
PROTECTION OF HISTORIC PUBLIC SPACES IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE CITY'S IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY OF SZCZECIN (POLAND)

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ABSTRACT: This article addresses the development of new identity in cities returned to Poland after the Second World War, taking the example of Szczecin (fig. 1). This process is characterized by many years of changes: reconstruction, revalorization and revitalization of urban complexes. In the process of creating a new, Polish identity of those cities, focus was clearly placed on the functionalist development of urban structures and strongly emphasized comprehensive functionality of downtown spaces. This trend seriously threatened historic public spaces preserved in these areas. However, it is also necessary to take into account the growing requirements regarding functionality and quality of life as well as needs related to the contemporary utility of historic urban areas. A living, developing city cannot be insulated from changes resulting from economic, technological and cultural development, or from the utilitarian needs of its inhabitants. Urban revitalization is a method that thoughtfully protects the historical value of buildings, while allowing new functions and activities, appropriately

selected in terms of heritage protection. In these processes, special attention should be paid to historic public spaces where urban life takes place as they are crucial for the city's identity. Negotiating the city's social identity takes place mainly in historical public spaces, where the reliability of the approach to the protection of historical values and resources is the condition for social acceptance.

KEYWORDS: city identity; monument protection; place; public space; revitalization; Szczecin; urban transformation



Fig.1. View of the restructured Podzamcze District in Szczecin from the Castle Bridge; photo by the author.

1. Introduction

1.1. Historical background

This article discusses the protection of Szczecin's historic urban spaces in the context of urban development and negotiations of Polish cities' identity. Szczecin is a model example of post-war transformation. This topic is inextricably linked to the history of the development and decline of European cities, and in particular to the exceptional dynamics of changes that affected urban structures in the twentieth century. Changes to Poland's borders after WWII led to the situation where two basic types of cities could be distinguished in terms of identity: (1) historical Polish cities whose identity, despite the physical damage they suffered, has not been significantly affected, and (2) cities located in Recovered Territories, whose Polish and local identity had to be built anew. The city of Szczecin (Stettin in German) is an example of the latter (figs. 2 and 3).

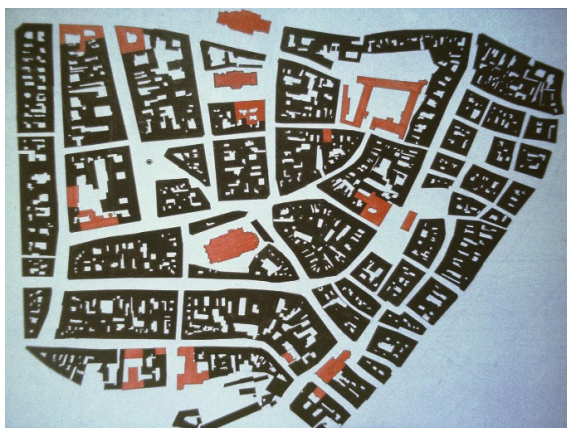


Fig. 2. Outline of the Old City in Szczecin in 1939, with public buildings marked in red. Drawing by the author.

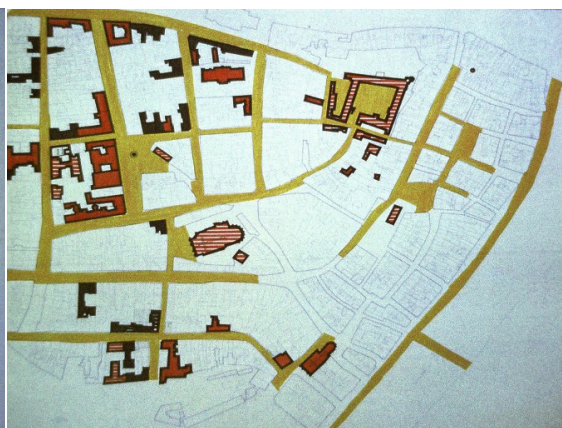


Fig. 3. Outline of the Old City in Szczecin after WWII, following demolitions and removal of ruins. Drawing by the author.

