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5. REPURPOSING EMPTY SPACES AS A PART OF MUNICIPAL PROGRAMS FOR URBAN REGENERATION

5.1. Introduction

The challenges of the housing sector in Poland have been overlooked in the public debate, and the answer to the question “what is the shortage of flats in Poland?” evokes strong emotions. Estimates from 2016 indicate that the deficit is nearly 800 thousand housing units². In the following years, the number of housing units in Poland grew dynamically. According to GUS (Polish Central Statistical Office) data, in years 2016–2022 954,970 flats were handed over for use³. In 2021, Poland had the highest number of new dwellings built per capita in the EU countries⁴. It should be stressed that the vast majority of investments are commercial projects with flats at market prices, not available to middle or low income earners. What also made impact was a result of Russian invasion on Ukraine, which began on 24th February 2022: nearly 3 million Ukrainians fled to Poland. It is estimated that nearly half of them will stay there permanently⁵. This immigrant influx has significantly exacerbated the shortage of affordable housing, which the author estimates, as of today, at 600 thousand flats.

The situation outlined above has forced the implementation of unprecedented temporary housing solutions. Polish families invited Ukrainians at their homes, municipalities converted sports buildings into collective housing, NGOs developed their own programs to provide housing for refugees. However, there is a lack of systemic solutions to build long-term housing solutions. In a letter to the Prime Minister of the

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² Twardoch A.: Systemy do mieszkania, Wydawnictwo Bęc Zmiana, Warszawa 2019.

³ <https://demagog.org.pl/wypowiedzi/ile-mieszkan-oddano-do-uzytku-w-ciagu-ostatnich-pieciu-lat/?cn-reloaded=1> [access: 04.05.2022].

⁴ Raport Property Index 2021: „Jak mieszkają Europejczycy I ile ich to kosztuje”, Deloitte [źródło:<https://www2.deloitte.com/pl/pl/pages/real-estate0/articles/raport-property-index-2021.html>] [access: 04.05.2022].

⁵ <https://300gospodarka.pl/news/uchodzy-z-ukrainy-w-polsce-liczba> [access: 04.05.2022].

Republic of Poland dated 17.03.2022, a group of experts associated in the Rental Foundation points out, among others: the need to increase the stock of available housing, which is possible through adaptation of vacant public resources (communal resources owned by municipalities, State Treasury and State Treasury companies resources)⁶. In 2021, Habitat For Humanity Poland Foundation commissioned to the Institute for Urban and Regional Development (IRMiR) counting public vacant housing stock. According to the report, local authorities reported 817 buildings and 6201 dwellings as vacant. It needs to be noted that 255 out of 13,000 respondents (municipalities, state-owned companies, receivers, housing communities) sent data for the report which constitutes less than 2% response rate⁷. A full picture of the number of vacant units (both public and private) is expected as a result of the Census 2021, in the second half of 2022. The analysis of statistical data leads to the conclusion that repurposing public vacant units is one of the methods for reducing the deficit of affordable houses in Poland.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the literature on the subject – mainly expert studies prepared by the Institute for Urban and Regional Development; to analyse selected Polish local regeneration programs for Polish cities and then to determine the potential and barriers for the adaptation of vacant buildings as part of municipal renewal programs. The paper is enriched with illustrations depicting examples of projects implemented within the framework of regeneration programmes.

5.2. State of the research

There are numerous Polish studies on the renewal practices of Polish cities and containing an evaluation of processes on a national scale⁸. Items describing implemented regeneration programs in selected European countries⁹ can also be found. Experts indicate that municipalities rarely choose housing projects for implemented renewal programs¹⁰. The analysis of the sources led to the conclusion that due to the rarity of

⁶ <https://ryneknajmu.org/list-rady-frn-do-premiera-rp> [access: 04.05.2022].

⁷ Jadach-Sepioło A., Tomczyk E., Wysocki K., Milewska-Wilk H.: Pustostany w gminach i możliwości ich przekształcenia w mieszkania dostępne cenowo dla osób niezamożnych, Instytut Rozwoju Miast i Regionów, Warszawa 2021.

⁸ Jadach-Sepioło A., Sobiech-Grabka K.: Bariery rozwoju przedsiębiorczości na obszarach rewitalizacji – badanie skuteczności podejmowanych interwencji, raport z badań statutowych, Szkoła Główna Handlowa, Warszawa 2017.

