

Revitalization in favour of socially mixed neighbourhoods – the case of “At Scheibler” lofts in Lodz, Poland

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The transition process and economic crisis in 90. in Lodz caused by collapsing of textile industry resulted in bankruptcy of most textile factories located in huge neglected postindustrial areas in the central part of the city. The supply of land from one hand delivered very attractive space for new functions such as housing, services or recreation, but from other hand demanded huge investment to adopt the existing estate for new purposes.

At the same time the number of locations devoted to housing functions declined due to intensive economic development of the city. Additional difficulty appeared because of the fact that the structure of demand for housing has changed in last decade. Economic development caused enrichment of society and resulted in increasing demand for high standard apartments. This situation forced intensive search for the solution that would allow to fulfill the demand for housing and at the same time enable to change the function of postindustrial degraded fabric of the city. The most logic action was to introduce the revitalization program. It was expected that revitalization allow to solve housing problems and at the same time to preserve the heritage of industrial history of the city. It was also the tool for developing complex, integrated and long term programs leading to refurbish and regenerate the particular, the most valuable parts of the city. To make it happen city government initiated the search for external sources of finance due to its limited budget.

The aim of the paper is to present main aspects of revitalization program introduced in “At Scheibler” within the Priest’s Mill area in Lodz. It discusses how the revitalized area influences direct surrounding and weather it causes economic revival of the area. It also relates to social aspects of revitalization process.

The goals of the program were set as follow:

- preventing further physical, social, economic and cultural degradation of urban space
- strengthening economic structure of the city through supporting entrepreneurship and attracting new investment
- improving transportation system
- preserving cultural identity of space and its historical heritage
- improving living quality of housing estate within the area
- improving living conditions of local society
- improving image of the city and enhancing competitiveness of space
- improving environmental conditions within the area
- enhancing attractiveness of public space

The first issue presented is the description of one of the most successful projects accomplished at the Priest's Mill - "At Scheibler's" lofts. "At Scheibler's" is a unique project of the Australian development group Opal Property Developments undertaking a complete revitalization of the historical Karol Scheibler's factory complex dated from the 19th century. The main part of the project was conversion of a huge spinning-mill into a housing estate. Lofts are finished with a high standard. Postindustrial character of the project gives the location a unique atmosphere. Lofts are relatively new concept of housing born in 60. in USA. The Lodz example shows that this type of flat is still attractive both as a high standard living place but also as an investment.

The second issue is the presentation of very important social problem caused by this particular revitalization project – the conflict between local authorities and local society over the authorities' idea of creation socially homogeneous space at the Priest's Mill, especially the area surrounding "At Scheiblers" lofts. To cause that the area around lofts would be perceived as attractive the local authority tended to control the characteristics of tenants through relocating poor individuals and households to social housing situated within the external zone of the city. Such a concept would definitely increase management difficulties in social housing as well as strengthen the process of forming underclass and social exclusion.

The paper concludes with some proposals that has been introduced to resolve the social conflict within the Priest's Mill area. As well as some recommendations concerning further actions that brings degraded fabric of the city up to high standard living place and at the same time improve social cohesion.

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