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CONCEPT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF OŚWIĘCIM THROUGH AN OFFERING OF INCREASING CULTURAL AND UTILITARIAN QUALITIES

KONCEPCJA ROZWOJU MIASTA OŚWIĘCIM POPRZEZ OFERTĘ WZROSTU WALORÓW KULTUROWYCH, UŻYTKOWYCH

Abstract

The author discusses the city of Oświęcim in terms of the abovementioned aspects, trying to justify that the city of Oświęcim is following the path of development. There are many issues which cover urban renewal through offering an increase of quality: – an improvement of the quality of the public space within a city; the regeneration and modernisation of buildings and technical infrastructure within its Old Town area; – increasing the rest, recreation and tourism offering of the city in areas along the Sola River [16]; – uphold the identity and culture of the area; – use the creative potential that supports economic growth, including the creation of new employment opportunities, creating conditions for new economic investment. Reinforcing the intellectual capital of the city; – use the potential that is Oświęcim's location at the crossing of transit routes of national and voivodship-level significance.

Keywords: town development, identity and attractiveness of places, offering of an increase in cultural and utilitarian qualities, functional and utilitarian diversity

Streszczenie

Autorka omawia miasto Oświęcim pod kątem aspektów, starając się uzasadnić, iż Oświęcim podąża drogą rozwoju. Jest wiele zagadnień, które obejmują odnowę miejską poprzez ofertę wzrostu walorów: – poprawa jakości przestrzeni publicznej w mieście; rewitalizacja i modernizacja budynków i infrastruktury technicznej, na terenie Starówki; – zwiększenie oferty rekreacyjno-wypoczynkowej i turystycznej miasta na terenach wzdłuż rzeki Soły; – podtrzymywanie tożsamości i kultury miejsca; – wykorzystanie potencjału kreatywnego, który sprzyja rozwojowi gospodarstwu, w tym doprowadza do tworzenia miejsc pracy, tworzenia warunków dla nowych inwestycji gospodarczych, wzmocnienia kapitału intelektualnego miasta; – wykorzystanie potencjału, jakim jest położenie Oświęcimia na skrzyżowaniu tranzytowych ciągów komunikacyjnych o znaczeniu krajowym i wojewódzkim.

Słowa kluczowe: rozwój miasteczek, tożsamość i atrakcyjność miejsc, oferta wzrostu walorów kulturowo-użytkowych, różnorodność funkcjonalno-użytkowa

1. Introduction

The spatial structure of the city of Oświęcim¹ has been determined by the development of the Oświęcim Chemical Plant, around which multi-family buildings were being built en-masse. Funds were not being allocated towards the Old Town area during this time.

The Old Town remained poorly funded, the results of which are visible to this day. This uneven development has caused a series of problems of a social, economic and environmental nature. These include: the process of the ageing of the population, a high level of migration, an insufficient development of businesses.

The tragic heritage of the Auschwitz-Birkenau former German concentration camp has a very significant impact on the image of the city. The historical heritage of the city remains forgotten in its shadow.

The uneven urban development of the city and the phenomenon of its depopulation and sprawl have been caused by a crisis of urban space and by a crisis of public space as well [12]. It is associated with numerous processes, as a result of which the city and its fragments undergo cultural, economic, social, technical and environmental degradation. Significant issues focused around the improvement of the city's image include: eliminating areas suffering from urban decay, with a low quality of life and housing, as well as a broad communisation of this process, directed towards residents, entrepreneurs and tourists.

The qualities of a city that is well-suited for habitation and that teems with life that are of key importance include interventions in urban space which facilitate an increase of cultural and utilitarian qualities.

According to the assumptions of the Heritage and Leisure Industries Strategic Programme, a part of the Lesser Poland Voivodship development policy, one of the key elements of social and economic renewal in Oświęcim is the implementation of the Oświęcimska Przestrzeń Spotkań project (Oświęcim Meeting Space in English - transl. note, a project indicated as a part of Action 1.3 Comprehensive social and economic renewal programmes and the shaping of space)². A city that teems with life is a city that is filled with diversity and life, thanks to projects that lead to an increase in the attractiveness of places that are essential to

¹ Oświęcim is a small city with a population of 38,972, of which 52,5% are women and 47,5% are men. In the years 2002–2016 the number of residents fell by 6,7%. The average age of the residents is 43,3 and is higher than the average age of the residents of the Lesser Poland Voivodship, in addition to being slightly higher than the average age of the inhabitants of Poland overall.