⁹ Bryx M., Jadach-Sepioło A. Rewitalizacja miast w Niemczech, seria „Rewitalizacja miast polskich”, Vol. 3, Instytut Rozwoju Miast, Kraków, Warszawa 2009.

¹⁰ Guzik R.: Rewitalizacja miast w Wielkiej Brytanii, seria „Rewitalizacja miast polskich”, Vol. 1, Instytut Rozwoju Miast, Warszawa 2009.

Mróz A. Rewitalizacja w praktyce. Modele rozwiązań jako rezultaty konkursu Modelowa Rewitalizacja Miast i pilotaży w zakresie rewitalizacji, Krajowy Instytut Polityki Przestrzennej i Mieszkalnictwa, Warszawa 2018.

implementation, building adaptation as an element of regeneration for increasing the housing stock of municipalities is not sufficiently exposed.

“Report on the State of Polish Cities. Regeneration” prepared by the Institute for Urban and Regional Development in 2019 includes a chapter “Regeneration and housing” by Alina Muzioł-Węclawowicz, PhD¹¹. The author presents the stages of the renewal process in Poland since 2004; she points out the available tools that improve the process; links between regeneration programs and available EU funds (mainly European Regional Development Fund, RPO 2014–2022). The content is enriched with a review of selected regeneration programs implemented by cities such as Szczecin, Bydgoszcz, or Warsaw. In the conclusion Muzioł writes: “Housing projects – contrary to obvious logic and actual needs – still do not play a fundamental role in regeneration process. The renewal of housing stock is still at the stage of being interesting good practices and experiments, while mass actions are necessary to complete the process in a foreseeable perspective (15 years)” (Mync 2018)¹².

This study complements the above mentioned paper with an analysis of the regeneration programs of municipalities which had not been included in the study.

The acquired knowledge will allow to refer to the conclusions pointed by PhD Muzioł-Węclawowicz and to determine a wider group of possibilities and barriers for the popularization of adaptation of the existing tissue for the benefit of increasing the housing stock of Polish cities.

5.3. Methods and materials

This study was conducted in Poland in March-April 2022. The following methods were applied: historical-interpretative, logic argumentation and case study. Selected, adopted by Polish municipalities renewal programmes with housing component were analysed which were not described by Muzioł-Węclawowicz, which is: *Local Regeneration Programme for years:*

- a) “Wrocław Local Regeneration Programme for years 2005–2006 and 2007–2013”¹³,
- b) “Jelenia Góra Local Regeneration Programme for years 2008–2013”¹⁴,

¹¹ Muzioł-Węclawowicz A.: Rewitalizacja a mieszkalnictwo [In:] Jarczewski W., Kułaczowska A. (eds.): Raport o stanie polskich miast Rewitalizacja, Instytut Rozwoju Miast i Regionów, Warszawa 2019.

¹² Mync P.: Problematyka mieszkaniowa w programach rewitalizacji – perspektywa praktyka, materiały V Kongresu Rewitalizacji, Lublin 2018.

¹³ Lokalny Program Rewitalizacyjny na lata 2005–2006 i lata 2007–2013 miasta Wrocław, Resolution of the City Council of Wrocław, Vol. XLIV/2969/05, Wrocław 2005.

¹⁴ Lokalny Program Rewitalizacyjny Miasta Jelenia Góra na lata 2008–2013, Resolution of the City Council of Jelenia Góra, Vol. 341.XXXV.2013, Jelenia Góra 2013.

- c) “Leszno Local Regeneration Programme for years 2010–20015”¹⁵,
- d) “Grajewo Municipal Regeneration Programme for years 2017–2027”¹⁶.

Due to the subject matter of the paper, it seems appropriate to introduce the reader to the term “vacancy”/“empty space”. GUS defines vacancy as follows: “a dwelling in which at the time of the statistical survey no person was registered (for permanent or temporary residence) or no person lived, even temporarily, without registration”¹⁷. A different definition was adopted by the IRMiR during a study conducted for the Habitat Foundation, which was mentioned earlier: “a definition of vacancy was established as a premises or building unused for the last 12 months”. In the following part of the research, the abbreviation LRP is used, which means Local Revitalization Program.

