

THE CONDITION AND FUTURE OF BIG SLAB HOUSING ESTATES FROM SOCIALIST TIMES IN VIEW OF COMPARATIVE DATA DERIVED FROM THE POLISH-GERMAN RESEARCH PROJECT CONDUCTED IN LEIPZIG AND KATOWICE. CHAPTER II

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Abstract

In 2011 interdisciplinary Polish-German research project, entitled: *Yesterday, today and tomorrow of Polish and German large housing estates. A comparative study of urban development models and their acceptance as an example of Katowice and Leipzig*, was undertaken. This paper presents a comparative study of selected housing estates and that is a continuation of the document presented in the previous issue of the magazine.

Streszczenie

W 2011 roku podjęty został interdyscyplinarny polsko-niemiecki projekt badawczy pt: *Wczoraj, dzisiaj i jutro polskich i niemieckich wielkich osiedli mieszkaniowych. Studium porównawcze modeli rozwoju urbanistycznego i ich akceptacji na przykładzie Katowic i Lipska*. Artykuł przedstawia badania porównawcze wybranych osiedli mieszkaniowych i jest kontynuacją dokumentu zaprezentowanego w poprzednim numerze pisma.

Keywords: **Housing estates; Key driver factors; Examination scenario.**

1. INTRODUCTION

In the first part of the paper presented in the previous issue of the magazine, social studies, expert analysis as well as architectural and urban researches and SWOT analyzes on selected tests of large housing estates were described. Part II of the article is based on the results obtained in these studies and emerging key driver fac-

tors responsible for the development of these settlements and the examination scenario, which presents a somewhat negative view of their future.

2. KEY DRIVER FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING ESTATES

The outcome of the conducted SWOT analyses was the identification of key driver forces that may play an essential role in the future development of the housing estates in Katowice and similar cities threatened by depopulation. The key driver forces include, first and foremost, demography, economic growth, state and local policies towards housing, the real estate market activity, the emergence of new housing models, introduction of new construction technologies and the Sustainable Development requirements that promote environmentally – friendly activities, achievability of investment activities and adjustment to the social and cultural needs of the society.

The key driver forces were assessed in terms of their priority and certainty of their emergence. A number of important driver forces such as economy, politics and the real estate market which are strictly connected with one another, are characterized by low certainty, thus, in practice, it is impossible to estimate their impact in the longer period of time. Both politics and the real market estate are strongly dependent on the economic growth, which, in the times of globalization and increasing tendency for the occurrence of crisis pose a bleak picture of the future. This means that, in view of shrinking economy and no support from the state and local city authorities, the real estate market will not be properly expanding; accordingly small flats that have low maintenance costs will become more attractive to impoverished part of the society.

3. DEMOGRAPHY

As compiled in Table 1 the key driver force for the development of housing in Poland is demography in accordance with the demographic scenario for Poland devised in 2003 by the United Nations Organization [1] and the State Population Committee. The UN scenario forecasted that in Poland in 2010 there will be 38 million inhabitants, and in 2050 about 32 or even 30 million. The State Population Committee [5] also predicted the process of depopulation in a similar manner. Due to such priority and high degree of certainty of the forecasts, practically there is only one probable scenario for the future of housing in Poland, determined by continuously shrinking population. The scenario will involve decreasing social and political pressure for the construction of new housing resources, as the moment of equilibrium between supply and demand is close to come – as far as the city of Katowice is concerned, it will arrive in 2013 (data derived from Home Broker).

