



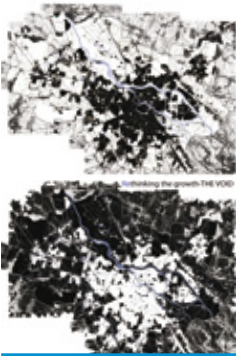
KLAAS JAN BOLHUIS, TAMARA BRAJOVIC, IZABELA GENDEK  
VOLHA MAKHATAY, BARBARA MARCHWICKA, KATALIN MOHACSI

#### INTRODUCTION: WHAT DEFINES WROCLAW?

- > We decided to look at similar middle sized expanding European towns to assist us in defining a future image of the city Wrocław, although Poland is different with still a quarter population living in rural areas, and an economy growing (by 1,7% in 2009, increasing to 3,4%-3,8% in 2010).
- > Wrocław, like the other regional capitals of Poland, is expanding outwards onto green fields even beyond its boundaries, despite its aspiration to harness its physical, economic and human resources fully and efficiently. However, we noticed that expanding the physical fabric without constraints may lead to cracks within the urban fabric. Without a coherent citywide development strategy many areas may not realise their potential. Therefore, we decided not to study the existing city fabric but to focus on what it lacks. We made emptiness the subject of our study.

#### VOIDS IN THE CITY

- > Voids manifest themselves in many different forms in a city. Instead of establishing an exhaustive typology of urban voids, we analysed the voids we had observed. They encompass voids at several layers of abstraction, ranging from physical voids at different scales to social and governance voids. How these voids should be filled in should be subject of public debate.
- > The physical level of voids encompasses material, functional and symbolic aspects of the city, at different local, city and even regional levels. At the smallest scale voids include cracks in pavements which may be filled with different materials. At the local scale they include end walls of buildings left bare by the demolition of adjacent structures. They symbolise 'void' and invite to be filled. Some have been covered with graffiti, some with public art, some with bill boards. Boarded up shops or small spaces to rent are also physical voids which



Rethinking the growth  
THE VOID

result from functional discontinuity. At the scale of the street, missing buildings constitute symbolic meaning and contribute to the physical level of emptiness. These gaps may be highlighted as symbols of the past.

At a larger scale whole blocks may form voids (physical, social aspect). In Wrocław this can be a block destroyed during World War II or a former industrial site no longer in use. Although the latter have physical existence, they constitute barriers in the urban tissue. This scale can have a symbolic meaning which may invite action or rejection. Examples are super-block from socialistic times which symbolise urban planning and architecture reminding socialist realism ideology.

Voids also appear at city structure level. They include abandoned zones, such as post-industrial areas, or voids that cut up the city (e.g. linear barriers created by flooding areas along the river). Social voids are more difficult to distinguish in the urban tissue, than purely physical voids. In Wrocław we noticed two main social voids. 'Things we don't talk about' voids include social dichotomies, differences and problems not being mentioned in public space. Other voids were created through an ongoing process of (involuntary) migration. Places that once belonged to groups or individuals (like Germans, Jews, etc.) are taken over by newcomers like Roma, students etc. These voids are in constant multicultural flux, still not belonging to anybody. Other voids are taken over randomly by newcomers for their convenience. Social voids in the economy create an informal economy attracting illegal immigrants, a process which has also a physical expression.

City management or governance voids result from city council policies of dealing with voids. Wrocław has chosen the easiest way to cope with its voids (mainly public property) by putting them on the free market.



City management  
and governance voids



*Small scale*



*Street level*

*Block level*



*A void we don't talk about*



*City level - industrial voids*



*City scale - blue voids*

**DEALING POSITIVELY WITH VOIDS**

We consider that voids can be dealt with in various ways by rethinking their existence in the city, reusing them, recycling them, leaving them as they are as symbols, highlighting their existence, or promoting a temporal use of them. We consider that a proper system is necessary to elaborate on these voids, rethinking them and shaping them up. This system could be a coherent tool for the future development of the city, seeing the whole city as an organism and using the potential of the existing city structure.

We focused on two examples. Industry related voids are often close to the city centre and well connected. These sites have often a sense of place. Regenerating these voids can take many forms, ranging from lighting to introducing new uses to the sites and refurbished buildings. Blue voids can be reused despite seasonal change of water levels by means of floating decks, temporary structures on the river banks, open air festivals and foot and bicycle paths on dikes.

**GOVERNANCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING**

Proactive and open governance welcoming bottom up ideas from the public which would mobilise its cooperation is needed to implement proposals to put voids back into use. Events like Euro 2012 and Wrocław's application to become European cultural capital in 2016 can be harnessed as catalysts to recover many voids which would be earmarked in a spatial policy.

**FINAL CONCLUSION**

We introduced the theme of urban voids and gave examples on how to shape them. We see an opportunity for a system that will elaborate these voids, rethink them and reshape them. This system will be a coherent tool for the future development of the city, relying on Wrocław as an organism capable of using the potential of its existing city structure. It is time to shape up the void.



*REUSE - industrial voids*



*RETHINK - blue voids*