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Reinstanation the Significance of City Main Public Space - Revitalization of the Main Square in Polaniec

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Reinstanation the Significance of City Main Public Space - Revitalization of the Main Square in Polaniec

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Abstract. The aim of the conducted research is to analyse the changes taking place in the public spaces of small towns of South-Eastern Poland and their impact on the residents' awareness and the sense of local identity. The analysis included the actual state "before" and "after" the revitalization carried out, as well as the study of planning and strategic documents. Połaniec was the subject of the research, among others. In its history, the town has been repeatedly destroyed, among others as a result of war and natural disasters. Thanks to the residents who have always been strongly connected with the town, Połaniec was rebuilt every time. The locality alternately gained and lost municipal rights, and finally, in 1980, become recognized as a town. The granting of city rights was closely related to the rapid development of Połaniec, caused by the construction of a power plant in nearby Zawada. In the seventies, eighties and nineties of the XX century, new large housing estates and service facilities were built in Połaniec. During this period, the most intense development of the city took place. Public spaces, like, "Promenade" at the shopping pavilion along Kościuszki Street and a "traffic town" have arisen. The main square - the heart of the medieval Połaniec - in the 60s of the twentieth century was transformed into a communication node, thanks to which the town lost its main representative space. In addition, the service functions that so far have been focused within the market have been taken over by the pavilions built at Kosciuszko Street. Cultural events, since 1994 have been transferred to the concert shell. In 2008, the Połaniecka Gallery was opened, creating a potential representative space of the city. It was only within the framework of the Local Program for the Revitalization of the City and Municipality of Połaniec for the years 2007-2013 the funds were found for restoration the proper status of the main square. In 2009-2010, the reconstruction was carried out and the former - the representative character of the square (now Połaniecki Square) was recovered, at least partially. Raising the quality of the town's representative space resulted in an increase in the sense of local identity of the residents, which have an effect of, among others, renovation of the majority of the facade of the market buildings, which further contributed to the improvement of the quality of the town square. A successful revitalization process can take place only when it is conducted comprehensively. Restoring the rank of the Połaniec market, high awareness and a sense of responsibility for "their" town among the residents, resulted in a living, attractive space that became the showcase of Połaniec.

1. Introduction

The aim of the research presented in this article was to analyse the changes taking place in the public spaces of small towns of the South-Eastern Poland and their impact on the inhabitants' awareness and the sense of local identity for the selected city. The subject of functioning of urban space is widely described in literature [1,2]. In recent years, in Poland, the people more and more talk and write about



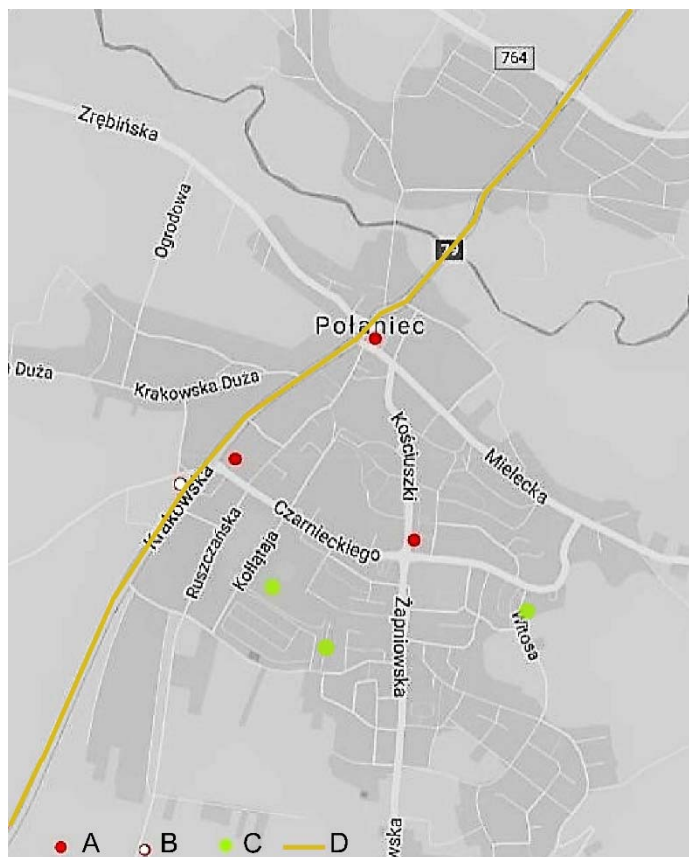
social participation in the process of city renewal and about the awareness and sense of local identity among residents [3]. Numerous observed and described examples of urban space revitalization indicate that, to a large extent, it is thanks to stakeholders (residents, officials, etc.), who are strongly connected with the place, the process of revitalization can be complete and successful. The problem of poor quality of public space in small towns, especially in voivodeships of Easter Poland, is very often overlooked or moved to the background due to the financial reasons. However, there are positive exceptions, including Połaniec located in the Świętokrzyskie Province.

