

# Renewal of a Small Town in Poland Based on Example of Ustka

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**Abstract.** Ustka is a historical seaside town, port and health resort, a town of many possibilities. In this tourist town the old urban arrangement and many historic objects are preserved. Despite such potential, the town struggles with various problems, as do many small towns in the north of Poland. In 2003 works on a revitalization programme began (it has been implemented since 2005). The next stage was a programme which started in 2011. At present Ustka prepares for the next revitalization plan—a "District Revitalization Programme for 2016 – 2022". The article describes: the situation at different stages of town development related to previously carried out revitalization programmes and the prospects for its further prosperity.

## 1. Introduction

Ustka is a Polish health resort of nearly six thousand inhabitants, located by the Baltic Sea, on the Slovincian Coast, at the mouth of Słupia river. Although its history began in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was granted a charter only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (22.03.1935).

In our times the town remains a seaside port. It has many valuable cultural, landscape and natural assets. As a tourist town, it takes advantage of all these qualities, particularly in the summer season, when the weather is favourable.

The town has fewer and fewer inhabitants – in the period of five years their number decreased by 576 persons. In 2011 Ustka was populated by 16 445, and in 2016 by 15 869 inhabitants (Population - Ustka..., 2017). The estimated unemployment rate registered in Ustka in 2015 was 11.6% and was higher than that for the Pomeranian Voivodeship: 8.9%, and the whole country: 9.7% (Estimated unemployment rate..., 2017).

## 2. A bit of history

As early as in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Ustka health resort was a popular seaside holiday town. People went there for their summer relaxation. At that time it had its renown and character. All that affected the economic development of the then settlement. Boarding houses, villas, restaurants were built. For the holidaymakers and inhabitants the sandy beaches were properly arranged. The old town was characterised by small fishermen's houses with lintel structures and small tenements. The entire layout was dominated by the tower of the neo-Gothic church of the Holiest Saviour (figure 1a). A little bit further from it the villa and boarding house district was developed. From 1912 a characteristic object was the Natural Therapy Centre, where the diseases of the respiratory system, circulatory system, metabolism and rheumatism were treated. The building was erected in the place where in 1877 the first



steam baths in Ustka were built, to which the sea water used for curative baths was pumped. In 1875 a park with alleys for pedestrians was created (figure 1b).

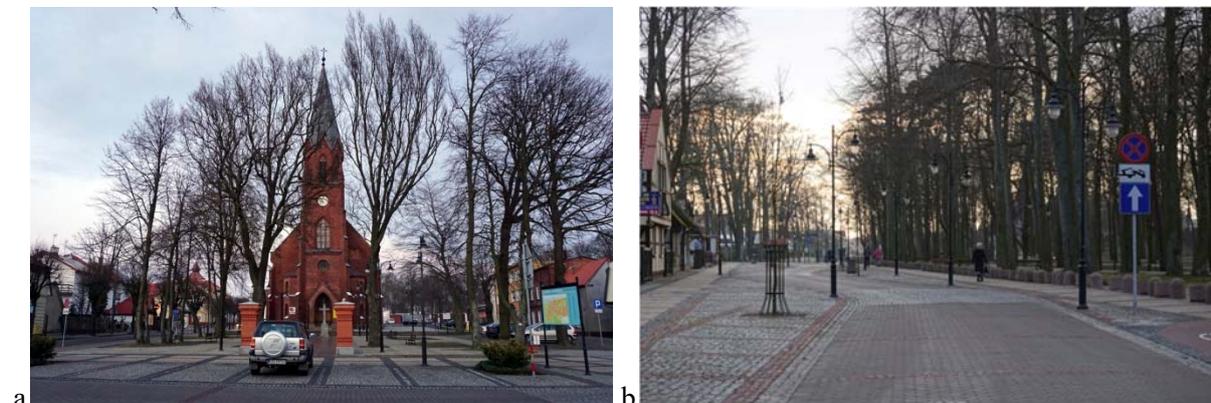


Figure 1. a) The church of the Holiest Saviour at Marynarki Polskiej street; b) Chopin street and park

During World War II Ustka suffered relatively few damages in the town structure. From that time to the end of the 90s no extensive remedial actions were taken in the town. This contributed to the degradation of buildings and public spaces. The port and maritime fishing were also affected.

