

Looking for New Ideas of Public Space – Public Space Projects in Gdansk Reinforced by Art Activities

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1 ABSTRACT

Revitalization of public open spaces is a complex enterprise in Poland in terms of the art, cultural and information aspects of this process. Simultaneously the public space should play an important role when building the quality of revitalization programs and the quality of city development. The new art and cultural activities are the revitalization tools, which are also the good examples of bottom up ideas helping to start a process of change in the degraded urban areas.

The art and cultural projects, both in Young City of Gdansk (former shipyard areas) or in the Dolne Miasto (historical, degraded city centre district of Gdansk) shows that it is a real need of implementing such ideas and treating them as an important urban operational tools of the revitalization program.

The Wyspa Progress Foundation and the LAZNIA Center for Contemporary Art are very interesting initiatives which not only enable to transform the public space but also help to bring art into the urban space. The Wyspa Institute of Art is located in the building of the former Basic Shipbuilding School in the Gdansk Shipyard. It has become a home of the Wyspa Progress Foundation, an innovative artistic organization combining the presentation of contemporary art with reflections on the shape of social culture.

LAZNIA Centre for Contemporary Art is an animator of a new artistic project whose aim is to create a permanent collection of artworks in the urban space, called the Outdoor Gallery of the City of Gdansk. It is supposed to act as a stimulus to change the character of the district, where the institution is located. It should join the process of social and architectural transformation of this run-down district of Gdansk, called the Dolne Miasto, cooperating in a long-term revitalization plan.

Both projects (The Wyspa Progress Foundation and the LAZNIA Centre for Contemporary Art) are starting to be the catalyst of change in the revitalization areas of Gdansk. Due to revitalization process the degraded urban structure should be closer to meet the needs of people in their everyday life.

2 THE ROLE OF ART IN A PUBLIC SPACE WHEN CREATING THE REGENERATION PROGRAMME

2.1 Public space as an important element of building the regeneration program

The public space should play an important role when building the quality of revitalization programs and the quality of city development.

The public space and the whole strategy of building public space are a key element of regeneration programs. Building these programs is a multi-dimensional task based on spatial projects as well as on the „soft“ projects related to local community. It is essential that designing the attractive public space for revitalization program is one of the most important factors that decide about its success. The attributes of a good public space like aesthetic and compositional attractiveness should have decisive role when creating city regeneration program (Zuziak p. 28-38).

The mentioned public space could not be only a showroom but should fulfill a further more important role – should be the heart of urban activities, determinant of local identity and a key element of structural conjunctions. Only this kind of space could be important for the local community (the actor of urban regeneration program) and have the significant role in the whole regeneration process.

2.2 Why exactly art in a public space

Speaking about public space it would be essential to understand what is the relationship between the public art initiative and urban regeneration program.

Commonly known examples of the artistic district (South Houston – Soho in New York, Marais in Paris, El Raval in Barcelona) demonstrate how art is important when creating the identity of degraded urban space. These districts attract the artistic bohemia, architects, and designers. The built-up area, former degraded, receives a new architectural value by converting into artist work-rooms, mansard roofs, galleries or museums.

Worldwide there is also the action of implementing the pieces of art in a public space. The actions organized by the Public Art Fund in New York (Manhattan, Rockefeller Center) or creating a permanent collection of art in Potsdamer Platz in Berlin or in Liverpool could be a good representation of it. What is more, Public Art Fund in New York has been committed to working with emerging and established artists to produce innovative exhibitions of contemporary art throughout New York City. By bringing artworks outside the traditional context of museums and galleries, the Public Art Fund provides a unique platform for an unparalleled public encounter with the art of our time.

It should be underlined that art in a public space is also an alternative for art in galleries and is a chance for artists to obtain a mass consumer as well as capture the individuals that do not have contact with art in their everyday life.

The types of public art involved in urban regeneration programs depend very much on the type of regeneration programs. For example Tim Hall and Iain Robertson demonstrate that we can recognize a broad distinction between flagship, or prestige, revitalization projects and communal regeneration projects. These have been summarized by the Policy Studies Institute as:

- contributing to local distinctiveness
- attracting companies and investment
- having a role in cultural tourism
- adding to land values
- creating employment
- increasing the use of open spaces
- reducing wear and tear on buildings and lowering levels of vandalism. (1994,p. 38)

3 PUBLIC SPACE PROJECTS IN GDANSK REINFORCED BY ART ACTIVITIES

3.1 Revitalization of Dolne Miasto in Gdansk through the art

The Dolne Miasto in Gdańsk is a historical, degraded urban district which is located in the close neighborhood of city centre (Głowne Miasto) however isolated. The Dolne Miasto is indicated as a pilot revitalization area due to its high cultural values. Furthermore it is the only part of a historical downtown that was not destroyed during the war. The second important factor is the necessity of immediate renovation activities in this area. The district of Dolne Miasto has got a specific genius loci because of its urban blocks, historical buildings (great examples of architecture dates to XIX century), characteristic public spaces. However the area is degraded and its state is becoming exacerbated. This situation ultimately affects social processes.

