

# **REVITALIZATION OF URBAN GREEN AREAS AS AN ELEMENT OF THE PROCESS OF THE CITY REGENERATION AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE EXPO HORTICULTURAL 2024 IN ŁÓDŹ**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Revitalization is a process which takes place simultaneously in many dimensions such as social, town-planning and functional or environmental one. The manner in which the post-industrial, post-military or run-down city quarters are adapted to serve new purposes is of vital importance in the said process. It results in changes in the functions performed by a particular area, the architectural and urban layout and transformations of some parts of the city. One element of the process is the revitalization of green areas. It is even possible to venture a statement that revitalization is not possible without taking into account urban greenery. Greenery is currently referred to as the “green infrastructure” of the city since, in the same manner as the technical infrastructure, it plays a crucial role in improving the living conditions and increasing the comfort of urban life. The regeneration of greenery exerts a very positive impact not only on the image and the aesthetic value of the city, but also on the whole process of reviving degraded spaces. Changes in the city landscape are one of the most spectacular effects of revitalization activities. At the same time, they become a stimulus for taking more intense recovery measures in other spheres which are crucial for the revitalization process, e.g. in the social, economic or legal sector.

The paper is devoted to the revitalization undertakings in the city of Łódź from the point of view of the activities carried out within the framework of the EXPO Horticultural 2024. The paper discusses the vital issue of regenerating urban areas in cities. The issues presented in the paper concern current critical problems, which constitute global challenges, aimed at improving the quality of life in cities by means of modernizing or regenerating recreational areas, i.e. the green fabric. The objective of the paper is to draw the readers’ attention, firstly, to revitalization, including regeneration of urban greenery, as a tool aimed at recovery from the crisis state of the degraded area and, secondly, to the benefits resulting from hosting international events and their impact on the local development. Łódź as one of the pioneering cities in Poland has made an attempt at carrying out comprehensive revitalization. Apart from the rehabilitation of degraded infrastructure, historic tenement houses or post-industrial areas pertaining to the 19<sup>th</sup> century factories, also the public space including green areas undergoes revitalization. The research methods applied in the paper are based on the study of literature on the subject. They will also encompass a financial analysis

concerning revitalization in Łódź in the light of hosting by the city of the International Expo Horticultural 2024.

***Keywords: local development, revitalization, EXPO Horticultural***

## **INTRODUCTION**

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is referred to as the era of cities. Over the last century, on almost all continents, there has taken place a significant change with regard to the image which has consisted in gradually transforming rural areas into urban ones. In 2010 the rate of inhabitants dwelling in urban areas in proportion to the overall global population amounted to approximately 50% and it has been growing ever since. According to the UN estimates, it is predicted that by 2050 almost 70% [1] of the population will reside and work in urban areas. Although modern-day cities play a vital role in the social and economic life of countries, they are a generator of innovative solutions, serve society and boost prosperity, nevertheless, they themselves require aid. Contemporary cities are fraught with problems regarding gradual degradation ensuing from the overexploitation of the urban fabric. Therefore, the regeneration of the extensively devastated urban fabric is of particular importance. Revitalization projects implemented in a comprehensive and coordinated manner should not only focus on recovering from the critical state of a given degraded area, but also on creating the conditions which may trigger its further development. Reviving the run-down city quarters, which consists not only in renovating the “hard fabric”, *id est* the technical infrastructure, but also in introducing more greenery into the public space, constitutes a significant element of the whole revitalization process. In general, regeneration undertakings should not only be aimed at improving the standard of living in cities, but also at enhancing the quality of public space. For the purpose of spatial processes which are taking place in cities, including in particular revitalization activities, it is necessary to review the meaning of public space and urban green areas. Currently, it is increasingly emphasised that in order to attract people as well as business entities a city cannot be a “concrete desert”. The greenery in a city is crucial for fostering a good climate and providing adequate conditions for effectively implementing comprehensive revitalization. Green areas in a city are indispensable for a good quality of life. The very awareness of the significance of greenery in highly urbanised areas in conjunction with the specific development and infrastructure of these areas, which are often of a historical, post-industrial or post-military character, exerts a positive influence on the revitalization activities carried out by public authorities. Greening of urban space constitutes a highly important component of the whole process aimed at regenerating degraded urban fabric. Selected examples of greening projects have been of such a significance that they have attracted publicity from far beyond the administrative boundaries of the cities in which they have been implemented, which is the case with hosting *inter alia* the EXPO Horticultural.