### 3. Ustka Health Resort

At present Ustka has two summer seaside bathing beaches: "Ustka Wschód" and "Ustka Zachód" with the total coastline length of 700 m. Since 01.01.1988 it has had the status of a health resort. Today in Ustka there are three health resort protection areas. There are some spa therapy institutions in the town. Apart from the health resort clinic, the best known are: the Nature Treatment Institution (figure 2a) and "Tęcza", "Promyk" and "Radość" spas. Currently the spa infrastructure of the city is being supplemented with new hotels, restaurants and others (figure 2b).



Figure 2. a) The Nature Treatment Institution at Beniowskiego street; b) Grant Lubicz Hotel - new spa at Wczasowa

Ustka provides treatment for the following types of diseases: orthopaedic-traumatic, diseases of the nervous system, rheumatological, cardiac and hypertension, as well as diseases of the upper respiratory tract (<http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ustka>). Ustka is a town of specific climate properties. Natural healing minerals are extracted in two mining areas. In the first one, called "Ustka", in "Ustka IGH-1" deposit there are mineral 3.43% chloride-sodium, iodine, thermal water supplies (so-called salt-spring). The other one – "Ustka 1" contains a low type peat deposit, mud bath (A list of kinds..., 2017).

Apart from therapeutic treatment, the patients and tourists can use the renovated seaside promenade (figure 3a). Valuable objects in the town include the port and lighthouse from 1871, situated at the end of the eastern breakwater (figure 3b). Because of maintained numerous cultural – urban and architectural – assets, there is an urban conservation area determined in the oldest part of Ustka. Healing qualities are also influenced by the two neighbouring Protected Landscape Areas, “Buczyna nad Słupią” natural reserve, Słupia River Valley Landscape Park and Słowiński National Park, included in the UNESCO World Biosphere Reserves.

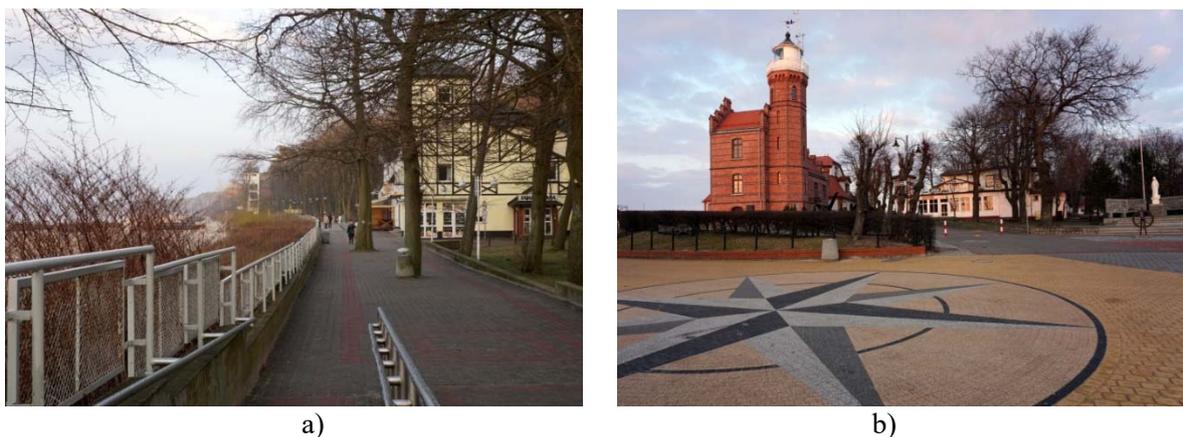


Figure 3. a) Boardwalk at the seaside in Ustka; b) the lighthouse nearby the Port embankment

#### 4. Town revitalization programmes

Only in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Ustka entered its first programme of the revitalization of urban areas. It began with the housing and service areas. The first actions were taken up in 2003. Thanks to the accession of Poland to EU (2004), the town authority could apply for funds for the revitalization plans of Ustka.