The stimulus of change in Dolne Miasto is LAZNIA Centre for Contemporary Art. It is an animator of a new artistic project whose aim is to create a permanent collection of artworks in the urban space, called the Outdoor Gallery of the City of Gdansk. The collection of the Gallery is supposed to be created by years and the works of arts are chosen in the international competitions. The important works which have already appeared in Dolne Miasto are: LKW Gallery by Daniel Milohnic and Alexander Rijkers from Germany, Staging Anonymous by Dominik Lejman, Invisible Gate by Front Studio from New York or Untitled by Esther Stocker from Austria.

The LKW Gallery by Daniel Milohnic and Alexander Rijkers is the lorry in a viaduct, a symbolic representation of mental barrier between Dolne Miasto and the rest of the city. Due to its construction it is easy accessible and simultaneously it is a place where workshops for children, exhibitions, concerts are being held. As authors say the LKW Gallery shall help to build a passage at Szopy-road, between Dolne Miasto area and the centre in order to integrate the district into the city of Gdansk. Furthermore the passage shall be an impulse for further artistic work and creation. The non-area under the bridge is transformed into a place of communication.

In December 2009 a new installation called the Invisible Gate design by Front Studio from New York won the competition. This is an urban, monumental project that has got influence on a city scale. Moreover the

Invisible Gate is characterized by a wide symbolic meaning thanks to the form of mirrors, reflections and pictures of architecture, people and river giving a wide range of interpretations.

The Outdoor Gallery of the City of Gdansk is an important and necessary element of the revitalization of the Dolne Miasto and plays a great role in eliminating social problems - through the art. Competitions of the Outside Gallery of the City of Gdańsk are a part of actions of the artistic practice as well as they are creating social behavior. The project is the part of the wider program which helps to improve living conditions in the housing areas. It also enables to change a character of the district and helps to create a unique collection of art in the urban space.



Fig. 1: The Invisible Gate design by Front Studio from New York. Photo by Anna Szynalewska

3.2 When the art becomes too difficult

Broadly promoted strategy of revitalization of Dolne Miasto through art is one of the most important issues related to LAZNIA activities. When presenting the program for 2010 there were a lot extreme opinions about the entire project: from the full of hope beliefs that Dolne Miasto will be a social laboratory to the very critical ones.

What is even more interested the inhabitants itself do not pay so much attention to the project.

When reported by Weronika Korbal, the respondents were rather insensible to theatrical character of installation by Dominik Lejman or other works presented by The Outdoor Gallery.

On the other hand the workshops for children organized by LAZNIA (e.g. architecture for the youngest or workshops with Front Studio) were very much approved by the local community.

This example shows that the art in public space, as a revitalization tool, will have a proper meaning only then when it will involve the local community.

3.3 The Wyspa Progress Foundation on the post- shipyard areas

The Gdansk Shipyard is a significant place, simultaneously symbolic in a mass memory of polish people. It is a place of freedom and place of birth of Solidarity in 1980 as well as the place of difficult experiences of transformations. In 1990 when the shipyard was adjudged bankrupt the city decided that on the post-shipyard areas will be a new city centre district called Young City of Gdansk. To start a process of change and revitalization of the area the artists were asked to liven up the space. The aim was to create the cultural space open for the city.



Fig. 2 : The Wyspa Progress Foundation. Photo by: Joanna Kurkowska

In 2004 the Wyspa Progress Foundation was founded by Grzegorz Klaman and Aneta Szyłak in the building of the former Basic Shipbuilding School in the Gdansk Shipyard.

The Wyspa Progress Foundation is an innovative artistic organization combining the presentation of contemporary art with reflections on the shape of social culture. There is a place for workshops, library, club and exhibition. The artistic actions and exhibitions can be also found in the open space of Gdansk Shipyard.



Fig.3 : The Young City of Gdansk and the Wyspa Progress Foundation (IS WYSPA). Source: www.mlodemiasto.pl

But first of all the Wyspa Progress Foundation is a bottom up idea helping to start a process of change in the degraded urban area. However this process is not easy. The field researches led by Professor Joanna Tokarska Bakir (2008) show the differences in understanding the space of transformed shipyard by the social groups. For the artist this space is connected with symbols, history and the magic of post-industrial area. In the contrary the former shipyard workers emphasize the economical and the political context. In the same time both groups are afraid of the new investments and criticize the commercialization of the Young City project.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Public art can help alleviate a wide range of urban and social problems. In the same time it can be a good revitalization tool only then when it will involve the local community in the process of change. Both Gdansk' projects (The Wyspa Progress Foundation and the LAZANIA Centre for Contemporary Art) shows that revitalization process can be started due to art . It is also important that this kind of initiatives should have the wider context as well as they should reflect the processes of revitalization of the degraded urban substance.

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