2. Połaniec

2.1. Short characteristics

Conducting the research, archival materials and own inventory materials were analysed, collected in the years 2007-2008. The literature analysis concerning the problems of small towns [7] shows that in most Polish cities, in the period from the 1950s to the political changes in 1989, many of the main public spaces have been transformed and overwhelmed by the communication function. Połaniec, which currently has a population of just over eight thousand inhabitants, is located on the former trade route that led from Cracow to Ruthenia along the left bank of the Vistula river. The town lies about 120 km north-east of Cracow, 80 km south-east of Kielce and about 50 km south-west of Sandomierz. Due to its location, the town was destroyed many times as a result of fires, flood or armed conflicts, but it was always rebuilt by the inhabitants. Połaniec has in turn – lost and regained city rights to finally be recognized as a town in 1980. The rapid development of the centre, mainly related to the power plant that was built in the nearby Zawada, took place in the seventies and eighties of the 20th century. At that time, the town grew not only in terms of housing, but also service. However, public spaces have been limited, mainly to housing estates. The “promenade” at the shopping pavilion built in the 70s along the Kosciuszko Street and a traffic town were the exception. Considering the size of the town (the population of Połaniec amounts to 8 204 persons [4]) public spaces existing from the 80s gradually ceased to meet the needs of residents. For many years, the market in Połaniec (currently the Połaniecki Square) served mainly as a transport hub. Not without significance is the fact that one of the roads crossing the Universal Square is the national road no. 79 (Figure 1), busy and forming a spatial barrier, not only on the market scale, but also the entire city. The nuisance of car traffic practically excluded the Połaniecki square as the main urban space, in addition, it prevented pedestrians from using the space of the “square”. It is difficult to describe the space as a square, which for many years has functioned as a roundabout, or rather three communication roundabouts forming islands planted with high greenery (Figure 2). On the middle square there was a former depot of the Volunteer Fire Brigade, a building which for years has served various service functions, none of which were representative. The access to the facility was difficult. In addition, the analysis of the location of concentration of service functions in Połaniec from this period showed that the market, which role and rank were weakened in favour of service pavilions at Kosciuszko street retained only a few points of a service nature, however, the range of the above-mentioned service points were mostly limited to the nearest neighbourhood. There were also no prestigious or even attractive functions for a larger number of users. In addition, the importance of the market as a service centre was weakened by the creation of a shopping centre connected to the bus station, which was located next to the cinema, school complex, municipality office and marketplace.

Activities related to the restoration of the appropriate function and rank of the market were initiated by the Municipal authorities from drawing up the Local Program for the Revitalization of the City and Municipality of Połaniec for the years 2007-2013 [5] and subsequently, proceeding to the preparation of the local plan for spatial development [6], in the area, covering with its range, among others, the main town square.



A – the main places of concentration of the service function, generating a large number of users

B – a marketplace – functioning only on Fridays in the afternoon

C – recreational areas and larger clusters of greenery

D – the route of the national road no. 79 – Cracow Sandomierz

Figure 1. The map of Połaniec with the marked route of the national road no. 79 and clusters of service functions.