5.4. Case study

5.4.1. Wrocław

Wrocław is a city with powiat rights (Polish administrative district) located in southwestern Poland, the seat of local government of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship. As of 2019 the population of the city was 641,929. On December 8th 2005 the City Council of Wrocław adopted the document “Local Regeneration Program for 2005–2006 and 2007–2013”, and then, on April 21st, 2016, “Local Regeneration Program for 2016–2018”. This analysis concerns the former document. It specifies the area for the planned regeneration activities, i.e. 6500 ha, which is 22% of the total area of the city. Analytical works carried out before the creation of the target horizontal regeneration programs showed the following, among others: neglect in the renovation of buildings and structures owned by the city, excessive exploitation of the city, the need to revitalize the Old Town area, lack of coordination of individual regeneration projects from the past. The first part of the LRP for the years 2005–2006 and 2007–2013 lists the strategic objectives for regeneration of the city. None of them refers directly to increasing the housing stock. Selected ones, i.e. improvement of housing stock standards, restoration of the lost value of properties, adaptations of buildings for economic, social and cultural

¹⁵ Lokalny Program Rewitalizacyjny Leszno na lata 2010–20015, Resolution of the City Council of Leszno, Vol. XLII, No. 504, Leszno 2010.

¹⁶ Gminny Program Rewitalizacji Miasta Grajewo na lata 2017–2027, Resolution of the City Council of Grajewo, Vol. XLVII, No. 370, Grajewo 2018.

¹⁷ Niezabitowska E.D.: Metody i techniki badawcze w architekturze, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, Gliwice 2014.

purposes, correspond with it indirectly. The program lists 10 categories of actions, including four related to the residential tissue, i.e.: tenement houses, small-town development areas, pre-war housing estates and areas of block housing. In the LRP, justification for each group and a list of expected effects was provided. Actions aimed at renewal of the substance of buildings, thermal efficiency improvement of buildings, improvement of housing conditions, exposure of historical values, change of functions of common parts were assumed. Adaptation of vacant buildings for housing purposes was not mentioned¹⁸.

In Annexes 2 and 3 to the LRP, 341 regeneration projects were planned, of which 80 were related to adaptation of residential buildings, i.e.: 30 renovations of tenements, 5 renovations of multi-family residential buildings, 40 renovations of multi-family buildings, 4 service and residential buildings, and 1 other type. For most of them, buildings thermal efficiency improvement, replacement of installations, replacement of roofs, change of the function of first floors or entire buildings to non-residential functions were assumed. Project descriptions do not indicate that the purpose is to adapt vacant buildings to additional housing functions. Figure 5.1 presents a photograph of the façade of the tenement houses located at 5-6 Grodzka Street, which were carried out within the LRP.



Fig. 5.1. A tenement with flats in Wrocław at Grodzka 5–6 street after renovation within the LRP in years 2005–2006. Archives from 2008. Source: <https://polska-org.pl/742054,foto.html> [access: 05.05.2022]

Rys. 5.1. Kamienica mieszkalna zlokalizowane we Wrocławiu przy ul. Grodzkiej 5–6 po renowacji, zrealizowanej w ramach LPR 2005–2006. Zdjęcie archiwalne z roku 2008. Źródło: <https://polska-org.pl/742054,foto.html> [dostęp: 05.05.2022]

¹⁸ Lokalny Program Rewitalizacyjny na lata 2005–2006 i lata 2007–2013 miasta Wrocław, Resolution of the City Council of Wrocław, Vol. XLIV, No. 2969, Wrocław 2005.

5.4.2. Jelenia Góra

Jelenia Góra is a city with powiat rights located in south-western Poland, in Lower Silesian Voivodeship. In 2020, the population of the city was 78,335 inhabitants. In recent years, the City Council of Zielona Góra has adopted two revitalization programs: “LPR of the City of Jelenia Góra for 2008–2013” and “LPR of the City of Zielona Góra for 2015-2023”. The first one was analysed. The area designated for regeneration occupies 196.5 ha, which constitutes 1.8% of the total area of the city. The following challenges were outlined: degradation of urban areas, destructive phenomena and processes in the economic, spatial and social sphere, population decline, high poverty rate, lack of a coherent long-term regeneration policy for the city, punctual revitalization activities .