Professor Bogusław Szmygin described the overall timeline of stages of urban reconstruction in Poland (Szmygin, 2000). From 1945 to 1956, the reconstruction was undertaken with the priority of rebuilding the capital and the implementation of socialist realism as the ideological basis; the period from 1956 to the turn of the 1970s and 1980s was dominated by modernist projects; from the turn of the 1970s and 1980s to 1989, post-war architecture underwent crisis, inviting search for traditional solutions along with popularization of postmodern ideas; after 1989, restoration of historical structures began in selected cities, basing on the conservation program from the second half of the 1980s, which was implemented in the following decades in Elbląg (the retroversion method) (Lubocka-Hoffmann, 1997, 2006) and Szczecin (the restructuring method) (Paszkowski, 2007).

1.2. Strangeness and multiculturalism

Developing the Polish identity of Szczecin for only seventy-eight years after WWII has been a difficult and complex task, all the more so since it began in a ruined city with few of its original inhabitants, its final fate and nationality still uncertain for many years after the war. The story of Szczecin is completely different from that of Warsaw, which was kept in the memory of thousands of inhabitants, or that of Kraków, which preserved its historical substance and complexity. From the very beginning, the reconstruction of Szczecin was associated with attempts to develop a Polish, or broadly Slavic identity in a multi-layered and multi-threaded way. These layers included political propaganda, scientific search for Slavic traces and their selection, and finally the “functionalist reconstruction” of Szczecin as a socialist city, along with other ruined towns of Western Pomerania, with no respect for their German heritage, which was left predominantly in ruins. The influx of Polish, Ruthenian and Ukrainian people from eastern and southern Poland, Masovia and Podlasie, as well as the repatriation of Siberians and refugees from the East, created a new society that had to learn to live an urban life (most newcomers had rural background) and cooperate despite the city being completely different from their homeland, appearing to be foreign due to its developed infrastructure and rich material culture: asphalt streets, concrete

sidewalks and rows of greenery. This historical foreignness was gradually assimilated by the newcomers in a long process of adaptation, whose initial phase was marked by uncertainty about the permanence of the Potsdam arrangements. The process of cultural assimilation of Szczecin and other cities in Recovered Territories was not a success story as much as Soviet propaganda would have liked. The presence of German history in cities throughout the region was basically removed, beginning from cemeteries and ending with tenement buildings. Remains of ruins were dismantled, along with medieval fortifications, residential buildings, industrial complexes and farm houses. Many valuable assets, objects, technologies and devices were irretrievably lost after being sent to the USSR.

1.3 Socialist realism and the historical city

The implementation of the policy intended to forge a socialist subjectivity (*homo sovieticus*) through architectural and urban forms developed in an authoritarian and planned way underwent certain modifications in subsequent periods of political and social life after 1945. During the period of the Three-Year Plan (1946-1949) the reconstruction program was implemented according to principles of modernism and constructivism. However, this approach was reverted during the period of the Six-Year Plan (1949-1955) (Gliński, Kusztra, Muller 1984). The significant turnaround in the history of Polish architecture is associated with the Nationwide Party Conference of Architects (20-21 June 1949), when functionalism and constructivism were condemned and socialist realism was recognized as the only correct direction in architecture. The idea of architecture as “national in form and socialist in content” was developed at the time, helping to combine new urban layouts in the spirit of socialist realism with preserved elements of historical architecture, promoting regionalism and studies of historical buildings. One significant example of this is the reconstruction of the interiors in Marszałkowska Street and Plac Zbawiciela in Warsaw (figs. 4 and 5), and Aleja Jedności Narodowej (today Jana Pawła II Street) in Szczecin, also known as the “Avenue of Fountains” and the “Aviators’ Square.”



Figs. 4 and 5 Plac Zbawiciela in Warsaw and the Muranów District in the 1960s, after reconstruction in the spirit of socialist realism. Photos: National Digital Archives (NAC).

streets and squares with compact building lines and facades, employing classicist style, arcades, columns, baroque balusters, balustrades and attics. The difference was mainly in the function of the buildings as they would no longer be bourgeois tenement houses but hold small apartments for the average family. The courtyards were more spacious, with greenery. In this, they did not resemble the cramped backyards of tenement houses built in the nineteenth century.