Although the paper is devoted to the revitalization projects carried out in the city of Łódź with regard to the activities undertaken in the course of organising the EXPO Horticultural 2024, it touches upon the current critical problems which constitute global challenges. The paper discusses the activities aimed at improving the quality of life in cities by means of modernizing or regenerating recreational areas, i.e. the green fabric.

The objective of the paper is to draw public attention to revitalization treated as a tool designed to enable the recovery from the crisis state of a degraded area as well as to the benefits resulting from hosting international events. Apart from the study of literature on the subject, research carried out for the purpose of this paper will also encompass a financial analysis concerning revitalization in Łódź in the light of hosting by the city of the International Expo Horticultural 2024.

### **REVITALIZATION – ITS ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE IN TERMS OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT**

Local development is defined in various ways in the subject literature. It may be described as “harmonised and systematic activity undertaken by the local community, local authorities and other entities operating in the *gmina*, which are aimed at creating new practical advantages of the *gmina* and improving the existing ones, fostering local economy as well as ensuring spatial and economic order”[2]. Local development may also denote “the process in which local governments or community-based organisations engage to stimulate or maintain business activity and/or employment. The principal goal of this engagement is to develop local employment opportunities in sectors which are beneficial for the whole local community. In the process of local economic development, existing human, natural and institutional resources are used.”[3] In general, when defining the notion of local development, it is possible to point out its characteristic features which show that it is an intentional, time- and labour-intensive process. It is initiated by local self-governments which take on the responsibility for monitoring, evaluating and analysing the effects which should bring about the amelioration of the living conditions of local communities. It is directly related to the increase in the standard of living of the inhabitants, and in the level of satisfying their life needs, which is reflected in a general improvement in the actual quality of existence. Any activities carried out at the local level should lead to *inter alia*: [4]

- supporting entrepreneurship and the local labour market,
- the ability to use the practical advantages and determinants prevalent in the *gmina*,
- improving the condition of the natural environment, and
- constructing technical infrastructure or further developing the existing one.

When seeking the stimuli which could intensify local development, many local self-government units implement activities pertaining to revitalization. Revitalization is a process whose distinctive features are the complexity and the

interdisciplinary character of carried out activities, which is reflected not only in the time needed to implement these activities, which usually covers several years, but also in the need to constantly monitor, modify and update the whole process. In general, revitalization projects implemented by local self-governments may be divided into *inter alia*:

- economic revitalization undertakings – intended to provide conditions conducive to boosting the economy,
- spatial revitalization undertakings – aimed at improving the technical condition of buildings, and
- environmental revitalization undertakings – encompassing the processes designed to ameliorate the condition of the natural environment by enhancing communal green space.

With regard to the function performed by the area in which regeneration works are carried out the following types of revitalization activities can be distinguished:  
[5]

- revitalization of multi-family high-rise housing estates – the process of so called humanizing the high-rise,
- revitalization of degraded inner-city quarters as well as old city districts,
- revitalization of abandoned mono-functional lands – of a post-industrial, post-railway, post-shipyard, post-harbour or post-military character.

In addition to the above mentioned activities, also the undertakings aimed at regenerating degraded green areas in cities are growing in significance and thus urban greenery revitalization projects may be included in the catalogue of revitalization activities.

In general, it can be stated that “urban revitalization concerns selected areas, where negative phenomena are prevalent and their intensity makes it impossible to apply simple sectoral solutions”[6]. Revitalization projects, that is activities carried out primarily in the architectural and town planning, social and environmental scope, should revive degraded space by adding to it a new dimension of aesthetic order. Revitalization may also be perceived as an opportunity to create new spaces which can foster a friendly and attractive environment for inhabitants and tourists, including those who will visit a particular city due to mass events organised within its boundaries.

To sum up the deliberations presented above, it may be stated that revitalization undertakings are made up of the activities of an architectural and town planning, social and environmental character which together constitute a cohesive whole. They present a chance for restoring spatial order. At the same time, it is an opportunity to redevelop degraded areas to serve new functions. Apart from the improvement of the quality of life of the residents of a particular degraded area, revitalization activities are aimed at supporting local development defined, first and foremost, as a long-term process of change with an intentional character, which is focused on an intended improvement in the current state. Thus, it may be stated that one of the objectives of revitalization is boosting local

development and one of the tools which may be applied to achieve it may be the hosting of mass events, in particular international exhibitions such as the EXPO. Such pro-developmental events constitute a part of the development strategy adopted by the local self-government.