The population dynamics index, which is the relationship between the number of live births and the number of deaths is 0,98 and is considerably lower than the average for the Voivodship and comparable to the population dynamics index for the entire country. 58,9% of the residents of Oświęcim are in working age, 16% are in pre-working age and 25,1% are in post-working age. The average age of residents is 43,4, including 45,5 for women and 41,0 for men. In Oświęcim there are 314 employed persons per 1000 inhabitants. This is a significantly higher number than the value for the Lesser Poland Voivodship and considerably more than in Poland. 52,0% of all employed are women, and 48,0% are men. See [17] "Oświęcim » mapy, nieruchomości, GUS, szkoły, kody pocztowe..."

² This project is understood as a tool making it possible to overcome the key development problems of the city, among which the following are pointed to: the spatial structure of the city determined by the development of large communities, Programme of the Regeneration of the City of Oświęcim for the years 2015–2025. See [18, p. 11].

a city. Improving the quality of life and a diverse use of space ensure residents and visitors different experiences, impressions and sensations. The climate of a city is also conducive to all manners of technological and economic innovations. It promotes artistic and cultural activity.

The project that will improve the image of the city will affect the increase of its attractiveness and covers the carrying out of a project through developing urban space and establishing an infrastructure that creates bridges that lead from the tragic history of this place to the contemporary life of the city. The project is located along the axis from the Place of Remembrance and along the Sola River to the Old Town and centre of Oświęcim. The leading functions of the structure will include meeting spaces: for people, cultures, experiences and thoughts, which are to be implemented by such functions like: education through history, tourism traffic services and opening it up to the city, cultural and educational projects as well as contact with nature.

The planned project features comprehensive urban renewal, encompassing the urban renewal of the historical part of the city with a focus on the city's diversity in tourism-related aspects.

Its main goals are:

- ▶ improving the quality of the public space, particularly that of the city centre and that of a friendly urban space which makes it possible to improve the quality of life of residents and visitors - both tourists and entrepreneurs;
- ▶ making use of the potential of the areas along the Sola River;
- ▶ establishing a meeting space of a symbolic, educational, cultural and recreational character along the axis between the Place of Remembrance and the Old Town, whose goal will be to link the past with the future;
- ▶ making use of the potential that is Oświęcim's location at the crossing of transit circulation routes of national and voivodship-level significance.

The quality of public spaces is a problem that is key in towns that are on the path to development. Their high quality causes residents, as well as other current and future users, including tourists and entrepreneurs, to become more interested in them.

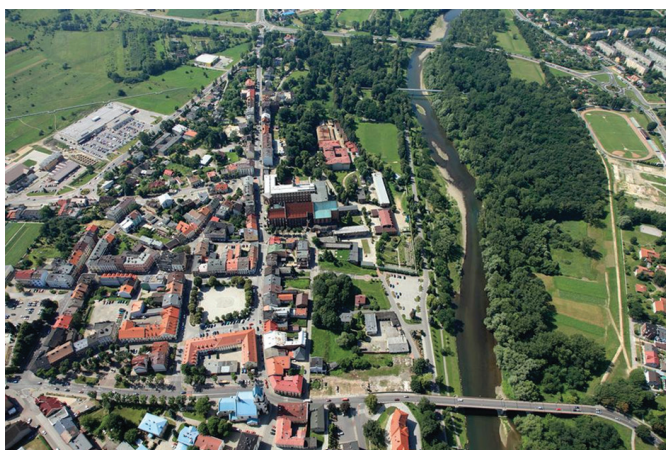


Fig. 1. Oświęcim – the Old Town as seen from a birds-eye view: Oświęcim City Hall | Oświęcim – a City of Peace, Oświęcim City Hall | Oświęcim – a City of Peace 1000 x 666 Image search (source: [19])