1.4. Modernist functionalism in the service of socialism

Political changes after Stalin's death in 1956 rehabilitated modernist ideas in Polish architecture. As a world trend supported by the philosophy of CIAM, it became an instrument helpful in translating socialist ideology into spatial and architectural forms in most Polish cities that were being rebuilt at the time. In place of demolished buildings, or the so-called "post-German" ones, modern functionalist architecture was introduced, chiefly in the form of blocks of flats. Their urban planning was quite schematic, with complete ignorance of the layout of earlier buildings and no reference made to remaining historical urban resources, mainly from the nineteenth century. Socialist ideology sought to oppose the bourgeois past of the cities in the name of building a "socialist city." Reconstruction of historic building complexes was carried out only in exceptional cases. In particular, spatial changes made "in the modernist spirit" concerned urban centers in cities destroyed by the war, for example Warsaw. Many cities located in territories regained by Poland after WWII were restructured as a result of the provisions of the Potsdam Agreement, including Szczecin.

This policy was implemented equally in Warsaw, Szczecin and smaller cities in Recovered Territories. The implementation of these assumptions involved abandoning reconstruction of destroyed historical buildings, demolishing tenement houses, changing the geometry of streets and squares, and allowing many historical buildings in urban areas to decay. New facilities were built on previously developed areas, but without continuing the spatial geometry and scale of historically shaped public spaces.

The use of modernist style at the service of the socialist Polish People's Republic in the years 1945-1989 fundamentally changed the spatial forms of many city centers, leading to the devastation of many historically formed parts of cities and towns, and raising the question of their contemporary adaptability to new urban functions (Ciarkowski, 2020).

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Reconstruction of historical urban interiors

Planned economy, introduced systematically during the recovery of historic cities in Poland, limited their historical spaces to so-called "relic areas," which should be protected. According to the General Plan of Warsaw from 1965, the rebuilding of the Old Town in its historical form stemmed from "the social need to recreate the historical forms of urban planning and architecture of old Warsaw in a historically limited area, as a document of the cultural past of the nation."¹

1 *Plan Generalny Warszawy*, Prezydium Rady Narodowej Miasta Stołecznego Warszawy, Rada Główna Społecznego Funduszu Odbudowy Stolicy, Warszawa 1965, p. 47.

In Szczecin, historical public space shaped in the Middle Ages was reduced to the courtyard and surroundings of the rebuilt Pomeranian Dukes' Castle, and part of the Orła Białego Square. The area of the nineteenth-century historic city center in Szczecin with its central compositional axis and tenement buildings includes such excellent historical public spaces as St. James Cathedral, whose bell tower is the highest historical structure in Szczecin, along with the adjacent square, the circular Plac Grunwaldzki with a diameter of two hundred meters, Aleja Jana Pawła II with lavish housing, stately tenement houses with front gardens, the palace-like complex of the Town Hall in the baroque "*entre cour et jardin*" style, called the "spinach palace" due to the dark green color of the facade, the magnificent park complex with a rectangular lawn in Jasne Błonia, with old plane trees lining the alleys, and the Jan Kasprowicz Park in the English style. These preserved objects and spaces in Szczecin are undoubtedly important today and define key points on the city inhabitants' "mental map."

The reconstruction of cities in Recovered Territories followed a simplified plan, creating regular layouts of apartment blocks in place of historical urban spaces such as buildings dating back to the thirteenth century and other locations destroyed by the war. In these cities, the reconstruction of historical urban layouts and public spaces was particularly challenging due to the displacement of the local community (German, Jewish and of other nationalities), lack of support from the immigrant community, and the policy of state authorities, who were not interested in rebuilding the material testimony of a history that is not Polish.

2.2. Identity and subjectivity

After the political transformation of 1989, cities in Poland gained the opportunity to develop their identity by establishing municipal governments and communalizing urban areas in possession of the State Treasury. The collapse of factories producing large precast concrete slabs, called "house factories," also contributed to the move away from the process of modernist homogenization of city architecture, which had produced uniform standards and similar architectural forms in all major urban centers.

The new architecture that replaced historical spatial layouts in many damaged cities after the war can hardly be considered historic, although in many cases modernist pavilions and four-story blocks of flats hide remains of nineteenth-century cobbled streets as well as surviving Gothic sacral and defensive buildings. Although socialist realism and unreflective modernist functionalism of the Polish People's Republic have passed into history, they left many urban spaces in a heterogeneous, hybrid state ("historical-contemporary"), for example mixing compact frontage with open composition. This characterizes Szczecin and many other cities in Western Pomerania: Goleniów, Gryfice, Gryfino (figs. 6 and 7), Kołobrzeg, Pyrzyce or Stargard, and Recovered Territories in general. In some towns, monuments to the Red Army would be erected in market squares (fig. 8). Later on, they were once again transformed into public spaces.