The key data are not limited to the future state of equilibrium between supply and demand (The balance between the number of households and the number of flats do not mean the state of equilibrium, as in the case of over-supply there may also appear increasing and unfulfilled demand for certain types of flats. Monitoring of the changes in users' needs and requirements usually protects developers against undertaking erroneous investments), they also indicate the importance of the following factors:

- The life span of seniors tends to be longer- the percentage of people aged 90 or even 100 is increasing, which is reflected in the concurrent life of 3 or even 4 generations,
- In 2050 every third Polish citizen will be 65 years old, and for every person aged below 45 there will be 7 seniors,

Table 1.
The number of building permits issued in 2001-2006 (source Katowice City Council)

Key driver forces	High priority	Average priority	Low priority	High degree of certainty	Average degree of certainty	Low degree of certainty
Demography	X			X		
Economy	X					X
Politics/ policies		X				X
Real estate market	X					X
New housing patterns		X			X	
New technologies		X		X		

Source: Elaborated by the research team

- The number of singles and people living alone, as well as widows and widowers is increasing, in 2008 there were 3.8 million people living alone (which constitutes about 10% of the entire population),
- The so called: “sandwich generation” will emerge, placed between the generation of grandchildren and parents or even grandparents requiring care, this sandwich generation will be unable to provide due to its involvement in professional work and career.

The Polish Statistical Office forecasts that the number of people living alone will reach 4.7 million in 2050, and two-person households will shrink by half. There will be only 1.5 million households composed of 3 people. According to statistical data, the current model of flats available on the real estate market are flats of the floor area of about 60 m². However, the outcome of the research conducted by Professor H. Zaniewska specifies, which is of significant importance, that 65% of young adults who currently live together with their parents or in rental flats plan to have their own detached house situated in suburban villages, of the floor area of 100-200 m² with a garden. Accordingly, it seems that reality is inconsistent with the dreams and concepts concerning the attributes of the desired place of occupancy. The investments undertaken on the grounds of dreams and not substantiated by reliable research findings may end in failure.

The demographic phenomena described above will exert a great impact on the development of housing in the next 35 years. As forecasted, the demand for flats will decrease – both for newly constructed flats and for those already available on the secondary market. On the other hand, the purchasing power of childless families or families with only one child will be stronger in comparison with families with more children; thus, new housing needs may appear and new housing models, both in terms of location, type of buildings (multi-family houses, terraced, semi-detached or detached houses), size and furnishings (specialized facilities and rooms, for example: workplace at home, swimming pool, sauna, etc.).

Together with ageing of the society and the emergence of “the sandwich generation” – not capable to look after their grandchildren, parents and grandparents at the same time – there will be a growing demand for the so called: “seniors’ homes”, taking over the care over old people who are unable to handle day-to-day tasks on their own. This will concern seniors who have children, as well as childless seniors. Likewise, there will be an increasing demand for care

over children – nurseries, kindergartens, looking after older children, playgrounds and activity centres or facilities for teenagers, because of prevalent engagement of women in work and the extension of the term of employment before retirement (grandmothers shall not afford to look after their grandchildren contrary to a common practice nowadays). It may also be expected that there will be an influx of migration of people from East European countries looking for work involving the care over seniors and children, and, in consequence, the immigrants will occupy vacant flats at the existing slab housing estates, because, in spite of their small floor area, such flats have low maintenance costs and relatively decent civilization standard (supply with central heating, water and electricity). These factors will determine the fate of big housing estates examined under the project, and many other estates of similar nature in all parts of Poland.

4. REAL ESTATE MARKET (REVITALIZATION)

The outcome and experience derived from the studies of Grünau estate in Leipzig demonstrated the Polish research team how the future development of the examined Polish estates may look like. The Grünau example should show our local politicians and administrators and design architects how to approach the creation of normative scenarios, to avoid in the future unnecessary social costs, as well as excessive financial outlays. According to the results of the joint Polish-German project, the city of Leipzig was unprepared to face the phenomenon of the depopulation of such huge housing estate, the detrimental processes occurred rapidly and almost spontaneously. The city was focused on the reduction of costs, so decisions were undertaken chaotically, without any long term plan, not to mention easily obtained approvals for demolition works.

According to the authors of analyses made at UFZ – up to 2001 over 7500 flats were demolished at different parts of the estate, initially ad-hoc and without in-depth analyses.

