Touristic Infrastructure Development in the Context of Increasing a Town Space Attractiveness

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Abstract

The topic of the paper is an attempt to find a research tool in order to find the answers to questions about the proper directions of development of tourist infrastructure and functions in small towns. How to define the relationship between the existing natural and cultural values and needed tourist infrastructure? Where are the best areas in town for the implementation of tourist infrastructure? With what planning tools is it possible to forecast the possible barriers of development? The students of the Faculty of Architecture at Poznan University of Technology were trying to find the answers to these and other questions and there is presented the outcome of this research.

Keywords: touristic functions, city space attractiveness, sustainable development

Introduction

According to the author, tourism as a function stimulating towns and cities development is one of the few economic brands which have a high ratio of profitability (at relatively low costs can be achieved large profits), and further, while retaining the relative political stability, touristic functions provide a steady demand for manufactured goods. However, so as to bloom local economy and improve the quality of residents life, it is necessary to preserve the principles of sustainable development.

Sustainable development of tourism depends on a number of factors: tourist attractiveness of the city, uniqueness and location values, high quality of services, availability, socio-economic potential, as well as a holistic and integrated approach to planning development of touristic reception city. The fulfillment of all the conditions may seem impossible, but it is needed to consider all of them within programming renewal and development projects. Cities with tourist attractions but without a well-developed services and transport accessibility, as well as cities that have only excellent position in relation to major transportation hubs, have a chance to benefit from the development of tourism.

A special type of touristic development is spa tourism. Wellness and spa functions can perform invigorating role not only in terms of patients recovery, but also in spatial and economic meaning. The condition is prudent management of urban and natural environment, protection of local identity and control of the intensity of tourist traffic. Protection of cultural heritage in spa city concerns preservation of historic architecture, which significantly creates the city image, local traditions and regional identity as well as unique non-material cultural goods like customs, cuisine, crafts. Restitution and incorporation of historical buildings into touristic infrastructure is needed so as to expose the uniqueness of location and all the characteristic elements within functional and spatial structure of the city. These specific and meaningful landmarks define and highlight the character of the reception area.

The proper use of existing natural and anthropogenic values and existing social potential is a huge challenge, but also an opportunity to improve the economic situation, quality of life and spatial attractiveness of the city, not only for present but also future residents. For many cities, especially those of small size, development of touristic function is an important opportunity to improve the condition of the socio-economic and spatial attractiveness.

Sustainable development of tourism is about promotion of different functional offer and profiles, with touristic infrastructure development which is in accordance with protection of spatial and cultural values. However, achieving economic stability, ensuring the attractiveness of land and meeting social needs in small cities should be associated with the need of
preparation and implementation of long-term and multilayered development plans. Identification of strengths and weaknesses of existing spatial, social and economic situation is crucial in terms of defining possible targets and enabling division into separate phases the development programme. The key importance of spa tourism development is reasonable and wise management of space and programming of spatial planning in accordance with sustainable development rules.

Legislation tools and participatory planning in the context of increasing town attractiveness

The local plan as an act of local law, is considered as an essential tool for defining the manner of managing the key areas for the development in towns and cities. It is the only document in Polish spatial planning law that has a real impact on spatial changes and spatial order. The act describes a series of activities related to the preparation, voting on and implementation of master plan. The aim of master plan is in particular the determination of: functional and spatial destination of indicated areas, introduction of new functions into developing fragment of a city space, the principles of management so as to provide and maintain spatial order, the protection of natural and anthropogenic environment, cultural heritage and cultural values preservation, definition of contemporary public space design rules, parameters and indicators of building and other forms of land development, the principles of expansion and reconstruction of technical infrastructure and communication system, rules of sharing and merging real estate, detailed rules on security actions within risk areas for mining damage, floods, landslides, etc.

The master plan should specifically and unambiguously define the framework of the planned spatial and functional transformations of a city space. Too general regulations conducive to the formation of investments contrary to the principles of spatial order. It must therefore be stored in such a way that its interpretation is closest to the intentions of the plan ideas and aims. It must be remembered that all planning documents are being drawn up for over many years and so there must be provided a proper level of generality and flexibility within formulated postulates and decisions.

In addition to the issues associated with master plans preparation, a separate group of questions consists of the statutory provisions on the need for the socialization of planning process as well as an analysis of the effects of the master plans implementation. It is particularly important for architects and urban planners to understand the needs of city users and the economic consequences of the planned transformations. The protection or maintenance of spatial order is the most important task of planning, regardless of the scale and size of the city.

This means harmonizing the often conflicting needs and thus to minimize conflicts. In terms of the social aspects it is crucial to ensure that all the city are provided with the same possibility to take advantage of spatial situation and values at the same level. There is also a need to eliminate the negative phenomena of segregation and exclusion, to ensure the protection of the public interest and private rights of ownership and to overcome unjustified disparities in living conditions. The economic aspect should enable economically efficient use of space and ensure appropriate conditions for the functioning of all operators and users.

Unfortunately provisions of the spatial planning law in terms of social participation significantly limit the real influence of stakeholders. A mechanism for receiving and considering comments on the plan is not conducive to reliable diagnosis in the identification of existing or future social conflicts arising from the often divergent interests of different groups. This in turn often leads to irrational management of spatial and financial resources. Such phenomena does not contribute to spatial order protection and to rational use of resources in accordance with sustainable development rules.

