

Ways of implementing green spaces in urban areas based on selected market revitalisation projects in Greater Poland

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to present ways of reintroducing and enhancing greenery in urban spaces. Many revitalisation activities in markets and squares have resulted in the loss of their attractiveness. Removal of greenery elements led to a deepening degradation of spaces and intensification of urban heat islands. The introduction of new revitalisation guidelines for local governments forced a change in the approach to ongoing projects. The investments undertaken should preserve historic tree cover and limit the design of paved surfaces at the expense of existing vegetation. With the current climatic conditions, special emphasis is placed on the condition of the natural environment in urbanised spaces. In order to identify design trends, we selected markets in Greater Poland, where revitalisation efforts have been undertaken in recent years. Places were selected for the study, in which existing greenery was preserved or supplemented with new plantings. A comparative analysis of implementation and planned revitalisation projects in relation to the status quo was carried out.

Keywords: public spaces, revitalisation, urban greenery, markets

1. Introduction

Greenery is an integral part of the urban fabric and serves a variety of functions. It has a huge impact on improving the living conditions of residents [1]. In Polish cities, garden and park spaces began to be introduced on a larger scale as a result of progressive urbanisation and increasing population.

Through spatial and functional changes in urban systems, the role of greenery has changed in value and has been implemented in new forms. During the interwar period, it began to be incorporated into urban market areas. Initially, greenery was arranged in the form of green areas dedicated to historical figures [2]. With the transformation of market layouts and the loss of their commercial function, attention started to focus on the aesthetic and representative character of central urban spaces. In many cases, squares were greened, which turned them into decorative squares and even small parks [3].

The situation of city markets changed at the beginning of the 21st century. Due to funds from the European Union, there were greater opportunities to implement processes aimed at improving the situation and functionality of the squares [4]. Initially, most of the promoted activities resulted in the cutting down of trees and the "concreting" of lawns. Such activities began to lead to the disappearance of greenery in historic urban layouts. Currently, due to climate change and the problematic situation of the use of empty market spaces, more attention is being paid to urban greenery. With the publication of a new regulation by the General Conservator of Monuments in 2019, the way in which historic monuments are revitalised has changed. This also applies to market spaces.

The following article presents how the perception of the green space deficit has influenced the latest revitalisation activities in Greater Poland. To this end, projects to transform market spaces in small and medium-sized towns in recent years were selected. Through a comparative analysis of existing market layouts, along with completed and planned changes, an attempt was made to show how both the function and distribution of greenery have changed. It was also decided to identify current design trends in the revitalisation of squares while preserving vegetation.

2. The role of greenery in urban spaces

Urban green areas come in various forms and are an integral part of the urban landscape. The Act of April 16, 2004, on nature conservation defines such areas as "areas with technical infrastructure and buildings functionally related to them, covered with vegetation, located within the boundaries of densely built-up villages or cities, serving aesthetic, recreational, health or protective functions, in particular parks, green areas, promenades, boulevards, botanical gardens, zoos, playgrounds, historic gardens, and cemeteries, as well as greenery accompanying streets, squares, historic fortifications, buildings, landfills, airports, and railway and industrial facilities." In the case of market greenery, it is worth paying attention to its compositional and spatial features as well as its impact on climate change.

Both tall and medium-height greenery can create new landscape arrangements in market spaces. Depending on the distribution and density of greenery, they can form barriers and openings in urban interiors, stopping and guiding the eye [5]. This type of measure reduces the impression of open space and gives it a more intimate character for the viewer. Accompanying the buildings, they create compositional accents, a background for dominant features, and on a larger scale, they become part of the city panorama. Therefore, it can be said that they are an important element of the urban landscape [6].

Larger forms of greenery also have a positive impact on the local climate. The shade cast by trees with spreading crowns helps to reduce the level of ground heating. This is particularly important in the case of hardened surfaces made of stone or concrete. It allows for lower temperatures to be maintained in the space, which prevents the occurrence of so-called urban heat islands in cities [5]. In addition, the presence of large biologically active areas helps with water circulation. It prevents the accumulation of excessive amounts of rainwater and reduces the risk of flooding and "urban floods".

Thus, it can be concluded that green areas in cities provide services to humans [7]. They also have a very highly beneficial impact on the situation in the city and improve the quality of life of its residents. However, the type and quality of these services depend on the condition of the vegetation [8].