Although Ustka is a small town, the problems of its economic development seem to be very complicated. The geographical location of Ustka allows to classify it as a seaside and port town. There are still post-industrial areas connected with maritime economy, in relation to which new plans of use are being made.

##### 2005

The increasing of the value of the health resort was started through the development of the first Local Revitalization Programme (Local Revitalization Programme..., 2005). The Town Council passed it on 27 October 2005. At the timethe Programme concerned the area of the former fishing settlement entered into the Register of Historic Monuments (figure 5a), the Seaside Promenade, and streets: Perłowa, Pomorska and Beniowskiego . The area was outlined after public consultations. It was then the most squalid area in the town, which still had great cultural assets and valuable social and economic potential (figure 4). Kilińskiego and Mickiewicza streets, and later Leśna and Plac Wolności, were also renovated as part of the programme. The redevelopment in the seaside strip of the town (incl. Chopina and Zaruskiego streets and Chopin park) was carried out with the funds from the Marshal’s Office. The area in the strip from Marynarki Polskiej street, from the Harbour Master’s Office to Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego street was modernised with EU funds from the INTERREG programme (figure 5b).



Figure 4. A map of areas included in the revitalization programmes in the boundary of Ustka

Legend: *dark red colour* - the area boundary in 2005, *bright red colour* - the area boundary in 2011, *orange colour* - the area boundary in 2016 - fields "e" and "j", *purple colour* - the area boundary of the urban arrangement of Ustka entered into the Register of Historic Monuments.



a)



b)

Figure 5. a) Renovated buildings at Kosynierów street in Ustka; b) Marynarki Polskiej street – the main road in old part of Ustka

Most buildings (about 80%) located in the oldest part of Ustka belonged to the commune. Initially, the revitalization was to include the most valuable 43 buildings (mainly residential), which the Municipal Office contributed in kind to the Ustka Social House Building Association (*pl.*: Usteckie Towarzystwo Budownictwa Społecznego - UTBS). The residents of council buildings were removed to new multi-family buildings erected by UTBS on the grounds which belonged to the commune. UTBS undertook to renovate the abandoned half-timbered houses, or to pull them down to build new ones in their place, maintaining the most important features of the pulled down ones. After the completion of works the buildings were sold on free market (J. Poczobut, p.145-146, 2010).

At the first stage of subsidizing the projects with EU funds, some streets and the oldest part of the Seaside Promenade in Ustka were modernised. The area of the park was developed, routes for pedestrians and cyclists, street lighting and water and sewage systems were built, as well as elements of landscape architecture. Conservation works on the building at Kosynierów 21, and then a conversion to the Baltic Cultural Centre (*pl.*: Bałtyckie Centrum Kultury) were also carried out.

## 2011

Tourism and spa activities remained the biggest chance for the development of Ustka, so in 2011 “Local Revitalization Programme of the Municipal Commune of Ustka” (Local Revitalization Programme..., 2011) was updated. It included the oldest part of the town and the area directly to the east, adjacent to the sea, and the former port located on the west bank of Słupia river (figure 4).

The works done in town at that time turned out to be successful. The project of the revitalization of the Old Town in Ustka, won the first place in the local competition. Ustka was also distinguished in the competition of best public spaces in the Pomeranian Voivodeship in 2011. The project of the redevelopment of the Czerwonych Kosynierów road strip in Ustka took the fifth place.

## 2016

At present—at the next stage of revitalization of the town (Commune Revitalization Programme..., 2016), the revitalization programme included areas situated outside the town centre (figure 4). One of them, conventionally marked *field “e”*, concerns multi-family building development at Grunwaldzka street and the Sport and Recreation Centre (*pl.*: Ośrodek Sportu i Rekreacji - OSiR) facilities. Many critical social problems were noted there. The other, *field “j”*, encompasses the area on the west side of the town—between Darłowska street and Słupia river. There are residential block estates, built in the 70s in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as standalone single family dwellings. The area lacks good public infrastructure (communication, sport, recreation, tourist) and proper site development of public space, such as parks, squares, playgrounds.

