

TRANSFORMING A BROWNFIELD SITE INTO A “HART OF THE TOWN” – URBAN DESIGN CHALLENGES – A CASE STUDY OF GOLENIÓW

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Abstract

While there are several successful examples of successfully realized urban regeneration in larger Polish cities, as well as several ongoing projects, these processes have just started in towns. The paper presents the authors experiences with a design concept for regeneration of a 5 ha brownfield site in Goleniów, northern Poland. The authors winning competition entry was selected for proposing the best urban structure interwoven with the surroundings, and a vision of transforming the neglected site into a lively and vibrant “heart of the city” – a multi functional neighborhood combining housing, retail, entertainment and public spaces. One of the basic principles was to connect two parts of the site boundary with a pedestrian bridge which would become an iconic and unique spatial structure over the Ina river, which would allow to create a sequence of attractive public spaces: a boulevard along the Ina river, two public squares, green lanes, pedestrian zones, parking spaces. The initial design was the beginning of the masterplanning process, which includes various ways of public participation, stakeholder discussions, detailing variants and options of urban structure and design codes.

Streszczenie

Podczas gdy w większych Polskich miastach mamy już szereg sukcesów w rewitalizacji zdegradowanych przestrzeni miejskich i wiele trwających, obiecujących procesów rewitalizacji zdegradowanych terenów przemysłowych w małych miastach problematyka rewitalizacji w zasadzie dopiero się rozpoczyna. W artykule zaprezentowano doświadczenia autorów z koncepcyjnym projektem zagospodarowania i rewitalizacji zdegradowanego terenu o powierzchni ok. 5 ha, zlokalizowanego w śródmieściu Goleniowa (woj. Zachodniopomorskie). Autorzy uzyskali pierwszą nagrodę w konkursie ideowym na zagospodarowanie obszaru jako tzw. „serca miasta” – wielofunkcyjnej dzielnicy mieszkaniowo-usługowej z nowo kształtowanymi przestrzeniami publicznymi, a następnie kontynuowali prace w ramach uszczegółowionego opracowania pokonkursowego, z uwzględnieniem uwag sądu konkursowego, władz miasta, oraz wyników prowadzonych na kilka sposobów konsultacji społecznych (wystawa, debaty, prezentacje w mediach, dyskusje online). Dalsze etapy opracowania obejmują weryfikację rozwiązań konkursowych, dopracowanie proponowanej struktury zespołu urbanistycznego a także wytyczne do kształtowania zabudowy i przestrzeni publicznych.

Keywords: Urban design; Urban regeneration; Urban core; New Neighborhood; Town; Masterplan; Public participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Regeneration of derelict brownfield sites and incorporating them within the surrounding urban fabric context is one of the main issues of contemporary urban design. The issue is especially important nowadays in Poland, as several urban sites have been abandoned,

and are a challenge and opportunity in urban development. While there are several successful examples of ongoing regenerations in larger cities, these processes have just started in towns. The paper presents the authors experiences with a design concept for the regeneration of a brownfield site in Goleniów, north-

ern Poland. The winning competition entry was selected for proposing the best urban structure interwoven with the surroundings, and a vision of transforming the neglected site into a lively and vibrant “heart of the city” – a multi functional neighborhood combining housing, retail, entertainment and public spaces. The initial design was the beginning of the masterplanning process, which includes various ways of public participation, stakeholder discussions, detailing variants and options of urban structure and design codes.

2. THE NEED OF URBAN REGENERATION IN POLAND

Cities in Poland are still in great need for comprehensive urban regeneration. After the change of the political system in 1989, government policy and politics have been entirely dominated by and concentrated on economic and social problems, and not favorable to the whole sphere of spatial planning and space management. As one of the urban planners put it in the late nineties: *The planning agenda and planning issues have almost disappeared from the government's interests and most government officials see them as a drain on the economy.* The obligation of preparing the plans has been seen as a necessity and duty, and not on opportunity for development.

Since the change of the political system in 1989 several urban areas are in bad shape, and there are several brownfield sites, left over after running down of heavy industry. There is a growing need for housing and revitalization of the communist type of prefabricated housing estates. While there has been quite a lot of new developments in the big cities, these has been mainly greenfield development, revitalization of historic centers and infrastructure works. Very much still needs to be done in terms of revitalizing existing, run down urban areas, especially in smaller towns. While several sites have been subject to debates, competitions and consultations, only recently urban planning and design have become a real issue in the political agenda. Joining the EU and the possibility of acquiring funding targeted for urban development and regeneration projects has changed the situation, and currently the policy of many local authorities – especially medium sized cities and towns - is much more rational and spatial planning-oriented.