3. Destructive revitalisation activities

The main objective of revitalisation is to improve the condition of spaces that have lost their functional, compositional, economic, or technical value over the years [9]. According to the announcement of February 23, 2021, on the publication of the consolidated text of the Act on Revitalization, revitalisation activities are defined as "the process of bringing degraded areas out of a state of crisis, conducted in a comprehensive manner, through integrated activities for the benefit of the local community, space, and economy, concentrated in a specific territory [...]".

At the beginning of the 21st century, many processes aimed at renovating deteriorating urban spaces began. Unfortunately, not all of the measures taken had a positive effect and led to a worsening of the problem. This also applied to the situation of market squares and town squares. Despite improvements in their technical condition, these spaces lost both their historical and environmental value. Conservators, under the pretext of restoring the markets to their medieval state, approved revitalisation projects that caused drastic spatial and functional changes. The main drawback was the almost complete removal of greenery and its replacement with paved surfaces. Most often, these were made of materials with low water permeability, such as concrete slabs [10]. Due to the loss of the markets' commercial role, the new designs did not improve the usability of the space. Apart from serving mainly representative roles and as a venue for occasional local events [4], they did not introduce any specific new functions.

As a result of these measures, many markets and city squares lost their appeal. The decline in the number of visitors led to a kind of "social isolation." They became large empty spaces, which attempts were made to fill with small architectural features such as benches and fountains. Greenery was limited to single plantings, most often located around the square. These took the form of lawns and flower beds with low or medium-sized vegetation. There were

also rows of trees, often planted in place of felled trees. Attempts were made to compensate for the lack of greenery in the square with potted plants and flowers or low trees [11, 12].

Such methods of transformation began to appear throughout Poland. They could also be observed in the Greater Poland region. Towns such as Wągrowiec, Murowana Goślina, and Kórnik lost most, if not all, of their historic tree stands [11]. The modest amount of remaining or newly designed greenery was often not properly cared for. Fungal diseases began to appear. Some plants, due to insufficient adaptation and exposure to intense sunlight, dried out and began to die.



Figure 1. The condition of greenery in the market square in Wągrowiec (right) and in the square in Rogoźno (center, left). Photo: K. Tomczak, 2024

4. New conservation regulations

In the summer of 2019, new regulations for Provincial Conservators of Monuments came into force. They were aimed at introducing changes in the approach to the protection of greenery in historic urban layouts, and above all in market squares and other public spaces. In the regulation, the General Conservator of Monuments expressed concern about the revitalisation activities at the time. These involved the removal of green areas and the replacement of historic surfaces with less noble substitutes.

The role of historic market squares as characteristic urban spaces and cultural heritage was emphasized. These are spaces that form the central part of a town, which "have been shaped by successive generations and bear full witness to human activity in time and space." The approach to their revitalisation should be individualized and supported by detailed analyses that would influence the shaping of the appropriate character of the place and its integration into the existing environment. One such measure should be the preservation of the historic tree stand and the composed greenery, shaped as a result of functional and spatial changes. This is an important aspect of sustainable design and a form of prevention against adverse climate change.

In this situation, conservators should support measures to preserve historic greenery and cultural landscape. It is wrong to remove it from the square under the pretext of returning the historical layout, as this is a misinterpretation of cultural space. City squares should be designed in a way that reconciles their representative and social functions with the existing greenery layouts. Appropriate preservation of such space can contribute to the development of social capital and improve the economic situation. Therefore, the need to strive to restore the natural environment in market spaces where it has suffered due to inappropriate revitalisation measures was mentioned.

5. Research methods

Climate change and the effects of revitalisation measures have once again highlighted the important role that greenery plays in urban areas. To this end, it was decided to present how vegetation and its reintroduction are approached in the latest urban market revitalisation projects. The scope of the research covered public spaces in the Wielkopolska region, where revitalisation measures have been carried out in recent years. The cut-off date was set at 2019, when new conservation regulations came into force.

It was decided to focus mainly on towns with smaller urban layouts. This is due to the important role that market squares play in small communities and their impact on public life. Using case studies, the selection was limited to small and medium-sized towns (from 1,500 to 62,000 inhabitants). Then, among them, those were taken into account which, in their concepts and revitalisation projects, maintained vegetation in a form similar to the previous one or reintroduced it into the market space. Based on the above criteria, eight towns were selected for further analysis: Bojanowo, Jarocin, Kostrzyn Wielkopolski, Leszno, Opalenica, Turek, Wielichowo, and Wągrowiec.