Figure 2. A bird's eye view of the Universal Square from 1989, Photo by A. Pokora

The local plan was adopted by resolution no. XXI/118/08 of the Town Council in Połaniec of April 24, 2008. In this document, the Połaniecki market was marked as “KDP1 – town square of Połaniec (Połaniecki Universal Square), within which there is a crossroad of KDGP/Z, KDZ, KDD streets” [6] (Figure 3.) for “public roads, streets and public squares with a communication function, along with the necessary devices for the road equipment, as well as devices and objects not directly related to the communication function, including the network of technical infrastructure, small architecture and greenery, and also in the case of public squares: high greenery, monuments, non-cubic objects and devices of the square décor with the possibility of reconstruction of the existing communication system and reconstruction or demolition of the existing building on KDP1 square ” [6]

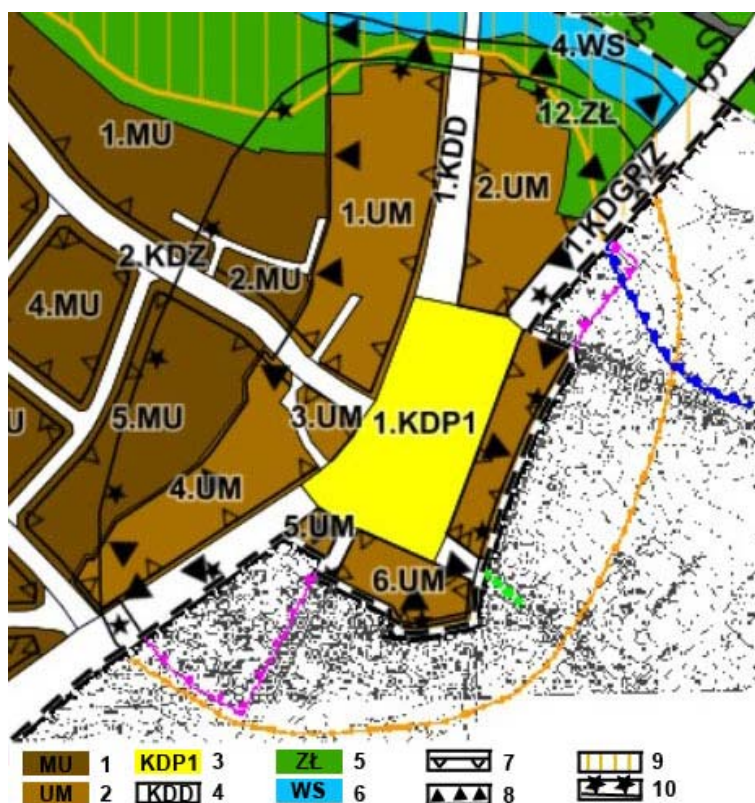


Figure 3. Fragment of the “Local spatial development plan for the town of Połaniec – part II covering the western part of the town”. Adopted by resolution no. XXI/118/08 of the Town Council in Połaniec of 24.04.2008 (1. Areas of multi-family housing, single-family housing and services, 2. Personal housing and services area in the town centre, 3. Połaniec market square (Połaniecki Universal square) within which there is a crossroad of the KDGP/Z, KDZ and KDD streets, 4. Areas of roads, streets and public squares, 5. areas of grasslands and greenery accompanying watercourses, 6. Surface water areas, 7. Building lines, 8. The boundary of the conservation protection zone, 9. The extent of areas threatened by flooding with flood waters, 10. The limit of the archaeological site).

The Local Revitalization Program of the City and Municipality of Połaniec for the years 2007-2013 [5], assumed effects under three basic areas: socio-cultural, economic and infrastructural. In the Revitalization Program, the area of the Połaniec market was located in Area A, called Historic Połaniec. The main goals that were set for this areas included, among others, “shaping and preserving the historical landscape of the historic urban layout, promotion of cultural and economic achievements of the town, increasing the participation of residents and tourists in culture, preservation of local and regional identity and cultural heritage, development of recreational and leisure functions of the area, activation of business entities related to traffic tourism, activation in the labour market and reducing unemployment,

and improving public safety” [5]. Observing the current state of space in the area covered by revitalization, it can be stated that in the area of Historic Połaniec, the revitalization program has been successfully completed. It is worth noting that in the years of implementation of the above-mentioned Program, the revitalization act was not yet in force [8], which regulates the provisions, form of implementation and procedures that must be met by activities, called “revitalization”.