At the turn of the 21st century there are several regeneration experiences. Some key sites in large cities have been regenerated, such as downtowns and neighborhoods (Kazimierz in Kraków). There are

several ongoing brownfield sites regeneration processes, which are currently on different stages of planning, design or construction [1]. Recent experiences of urban regeneration in Polish cities show, that successful development happened in those places, where several regeneration factors coexisted, such as location within the city, relation to the neighboring areas, existing sites structure, transportation links, etc. An extra value of the success stories is related to heritage and historic values, such as the regeneration of Kazimierz in Kraków (Jewish heritage) or the Young City in Gdańsk (key waterfront location combined with the narrative of the shipyard where “Solidarity” originated). There have been some examples of successful regeneration programs in smaller towns; e.g. Żyrardow – an industrial town near Warsaw – program aims at renovation of the 19th century industrial complex, create art and cultural centers, and make the town a tourist weekend destination from Warsaw. However, generally derelict sites in smaller towns seem to have had less potential than those in cities, and their processes of regeneration are on an earlier stage, or – in many cases – has not yet started.

3. THE CITY OF GOLENIÓW

The historical beginnings of the city date back to 10th century – at that time a settlement was built next to Ina River. In 1268 Goleniów was distinguished with city rights, and in 1368 became a member of the Hanseatic League. XIVth and XVth century were the time of prosperity in the city. After World War II over 70% of the city was destroyed. Till nowadays only a few buildings have remained untouched with their historical style (for example Wolińska Gate [Fig. 1]). Today most of the buildings have modern post-war origins [Fig. 1, 2] [10].

Goleniów is a city which covers 12 500 square kilometers with over 22 thousands inhabitants. Goleniów is one of the largest cities in Zachodniopomorskie Province, located 22 km from Szczecin – important seaport in the west part of Polish coast. Goleniów has a strategic location: it is situated very close to Polish-German border with relatively good connections and also there is a Szczecin-Goleniów Airport located on the northern outskirts of the city with over 300 thousands passengers annually. Another important aspect of the future growth of Goleniów is the Industrial Park with Special Economic Zone. Since 2003 over 35 companies have invested in the Park and it is still growing [2].



Figure 1.
Wolińska Gate – historical monuments next to modern post-war buildings in the city centre of Goleniów; photo by authors



Figure 2.
Open air exhibition in the city centre - modern post-war buildings in background; photo by authors

