which are the elements that define the perception of the landscape. As well as the guidelines for public spaces were established, and the propositions of actions that can be used to stimulate social activity within the community, at the same time leading to the preservation or reinstatement of the harmony of a place were important for the overall programme. A SWOT analysis has also been performed, which indicated that the strengths and opportunities of the area are derived from issues tied to the landscape. The weaknesses and threats included elements of infrastructure, the tourist attractions being offered, as well as issues regarding society and improper intervention in the field of landscape architecture. Thus, it is important that the processes of participation be conducted by specialists in the field of landscape architecture. In the case of Stary Paczków, a number of meetings with inhabitants have taken place – these were used to present the successive stages of the project and the end result in the form of catalogue cards for example of a selection of valuable farms.

Chapter 2, Article 7 of the Revitalisation Act underlines the need to establish a Revitalisation Committee which is to be a consulting body to a commune head, mayor or city president. Placing landscape architects in this role would be a sound choice of action.

## 5. Conclusions

The examples that have been provided indicate that the process of revitalisation demands the involvement of local governments, the inhabitants of a given space, non-government organisations, economists, historical monument protection authorities, as well as experts in the field of landscape architecture, whose role is the shaping of space and establishing its quality on many levels. The need to take action involving landscape architecture is particularly important for rural areas which are characterised by spatial chaos and the loss of value.

A landscape architect should meet the needs of the local society and the need to cultivate the character and individuality which define a given area against the backdrop of the continent. The wealth of regional diversity is imprinted on the landscape thanks to the protection of the cultural environment, including its natural counterpart. Furthermore, original creations in the process of revitalisation mostly regards giving old forms new functions, adequate to a given socio-economic situation, while at the same time preserving their rural character and halting the negative tendency of conformed rural to urban areas [8, p. 20]. The character of a rural area is contained within its landscape, which is without doubt, seen as attractive by residents of cities.

The requirement of conducting landscape and cultural value analyses has proven itself to be an effective tool in the process of revitalisation. The obligatory presentation of the visualisations of designed or planned solutions regarding landscape architecture during the course of environment impact assessment procedures would be an interesting proposition, underscoring the importance of specialization which is the landscape architecture. In addition, the role of the members of the specialisation that is landscape architecture should include the carrying out of promotional and educational events – transferring the knowledge about the value of the region and its space, and pointing to the use of good practices, so that the inhabitants can become aware of the importance of the surrounding landscape and be able to participate in the renewal of their villages [13].

The most basic component of approaches to the revitalisation of rural areas is the stimulation of the activity of the local community, making it involved in the design of the village. The German experiences show a liberal approach to the principles of conservation and numerous adaptations of farming buildings for residential purposes. Buildings with a more modern form were confined to the outskirts of villages. An important element of the project is the establishment of a rate of return on investments for the construction projects to be carried out in these areas. Revitalisation support programmes are quite robust and are, of course, based on local governments.

The processes that are ongoing in Poland have only just started to be built and are being conducted with minimum funding. The example of the rural areas of the region of Opole shows that the basis for these types of programmes is the striving towards the integration of their inhabitants, increasing their involvement and meeting their needs while at the same time, preserving the heritage of Polish rural areas in combination with rational land management.

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