

# URBAN TOURISM AND CULTURAL CLUSTERS (THE PRAGA DISTRICT IN WARSAW EXPERIENCE)

## *Urban tourism*

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### Abstract

**Introduction.** During the last two decades (1989-2009) urban tourism and especially cultural tourism “off the beaten track” become of increasing importance in Warsaw and other major cities in Poland. The main purpose of the work was to increase the knowledge of city tourism in Warsaw in the context of the rapidly changing urban environment. The interest was also focused on better understanding of the contribution of newly created cultural clusters to the social, economic and urban landscape recovery. In addition to this, the study consists of analysis of the available quantitative data on urban tourism in Warsaw and a qualitative survey of urban landscape changes (field studies in the Praga District). **Material and methods.** The design of the study consisted of three main steps: a) field studies conducted in Warsaw, structured and semi-structured interviews with self-government and cultural institutions representatives; b) analysis of quantitative data from existing sources with regard to urban tourism with cultural motive; c) studying strategies of urban plans with regard to tourism; analysis of qualitative data on urban tourism, focused on possible solutions and on opportunities urban city tourism creates for built environment revitalisation. **Results.** The cultural clusters in the rapidly growing Praga District, the satisfactory recovery of built environment in decline, are important and difficult challenges for citizens, for urban planners, for public institutions at all levels. This experience also proves that the role culture tourism can play in the physical, economic, social and symbolic transformation of urban space in decline – may be significant. The urban tourism is not a panacea, but as alternative could be one of the many possibilities to save urban heritage, as its capacity to create new jobs and its dynamic – make this choice very serious. **Conclusion.** Tourism can yield enormous socio-cultural benefits as providing much-needed funds to help restore industrial sites in decline. Examples of such a good practice can be found in many European countries, also in Poland. However the net effect of further Praga District project development and its foreseen success will depend upon the responsibility exercised by various stakeholders, including the public and private sectors as well as tourists and residents.

**Key words:** culture clusters, urban tourism, local community, sustainable planning

### Introduction

At present, a cultural tourism could be interpreted in many ways [1, 2, 3, 4], but the main motivation of visitors are curiosity and education, interest in other people and their culture. The most important in this research, was to indicate that the cultural tourism is not just “high arts” (preserved and presented in museums), historic or heritage buildings, sites, monuments, opulent historic residences, but it may include popular folklore, traditional events, music and food. Tourists’ visits to host community are motivated (wholly or in part) by interest in both history and heritage and everyday lifestyle. Today, it can be experienced in Warsaw 2 329 674 tourists’ visits per year [5], inspired mainly by business, but also by museums and galleries, festivals and cultural displays (“Frederic Chopin in Warsaw” project), history of Polish “Solidarity” movement and recent socio-economic changes.

The phenomenon of urban regeneration and the contribution of cultural clusters have been widely recognised by researches [1, 2, 3, 4]. In most countries, the “cultural economy” makes up significant share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP):

five percent or more [3]. The culture clusters are components of economic growth, employment, innovation and social cohesion. Europe is no exception to that. Examples of recent initiatives that centre on this concept are: Cable Factory Helsinki (Finland), Temple Bar in Dublin (Ireland), Northern Quarter in Manchester and Tate Modern in London (the Great Britain). Cultural cluster theory assumes that urban space generates a variety of synergetic and innovative effects relevant to both consumption and production of culture and creativity (“culture economy”). Today, it can be witnessed the increasing presence of urban creative clusters. In the East European countries the important role that cultural clusters play in the regeneration of cities, especially those that suffered as a result of de-industrialisation process, is unquestionable. In the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland there has been a significant shift from a heavy industrial to service-based economy. On the example of Warsaw, Krakow and Gdansk it can be seen the growing importance of leisure and cultural activities. In many major cities cultural clusters are a source of revenue and catalysis for built environment regeneration [3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10]. European Economic and Social Committee reports show both the chang-

ing role of tourism in the East European countries and its significant contribution to the socio-recovery of areas in decline [8, 11].

During the last two decades (1989-2009) urban tourism and especially city-based cultural tourism have become of increasing importance in Warsaw. However, many ways in which culture clusters were actually transformed into added value (broad meaning: economic, social, cultural) remained understudied. For this reason Institute of Tourism and Recreation Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw has carried this study on tourism with a cultural motive in the built environment.