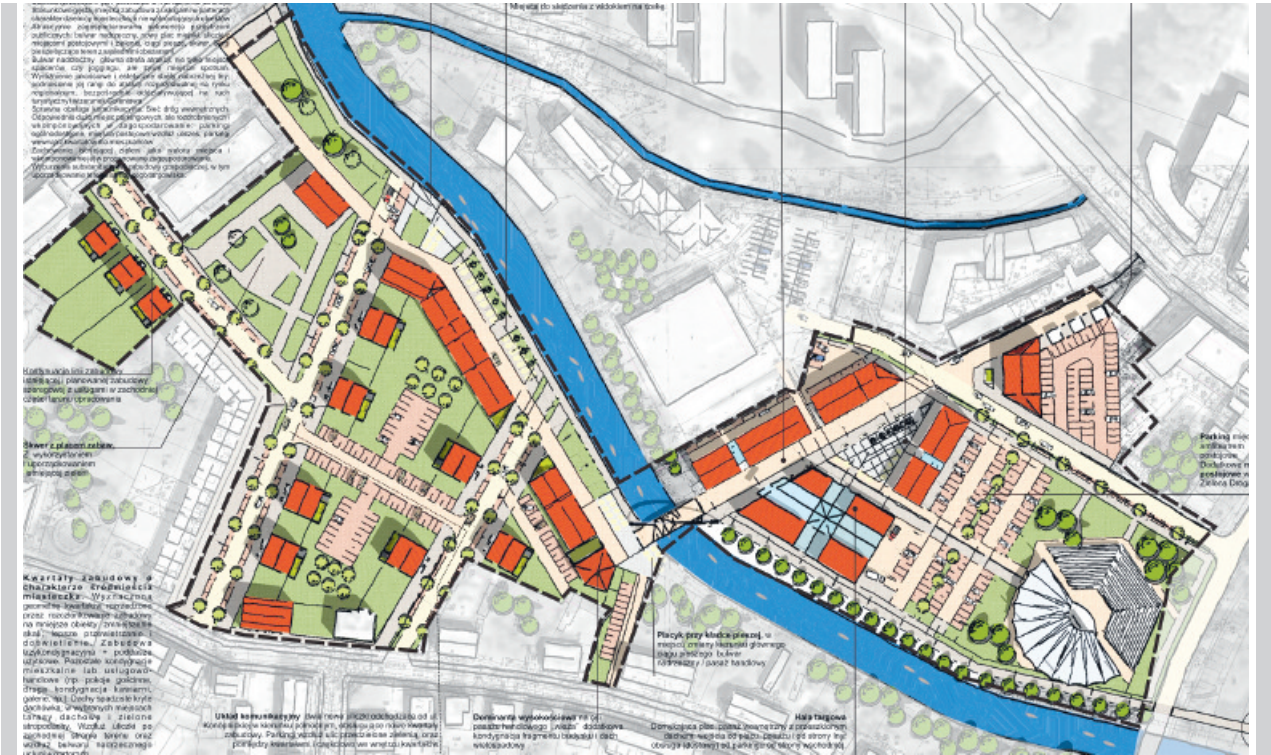


Figure 3. Masterplan – winning entry; drawing by authors



Figure 4. Aerial view – winning entry; drawing by authors



Figure 5.
Substandard market stalls (Site A) – view towards Zielona Droga street, photo by authors

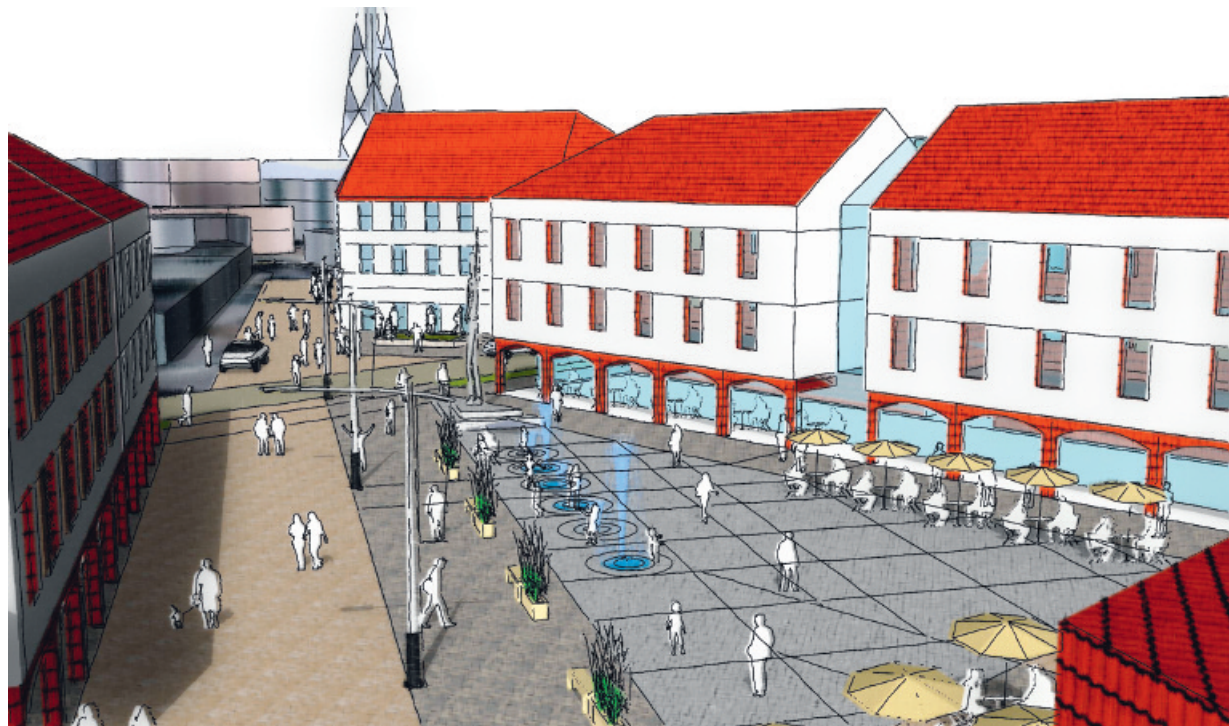


Figure 6.
Design proposal for regeneration of the site – perspective view towards Zielona Droga Street, triangle shaped public square; drawing by authors