The main goal in LRP of Jelenia Góra for 2008–2013 has been defined i.e.: counteracting marginalization of socially, economically, and spatially degraded area of Jelenia Góra. Specific goals were: increasing the quality of space of degraded areas, improving housing conditions of the population of the degraded area, counteracting social and economic isolation of inhabitants of the degraded area of the city. The LRP assumed the implementation of 17 projects, 10 of which concerned the improvement of housing conditions. The scope of the vast majority of them concerns modernization of roofs, staircases, buildings thermal efficiency improvement, replacement of windows, strengthening of structural parts of the building. A sample project is shown in Figures: 5.2. Housing projects of the LPR did not assume adaptation of unused buildings for housing purposes and renovation of unoccupied housing units in the indicated buildings. The actions indicated in the LRP focused on improving housing conditions and the aesthetics of buildings, rather than expanding the city's housing stock¹⁹.

¹⁹ Lokalny Program Rewitalizacyjny Miasta Jelenia Góra na lata 2008–2013, Resolution of the City Council of Jelenia Góra, Vol. XXXV, No. 341, Jelenia Gra 2013.



Fig. 5.2. Regeneration of a tenement in Jelenia Góra at Złotnicza 4, photo before and after and elevation improvement. Source: <https://docplayer.pl/57963534-Renowacja-budynkow-przy-ul-zlotniczej-2-4-6-8-10-w-jeleniej-gorze.html> [accessed: 08.05.2022]

Rys. 5.2. Rewitalizacja kamienicy mieszkalnej w Jeleniej Górze przy ul. Złotniczej 4, zdjęcie przed oraz projekt elewacji. Źródło: <https://docplayer.pl/57963534-Renowacja-budynkow-przy-ul-zlotniczej-2-4-6-8-10-w-jeleniej-gorze.html> [dostęp: 08.05.2022]

5.4.4. Leszno

Leszno is a city with powiat rights located in the western part of Poland, in Wielkopolskie Voivodeship. In 2020 the population of the city was 62,854 inhabitants. Two horizontal regeneration documents have been developed in Leszno, i.e.: “LPR of Leszno for 2010–20015 and Municipal Regeneration Programme of the City of Leszno for 2017–2027”. The first one was analysed. The areas indicated for renewal where the highest level of poverty was found, located in the city centre, were determined. The main problem of the specified area was identified as: “progressive spatial degradation, combined with an intensification of social problems”. The LRP does not state the ratio of the area to the city area. It is estimated to be 1–2%. The main aim of the LRP was to: “Improve the functionality of the Old Town area of Leszno in terms of local and sub-regional service for city residents, tourists and entrepreneurs”. It is to be achieved through numerous activities divided into three groups: spatial, economic, and social. Two of the activities of the first group are related to the adaptation of residential buildings, i.e.: “Renovations of residential buildings also with internal installations and surroundings, including yards and playgrounds in the strict area of the Old Town and residential blocks of parts of the Prochownia and Grunwald estates located in the area indicated for revitalization” and “Thermal efficiency improvement of residential and public buildings”. Descriptions of LRP tasks do not assume adaptation of unused flats, buildings or increase of housing resources of the municipality²⁰.

²⁰ Lokalny Program Rewitalizacyjny Leszna na lata 2010–20015, Resolution of the City Council of Leszno, No. XLII/504/2010, Leszno 2010.

The discussed LRP, due to financial constraints, assumed 19 projects including 2 which covered improving condition of residential buildings i.e.: “Conservation works, renovation of façades and roofs of buildings with architectural value and historical significance of the Old Town in Leszno that are in the register of monuments” and “Repair of buildings that constitute the housing stock of the City of Leszno”. As mentioned before, these projects did not concern adaptation of vacant buildings. No specific action was proposed for a considerable part of the identified needs. Figure 4 shows the façade of a former vinegar factory in Leszno. The building was presented in the LRP, in the section “Spatial conditions and problems of the area to be renewed”, where its new function was defined as residential. Ultimately, its regeneration was not proposed.



