

---

## **A VITAL CITY AND REVITALIZATION PROCESSES**

---

### **1. Introduction**

The modern form and nature of the socioeconomic space of Polish urban centres is characterized by high dynamics of changes. On the one hand, these are growth and development dynamics, which manifest themselves in the establishment of urban areas and an increasing urban density. On the other hand, these are destruction dynamics arising from the winding-up of industrial facilities, migration and depopulation of certain territorial units, as well as the surging spatial chaos. What becomes one of the essential civilization challenges is the processes of restoring vitality of the degraded resources of the development and the areas of dysfunction. The urban centres subject to the revitalization process regain their “vital forces”, new development opportunities and challenges arise. Urban vitality is a set of functional and spatial, social and cultural, as well as economic features the synergy of which creates an added value for a unit. The ongoing process of globalization, in turn, is reflected in spatial and cultural standardization accompanied by the disappearance of the local and regional characteristics of urban areas. The architectural and spatial uniformity of urban centres and the non-existence of effective protection of the cultural heritage result in the specific local nature of a space fading away (Twardzik and Wrana, 2017, p. 11). By definition, the revitalization process is to oppose to these trends and contribute to the preservation of the cultural heritage as well as to the functional use of unoccupied buildings and degraded areas with a view to new urban functions and new jobs (Paszkowski, 2014). Consequently, revitalization becomes a process of renewal rather than repair of territorial units. Hence, a vital city is characterized by organized space, efficient local economy, environmental assets, availability of transport, availability of social and commercial services, specific architectural characteristics, and local cultural identity. The potential for vitality of an urban centre is, therefore, a set of various assets referring to the quality of life, conditions in which enterprises operate, and the natural environment (Twardzik and Wrana, 2017, p. 11).

This paper aims to determine the symptoms and causes conditioning the loss of vitality by Polish cities, and in particular to identify and organize the problems underlying the revitalization process.

---

## 2. The notion and essence as well as objectives of revitalization

The term “revitalization” describes a complex process the progress of which depends on numerous factors. This term best captures both the nature of changes and the essence of the process itself. The Latin word *vitalis* means: of life, able to live, life-giving, worth living, and the prefix *re* means: again, anew, once more (Kumarniecki, 1982, pp. 420, 540). English has three equivalent terms for this notion: revitalization, urban renewal, and urban redevelopment. Their closer semantic analysis allows the first one, revitalization, to be treated as a broader term, encompassing not only urban space (Czaja, 2018, p. 66).

In the discussions on socioeconomic geography (Tab. 1), in particular in the context of industrial wasteland, revitalization is defined as a complex repair process concerning a given degraded urban space, as part of which other than traditional, i.e. new, functions are introduced to the destroyed, “dead”, fabric of a territorial unit (Kaczmarek, 2001, pp. 22-23). The aim of the measures taken in this process is to ensure harmonious and sustainable development through adaptation and proper development of a given area with the changing needs of its inhabitants in mind. The objectives of revitalization include: improvement of the conditions of living and working in an urban centre, restoration of spatial governance, economic recovery of a given area, as well as protection and preservation of old, often heritage, fabrics of a city. As a result of these actions, the functional and spatial structure of the destroyed areas changes (Boryczka, 2019, p. 146).

**Table 1.** Types of revitalization analysed from the viewpoint of socioeconomic geography

Types	Description
Implantation	It consists in introducing new spatial functions and forms to the degraded area. These measures are taken and determined outside the area itself. What is also significant is the assumption that the direct recipients of the new space will be newcomers, while local residents will benefit from the introduced changes only indirectly “through the emergence of new services the users of which they might become, or the coming into existence of a place that is better and more interesting in terms of urban landscape aesthetics.”
Integration	It is similar to implantation revitalization. The fundamental difference is, however, the inclusion to the decision-making process and the transformations themselves of the local community. The effect of the actions taken should be improvement of inhabitants’ lives, creation of new jobs, and possibility to acquire new qualifications by the present residents. In this sense, as is emphasized by specialists, revitalization is not only a process of functional and spatial transformations but also a much broader and more complex socioeconomic process.

Source: own work based on: (Kaczmarek, 2001, p. 27).

Additionally, in light of socioeconomic geography, four dimensions of the revitalization process are exposed (Tab. 2). Each of the dimensions has the features enabling the determination of its significance in the entire transformation process.