The Municipal Revitalization Program for the Municipality of Połaniec for the years of 2016-2023 [9] is the next stage of the previous one – Local Revitalization Program [5]. Despite the success of the revitalization activities of the Połaniec market, this area is still threatened by the degradation process. The Municipal Revitalization Program [9] designated several degraded areas. One of them is the estate no. 1 in Połaniec (Figure 4.). The area of estate no. 1 covers the central areas of the city, including the square – Połaniecki Universal Square. The diagnosis prepared for the needs of the GPR development [9] showed that there are still many crisis phenomena in the selected area. The area of the revitalized market is currently an asset in the spatial and urban space, but there are still some dissonances.

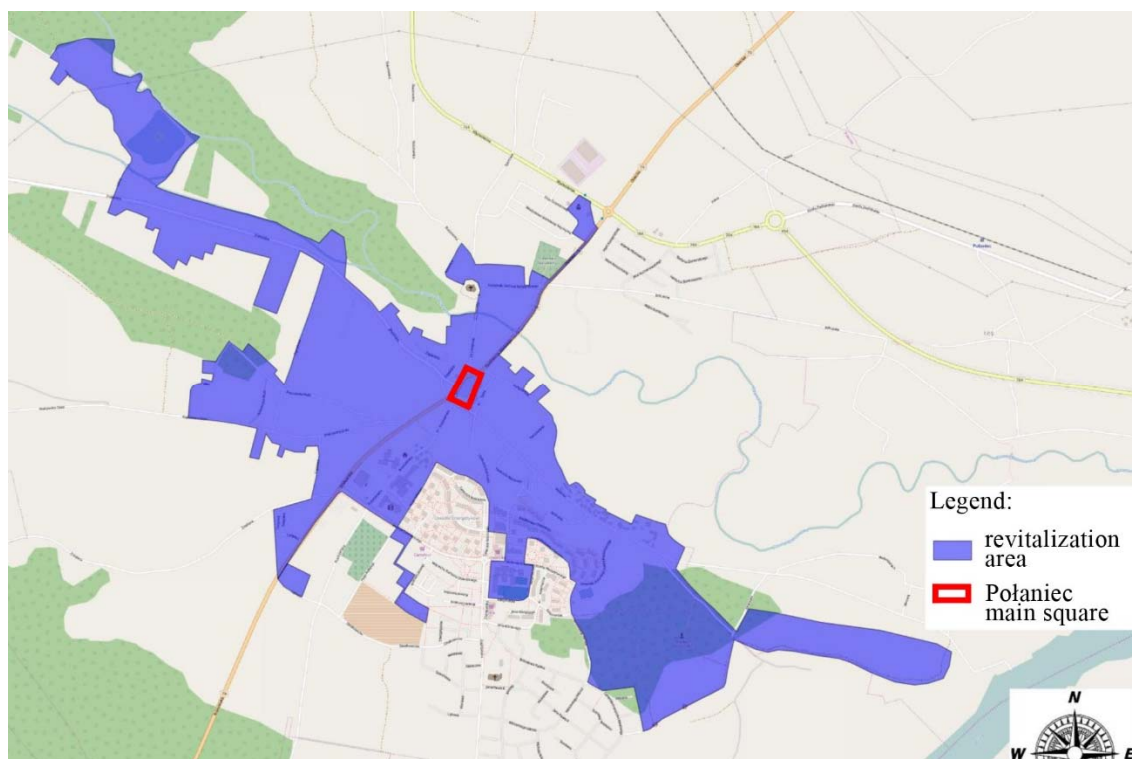


Figure 4. The boundaries of the designated revitalization area in the municipality (GPR [9]) together with the marked area of the Połaniec market.