The demolition works were administered to entire buildings, parts of buildings or to several top floors. After the implementation of such drastic measures, there emerged a concept of pulling down an organized demolition strip of settlements, the result of which was the acquisition of green sites mostly allotted for parking places. The undertaken measures only increased the maintenance costs of greenery at

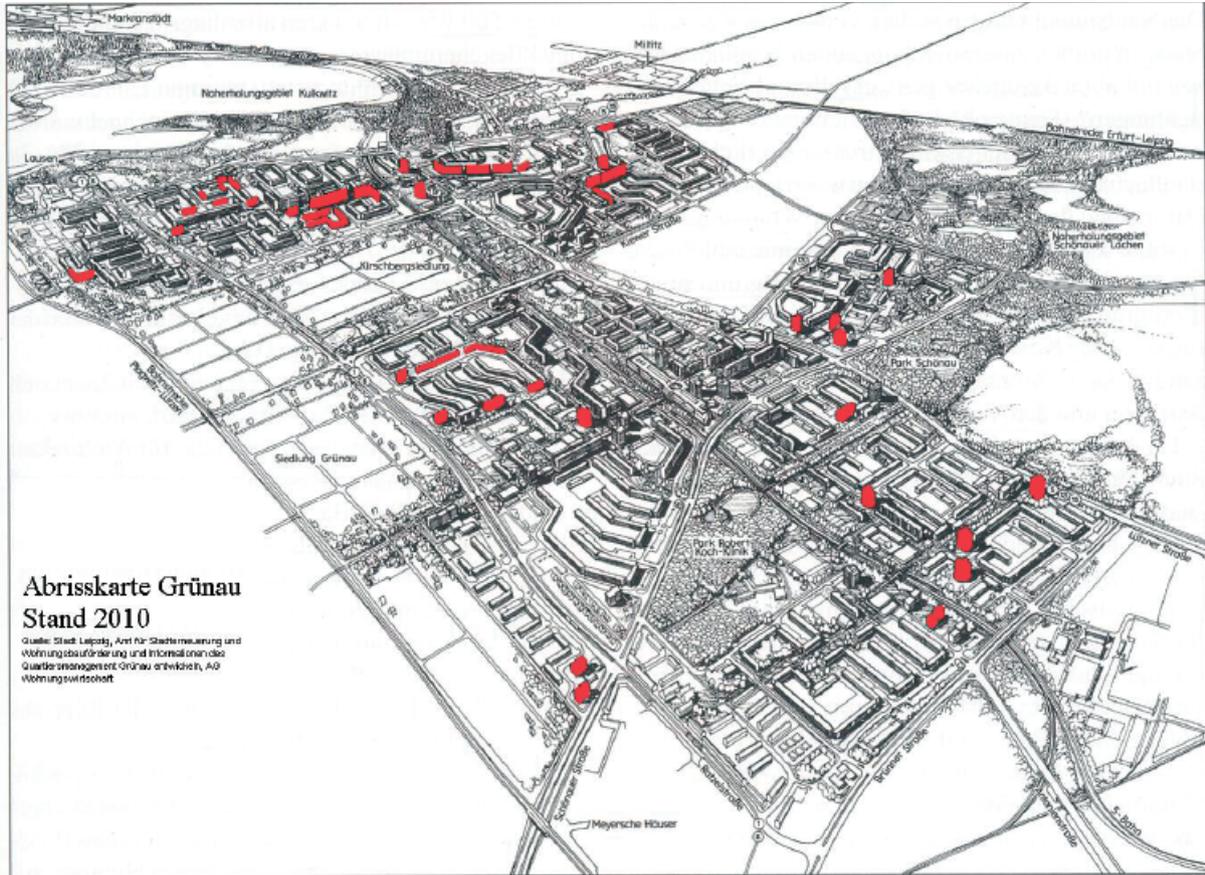


Figure 1. Range of demolition works administered at Grünau Estate in Leipzig. Source: S. Kabisch, D. Rink, M. Bernt: Governance of suburban shrinkage. The case of Eastern Germany, 2011



Figure 2. Liquidation of architectural barriers at Grünau Estate in Leipzig – entrance from the ground level, lifts, ramps at the exterior stairs. Source: The photograph taken by the research team

the estate, which, even previously occupied about 50% of the entire area of the estate. Unfortunately, the sites required for the introduction of new functions to the interior space of the estate were not reclaimed. The continuity of the architectural layout of the entire composition was disrupted and the

vacant sites create the impression of disturbed harmony and noticeable empty spaces.