Fig. 6. View of Gryfino at the Oder River in the 1930s.



Fig. 7. Aerial view of Gryfino, a town that lost its identity following post-war modernist reconstruction.



Fig. 8. View of Plac Zwycięstwa [Victory Square] in Gryfice after the reconstruction and relocation of the “monument of gratitude to the Soviet Army,” which was placed in the middle of the market square in the 1950s.

2.3. Revitalization, revalorization, redevelopment

Concepts of “revitalization” and “revalorization” have gained popularity in Poland mainly due to EU programs that have co-financed the restoration of neglected historic urban spaces and buildings. While “revalorization,” or “increasing the value,” mainly refers to material conservation and modernization of the building’s structure, “revitalization” essentially focuses on the social goal of improving utility, for example by repairing degraded elements, preferably in historic areas. Revitalization must take into account the extraordinary diversity of heritage issues in cities, their individual character and history, aspirations and goals, as well as the history of reconstruction and the resulting possibilities of revitalization. Unfortunately, an individual approach to cities and their historical centers is not reflected in the unified system of legal protection of monuments, which creates formal difficulties and obstacles to the protection of heritage in historical cities and their extremely diverse, “hybrid” areas.

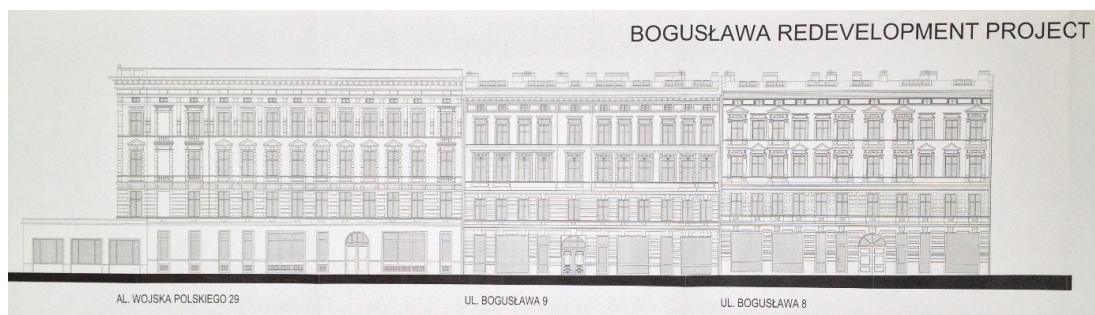


Fig. 9. Revalorization project of the nineteenth-century building complex in Szczecin at the Bogusława Passage; from the author’s private archive.



Fig. 10. Revitalization of tenant houses from the 1890s in Ślaska Street, Szczecin.

3. Results

3.1. Identification of inhabitants with their place of residence

New economic and social relations created a strong need among people to identify with their place of residence, also triggering competitiveness between cities. This was described by authors of the article “Homo urbanisticus,” who observe that “the social purpose of urban design is to plan the forms of the place, which, inhabited by the community, also becomes a social environment”; consequently, “design should aim to form space in accordance with its social use, matching the lifestyle adopted and accepted by the community” (Gachowski, Lessaer 1987).

After 1989, it became possible to oppose the uniformity of urban development resulting from the socialist perception of society as homogeneous in terms of psychological and physical needs. In Poland, many cities are small and medium-sized, and due to metropolization many of their inhabitants moved to larger cities (Muszyńska 1984). However, the former retained their historical identity and the special bond between inhabitants and their place of residence.

3.2. The historic city as a multidimensional spatial system

In terms of its objects, a historic city can be analyzed as a structure composed of various places (public spaces), created in different periods and forming a three-dimensional spatial system (based on topography as well as the volume and importance of structures), with the fourth dimension comprised by the socio-cultural system of meanings, including a sense of identity.