The Municipal Revitalization Program [9] stated that buildings with very different roof heights and geometries are one of the aesthetic problems within the market. However, the residents, as far as possible, have ordered the elevations of the buildings forming the eastern frontage of the square, the southern part of it requires further intervention. However, the main GPR assumptions focus outside the area of the market itself and in the spatial and functional sphere include “ordering and creating attractive public spaces conducive to the activity of residents, increasing the availability, functionality and quality of services in the area of revitalization, reducing architectural barriers for people with disabilities, ordering and increasing access to basic communal infrastructure for residents and increasing the functionality of communication systems, taking into account the preferences for pedestrian and bicycle traffic” [9]. These activities are aimed at improving living conditions in the city and using its

development potential. These activities are to focus on housing areas, so that the main city square is not the only aesthetic and well-designed public space.

2.3. *The market after revitalization*

The project of rebuilding the market was to restore the rank of the city's main square. One of the problems the designers had to face was to solve the communication system. The national road no. 79 remained within the market space (from the west), but the roundabouts, which previously occupied the square, were liquidated. The course of the national road, although creating a kind of nuisance associated with high traffic, allows at the same time to show the values of the rebuilt square space, not only to the residents, but also to a wider group of people passing through this route. The good-quality space has become a showcase of the city. In connection with the necessity of commuting to the real estate area of the square – as shown in Figure 5. – it is “cut off” on each side from the buildings creating the perimeter frontages.



Figure 5. A bird's eye view of the Połaniec market (Połaniecki Universal Square) after revitalization.
Photo by M. Szelest.

Closing the street along the eastern edge of the square and calming the car traffic improved the level of security in this zone. In addition, solutions introduced in the floor meant that (despite the street separating the area of the square from the building), the user has the impression that the whole square adjoins directly to the building located on its eastern side. Part of the square has been designated for parking spaces, which due to the scale (relatively small size of the car park) and clear separation of greenery and fountains from the representative part, does not affect the reception of the whole. The floor of the square itself was divided and within it small trees were spaced evenly apart. In the northern part of the square, there is a former fire station building, where a tourist information point and a restaurant were located after the renovation works. Below the former fire station building, there is a deep well renovated in a similar convention. The replaced lighting and elements of small architecture complete the whole. The market – the Połaniecki Universal Square – has not only become a place of various kinds of local events and festivals (Figure 6), but most importantly, it has become a meeting place for residents, giving the opportunity to establish strong social ties.



Figure 6. Połaniec main square after revitalization during city festival – Photo by D. Reichert

3. Results and discussions

The research confirmed that the revitalization process, in which stakeholders are heavily involved, can be successful and cause further effects, such as (in the case of Połaniec) the renovation of the building façades on the market by residents, including the arrangement and subduing the advertising signs. The revitalization process carried out in a comprehensive way results not only in a better quality space, but also strengthens social ties and increases the sense of local identity of the residents, additionally creates opportunities for the local community, taking responsibility for their town (or the immediate neighbourhood) and active participation in its life. The involvement of residents in the life of the city has a direct impact on its functioning. Revitalization, in order to be called successful, must take into account the needs of users. In the case of Połaniec, the level of social acceptance for the project exceeded the expectations of the Town authorities (the residents financed the renovation of the façade – if possible from their own funds). However, a successful revitalization is not a finite and closed action. Stopping the crisis phenomena in a given area often requires long-term planned and related undertakings. Therefore, the Town authorities prepared another Revitalization Program [9] containing a package of remedial actions planned for 2016-2023, in such a way that the process of revitalization of the town – and not only its fragments – could still proceed.

4. Conclusions

The revitalization process carried out in a comprehensive way results not only in a space with improved aesthetics or higher quality, but it also strengthens social ties and increases the sense of local identity of the inhabitants. Furthermore, it creates opportunities for the local community, taking responsibility for their town (or the immediate neighbourhood) and active participation in its life.

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