The Commune Revitalization Programme for both outlined areas provides for 40 projects (24 in the “e” field, and 16 for the “j” field). It plans for the improvement of the condition of the degraded communication infrastructure, modernisation of selected streets, building of a footbridge over Otocznica river and a Pomeranian Cycling Route of international significance (R10). It also provides for the development of public spaces near the blocks and their adaptation to the needs of the disabled. The Programme plans for the building of the Support Centre for the Revitalization Area Residents (*pl.*: Centrum Wsparcia Mieszkańców z Obszarów Rewitalizacji - CWMOR), as well as the access to and modernisation of the sports and recreation infrastructure (including a football pitch). An important enterprise in the “e” and “j” fields is also the replacement of outdoor lighting with energy-saving lighting, improvement of energy performance and the replacement of the heat sources of individual houses. All the investment works planned in the areas will be combined with social tasks. Integration and activation actions for different groups of residents are planned (including employment support programmes), as well as actions aiming at the reduction of the level of exclusion of the residents in both areas. Social services for families, dependent persons and their carers will be available. The activity of the Centre for Support of Social Economy, Non-governmental Organisations Centre and enterprise generator is also planned.

## 5. Life in a health resort and port town

In the popular Polish health resort and tourist towns like Ustka, in the summer there are many more tourists than in the autumn and winter, when the tourist offer is limited. In Ustka in the winter one can get the impression that the town is abandoned. Contrary to the summer, when the number of inhabitants of the resort increases even several times. That is why the hosts of small health resort towns seek for the ways to expand their offer over the entire year. This is connected with the execution of new investments in order to boost the town's prestige. The lack of proper facilities discourages many patients from visiting the town outside the summer season, which is why it is necessary to adapt the services to the growing needs of the clients. This is not favoured by local autumn-winter climate, either. In this situation, after the end of the summer season, some inhabitants of Ustka move to bigger urban centres in the neighbourhood, e.g. Słupsk, which is 17 km away.

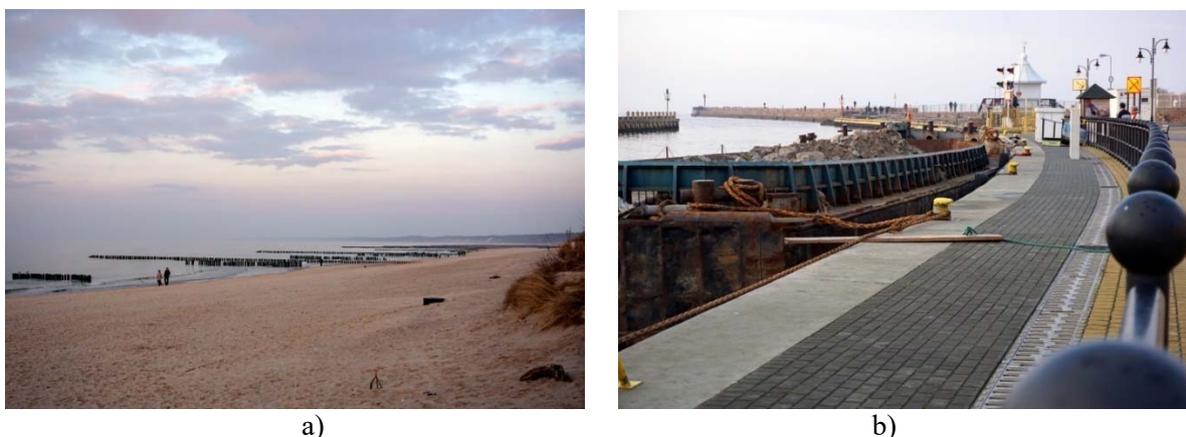


Figure 6. a) Eastern part of the beach in Ustka; b) the seaport in Ustka

According to K. Krośnicka – a researcher of port towns, Polish seaside towns become seasonal and at the same time the district of bigger neighbouring towns (K. Krośnicka, p.55, 2010). In the long run such tourist seasonality is not beneficial for the town development, especially in a balanced context. Unfortunately, in our times, also in Ustka, the development of the port function, fishing and port-related industry does not take place at the same rate as in the housing and service function. K. Krośnicka states that “at present it is the town and its tourist function that activate small ports, and not the other way around” (K. Krośnicka, p.55, 2010).