2. Improving the quality of public spaces. The urban regeneration of the old town and riverside areas³



Fig. 2. Oświęcim – Old Town – panorama (source: [20])

Oświęcim is an old town, with a tradition going back 800 years. Its urban layout and the historical sites of its Old Town section are a monument to history (Fig. 1, 2). One consequence of this situation are difficulties with access to individual public spaces, public services, as well as the necessity of significant costs associated with the development of public infrastructure. The Old Town is characterised by a poor technical condition of buildings and was characterised by a poor state of technical infrastructure up until the time of the Old Town becomes renovated. This state of affairs is the result of an uneven development of the city, as well as the age and construction technology of the buildings.

In the last couple of years the Old Town was being subjected to a gradual modernisation. Renovation work was performed on the Piast Castle and the Castle Hill, where a museum was established. Kościelna Street along with ks. Skarbek Square in the area of the Jewish Centre and the Synagogue were redeveloped and modernised, Bulwary Street was modernised as well, along with the parking lot adjacent to this street. An urban regeneration of the Main Market Square along with its accompanying infrastructure, which was preceded by ownership disputes regarding the surface of the Main Market Square, was performed in recent years (Fig. 3, 4).

All of the interventions that were performed in the area of the Old Town affect the quality of life and housing within it, as well as the quality of its public space, so that it can teem with life⁴. The appearance of public spaces: streets and squares, tells much about the city. People feel safe in friendly and well-kept places⁵ and are eager to spend their time there, returning to them often.

³ The area of the Old Town constitutes the historical city centre, which is located on the right bank of the Sola River. The area includes the Oświęcim historical old town along with the surrounding small streets. It is an area of around 68,27 ha, which includes the areas of the Old Town, the Boulevards, the Fika housing estate near Górnickiego Street, as well as the zone between Kracickiego and Fryderyka Chopina streets. The area of the Old Town is inhabited by 2018 people, see [18, p. 61].

⁴ Attractiveness – the quality of something, which through its merits, causes the interest of others. Great Polish language dictionary [21].

⁵ It is estimated that 768 crimes were perpetrated in Oświęcim in the year 2016. This means that for every 1000 inhabitants 19,68 crimes were registered. This is a value that is lower than the one for the Lesser Poland Voivodship and comparable to the average for Poland overall.

The effective management of “urban resources” by municipal governments counteracts and limits the development of negative phenomena: urban decay, the decapitalisation of buildings, depopulation and deurbanisation. The upholding of cultural values and identity has the purpose of engraining a feeling of belonging to, as well as of ties with the urban community in the conscious of the residents. It is a form of a counterweight to the processes of globalisation that are visible in cities.



Fig. 3, 4. A view of the modernised Main Market Square in Oświęcim (photo by K. Paprzyca, 2016)

Thanks to the investment meant to improve the quality of public spaces that were made, the Old Town of Oświęcim has become a hallmark of the city, a place where the most important cultural events are cyclically held (Fig. 5–8).



Fig. 5–8. Cultural events on the surface of the Main Market Square of Oświęcim (source: [22])

The area of the Old Town features mixed-use residential and commercial forms of use. Among residential buildings, as many as 41 were built before the year 1945, while 12 were built in the years 1946–1989. The average number of people inhabiting an apartment in the years 2010–2015 was characterised by a downward trend [18, p. 67].

The age of the buildings of the Old Town leads to the necessity of carrying out renovation, redevelopment, modernisation and replacement works associated with the technical condition of the buildings and their installations (Fig. 9–14).