4. URBAN DESIGN COMPETITION FOR “THE HEART OF THE CITY OF GOLENIÓW”, RESEARCH ON SITE

In February 2009 the City Council of Goleniów announced open urban design competition for proposals of the new city centre called “The heart of the city” [3]. The site boundary of the competition consists of two parts A and B connected together in one place over the Ina river. Research on site was conducted. Following methods were used: observation, interview, review of plans, documents, historical issues etc. For observation purposes qualitative and quantitative indicators such as: number of people in different time, age and “type” of people, form of activities were considered. Site A is adjacent to the existing “city centre” where most basic uses is located. The central space of the competition site A is a market where local food and other goods are being sold (different goods depending on day at a week) [Fig. 5]. Despite the low quality of hard landscaping (broken pavement, corroded street lights etc.) – most of the inhabitants seen in the area crossed the site for shopping or to visit the place. Site B is partially a greenfield with a path along the bank of Ina river [Fig. 7]. Ina river itself performs as an *Edge (it is a linear element that forms a boundary)*, while it could be perceived as a *path (channel along which observers move)*. Lynch [8] derived also other key physical elements which were observed in Goleniów: the post office building can be identified as a node, and communication tower and church as a *landmark*. Although those elements were identified, they were not significant.

According to Jan Gehl [4] the number of users of every public space indicates whether it is popular and pedestrian friendly. Gehl (2005) states three basic uses: meeting place, market place, traffic space and these may be reason to visit a place. Site A showed to be very busy and popular space, and Site B appeared to be abandoned and unpopular one. Observation was conducted at noon, in the afternoon and evening time. Lack of visitors on both sides A and B in the evening may be a result of strictly commercial use and low density, while mix of uses and density are the most important indicators of a successful place [9]

The competition objective was to connect two competition sites and create a vibrant public space within the new build form – all connected with the existing urban structure. The results of the competition were announced in the end of October 2009: one entry has been awarded with 1st prize and three entries were mentioned.

5. URBAN DESIGN OBJECTIVES OF THE WINNING COMPETITION DESIGN

The main objective of the urban design for The Goleniów centre was to create a livable and vibrant “heart” of the city, with unique spatial plan with different uses for citizens and tourists of all ages: teenagers, young couples and also elderly people. One of the basic principles was to connect two parts of the site boundary with a pedestrian bridge which would become an iconic and unique spatial structure over Ina river [Fig. 8]. That would allow to create a sequence of attractive public spaces: a boulevard along Ina river, two public squares, green lanes, pedestrian zones, parking spaces. One of the public spaces has been designed as a “quasi” port for kayaks, and boats, and that would become an extraordinary feature. The Boulevard would become the main area of different activities to do: city walks, jogging, meetings, leisure etc. due to high quality landscape architecture which would strengthen the image of Goleniów in region.

The masterplan [Fig. 3] forms a few urban blocks partially enclosed distinguishing public space outside and semi-public space inside the blocks. Suggested road layout would provide optimal circulation with car spaces along roads and on the backyards of the plots. Existing substandard buildings would be removed. Existing greenery would be preserved and incorporated in detailed landscape architecture.

The existing site used as the local market would be renewed. The existing substandard market stalls would be removed to allow for better pedestrian circulation and just nearby open market hall has been proposed as an alternative for local sellers. Renewal of several spaces has been suggested: Zielona Droga street, amphitheatre and bank on both sides of Ina river. One of the important public spaces would be a triangle-shaped square with fountains [Fig. 6], high quality paving, banks and green spaces.

It has been proposed that most of the new buildings would be of mixed use with commercial use on the ground floor and office or housing space above. Three story buildings have been proposed with steep 45 degrees inclined roof [see Fig. 6] except for several higher structures, that would become landmarks [see Fig. 8]. The main idea for newly built form was to incorporate in architectural design some of the historical building traditions such as: number of floors, the shape and cover of the roof, proportions of walls and windows, individual character and ornament. Modern architectural interpretation of the local,



Figure 7.
Ina riverline (Site B) – view towards featured bridge, photo by authors



Figure 8.
Ina riverline – view towards featured bridge, photo by authors

hanseatic esthetics would strengthen the unique character of the place and refer to heritage such as: Wolińska Gate, St. Catherin church, the remains of the city walls.