In order to present the changes affecting market squares, the current state of greenery and its function were compared with their form after revitalisation or as envisaged in planning documents. This was done by analyzing orthophotomap data before and after the transformations and archival photographs. In the case of spaces where revitalisation plans have not yet been implemented, their designs and the changes they introduce were examined. A site visit was also carried out in the localities. The focus was on the ratio of biologically active to paved areas and the types of plantings found in the square. The transformations brought about by the planned activities in the vegetation arrangements were also determined. In addition, based on the results, it was decided to identify the general design trends accompanying the current transformations of urban markets and how they may affect their functioning. The results of the analyses were grouped and presented below in tabular form.

Table 1. Parametric data of revitalisation projects of selected markets in Greater Poland. Compiled by K. Tomczak

No.	Location	Population	Status of implementation	Year of implementation
1.	Bojanowo	2,500–3,000	Completed	2022
2.	Jarocin	25,000–27,000	Completed	2023
3.	Kostrzyn Wielkopolski	20,000–22,000	Planned (not yet executed)	2025–2027
4.	Leszno	60,000–62,500	Planned (not yet executed)	2025 – plan
5.	Opalenica	7,500–10,000	In progress	2025
6.	Turek	25,000–27,000	Planned (not yet executed)	2024 – plan
7.	Wielichowo	1,500–2,000	Completed	2019
8.	Wągrowiec	22,500–25,000	Completed	2023/2024

Table 2. Changes in green space layouts and design trends in revitalisation projects of selected market squares in Greater Poland. Compiled by K. Tomczak

No.	Location	Greenery layout before revitalisation	Greenery transformations	Green space design trends
1.	Bojanowo	A square with a central layout featuring large lawns and plantings.	Preservation of the original layout of lawns. Removal of some vegetation while preserving individual plantings. Addition of new medium-sized green areas along the eastern, northern, and western borders of the market square.	Supplement
2.	Jarocin	Tree rows along the south-eastern and south-western frontages of the market square.	Introduction of rows of trees along the north-eastern and north-western frontages and a double row supplemented with medium-sized greenery along the south-western frontage. Creation of flower beds with medium and low vegetation in the south-eastern part of the market square. Supplementing the market square with planters with trees.	Restoration
3.	Kostrzyn Wielkopolski	A square in the form of lawns with trees. A medium-sized green belt separating the market square from the parking lot.	Redesign of the greenery layout while preserving the existing tree stand. Increase in the biologically active area in the form of lawns and flower beds. Supplementing the existing vegetation with medium and low greenery plantings.	Redesign
4.	Leszno	Rows of trees along the market square frontage. Individual trees in the central part of the square, supplemented with planters with low greenery.	Introduction of lawns with low greenery under the rows of trees along the western, northern, and eastern frontage of the market square. Creation of a square in the central part of the market square with a central layout featuring low and medium greenery, surrounded by rows of trees on the eastern and western sides.	Restoration
5.	Opalenica	Square and greenery accompanying parking spaces.	Redesign of the greenery layout while preserving individual plantings in the market square and tree rows. Creation of multi-surface flower beds with shrubs and perennials.	Redesign
6.	Turek	A square with a central layout featuring large lawns and plantings. Medium-sized greenery around the central square.	Removal of greenery from the central part of the green area. Preservation of as much biologically active area as possible and supplementing it with composed planting arrangements.	Redesign

No.	Location	Greenery layout before revitalisation	Greenery transformations	Green space design trends
7.	Wielichowo	A park with a central layout. Plantings are not very orderly.	Removal of some trees and shrubs, creation of orderly arrangements of new plantings in their place.	Supplement
8.	Wągrowiec	Form of separating the market square from traffic. Green belts around the square on the north, east, and south sides. Medium-sized vegetation with single trees. Supplemented with planters on the west side of the market square.	Creation of a kind of square. Creation of flower beds with low greenery in place of the removed concrete slabs, in the northern part and along the eastern and western borders of the square. Planting of low deciduous trees around the fountain and in place of the planters.	Restoration

6. Changes in greenery layouts

Based on the analyses carried out, it can be concluded that the selected market squares are characterized by varying initial conditions of their original greenery. In some cases, the spaces were almost completely devoid of any biologically active areas, limited only to rows of trees or individual strips of greenery (Jarocin, Leszno). This was due to the lack of action taken in the previous century to change the spatial layout of the market square. In this way, the market squares retained their historical character in terms of urban planning, but due to functional changes and the loss of their commercial role, these spaces became mainly empty squares, devoid of most vegetation.

In other cases, this character was the result of destructive revitalisation measures (Wągrowiec). The greenery that accompanied the functional transformations in the 19th century was removed in order to restore the historical layout of the market square. Such superficial measures, without a deeper understanding of the situation of the space, led to a lack of vegetation.