Fig. 5.3. Former vinegar factory building intended for residential building as per LRP. Source: “Leszno LRP for years 2010–2015”

Rys. 5.3. Budynek fabryki octu w Lesznie przeznaczony mocą LPR na funkcje mieszkaniową. Źródło: „LPR Leszno na lata 2010–2015”

5.4.4. Grajewo

Grajewo is a city with powiat rights located in northeastern Poland, in Podlaskie Voivodeship. In 2021, the population of the city was 21,614 inhabitants. In 2017, the City Council of Grajewo adopted the “Municipal Revitalization Program of the City of Grajewo for 2017–2027”, which was relocated for housing projects. The document indicates a regeneration area, overlapping significantly with the city centre, with an area of 76.37 ha, which is 4% of the city area. Some challenges for the area are formulated as follows: high unemployment and poverty rate; migration and aging of the population;

low attractiveness of the area for entrepreneurs; noise pollution; perception of the city centre as unattractive and dangerous²¹.

In the Grajewo Municipality Regeneration Program, the renewal mission was set as follows: “to regenerate the Grajewo city center”. In order to achieve it, four objectives were set, one of which concerns housing issues, i.e.:

- a) an active, integrated society, acting for the benefit of the community of the regeneration area;
- b) reduced scale of negative social phenomena in the regeneration area and increased social cohesion;
- c) increased economic activity of the regeneration area and entrepreneurship of the regeneration area residents,
- d) public spaces: attractive and adjusted to different groups of users of the regeneration area and functional, safe and aesthetic urban space;
- e) active institutions and inhabitants of the regeneration area,
- f) improved quality of housing space in the regeneration area.

The Grajewo Revitalisation Program assumed 29 projects of various types, 10 of which were housing projects. All of them concern thermal efficiency improvement of complexes or single multifamily residential buildings. The scope of works includes most often: completion of central heating installation and heat substation, completion of hot water installation, building elevation, staircase renovation or roof covering replacement. These projects are focused on improving living conditions, not on enlarging communal housing stock.

5.5. Conclusions

The research results of selected regeneration programs which take into account housing projects, especially adapting vacancies are shown in Table 5.1. In the analysed documents housing projects were included, however, they did not include repurposing empty spaces (buildings, houses). Most of the actions concerned improving housing conditions of inhabited flats i.e. buildings thermal efficiency improvement, exchanging windows, roofs or modernization of construction elements. Only for one among four LRPs, Leszno, a potential of adapting unused non-residential buildings to houses was determined. Due to budget restraints, such project was not brought to life.

²¹ Gminny Program Rewitalizacji Miasta Grajewo na lata 2017–2027, Resolution of the City Council of Grajewo, No. XLVII/370/18, Grajewo 2018.

Table 5.1

Analysis of selected regeneration programs with housing projects

Program name	Indication in vacancies potential diagnosis	Total number of assumed projects	Number of housing projects	Number of housing projects on adapting vacancies
LRP for years 2005–2006 and 2007–2013 city of Wrocław	No	341	80	0
LRP Jelenia Góra for years 2008–2013	No	17	10	0
LRP Leszno for years 2010–2015	Yes	19	2	0
Municipal program for regeneration of city of Grajewo for years 2017–2027	No	29	10	0

Repurposing vacant spaces is not taken into account in diagnosis elaborated for regeneration programs despite the fact that inhabitants indicate such actions as desired. Municipalities are more willing to build new housing stock than to transform an existing space due to operational costs, ability and financing availability. What is more, this method is not considered as the proper one on central level for example in National Housing Programme. Muzioł also stresses limited availability of financial instrument in previous European Funds. All these barriers cause that municipalities resign from realizing adapting vacancies projects in regeneration programmes.

It is recommended to broaden research on regeneration programs to include housing projects which are based on adapting empty spaces into residential space. It would also be beneficial to revise assumptions for the available (e.g. Subsidy Funds by BGK) and planned (e.g. subprograms for the EU Funds 2021–2027) methods of financing renewal programs for municipalities and related entities to include such solutions. IRMiR report findings made for Habitat²² indicate a great potential of vacancies in public resources, which should be taken into consideration.

²² Jadach-Sepiolo A., Tomczyk E., Wysocki K., Milewska-Wilk H.: Pustostany w gminach i możliwości ich przekształcenia w mieszkania dostępne cenowo dla osób niezamożnych, Instytut Rozwoju Miast i Regionów, Warszawa 2021.