### **ORGANISATION OF INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS – BENEFITS FOR THE HOSTING CITY**

In accordance with Article 1 of the Convention Relating to International Exhibitions [7] an exhibition is a display which, whatever its title, has as its principal purpose the education of the public: it may exhibit the means at man's disposal for meeting the needs of civilisation, or demonstrate the progress achieved in one or more branches of human endeavour, or show prospects for the future. The above-mentioned definition is supplemented with a statement that an international exhibition is a mass event in which more than one state takes part. The functions attributed to this kind of events encompass economic and commercial functions, but also developmental ones, in the case of which the primary goal is to support the development of countries, regions, and cities.

It is commonly acknowledged that mass events, including international exhibitions, help the city to develop its image. The venue where such an event is organised gains recognition in the international arena. Apart from the hosting city, also the whole region benefits from this kind of events as it takes advantage of the incentives stimulating local entrepreneurship. Thus, exhibitions are not only an effective aspect of local, regional or international promotion, but also a significant vehicle for conveying information, e.g. about the markets, the directions in which they develop and about new trends in the international economy [8].

The list of positive effects for the city, which has endeavoured to organise a mass event must be based on the statement of gains which encompasses the following benefits: indirect and direct ones, current and future ones, primary and spin-off ones, financial, material, infrastructural, educational and marketing ones, gains for firms, firms market entities, city budget and inhabitants. [9]

All the enumerated effects complement one another and the achievement of the majority of these guarantees a successful fulfilment of set objectives, one of them being local development. A detailed listing of these effects together with their potential impact on local development are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The effects related to the organisation of international exhibitions.

Time of exerting an impact	Effects of the impact			
	Measurable		Hard to measure	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Before the event	New jobs	Preparation costs	New ideas connected with arranging the space in the city	Inconvenience connected with the organisation of the event
During the event	An increase in city budget revenues	Implementation costs	Better image, active promotion of the city	Changes to traffic organisation
After the event	Better look of the city as a result of renovation works including renovation activities carried out in green areas	Costs connected with cleaning up the area when the event has terminated	Experience, boosting local entrepreneurship, pride	Littering of public space, increase in petty crime

\*Compiled by the author on the basis of: Budner W., Organizacja imprez biogowych źródłem korzyści dla różnych beneficjentów, pp 10-11,

When summarising the deliberations concerning this issue in a general context, it may be pointed out that the organisation of any mass event, including international exhibitions, is inextricably linked with incurring costs (it is often the case that, in the initial calculations, outlays exceed potential profits), however it is a part of creating the image of a particular city or region, which in turn is supposed to generate profits in the future.

Generally, the impact of mass events, including international exhibitions, on local development depends, first and foremost, on the significance of the undertaking. Nevertheless, regardless of the scale of the organised event (no matter whether it is of a regional, national or international character as is the case with the EXPO Horticultural 2024) it may be stated that one of the benefits resulting from the hosting of such events is creating the positive image of the city, which influences its development by *inter alia* an inflow of new inhabitants, investments and intensification of tourism as well as by achieving the objectives adopted in development strategies.

### **THE EXPO HORTICULTURAL 2024 ŁÓDŹ – ANOTHER STEP TOWARDS REGENERATING DEGRADED SPACE**

The EXPO is a mass event which is held on a cyclical basis. One of its goals is to enable its participants to present scientific achievements, to share knowledge and to showcase state-of-the-art technical advances as well as to participate in a worldwide debate on presented technologies, materials and ideas. One of the