Fig. 9. Oświęcim. A vandalised corner townhouse near Klasztorna Street, as well as an abandoned building near the Small Market Square (photo by K. Paprzyca, 2013)



Fig.10. Oświęcim. Renovated corner townhouse on the corner of Klasztorna Street and the Small Market Square (photo by K. Paprzyca, 2015) (source: [23])



Fig. 11, 12. Townhouse at the Small Market Square in the year 2014 and the year 2017 (photo by K. Paprzyca, 2014, 2017)



Fig. 13, 14. Townhouse on the corner of Sienkiewicza and Mickiewicza streets in the year 2014 and 2017
(photo by K. Paprzyca, 2014, 2017)

3. Upholding the identity and culture of a place. Social activation, building social capital in the area of the Old Town and its vicinity

Oświęcim, similarly to many other small and medium-sized cities, is being affected by problems associated with depopulation and the ageing of the local community. The first of these problems involves migration, which is local and is associated with the city being affected by urban sprawl. Oświęcim has a limited amount of buildable areas, including those assigned for residential buildings, which leads to residents often searching for plots outside of its borders. Thus the process of the ageing of society within the city is linked with suburbanisation.

The municipal authorities are trying to prevent this problem through various efforts. In the area of the Old Town we can observe a tendency to develop “empty townhouses” that do not have any known owners (Fig. 9–14). The following vandalised townhouses can serve as an example: the townhouse on the corner of Klasztorna Street and the Small Market Square, as well as the one on the corner of Sienkiewicza and Mickiewicza streets. The renovation, demolition and modernisation work was carried out by Towarzystwo Budownictwa Społecznego (Fig. 9, 10, 14, 15 – townhouse on the corner of Sienkiewicza and Mickiewicza streets) [23].

The area of the Old Town is inhabited by 2018 people, which constitutes 5,12% of the overall population of the city. The population structure is characterised by a decreasing number of people in pre-working and working age. This tendency has been stable since 2010. At the same time the amount of people past working age is increasing, which is proof of the ageing of the city’s residents [18, p. 63].

This area shows the highest possible exceeding of the values of indicators associated with reported crimes and offences in relation to the same data presented for the remaining parts of the city (it is over twice as high in comparison to the rest of the city). Taking into account the number of residents of the area, we can state that it is a situation that points to a very high grouping of pathological behaviour and criminal activity. The intensity of the phenomenon of unemployment is also higher than the average for Oświęcim and points to a high scale of the problem. Municipal efforts associated with the development of abandoned townhouses by TBS in the area of the Old Town will positively affect the population structure of the people who inhabit this area.

4. Expanding the rest, recreation, cultural and tourism-related offering of the city in the areas along the Soła River

Access to green areas that offer rest and recreation has considerable influence on the quality of life within a city. Oświęcim is characterised by a high amount of greenery which is present in various forms: parks, belts that accompany vehicular circulation routes, as well as a number of recreational areas, for instance the boulevards on the Soła River (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15. The development of the area along the Soła River (photo by K. Paprzyca, 2015)

The municipal government's plan of action is directed at the activation of the area of the Old Town, along with the recreational areas along the Soła River. The development of the urban space in such a manner that tourist traffic, which is currently mainly concentrated at the Auschwitz Museum, will reach the Oświęcim Old Town to a greater degree, is an important aspect. Tourists will be able to visit its historical sites and pleasantly spend their time. The plan is associated with the establishment of a space that has a symbolic, educational and cultural character along the axis that leads from the Place of Remembrance to the Old Town, so that it can affect the diversification of the attractiveness of the city in terms of tourism. The area will undergo urban regeneration to serve the needs of the public, in addition to activation through making it "attractive" to visitors – tourists. The functional and utilitarian diversity, which the Old Town is meant to be characterised by, will lead to an increase of the attractiveness of the area.

The Old Town is a key part of the city from the point of view of the possibilities of developing tourism, especially in terms of the leisure industry. The amount of tourists that visits the National Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum in Oświęcim is increasing (2015 – 1,7 million), which provides the opportunity for the area around the Soła River to become an eagerly visited place. Attracting tourists to the Old Town can be performed through the Bridge of Ghosts designed by Jarosław Kozakiewicz [24], which is meant to be built in the future. It depicts the link between the Auschwitz camp, which has become a symbol of remembrance, and the city of Oświęcim, which symbolises everyday life [25] (Fig. 16).