Places can be categorized as:

- permanent, inscribed in the city’s genetic code, constituting the core of the city’s identity (market square, network of main streets, fortifications, etc.);
- reconstructed, following their destruction or fall into oblivion (discovered, restored or reconstructed in part or whole);
- new (creating complementary or novel qualities in urban space);
- “non-places,” i.e. ones without defined form, with the potential to be transformed and become essential elements of the city’s spatial structure, e.g. former ports, magazines, railway facilities, etc.

The discussed case of Szczecin includes:

- permanent places: the network of streets forming the genetic code of the city with the unique geometry of orthogonal, radial and axial systems, accentuated by nineteenth-century corner turrets, medieval squares (Orla Białego, Sienny, Nowy, Rybny, Warzywny), remains of medieval fortifications (Basztą Siedmiu Płaszczy and classical ones (Brama Portowa, Brama Królewska); dominant objects in the historical layout: cathedral, downtown churches, castle, railway station; port quays, boulevards, and particularly large-scale layouts such as Wały Chrobrego (fig. 11) or Jasne Błonia, featuring unique public places maintained at the highest conservation level;
- Podzamcze, the oldest district in the city (fig. 13), completely destroyed during Allied air

raids, demolished to the ground in the 1950s (fig. 15) and undergoing reconstruction since the 1990s on the basis of the historical grid of streets and squares, with a whole range of individual public interiors (figs. 17–20), restored after decades of non-existence;

- new, contemporary downtown spaces, strongly rooted in the identity of contemporary residents of Szczecin, such as Plac Solidarności with the underground Museum Przełomów and the Szczecin Philharmonic (fig. 12), the PAZIM high-rise building, the new downtown shopping malls Galaxy and Kaskada, rows of boulevards along the Oder River, revalorized streets and squares, adapted for pedestrian traffic (Deptak Bogusława, Plac Zamenhova, Kaszubska, Wojska Polskiego, Aleja Fontann, Plac Wojska Polskiego with Aleja Kwiatowa, and others), where an important role is played not only by external formation but also the activities of inhabitants, for whom these objects constitute the basic spatial framework of everyday life;
- “non-places” such as the waterfront areas at the border of city center, which have huge potential after they ceased to serve functions related to port activities, storage and other post-industrial tasks; new, urban functions are designed for these spaces, gradually filling them and creating new places that strengthen local and social identity.



Fig. 11. The Wały Chrobrego embankment in Szczecin – the most recognizable group of monuments in the city; photo by the author.



Fig. 12. The Solidarity Square – a new meeting point over Muzeum Przełomów, with a view of the new Philharmonic, winner of the Mies van der Rohe Award, and the sculpture of the Angel of Freedom; photo by the author.

3.3. Reconstruction of Podzamcze as an example of restructuring

Reconstruction of the Podzamcze district in Szczecin began in 1984 after the announcement of results of the TUP architectural competition.² Essentially, the project was to recreate the historical shape of public spaces and the lines of frontages to the greatest possible extent. The priority was to reconstruct the historical sequence of narrow streets and city squares as places that could recreate the atmosphere of a medieval port city that Szczecin used to be (fig. 13) by following the lines of former buildings whose foundations had been hidden under the surface (fig. 14). Special attention was paid to the sequence of four medieval markets (marked in red), forming the heart of the Podzamcze public space (fig. 13). These markets were reconstructed by erecting Podzamcze quarters and aligning historical lines of buildings and pavement levels, wherever it was still possible after damage caused by war (Płotkowiak, Słowiński, Paszkowski, 2021). The Hay Market became a new symbolic space in the image of Szczecin (fig. 15). The area marked in yellow (fig. 13) was occupied by the ORBIS Hotel, built in the 1970s and now being reconstructed for mixed use (housing, hotel, shops and catering facilities) in architectural form matching the two medieval quarters (fig. 16).

2 The team at the Szczecin University of Technology (S. Latour, B. Paszkowska, Z. Paszkowski, M. Płotkowiak, J. Wanag) won the second award, tied with the team led by Professor R. Żabiński from Wrocław, which proposed a solution in the form of a housing estate unrelated to the historical layout of buildings and public spaces in the area.