6. FURTHER MASTERPLANNING AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Successful examples show that urban regeneration processes are complex, interdisciplinary and take a long time from initial steps through planning and design, to realization. For example, the regeneration of central areas in Sheffield, UK has taken some 11 years so far, from initial master planning, through delivery plan and design of particular spaces, to construction [6]. Simplifying the issue, we may say that the process of the regeneration of a derelict urban brownfield site takes at least these subsequent stages:

- Gathering information and formulating the conditions and needs
- Creating the transformation Vision (organizational, political, and spatial – which may include a design competition ideas)
- Creating a masterplan, which addresses all important issues and constitutes a consensus between options and stakeholders interests
- Creating a delivery plan which further details the masterplan
- Detailed design of the elements of the masterplan, such as buildings, public spaces, infrastructure (which may include design competitions)
- Tenders, delivery and implementation
- Evaluation and monitoring of the results / management of the area

Likewise in Goleniów, the competition was the beginning of a long process which shall lead to the physical regeneration of the area. The subsequent phases included public discussion about the results, formulating future directions of development, and refining the competition design scheme into three variants of the masterplan. While the competition design gave an overall vision of the transformation, generally accepted by the town authorities and general public, several issues were raised shortly after announcing the results. The public debate concerning transformation of the intended future “heart of the city” was led in several ways. Firstly, local authorities organized an open air exhibition of all the awarded competition entries in an urban space nearby to the competition site. Copies of the whole original entries

were presented in covered displays [Fig. 2] for four weeks, together with an explanation of the process, as well as an invitation to comment by mail and email. Secondly, the entries were published on the town website, and an online discussion started. Within few weeks there were about seventy posts, and unlike many online discussions, most were in favor of the issue. Generally commenting people were content with the fact that the competition was organized, and agreed with the jury verdict. However, there were some concerns and ideas of detailing future design, such as of the density of the built form, or the commercial functions to be contained in the new buildings. The competition was also commented in local media, especially in the main local newspaper – *Gazeta Goleniowska*.

Debates and meetings of the authors with town authorities led to formulating the ground for further proceedings in the refinement of the design and creating a deliverable masterplan. It was agreed that the main advantage of the plan is proposed dense urban structure, but “what will the structure be filled with” shall remain an open question for the refining process. Thus the commissioned interim design will include three variants of urban structure, as well as variants of the form of the urban blocks and individual buildings, and also options for shaping the public space. The ongoing masterplanning aims at addressing the following issues:

- creating larger open urban space – “market square” – within the north – western part of the site, with one of the edges being the riverbank of Ina;
- Creating well defined active frontages to enclose the urban space, with possible use of arcades, canopies, “beer gardens” and other elements enlivening the facades and edges;
- dandifying the urban structure, or creating “the image of density”
- alterations to site boundaries and updated land ownership structure data
- transportation study of the city, commissioned meanwhile by the city
- “design coding” proposals for the architectural form of the buildings

Proposed variants will be subject to further analysis and debate and shall lead to reaching a consensus and constructing a preferred development scenario and a deliverable masterplan.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Regeneration of centrally located derelict brownfield sites can provide new opportunities for urban development. The case study of Goleniów shows such a prospective process in a small town, where the authorities intend to create a vibrant "heart of the city", as one of the key development aspirations for the years to come. The process so far has demonstrated the ability of the authorities to formulate the task and the initial brief, as well as the role of a design competition in order to formulate an initial transformation vision. The case illustrates the connection of various design issues, such as creating the urban block structure, connecting the circulation paths with the surrounding context, shaping the building form and public open spaces, etc. The subsequent participatory process has shown that such a vision needs refining, and both the authorities and designers need to be flexible and listen to the inhabitants and stakeholders in order to refine the masterplan.

Polish experiences so far show that working with local authorities to make public spaces a priority is often a challenge, as there are all sorts of different priorities and aims, and public participation is present in planning law or theoretic debate, but in "real life" practice it is quite limited. While regeneration processes have been more successful in larger cities, it seems that public participation often works better in smaller towns; in smaller communities where local authorities are closer to the inhabitants. This gives hope of successful masterplanning and further delivery process in case of Goleniów.

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