The design is in line with the programme of the development of the areas along the Soła River in connection with the Old Town, called the Oświęcim Meeting Space [26], which is meant to serve residents and tourists visiting the National Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum.

Another project associated with dialogue above cultural and state boundaries that this meant to build peaceful relations that is highly significant to the City of Oświęcim is the multicultural Oświęcim Life Festival, which attracts crowds of people of all ages every year. Up to this point the festival attracted world-famous performers; Elton John (2016), Queen

and Adam Lambert (2016), Eric Clapton (2014), Soundgarden (2014), Jesse Ware, UB40, Sting (2013) and Peter Gabriel (2012) (Fig.17) [27].



Fig. 16. Bridge of Ghosts | Histories of Oświęcim (source: [24])



Fig. 17. Life Festival (source: [27])

Utilising the historical and cultural potential of the city to increase tourist traffic requires the allocation of resources in development. The Hampton by Hilton Hotel is being built near the entryway to the Old Town, near the Piast Castle. (Fig. 18, 19). It is to house 40 thousand guests per year. The building is being built at the site of the no-longer existing townhouse and the Jakub Habercfeld Vodka and Liquors Factory. “This is going to be the first such building in the centre – Marcin Susuł from the Oświęcim-based company Susuł&Strama Architekci, which is responsible for the design of the building, told “Gazeta Krakowska”. The hotel is



Fig. 18, 19. Entryway to the Oświęcim Old Town, a view of the Hilton Hotel being built (photo by K. Paprzyca, 2018)

not simply meant to expand the accommodation offering – the developer is hoping that the building will lead to increasing the liveliness of this part of the Old Town, which has slightly decreased in attractiveness in recent years. The modern hotel is not only meant to generate greater traffic in the entire region of the city, but mainly to attract additional developers” [28].

5. Conclusions

In order for cities to develop, creating an image of a place with a rich offering of cultural, utilitarian and aesthetic qualities is necessary. This offering should be subjected to a constant valorisation. The functioning of a city is a living organism that is subjected to transformation.

The offering of the increase of the cultural and utilitarian qualities of the city of Oświęcim is a form of an intervention into urban space. It is meant to improve the image of the city, making it more attractive to residents, tourists and entrepreneurs. It positively affects transformation processes, including spatial, economic and social ones.

It includes urban renewal through:

- ▶ improving the quality of the public space within the city, as well as the regeneration and modernisation of buildings and technical infrastructure in the area of the Old Town;
- ▶ expanding the rest, recreation and tourism-related offering of the city along the Soła River;
- ▶ creating a meeting space of a symbolic, educational, cultural and recreational character along the axis between the Place of Remembrance and the Old Town, whose goal will be to connect the past with the future;
- ▶ upholding the identity and culture of the place.

The concept of the development of the city of Oświęcim through an offering of the increasing of cultural and utilitarian qualities is attractive. This can be proven by examining appropriate indices: the changing number of residents, the number of visitors and the level of the residents’ income, the level of property prices and capital invested in this sector. Over the past year the city has advanced in the “Forbes” ranking, moving from eighth to third position. “The greatest number of new projects is being built on plots belonging to Synthos (the former Dwory Chemical Company), which today function as a sort of industrial cluster. Around a dozen companies have built their buildings here and two additional ones are building their factories: IPB from Italy (a metal pressing plant) and Sofir (press and production line renovation). Synthos offers industrial areas with full access to building services, located alongside access roads, with a combined surface area of 100 hectares. In Oświęcim new companies are also developing in the 45 hectare Municipal Economic Activity Zone, as well as at the Oświęcim Entrepreneurship Incubator. Over 50 companies have decided to place their buildings there. The zone is located on the outskirts of Oświęcim, near road no. 44 (Tychy-Zator-Skawina-Kraków), which is a bypass for its centre. The further development of Oświęcim will be made possible by the recently started expansion of the urban zone (its part is covered by privileges of the special economic zone). The project will cost 16,4 million PLN, of which 9 million will be given to city from the Lesser Poland Regional Operational Programme. Most attractive cities for business – Forbes” [29].

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