Figure 2. Market square in Bojanów after revitalisation, orthophotomap. Source: https://mapy.geoportal.gov.pl/imap/Imgp_2.html?gpmmap=gp0



Figure 3. Market square in Jarocin after revitalisation, orthophotomap. Source: https://mapy.geoportal.gov.pl/imap/Imgp_2.html?gpmmap=gp0



Figure 4. Revitalization project for the market square in Kostrzyn Wielkopolski. Source: <https://kostrzyn.wlkp.pl/nasz-kostrzynski-rynek-w-przyszlosci,1154,,1>



Figure 5. Revitalization project for the market square in Leszno. Source: http://www.rewitalizacja.leszno.pl/Rynek_w_Lesznie_-_bardziej_funkcjonalny_i_zielony_3b7.html



Figure 6. Revitalization project for the market square in Opalenica. Source: <https://nowytomysl.naszemiesto.pl/niedlugo-ruszy-przebudowa-rynkow-w-opalenicy-przedsiebiorcy/ar/c1-9556893>



Figure 7. Revitalization project for the market square in Turek. Source: <https://www.miastoturek.pl/aktualnosci/6558-koncepcja-rewitalizacji-rynku>



Figure 8. Market square in Wielichowo after revitalisation, orthophotomap. Source: https://mapy.geoportal.gov.pl/imap/lmpg_2.html?gpmap=gp0



Figure 9. Market square in Wągrowiec after revitalisation, orthophotomap. Source: https://mapy.geoportal.gov.pl/imap/lmpg_2.html?gpmap=gp0



Figure 10. Market square in Bojanowo. *Photo: K. Tomczak, Ł. Górniaacyk, 2025*



Figure 11. Market square in Jarocin. *Photo: K. Tomczak, 2025*



Figure 12. Market square in Opalenica. *Photo: K. Tomczak, Ł. Górniaacyk, 2025*



Figure 13. Market square in Wielichowo. *Photo: K. Tomczak, Ł. Górniaacyk, 2025*



Figure 14. Market square in Wągrowiec. *Photo: K. Tomczak, 2025*



Figure 15. Market square in Leszno. *Photo: K. Tomczak, Ł. Górniaacyk, 2025*

Regardless of the existing urban space situation, the analyzed projects and implementations have a mainly positive impact on the current state of greenery. In each of the examples cited, the aim is to preserve as much greenery and biologically active space as possible. Most projects focus on increasing the amount of vegetation in the market square. The greenery is organized, and medium and low vegetation is planted to create new compositions. Ornamental plants such as perennials, grasses, and annual flowers are appearing. In addition to aesthetic and climatic values, spaces for recreation and leisure, equipped with small architectural elements, are being created in market squares. Through the use of appropriate plantings, such places are conventionally separated from the market surroundings (Bojanowo, Jarocin, Opalenica, Turek, Wągrowiec) or even from the square itself (Kostrzyn Wielkopolski, Leszno).

This creates intimate urban interiors. In many cases, changes in the layout of greenery allow the form of the square to be reconciled while maintaining space for the organization of local events (Jarocin, Kostrzyn Wielkopolski, Leszno, Turek, Wągrowiec).

Some of the projects also allowed for the introduction of new plantings without major interference with the historical layout of the market square. New vegetation was placed along the edge of the square and the frontages of the buildings, complementing the existing greenery, which until now consisted of rows of trees (Jarocin). Vegetation was also introduced in the middle of the square, complementing the existing structures that are central elements of the market square (Leszno).

Despite many positive changes in this type of space and the use of larger green areas, not all measures taken are fully satisfactory. One of the biggest problems is the frequent lack of consideration for tall greenery in new developments. The lack of trees results in less shade, which causes the pavement to heat up, especially in cases where there is still a large amount of paved surface within the market square (Wągrowiec).

On the other hand, in the case of large lawns (Bojanowo) and perennial flower beds (Opalenica), this can cause them to dry out and die. In this way, they lose both their health and aesthetic values. This also necessitates intensive irrigation or even frequent replacement, which increases the costs of maintaining the space.

7. Design trends

An analysis of the implementation and designs of selected locations has made it possible to identify three main design trends that accompany the current revitalisation efforts.

The first of these can be considered to be the supplementation of greenery without introducing any drastic changes in its quantity or compositional layout. These types of spaces maintain the same or a similar balance of biologically active area. Existing greenery is often left unchanged, or at least most of it. New vegetation is introduced to replace felled trees and shrubs. This improves the aesthetics of the space by creating orderly greenery arrangements. Most often, new plantings consist of low (perennials, ornamental grasses, and annual flowers) and medium-height greenery. Sometimes trees with smaller crowns are also planted.