characteristic features of this kind of events is a specific guiding theme which corresponds to current world trends, which usually touches upon the issues of particular importance for present-day economies. The themes the EXPO is devoted to are crucial since they highlight what is, to a lesser or greater degree, relevant to most societies worldwide at the current moment, in the times in which we live. In general there are two basic types of world expositions. Every five years the World EXPO is organised. Its theme is of a general character. The next exhibition of this kind will take place in Dubai. The other type of exposition is of a specialised character. It is the so called International EXPO and it is held in between World EXPO exhibitions. The next exhibition of this kind will be hosted by Buenos Aires and will take place in 2022. Apart from the exhibitions which are devoted to society, technology, science, etc. there are also expositions where the guiding theme is the natural environment, i.e. EXPO Horticultural. Such exhibitions are devoted to the issues focused on urban greenery. As many as 7 types of EXPO Horticultural may be distinguished. These categories depend on the duration of the event, and the area it will cover. The existing categories of EXPO Horticultural are as follows: A1 – World Horticultural Exhibition (Large), duration 3-6 months, minimum area of 50 ha, sanctioned by the BIE, held every 2 years, minimum period of 10 years between two exhibitions organised in the same country, A2 - International Horticultural Exhibition (Short), duration 8-20 days, minimum area of 15,000 m<sup>2</sup>, B1 – Horticultural Exhibitions with International Participation (Long), duration 3-6 months, minimum area of 25 ha, B2 – Horticultural Exhibitions with International Participation (Short), duration 8-20 days, minimum area of 6,000 m<sup>2</sup>, A2/B1 – Horticultural Exhibition with International Participation (Long), duration 3-6 months, minimum area of 25 ha, C – International Horticultural Show, duration 5-20 days, and D – International Horticultural Trade Exhibition the so called business exhibition. [10]

The first EXPO Horticultural was held in 1960 in Rotterdam. The exhibition was organised on the area of 50 ha and it was visited by 4 m people. Overall, in the period from 1960 to 2024, 23 EXPOS Horticultural of A1 type will have been held. Table 2 presents basic information concerning EXPOS Horticultural in the years 2002-2024.

**Table 2** EXPOS Horticultural A1 type in the years 2002-2024

Country	City	Theme	Duration	Number of visitors	Area
The Netherlands	Haarlemmermeer	The contribution of the Netherlands horticulture and international horticulture in the quality of life in the 21st century	25.04.2002-20.10.2002	2,071,000	140 ha
Germany	Rostock	A Seaside Park. A new flowered world	25.04.2003-12.10.2003	2,600,000	100 ha
Thailand	Chiang Mai	To Express the Love for Humanity	01.11.2007-31.01.2007	3,848,791	80 ha
The Netherlands	Venlo	Be part of the theatre in nature; get closer to the quality of life	05.04.2012-07.10.2012	2,046,684	66 ha
Turkey	Antalya	Flowers and Children	01.04.2016-31.10.2016	4,693,571	112 ha
China	Beijing	Live Green, Live Better	29.04.2019-07.10.2019	~16 mln	503 ha
The Netherlands	Amsterdam - Almere	Growing Green Cities	28.04.2022-23.10.2022	~2 mln	60 ha
Poland	Łódź	City Re:Invented	04-10.2024	~ 4 mln	~ 75 ha

\*compiled by the author on the basis of <https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/expos/about-expos/expo-categories/horticultural-exhibitions>, <http://docplayer.pl/72308754-Expo-2024-lodz-polska.html>

On the basis of the data presented in the above table it may be noted that exhibitions raise interest among the general public. The expositions have been or

will be visited (in the case of the exhibitions which will be held after the year 2018) by between 2 m to 16 m people. The area subjected to the “green metamorphosis” accounts for a large percentage of the city area as regards the cities which have hosted or will host EXPO Horticultural and ranges from 60 ha to 503 ha.

In March 2018 the members of the International Association of Horticultural Producers decided to grant the hosting of the EXPO Horticultural 2024 to Łódź. The city authorities applied for hosting the event in February 2018 after the city had lost in the competition for organising the small EXPO in 2022 (Łódź lost with Buenos Aires with the ratio of votes 56 to 62). Łódź is the third most populous city in Poland. The current population of Łódź amounts to 690,422 inhabitants [11], which accounts for 1.80% of the overall population of Poland. Łódź is the city where the issue of reconstructing degraded urban fabric is very important due to the large area in which the problems directly connected with revitalization processes are concentrated. Degraded quarters cover the area of 1,783 ha, which accounts for 6.08% of the total area of Łódź [12]. Aggregate minimum costs of the revitalization projects planned until the year 2020 will amount to approximately 233,492,300.16 euros, out of which the subsidies from the state budget will account for 4,393,202.52 euros and the funds from the European Union – 102,879,991.34 euros [13]. As indicated by the above mentioned data, total costs of revitalization activities constitute a significant financial burden for the city budget. Generally, the scarcity of public financial resources means that it is impossible to fully complete the tasks concerning rehabilitation of degraded urban fabric. Therefore, the priority in financing is accorded to the investments which have taken advantage of or will be able to take advantage of external financial assistance in the form of the EU funds or financial resources from private investors. Thus, the possibility of hosting the EXPO Horticultural 2024 is one of the methods of raising additional funds for implementing the investments which are so crucial for the city.