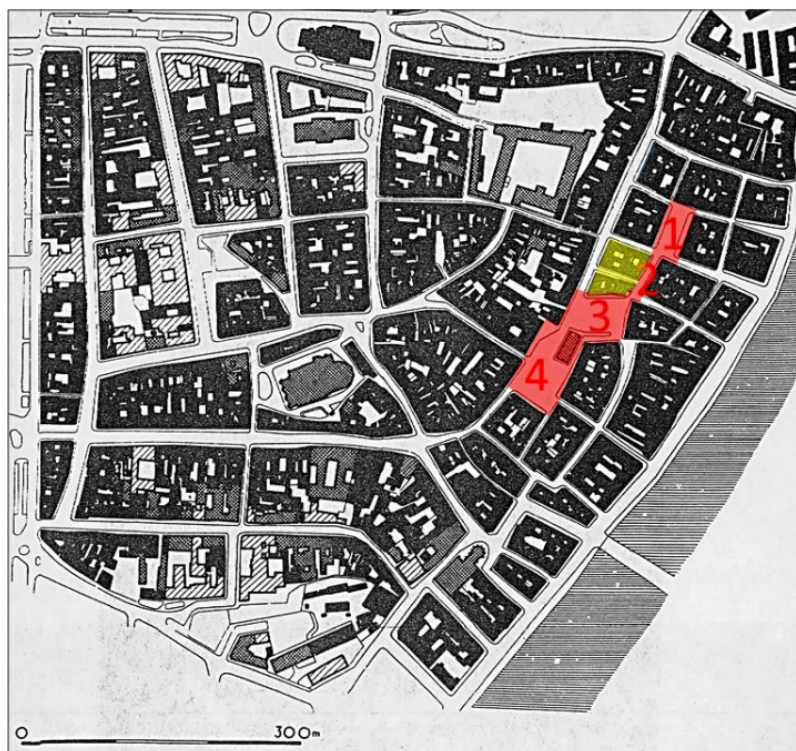


Fig. 13. Plan of the Old Town in Szczecin before WWII, when it was almost completely annihilated as a result of bombing raids and post-war demolition. The area is now subject to diverse forms of physical reconstruction and an important element in the creative process of rejuvenating the identity of Szczecin. From the author's archive.



Fig. 14. First archeological excavations showing the foundations of tenant houses in the Podzamcze area in the 1980s. Photo by the author.



Fig. 15. The reconstructed Hay Market Square in Szczecin, whose recreation strongly impacted the identity of Szczecin. Photo by the author.



Fig. 16. The new development of two small medieval quarters, preserving the dimensions and building lines of city squares, intended for hotel and residential functions, in place of the former Arkona Hotel erected in the modernist style in the 1970s (Podzamcze in Szczecin). Photo by the author.

Reconstruction in the area of Podzamcze was limited because its large part is devoted to transit communication along the Western Oder embankment and the bridge crossings of Długi Most and Trasa Zamkowa, which were given the parameters of an expressway already during the first period of Szczecin's reconstruction. The design of the new frontage of the boulevard is to match the Oder River cityscape and the buildings' interior walls (fig. 17).



Fig. 17. Reinforcement of the foundations for the restructuring of tenant houses in Podzamcze.
Photo by the author.



Fig. 18. Development of the frontage from the perspective of the boulevard on the Oder River shown in the previous photograph. Photo by the author.

4. Discussion

4.1. Historic public area as a “place”

Regardless of the history of a particular city, analysis of its spatial values can begin with its topology, understood as a system of “networks and places” (Frick 2008). The spatial scale of the concept of “place” can vary to a great degree. In Kraków, people say “I’m going to the city” when they mean the Old Town area delimited by the green belt of Planty. In the present case, “place” comprises the large area of the medieval city. A different scale of place can be identified for example in the Old Town Square, in a certain alley with a popular cafe, or in the scenic area of the Wały Chrobrego Embankment, which offers a fantastic view of the Oder River and the port. Another area whose revitalization restored the social and functional significance of place in Szczecin is Odrzańskie Bulwary (fig. 19). After reconstruction, the boulevard became a favorite spot for walks and meetings among the city’s inhabitants, who have long postulated the need to restore Szczecin’s waterside identity – “to reconnect the city with the river” after the two had been separated with thoroughfares as well as industrial and port areas. Characteristic places in public space give cities special meaning, which can help inhabitants identify with their place of residence, in turn becoming the city’s distinguishing features. Such places boost the city’s vitality and form the core of the revitalization process. True “places” strengthen the qualities of public spaces, including historic spaces, by highlighting historic values and connecting the past with both present and future.