Another method is to redesign part or all of the greenery. This results from changes made in the functional and compositional layout of the market square itself. The result is the creation of a square part of which is occupied by greenery in the form of a square or green area. Another solution is to arrange the greenery around the market square, thus creating a space with a central layout. For this reason, the compositional layout of the biologically active area is often transformed in order to increase the functionality and aesthetic value of the market square. In this case, individual plantings, usually the most valuable trees, are retained. The rest of the vegetation is removed and replaced with new compositions of plants that are more resistant to changing climatic conditions in cities.

The latest trend is to introduce restoration of green spaces into market squares, which until now have been dominated by paved surfaces. Vegetation has usually taken the form of single rows of trees or hedges, supplemented by planters. This situation has allowed for the free formation of new, extensive green spaces. The existing situation allows for the free design of flower beds, often using elements of existing small architecture (e.g., fountains). Squares are created with flower beds of varied low and medium greenery, with few trees. The rest of the space is supplemented with planters. In addition, the space is sometimes supplemented with rows of trees planted along the border of the market square.

8. Summary

In the recent revitalisation efforts, the greater importance has been placed on urban greenery. By adhering to the guidelines of new conservation regulations, vegetation is becoming an important element in the renovation and transformation of public spaces. Carefully planned, comprehensive processes for implementing greenery help to revitalise city markets. Preserved older vegetation, together with newer plantings, has a positive impact on the city. A greater amount of low and high greenery improves climatic conditions and aesthetic values. Even in the form of less complex, linear arrangements, it becomes a recreational space for residents. Characteristic forms and compositional arrangements of greenery can also be a culture-creating aspect and influence the sense of "spirit of place" [9].

In the examples analyzed, there is a noticeable tendency to ensure that vegetation is present in downtown areas. Greenery is preserved, restored, and introduced into market spaces. This significantly increases their attractiveness and revitalizes previously empty areas. It is not always possible to reconcile all the requirements and expectations for specific functions and values that they should fulfill. The presented projects still lack adequate organization of greenery forms. Despite the transformations that have been made, the introduced and organized planting arrangements do not allow the functional potential of the markets to be fully exploited. It should be remembered that such spaces cannot exist only in the form of squares. In smaller towns, they play an important role as one of the most important urban areas. They should fulfill their representative function as a place for organizing local events and mass gatherings, which is why it is important to properly balance the amount of recreational greenery with the market space – as a square that can be arranged in any way. Local governments and designers should focus more on an in-depth analysis of both the market itself and the environment in which it is located. Greenery should be formed in a way that further helps to highlight its natural and recreational values. This will enable the introduction of missing functions needed by residents, which will revitalise public space.

However, the changes that are still being promoted have a positive impact on market spaces and aim to improve the quality of life in cities. This gives hope that greenery will accompany squares to a greater extent and help to create their identity against the background of other regions.

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Sposoby wdrażania układów zieleni w przestrzeniach miejskich na podstawie wybranych projektów rewitalizacji rynków w Wielkopolsce

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie sposobów ponownego wprowadzania i rewitalizacji zieleni w przestrzeniach miejskich. Wiele działań w ramach rewitalizacji rynków i placów powodowało utratę ich atrakcyjności. Usuwanie elementów zieleni prowadziło do pogłębiającej się degradacji przestrzeni i nasilania miejskich wysp ciepła. Wprowadzenie nowych wytycznych rewitalizacyjnych dla lokalnych samorządów wymusiło zmianę podejścia do realizowanych projektów. Podejmowane inwestycje powinny uwzględniać zachowanie historycznego zadrzewienia i ograniczyć projektowanie powierzchni utwardzonych kosztem istniejącej roślinności. W obecnych warunkach klimatycznych kładzie się szczególny nacisk na stan środowiska przyrodniczego w przestrzeniach zurbanizowanych. W celu rozpoznania tendencji projektowych wybrano rynki w Wielkopolsce, na których w ostatnich latach podjęto działania rewitalizacyjne. Do badań wybrano miejsca, w których zachowano istniejącą zieleń lub uzupełniono nowymi nasadzeniami. Przeprowadzono analizę porównawczą zrealizowanych i projektowanych działań rewitalizacyjnych w odniesieniu do stanu wyjściowego.

Słowa kluczowe: przestrzenie publiczne, rewitalizacja, zieleń miejska, rynki