The guiding theme of the EXPO Horticultural 2024 will be ‘City Re:Invented’. It is a recognisable catchphrase which was first used during the promotional campaign of the city when it was running for the hosting of the EXPO 2022. This slogan is undoubtedly a continuation of the activities undertaken beforehand. It incorporates all the revitalization activities (social, economic and spatial ones), which are aimed at improving the quality of life. “The meaning of ‘City Re:Invented’ goes beyond the Horticultural EXPO. It encompasses *inter alia* social participation, area revitalization or social inclusion. At the same time ‘City Re:Invented’ means the preservation of the local and national heritage, which is manifested in protecting and respecting the functions and traditions of the city as well as in bestowing new energy on it.” [14] As part of the exhibition, a new Central City Park will be founded in the very centre of the city which will consist of three expanded parks the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May Park, the Baden-Powell Park and the area adjacent to the Clinical and Didactic Centre of the Medical University of Łódź. In other green spaces in Łódź special pavilions and thematic gardens will

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be set up for the duration of the exhibition, which will serve the needs of the inhabitants of Łódź many years after the termination of the said event.

The tentative cost of the exhibition, according to the data obtained from the Project Management Division, has been estimated at 100 m euros. These expenditures may however increase by additional 5 m euros when taking into consideration the financial resources allocated to developing the road infrastructure for the purpose of the organisation of the event. The Łódź authorities expect the central government to financially support the city in the organisation of the exhibition, as was the case with the Expo 2022 (according to the estimates resulting from the financial analysis of the budget of the International EXPO Exhibition, the amount earmarked to the EXPO from the city budget and the EU funds was supposed to amount to 649.76 m euros. The remaining amount totalling 738.14 m Euros was supposed to be provided by the company established especially for this purpose. The major shareholder of the said company was supposed to be the State Treasury which would contribute in the amount of 376.54 m euros, whereas the remaining 361.61 m euros was supposed to come from debt financing).

To sum up, although the estimated costs of the organisation of the Expo Horticultural 2024 are fairly high, it is envisioned that over the period of six months Łódź will be visited by at least 4 m guests. This means 21 thousand people per day (according to the Łódź City Office, the number of visitors may increase even to 30 thousand people per day). When calculating on average, one tourist will spend around 20 euros, which makes up the sum of 420 thousand euros. The sum will land directly in the purses of private entrepreneurs, and a proportion of it will indirectly contribute to the city budget in the form of taxes. Apart from that, also the proceeds from potential exhibitors will be transferred to the city budget. This means that the hosting of the EXPO Horticultural 2024 in Łódź will not only boost local entrepreneurship, but it will also improve the image of the city as well as enhance general local development.

## CONCLUSION

Summing up, the experience of territorial self-governments, including the worthy example of Łódź, as regards revitalization activities proves that bringing back to life the places which have lost their original function by promoting mass events such as EXPO or EXPO Horticultural constitutes the right direction for investment. It may bring substantial benefits not only for the local community but also for the city. It should be taken into consideration that revitalization is a process that consists in regenerating degraded urban fabric. It is a recovery process which comprises many kinds of activities such as inter alia: modernisation of buildings, adapting the existing developments to new needs and assigning new functions to them, but it also encompasses the actions stimulating local development in the sphere of trade and services or restoring the balance in social life. Therefore, undertaking the activities in this regard results, first and foremost, in improving the quality of life of the city dwellers, but also in enhancing the

image of the city. It is necessary to be aware of the fact that revitalization is not limited to merely reconstructing run-down urban infrastructure, but it also entails regenerating the city's green areas which enable city dwellers to rest. Greenery plays a vital role in the city. It exerts a substantial influence on raising the quality of life of its inhabitants. Unfortunately, revitalization is a particularly cost-effective process and local self-governments, trying to overcome the problem of scarcity of financial resources, are currently searching for other sources of finance. One of such sources may be the hosting of the EXPO Horticultural 2024, which, on the one hand, will require spending 100 m euros but, on the other hand, will considerably contribute to the process of regeneration of the city which is currently underway.

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