Fig. 19. The revitalization of Szczecin’s Oder boulevards has created a new, informal place for meetings.
Photo by the author.

The time factor is extremely important in processes of urban revitalization because it not only constitutes the link with the past but also suggests possibilities of using the city both today and in the future, indicating important historical, functional and spatial values. Historical public spaces also act as a “sensory background” for its users. Rich in form and color, they offer the stage for various manifestations of life.

Revitalization is one of the processes that aim to reinforce the impact of places, which can be complex and mysterious by being burdened with history, both individual and collective memory. Revitalization is also a mission of discovering and preserving the values of material culture and its achievements, consolidating existing social and economic values as well as creating new ones, particularly ones meant to be passed down to future generations in line with principles of sustainable development.

4.2 . Historic cities and environmental psychology

Analysis of the relationship between humans and space has led eminent psychologists, sociologists and philosophers to distinguish various models that employ the concept of “place.”

“Physical, architectural space is not indifferent to us. We are influenced by two basic factors: culture and human living space. Therefore, at every moment of creating space, what needs to be taken into account is human place in it as well as ways of using it” (Hauziński 2022). As this statement shows, the design process should be conscious and recognize individual, social and cultural needs.

Analysis of the city's physical structure and its components is the basis for creating plans for the protection of architectural and urban heritage. Despite statutory protection of intangible values of cultural heritage, the link between intangible and tangible (physical) values is not clarified in law, although it can be deeply felt by city-dwellers thanks to individual family histories, personal experiences, sensitivity and sensibility, including emotional bonds with cities and their historic spaces. Recognition of the city's values through analysis of meanings and social activities in specific urban areas is possible using the conceptual apparatus of environmental psychology (Canter, 1977; Bańka, 2016; Żmudzińska-Nowak, 2006; Wrana, 2011). Pursuit of identity and social belonging are needs of the higher order, according to the 1943 formulation by Maslow, whose pyramid of needs is thus inseparable from the place of living. Determining those characteristics of a place that are the building blocks of local identity takes place at the socio-cultural level, unfolding at a much smaller temporal scale than the planning of districts for future investments. The main value of places often consists in spontaneous actions resulting from informal events that emphasize the place's historical character. Along with the changes initiated by authoritative transformation processes in the 1960s, a new trend emerged, focusing on the street as the basic unit of urban life, which has continued until the present day. This approach, informed by principles of sustainable urban development, prioritize rational use of urbanized areas and limit territorial expansion, fostering transformation of internal spatial structures and adaptation of degraded and decapitalized areas to new functions (Kochanowski, 2005). Underlying these tendencies is also the search for new impulses of local development related to tradition, history and culture, as well as the attractiveness of a given location, often referred to as “milieu” (Parysek, 2005).

Relationships between the city and citizens are continuously shaped over the years and are evidenced by the process “separating time from space,” which Anthony Giddens understands in terms of progressive forgetting and blurring of meanings given to places, accompanied by the transfer of social relations into virtual space (Giddens, 2007).

The multi-dimensional nature of architecture and places where life unfolds is the result of many, sometimes difficult decisions made between the architect (urban planner) and the investor (recipient). This is further influenced by other areas of life that significantly affect the perception of space. According to Christian Norberg-Schultz, these include the results of actions and concepts developed in opposition to physical attributes, which are subject to different values. In consequence, the city can be regarded as a spontaneous creation where life takes place, at the same time leaving a large margin for individual shaping of space (Norberg-Schulz, 1971). The “feel” of space also concerns the interaction between place and its user. Kevin Lynch has addressed the relationship between urban form and subjective culture or temperament, i.e. the experiences of observers. He concludes that the production of mental space is incentivized by exploration and movement. As a result, the complexity and mystery of place can be beneficial, stimulating vital cognitive processes (Lynch, 2011).

The city is a complex tissue. In this sense, it is undergoing continuous processes of improvement, in which new values are formed and new possibilities opened. Still, it remains a stable center of values in the larger process of becoming. However, due to the destructive impact of time on space, in the context of physical presence, semantics of places, social ties or primary ties, it is worth to underscore the role of memory and recalling (Bauman, 1992). If a public space is to be used as a place of remembrance, it should be characterized above all by uniqueness and accessibility, not only in physical but also in visual and psychological terms.