The port area in Ustka borders directly on the oldest part of the town. Both of these functions are closely related and interact each other. Location of Ustka by the Baltic Sea and the Słupia river, its waterfront situated nearby the oldest part of the city, joined with the spa function and natural values, makes the potential for its spatial and economic development (figures: 6a, 6b). Professor P. Lorens - urban planner, dealing with - among others - issues of revitalization of port cities, claims that “the areas of waterfronts are inseparably linked to the maritime heritage of local communities” (P. Lorens, p. 108, 2013). He emphasized that in the revitalization of the city's waterfronts there are very important issues as: placing commercial ventures there, providing good transport links and universal access to water for recreation, and giving the proper image of revitalized areas (P. Lorens, pp. 110-111, 2013). In Ustka such efforts are taking up (figures: 7a, 7b).

## 6. Conclusions

At present Ustka is experiencing great spatial, social and economic changes. The town has changed a lot, especially for the last fifteen years. Clearly visible is the amount of invested funds (commune, voivodships and EU funds). The standard of public spaces and the aesthetic condition of the most valuable buildings in town significantly exceed the previous one.

The statute of a health resort helps to promote and develop the town. The possibility of mutual support between the tourism and services, including recreation and spa therapy, is invaluable. However, in health resort towns the leading function is not the one connected with treatment. It seems that at present the priority is being given to services connected with tourism and recreation, and the statute of a health resort takes the second place.

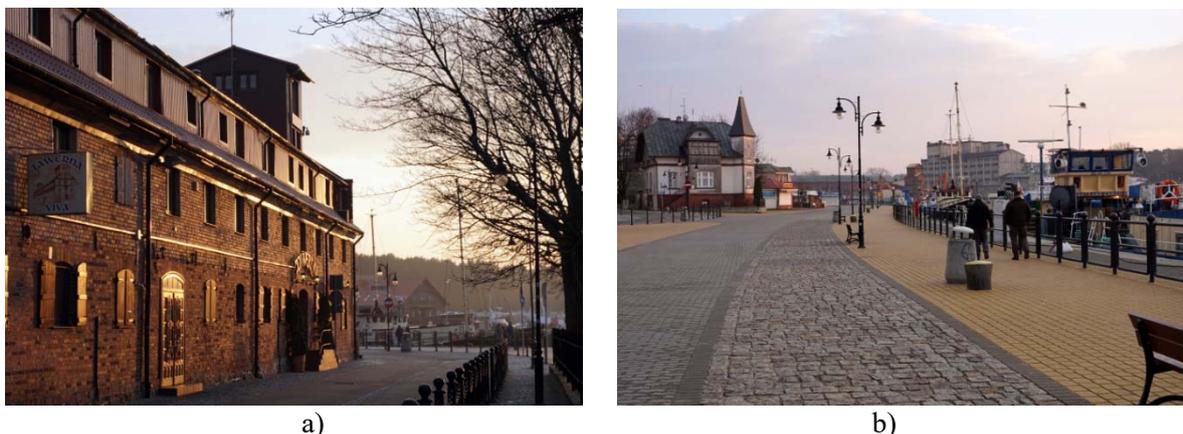


Figure 7. a) The Centre of Creative Activity in an old port granary at Zaruskiego street;  
b) the seaport - waterfront by the Słupia river

Ustka is a good example of a town which did not content with the first stage of revitalization. The continuity of planning its revitalization is maintained. The subsequent stages are consistently carried out in various parts of the town. Both at the first (from 2005) and at the second (from 2011) stage of revitalization of Ustka spatial actions prevailed. At the commenced third stage of the renewal of the town in the outlined "e" and "j" areas (from 2016), a more open and broader strategy was adopted. Apart from spatial and economic actions, social actions - which in terms of a number constitute over 40% of all the works - are planned. It is obvious that new social actions will and must be closely related to investment projects. After the completion of this stage of revitalization it is expected that the town inhabitants will be able to become a more integrated and active community. The new housing infrastructure will provide them with better living conditions, and an expanded educational and recreational offer – with comprehensive and attractive chances for development. The town will become more attractive for tourists. The areas by the river and other consistently developed public spaces will acquire new quality and popularity of use. Let's hope that everything will be successful and this is what will happen.

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