The main purpose of this work was to increase the knowledge of city tourism in Warsaw and study the contribution of tourism to the recovery of urban heritage in decline. As the interest was in resurgence context and the culture clusters role in revitalisation process (2008-2009), some "classic" case studies (museum districts, heritage sites, and artist's quarters) were included. In addition to this, the study consists of analysis of available quantitative data on urban tourism in Warsaw and a qualitative survey of urban landscape changes (field studies in Praga District in Warsaw).

### Material and methods

To examine the phenomenon of cultural clusters (as tourist attractions), to review current empirical work in this area and to offer a comparative review of selected case studies (the Praga District in Warsaw), the deliberate move was made beyond the mono-disciplinary approach, deciding on multidisciplinary analytical framework that, as it was hoped, might help develop the understanding of the relationship between the culture clusters and urban revitalisation. It resulted in the use of multidisciplinary approach with insights from the architecture and urban planning, humanities, sociology and geography. The intention was to examine selected creative clusters, which became a cultural tourist attraction (Fabryka Trzciny, Otwocka Street and Fabryka Wodki Koneser, Zabkowska Street), with a hope that the hypothesis, "The culture clusters are components of economic growth, employment, innovation and social cohesion", could be verified in this way. As the role culture and tourism can play in the physical, economic, social and symbolic transformation of urban space is significant in many aspects, broad context should be considered and different research tools used [9, 10, 12, 13]. Much of the research focused on the way in which Praga cultural heritage (as magnet for tourists) contributes to economic, social and cultural regeneration. As there was no blueprint for all stages of the research, for each segment (step) a separate framework was planned. As a consequence the design of the study consisted of five main steps:

a) a clear statement of problem, general aims and purposes, also anticipated outcomes of planned research were the base to identify organization schedule for field studies and to formulate questionnaire structure (concrete questions);

b) field studies conducted in Warsaw, structured and semi-structured interviews with self-government and cultural institutions representatives; interviews on-site with questionnaires, face-to-face, conducted by undergraduate students from the Institute of Tourism and Recreation, Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw; participant observations, field notes, photographs and drawings (case studies: the Praga District, Zabkowska Street, Otwocka Street); hypothesis testing, verifying and validating the data (no pre-piloting stage);

c) analysis of quantitative data from existing resources (Central Statistic Office in Warsaw, Local Authority, Warsaw Municipal Office) with regard to the Praga District as compared with the Capital City of Warsaw, focused on social and economic

issues of the district (environment, population, public safety, labour market, culture and tourism, housing, facilities and services);

d) studying strategies of urban plans with regard to tourism; analysis of qualitative data on urban tourism, focused on possible solutions and on opportunities urban city tourism creates for built environment revitalisation (Warsaw Municipal Office, Regional Design Office of Mazovia County);

e) synthesising a case from facts; reporting and writing up research (this article presents results of case study: the Praga District, 2008-2009).

### Results and discussion

Many cities create "cultural districts" as a part of regeneration strategies. Usually these quarters contain the high concentration of architectural relics, have long tradition of cultural and entertainment facilities for locals and tourists alike. These may include architectural and archaeology heritage, museums, art galleries, together with retail outlets (souvenir shops), eating and drinking establishments. In many cases these are the Old Cities, founded in the Ancient time or the Medieval Ages. In Warsaw Praga District was a different case. At present, the Praga District is one of 18 districts, constituting independent communes, has a population of 186 400 inhabitants (Warsaw – 1 692 900), mostly a dense-working class. The district area covers 22.4 sq.km (Warsaw – 516.9 sq.km) and the population density is 8329 inh./sq.km (Warsaw – 3275 inh./sq.km) [5]. The Praga District as many other Warsaw industrial quarters (Wola, Ursus) have suffered significant economic decline as a result of de-industrialisation after 1989. It demonstrated the same weakness as elsewhere in Poland, being non effective and non competitive in new conditions of market economy. Decision of therapy (modernization) was not considered due to vital interests of community: ecological reasons, very good location, close to the city centre, already existing housing estates, considerable land reserve for further development, urban greens and services. At first, during 1990s, the Praga District had lost its traditional industries, resulting in an economic downturn and job losses. The new local government, established in 1990, was faced with a very poor district condition. Within three years, with the support from Warsaw Chapter of Polish Town Planners Society and Polish Architects Association, the new spatial development, local plans have been prepared in 1992. It was an integral part of Master Plan for Warsaw Town (1:10 000), ratified by Warsaw Council on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1992 [14]. As a new concept, the contribution of local community was introduced to planning and decision-making process. The decision to start revitalisation project on the ground of tourist based services was difficult as this run-down district was far from being tourist attraction or cultural centre. A former, developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century, industrial quarter in decline had no tradition of cultural venues (museum, galleries or theatre). Not having been visited by tourists had no hotels, catering, no recognised cultural landmarks, lacking in distinctive architectural relics (as historical, monumental residences). Project of re-defining its tradition and identity has been developed with the aim of mixed-land-use: office space, residential areas, museums and art galleries, hotels, catering, retails, public transport and outdoor recreation and sport areas. The major aim was to transform this forgotten, industrial district into one of the most active in Warsaw cultural centres. It was hoped that "arts-led" regeneration strategy and creation of "culture clusters" would help to reconstruct quarter's image, making it attractive to potential investors and visitors (urban tourism). Inspiration was drawn from Bilbao, Birmingham and other European cities which re-designed their image in 1980s and 1990s [3, 4].