4.3. Historic architecture as an element of identity

In the multi-level understanding of identity outlined above, architecture and urban planning are of particular importance as values of the built environment and essential elements of the cultural landscape.



Fig. 20. Revitalization of the port focused on general urban functions. However, elements of the port landscape were retained as attractions and symbols of Szczecin's identity. Photo by the author.

In the case of the city as a subject, spatial identity can be understood as a set of characteristics of urban space with which a given person or social group identifies. The historic architecture of public space is the best example of spatial identity. Historic public spaces constitute places that are characteristic for the city and the local community, showcasing the identity of the place, which comprises “the core that integrates all characteristics and values of a place” (Żmudzińska-Nowak, 2010).

4.4. Evolution of contemporary models of human-space relations

Discussions of the relationship between the human subject and physical space, the built environment and public spaces, often draw attention to the process of atrophy of these relationships. It results from the development of social interactions beyond places understood physically, predominantly in social media, which is a physically unmarked space that involves large distance between participants. It is difficult to predict the consequences of these tendencies. Certainly, however, physical space has irreplaceable values, which has been confirmed during the period of forced social isolation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The hunger for social interactions of various types observed after lockdowns gives hope that spaces and places will return to their rightful place within physical spatiality.

Protection of cultural heritage in the revitalization process should aim to preserve or restore the role of place in historic physical space. This goal can be achieved with many methods, depending on both the object's initial state (technical, functional as well as the scope of its values) as well as the degree of social acceptance regarding preservation of historical and identity values. Notably, intangible values and local cultures are also of great importance in this respect (Archibald, 2020).

5. Conclusion

Protection and conservation of monuments are closely related to questions of city identity, which is also an important component in processes of revitalizing urban space. Presented analyses of issues pertaining to protection and revitalization of historical urban spaces lead to ten conclusions:

- Revitalization should serve to maintain or restore the identity of places in various regional, urban and social scopes.
- Revitalization is a mission of discovering and preserving the values of material culture, in particular architectural values; further, it aims to create social and economic values in accordance with principles of sustainable development.
- Revitalization's important goal is to restore the identity lost by cities and local communities, and to furnish places and spaces with new identities.
- "Places" in historic public space are vehicles of history as well as collective and individual memory.
- Creation of new places in historical public space can occur through the implementation of new architectural and urban concepts created with social participation.
- Places are also created through events, both one-off and cyclical, and public meetings.
- New identities and places that have been changed physically, spatially and semantically, need time to gain full acceptance and inclusion in social life.
- The factor of time plays the leading role in the process of assimilating the identity of newly created places by accommodating them and incorporating into collective memory.
- The space of the historic city is formed by historic places (buildings and public spaces) that are permanent elements in terms of physical spatiality and values, and new places that acquire value with time.
- Places in the public space of historic cities are semantically dynamic: they mature or wither with time, gaining or losing social and individual identity.

6. Recommendations

Architectural heritage, including heritage related to the shape of public spaces, is characterized by great diversity and individuality, both due to the geographical positioning and the location in the city's structure. It is necessary to strive to adjust conservation recommendations to individual objects and urban interiors in such a way that this diversity, specificity and identity is celebrated and preserved. This highlights the need to individualize conservation guidelines and ground them in in-depth scientific research. It is also recommended not to apply "conservation doctrines" in a thoughtless manner, instead taking into account the purposefulness and usefulness of the goals defined by conservation works. This postulate could be paraphrased as "the primacy of meaning over doctrine."

Revitalization of historic areas in cities should take into account the protection and preservation of traditional forms that constitute public space (squares, streets, alleys, passages, etc.). Specific features of unquestionable value constitute the historical identity of urban areas, along with their scale and related traditions. These should be strengthened, counteracting the destructive effects of time and the resulting processes of mental and physical atrophy.

Initiating and implementing processes of creating new places in historic cities in the form of new spaces and public facilities enriches their identity and is an element of the natural process of urban development as long as it takes into account the protection of historic values.

Mechanisms that strengthen the identity of places in public spaces of historical cities should restore their meaning as indicators of a specific identity or create new symbolism adjusted to the contemporary urban context.

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