

Abstract

Since ancient times, the importance of market squares in towns and cities has been associated with different functions such as representative, social and commercial (Greek Agora, Roman Forum). In relation to Polish conditions, significant changes to these spaces have taken place at several stages: In the Middle Ages, in the 17th, 18th and 19th century, in the period after World War II as well as nowadays.

In a medieval town, the market was a trading place and the centre of secular life, its size and shape, were qualified by the topography of the area, location in relation to important trade routes, and the type of trade that took place there. After the period of numerous wars and marches of troops, in 17th and 18th century, which led to the destruction and degradation of cities and towns, the use of the market square at the end of the nineteenth century, and especially in the inter-war period, changed significantly compared to earlier times. It became a more representative space, it began to be more often used to organize cultural or patriotic events.

The destruction caused by the First and Second World Wars as well as subsequent reconstructions resulted in both the loss of importance and degradation of historical main squares in many small towns. Subsequently, in the second half of the Twentieth century trees were planted within former town squares, as part of so-called social actions, and in the 1970s, transit roads were built there. At that time, bus stations and public transport stops were also built in town market squares. As a result of numerous investments in transport infrastructure, former town squares have been commonly turned into communication roundabouts, with centrally located garden squares and groves.

Nowadays, the role of market squares, especially in case of small towns, is particularly important. These places are still the elements that crystallize their spatial arrangements. Frequently, especially in the smallest towns, they constitute the service centres, main public spaces and the only town squares.

In the last twenty years, many towns have undertaken numerous investment interventions to increase the attractiveness of market squares, called revitalization, although they were often reconstructions or modernizations. They were often conducted on a selective basis, which was not conducive to ordering and making the central areas of towns more attractive, sometimes causing additional chaos and disarray.

In the context of the importance of the market square as the main public space in a small town, the level of its attractiveness seems to be significant, as it affects both the sense of local identity of the inhabitants and is the showcase of the town, attesting to its economic condition.

The aim of the dissertation is to define the canon of revitalization practices that determine the functional attractiveness and aesthetics of historic market squares in small towns.

The research goal was to analyse the tendencies of the changes taking place in the main public spaces in small urban centres, most often carried out under the name of revitalization, as well as to indicate whether the implementation and projects to change these spaces fulfill their task, increasing the level of attractiveness. The aim of this study is also to compare the effects observed in selected towns with changes that take place in other centres of similar size, located in other regions of the country and in neighbouring countries: the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The detailed study of Polish examples was preceded by literature studies and analysis of planning materials for individual cities, as well as a diverse scope of analyzes and field studies. The literature includes items constituting the canon of foundations related to the urban composition, the approach towards the town and the revitalization of urban spaces in various aspects. It also concerns historical and legal conditions related to the subject of the doctoral thesis. Detailed analyzes were performed for a group of five towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants, located in the southern part of the country, in the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship. They were selected on the basis of the criteria specified in the study.

Revitalization, renovation and reconstruction actions taken in the main public spaces of small Polish cities have a varied impact on entire towns. Regardless of their form, choice and method of project development and implementation. In many cases, the results are positive, but not always. It depends on the location of the urban centre in the region, accessibility, size, existing economic activity as well as the method of project preparation and the rules for its implementation. Moreover, each activity increasing the share of services in the central spaces of a town influences its reception positively.

Keywords: revitalization, public space, town, market square, town square