Conversely, the over-supply of flats and quantity of entities managing and administering the buildings and facilities at the estate – commercial companies and owners of houses – evoked fierce competition

and fight for clients – lessees who want to rent flats. Following the plan of well-directed renovations and adjustment of the housing tissue and obtaining financial support for the schemes of removing architectural barriers, the quality of the estate was significantly improved. The undertaken activities had a wide range: construction of a new shopping mall, seniors' home, alteration of the heat generation plant for the new function of a skate-park, well-planned management of the greenery and interior space of the estate, complete removal of barriers for the disabled on wheelchairs, modernization of buildings, installation of lifts in very high buildings and adjustment of many flats for seniors (removal of barriers inside the flats). Nevertheless, all the adjustment measures were not perfect and well-planned. For example, the newly installed lifts are accessible only at half-floors, so people in wheelchairs still find it very difficult to get inside the building.

Taking advantage of the experience of our German partners, the Polish research team had the opportunity of observing very good, but also not completely successful modernization measures administered to the housing settlements evoked by depopulation and unsynchronized investment activities undertaken by various ownership and administrative entities. Therefore, it is recommended that big housing estates in Poland should be prepared for the loss of their occupants. Another factor of great significance to the future of the Polish estates is the functioning of relatively integrated management of urban housing resources (disputes among politicians concerning the legal and statutory competencies and rights of housing cooperatives may change the current dominating status of administrators of multi-flat housing blocks).

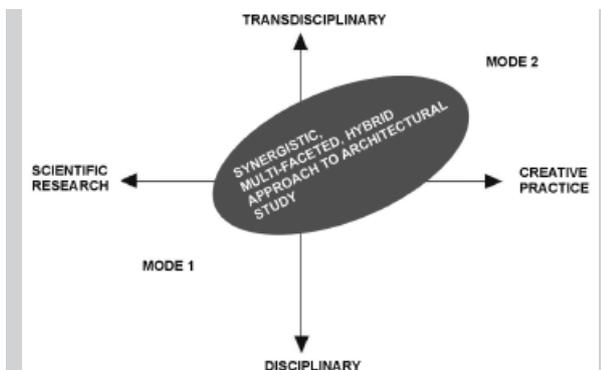


Figure 3.
Place of trans-disciplinary research in architecture
Source: Elaborated by the authors on the bases of Dunin-Woyseth H., Nielsen L.M. studies (2008) bydesigning.architectuur.sintlucas.wenk.be/rtts/rtts-resources/refl_7_light.pdf

5. CONCLUSION

As it was written in the chapter 1 of the paper, the discussed estates received high evaluation of residents, higher than the results from the expert assessment. However, in the context of knowledge about the needs of the elderly people it is proposed to conduct further research.

Our analyses designate important suggestions to initiate in-depth interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary research focused on the creation of normative scenarios that could demonstrate how, in consideration of research and scientific standards, undertake complex preventive measures, so as not to create new barriers in view of Sustainable Development and the future of such housing environments.

The cooperation of housing cooperatives, municipal authorities and interdisciplinary researchers shall set an example, and a laboratory experiment conducted under the Polish circumstances, on the grounds of the studies promoted by researchers from the School of Architecture and Design in Oslo – Halina Dunin Woyseth and Frederic Nilsson. Accordingly, it is planned to create a research team consisting of architects, demographers, sociologists, lawyers and specialist in estimating real estate value and construction works, comprising demolition works or transformation of the assets of the housing estates. The cooperation could also include housing cooperatives and city authorities – the most important stakeholders, whose initiative and commitment will be decisive for the future of not only big housing estates, but also for entire cities.

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