**Table 2.** Dimensions of revitalization

Dimensions	Description
Spatial	It emphasizes the visible elements of the revitalization process, including in particular urban composition, new development, and newly created quality of urban space.
Social	It emphasizes that people are an extremely important element of revitalization, since it is them who are both direct recipients of the new space and originators of the process. In the revitalization process, people play a double role in the social dimension: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• on the one hand, they participate in decision-making processes, from planning, to goal determination, to implementation method, to performance (they constitute the so-called external community or revitalization process originators);</li> <li>• on the other hand, these are local residents, who are directly subjected to the effects of the measures taken.</li> </ul>
Economic	It emphasizes that the objective of revitalization is to improve the existing economic and social situation. An element of this process is a partial or complete change of the functional structure. It is a very frequent case that economic activities (e.g. industrial ones) pursued earlier are replaced by modern disciplines from the sector of services, which are readily located in new spaces.
Cultural	It emphasizes that revitalization is a process of adapting the existing urban fabric to the new ongoing needs of residents with the simultaneous preservation of the physical evidence of the past development stage of a city.

Source: own work based on: (Kaczmarek, 2001, pp. 45-49, 51-52).

There are also two principal approaches to the object of revitalization that deserve mentioning. One is people-based initiatives (PBI) (Andersson, 2006, p. 793), defined as actions intended to help people who, as a result of exclusion processes, poverty concentration, and stigmatization of poor districts, cannot compete in the labour market and who will not be able to return to the labour market on their own. The other approach is area-based initiatives (ABI), defined as actions aimed in particular to improve the construction and natural environment of urban crisis areas, competitiveness of the area as a location of enterprises, and quality of residents' lives (Jadach-Sepiolo, 2017, pp. 30-32).

The notion of revitalization, which used to be limited to the renewal of single degraded urban areas, have currently become the basic instrument of the policy of

---

local development, which is oriented towards both physical and social resources of cities. This is because the times when the development of cities was determined by the location of the big industry and large-scale residential areas are gone. Spatial planning has returned to the areas which were developed in the past and have been inhabited for a long time now. The point is to restructure, renew, stabilize, and consolidate them. It is these areas and the local community residing there, who are capable of innovativeness and well-educated, that will decide on the future development of cities, which is understood primarily as qualitative development (Dąbrowski, 2012, p. 28).

### **3. Vitality of a city**

The notion of a vital city might be identified with the capability of an urban centre and its residents of a permanent, sustainable, multidimensional development, where the critical role is played by the use of creativity and innovativeness (Landry, 2000).

Attributes of a vital city include (Wrana, 2018, p. 30):

- development continuity, which is based on multiplied energy and ingenuity of inhabitants;
- wealth of opportunities enabling local entities to pursue their own aspirations at the same time attracting new entities from the environment to an urban centre;
- favourable conditions for the networking of entities, flow of information, idea, joint implementation of projects;
- multifaceted consistency and synergy of entities, functions, spaces;
- a specific “genetic code” enabling the preservation of the values and functions that are crucial for a city;
- capability of generating and controlling creative “mutations” introducing qualitative changes which enable the creation of a new configuration of the key values and functions to an urban centre and its community;
- capability of adapting to the changes occurring in the surroundings;
- minimization of the phenomena of marginalization of social groups and urban spaces.

Such an approach permits the deduction that vitality requires the following to be combined in local development processes: sustainability, creativity, and various aspects of cooperation, the result of which is multidimensional development.

When analyzing vitality of a city against revitalization processes, it is worth indicating the symptoms of loss of vitality (Tab. 4).

**Table 4.** Signs of loss of vitality of a city

Symptoms	Manifestations
Disappearing city-forming activities and functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• declining high-order services</li><li>• low rank of cultural events</li><li>• functional impoverishment of the city centre and districts</li></ul>
Limited activity of residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• low level of entrepreneurial activity</li><li>• low level of social activity</li><li>• decreased sense of responsibility for a city among its residents</li><li>• intensifying entitlement attitudes</li></ul>
Low interest in a city among investors	
Lack of public projects; budget allocation to ad-hoc problems and social problem solving	
Loss of potential regarding social and human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• emigration of human capital</li><li>• unfavourable changes in the age structure</li><li>• decrease in the level of relational capital – low social consistency of a city (ghettos)</li></ul>
Economic decline and its consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• loss of a city's fiscal potential</li><li>• loss of jobs</li></ul>
Degradation of space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• decrease in aesthetics, lack of maintenance and modernization actions</li><li>• degradation of infrastructure</li><li>• ghettoization of space</li></ul>
Loss of real property value	

Source: own work based on: (Twardzik and Wrana, 2017, pp. 11-12).