The study of good examples of legislative solutions in force in Europe confirms that the first phase of master plan preparation always becomes a priority, since it ensures the universal recognition of the provisions of plan. There is a wide range of instruments to carry out a public consultation in which social participation has a real impact on the planned changes. All kinds of workshops, joint development concepts, urban games and other forms of activities integrating various interest groups are supposed to be soft but significant tool within a process of promoting participatory planning solutions. Public acceptance of planned development and alterations ensures cost reduction not only during the design and implementation but above all during long-term implementation and realization.
Case study – introduction of spa offer to Międzychód city. Cooperation between practitioners and researchers

One of the good examples of taking advantage of scientific knowledge and expert opinions in urban planning practice is the cooperation of the Department of Urban Planning of Poznan University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture with the Municipality of Międzychód. The problem which was reported to professionals was interesting but quite complicated. City of Międzychód was the first city in Wielkopolska region trying to obtain the status of a health resort. In the period 2004 - 2014, a series of architectural studies and urban planning research were conducted. The first phases of cooperation were mainly related to the sphere of analytical investigation of existing spatial situation, valorization and forecasting. Undertaken activities aimed at existing spatial values inventory and development potential assessment.

The next stages were to determine key areas - both those with growth potential and those with a negative impact. At the same time the architectural concepts comprising the renewal of historic buildings of the most important frontages along main streets of the city were prepared. Unfortunately, there was a lack of long-term revival and development programming. Since the project was not included in any integrated program for seven years less than 10% of the buildings were renovated and regained its former splendor.

Then the main guidelines for tourism development and new functions introduction were defined so as to prepare a basis for the master plan alterations. The task that has been entrusted to scientists, was about the identification and verification of decisions of master plan and critical analysis of the current document. The aim was to test the provisions of the plan in force in relation to key areas in the context of the development of the spa functions and to make necessary adjustments. As a result the new master plan was established, which is now in force. Now, along with the master plan decisions, there is a better protection of existing spatial values – both natural and cultural ones, and the possibility of spa functions development in accordance with sustainability rules.

According to the adopted methodology, the study has been preceded by a vision of the terrain and analysis of the development strategy of the spa in Międzychód. This enabled the adoption of appropriate assumptions to develop several variants of spa development concept and designation of key areas. To achieve the maximization of profits from the planned investments there was proposed a system of key areas connection with the use of existing public spaces within a city. This solution increases the efficiency of the development owing to the principle of synergy of programming and realization of all investments.

There were not only researchers but students as well involved into cooperation between Municipality of Międzychód and Poznan Faculty of Architecture. During academic year students were preparing their proposals of spa functions development in Międzychód with the reference to master plan decisions. In this way, students had an opportunity to face real problems such as: finding the right formula for maximum integration of newly introduced investments into existing urban structure, maximizing the profitability of parcels in accordance with the spatial order rules, obtaining the highest possible standards of living and minimizing the cost of urban infrastructure modernization and development in terms of new functions introduction.

The main aim of the cooperation was to work out an expert study indicating the possible opportunities and barriers of spa spatial development. The additional aim was to establish a tool to collect votes and opinions about planned investments of the local community. The cooperation resulted in preparation of a shared document in the form of EXREF Doc. and a set of boards with graphic part of development proposals. It was done owing to the use of work in cloud method and in that way it was possible to collect opinions about presented spatial solutions. The outcomes of the work were presented at an official exhibition of at Poznan University of Technology with the participation of Międzychód Municipality representatives.

The last action in favor of spa functions development in Międzychód was the collaboration within preparation of a phased investment strategy. As part of creating the spa brand and a new image of Międzychód city there are some soft actions proposed in the so as to promote educational projects and hard ones, related to the implementation of certain investments. The most important investments accentuated in the strategy are: construction of water bottling plant "Międzychodzianka", Spa and Wellness Park - as the most important area of spa facility in the current park of Lake City, the infrastructure of mud treatment services, communication and technical infrastructure. In addition to spa buildings there is planned to extend the offer of existing sport facilities with hotel and training complex.
Pic.1. Identification of anthropogenic and environmental resources is a basis for creation of strategy of sustainable development of spa tourism in Międzychód city. Conception made by author.
Pic.2. Research and design work were prepared in different scales, and were prepared by researchers and practitioners with the participation of students of the Faculty of Architecture of Poznan University of Technology (P.Kluj, D.Woltyrski). Conception made by author and other researchers (R.Graczyk, D.Pazder).

The citywide investments are planned to be complementary to spa offer. They are proposed so as to increase the attractiveness of public space within a city. There are planned: a complex of tourist services, broadening of cultural and commercial offer, modernization of Market Square, Kosciuszko Square, Old Mill and Passage linking Lake City with the Old Port at Warta river, restoration and activation of historic buildings through the introduction of new services, construction
of a riverside hostel in the Old Port and complex of spa parks with pedestrian and bicycle lanes and the construction of urban fragment of an international Bicycle Route R1.

Conclusion
Implementation of ideas and design works aiming at creation and promotion of the first spa of Międzychód city in Wielkopolska region is an important development opportunity for entire county. Construction of hotels, boarding houses, sanatoriums, recreational and sports centers and the provision of treatment services and hospitality, is a project of key importance for expanding the local labor market offer and increase of inhabitants’ quality of life.

Promotion of a healthy lifestyle and leisure and spa offer development in a city of Międzychód, in accordance with the principles of a snowball economic rule, can initiate the development of private enterprises as complementary offer. The introduction of new functions, new architectural and infrastructural investments can positively affect the physiognomic image not of a city but entire region as well.

The impact of realization of the project in economic dimension may include western regions of Poland and even go abroad to the territory of Germany. In the past eight years, the Municipality of Międzychód, within a process of preparation for spa functions development has already organized many investments that cost over EUR 25 million. Considering either dynamics of the transformation, aspirations of a city, or taking into consideration endogenous and exogenous conditions, it is concluded that the spa offer and tourism development can result in many fruitful activities and undertakings in spatial, social and economic aspects. Creation of the brand product under the name of Spa Międzychód is a venture not only by all means desirable, but also necessary to maintain the trend of development in peripheral areas of the region.

References