The decreased level of vitality of an urban centre might be evidenced also by the emergence of burdensome surpluses, i.e.:

- domination of the city centre by financial and business activities;
- relative growth in the significance of residential functions (e.g. a bedroom suburb);
- increase in the level of crime or pathological phenomena.

The existence of the abovementioned signs of loss of vitality might be caused by highly diversified factors and processes (Tab. 5).

**Table 5.** Factors and processes of the loss of vitality by cities

Causes	Manifestations
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• changes in the economic situation and competitive relations on the national or global scale</li> <li>• economic problems of the centres with which a city and its enterprises are tied with special relations</li> <li>• collapse of the dominant economic branch determining the labour market and subcontractor networks</li> <li>• exhaustion of local raw materials</li> </ul>
Transformations of social and human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• frustration and dissatisfaction of inhabitants with the city development process, resulting in migration behaviours</li> <li>• reduced social integration caused by economic and migration factors (immigration and emigration)</li> <li>• low entrepreneurial potential of residents</li> <li>• residents' qualifications inadequate to the needs of the modern economy:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ low or very specialized education of the population, inadequate to needs of the labour market</li> <li>▪ lack of interest in improving and updating qualifications among residents</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exhaustion of the capacity of the natural environment – disproportions between environmental capabilities and the intensity of the development of settlement or economic functions</li> <li>• transformations of water circulation system in certain areas</li> <li>• impact of the natural force majeure: natural disasters or climate changes</li> </ul>
Financial and city management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unsuccessful local government or business investment projects</li> <li>• negligence in planning the development of the environmental dimension</li> <li>• short-term approach to the local policy and strengthening of the current development method without opening to the future</li> <li>• shortage of the skills of quick adaptation to new conditions by enterprises, local government, inhabitants</li> <li>• weakening of the competitive position of a city:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ decrease in the significance of the functions fulfilled by a city</li> <li>▪ quicker development of neighbouring centres</li> </ul> </li> <li>• disproportions between various local functions</li> <li>• loss of an external source of funding</li> </ul>

Source: own work based on: (Twardzik and Wrana, 2017, pp. 12-13).

Building a vital city, when considered in the context of revitalization, requires an approach intending to create new values, introduce radical changes, an innovative look at the potentials held. What is critical for reinforcing the vitality of an urban centre is the interdependent mutually driven development of diverse func-

---

tions, which draws its power from activity and creativity of local entities (Twardzik and Wrana, 2017, p. 13).

## **Conclusion**

From among numerous insightful issues regarding the development of cities, the significance of space transformations and their multi-layer impact deserve noting. In most general terms, it could be said that space quality, in the aesthetic dimension, determines the perception of a territorial unit and is an important indicator of its image. Urban centres with degraded architecture, disturbed spatial governance, visible wasteland, neglected unattractive public spaces cannot be associated with vital cities. However, apart from aesthetics, it is important to create such characteristics in the space of a territorial unit as make it more dynamic, surprising, and intriguing for both visitors and inhabitants. Such an effect is achieved by introducing cultural activities to the public space. It is also one of the directions of revitalization where historical and cultural heritage intertwines with the modern culture. It is also worth opening Polish urban centres to the new bold architecture becoming a testimony of their times to a greater extent. This is how the openness of a city to unconventional ideas and solutions can be manifested. Nevertheless, it is essential to give the spaces of territorial units to local communities. Public spaces should attract inhabitants and, in urban centres, contribute to changing conservative attitudes, which are typical of the societies of the industrial era. This means that space should not be “monumental”; instead, it should be an active element of the urban reality with a high value in use for residents and visitors. Permeation of the real and virtual spaces also need to be noticed. For a large number of territorial unit users, the real space has its value only when it ensures free access to the virtual space. The success in space transformations could be one of significant factors in solving the problem of weakening urban centres and the problem of suburbanization (Wrana, 2018, pp. 47, 48).

A modern city must become a place where local and global values meet, a place concentrating creative potentials, and a space for dialogue and transfer of ideas. It is definitely impossible to outline one universal city development model. The only certain thing is the emergence of new phenomena which will undermine the current development models and pose challenges for the urban policy.