One of the first to be developed was project intended for Fabryka Trzciny, former state-owned factory complex, built in 1916 as a fruit preserve plant (Otwocka Street). Today it serves as an art and education centre, filled with avant-garde art activities, being example of successful synergy of artistic collaboration and urban renewal. This raw brick-walled space of 2000sq m has caught the attention of prominent Warsaw architects and artists. On the base of ideas and design mastered in 2001-2002 by young architects (Agnieszka Chmielewska, Joanna Kuchyńska and Bogdan Kulczyński), the warehouse underwent two years of renovation and redesign to become the first Praga District "culture factory", a cultural cluster in the post-industrial landscape. The "culture factory" was opened in 2003, welcoming local community of the Praga District as well as Warsaw inhabitants from other parts of the city. Soon urban tourists groups arrived, attracted by concert halls, conference rooms (of total capacity of 650 persons), famous gourmet restaurant, and club with mini library, art gallery spaces and off-theatre "Teatr Nowa Praga". Having had already almost 270 000 visitors, 200 concerts, 60 art exhibition and 26 art festivals, it is clear that "Fabryka Trzciny" embrace opportunities to change "old Praga" unpleasant image. It became a role model for other projects (off-theatres, art galleries, restaurants and museums), a catalyst for revitalisation run-down cultural and social space.

The next to follow successful example of Fabryka Trzciny was well-known Praga landmark Fabryka Wodek Koneser, an old vodka distillery. In the past century this distillery perfected the art of vodka, producing various brands of liquid, including the popular Legenda, Warszawska and Targowa types. This 19<sup>th</sup> century brown-brick historically-listed, neo-gothic complex with charming towers and pointed arches (factory was established in 1897), after 1990 lacked sufficient state funding which led to the development of new, more creative sources of income. Now, it is recognised as a creativity cluster, only last year Luksfera Gallery, off-theatre, restaurant, club, have been set up there. Since 2005 the ambitious theatre group Wytwornia Entrepreneurs has been another prominent resident of the site, composing productions that explore unconventional and controversial topics, interestingly highly appreciated by both critics and audience. A southwest enclave of the historic complex is occupied by Magazyn Praga, the interior design boutique combined with fashion-forward art gallery. Its owner, the young art historian sees the value in promoting local designers and fresh young designer's ideas. The gallery offers furniture, lamps, candle holders, porcelain products, clocks, paintings and sculptures. The location is strategic as the remaining vacant mega-space of Fabryka Wodek Koneser is now being converted into opulent lofts.

These two clusters are not isolated islands. Historically the Praga District was divided between two communities: Jewish and Christian. In 55 Targowa Street, a museum in the oldest preserved residential building and Jewish Synagogue of the Praga District will be soon opened, with a display of 18<sup>th</sup> century wall paintings (now being carefully renovated). In Inżynierska Street, Stalowa Street, Mała Street we can feel powerful creative spirit, visible through changing landscape (architecture and society). New smart restaurants, art galleries (Nizio Gallery, Studio Melon), nightclubs, photography studios (3/3 Studio), have all set down roots there. The charming and unique in character ('bohemian style') cafe-bar combos have usually outstanding flea-market decor (old-school sofas, carpets, rickety tables, large oak bar cabinets, often pianos). Occasional art exhibitions decorate its walls. Its ridiculously long names ("In the vapours of the absurd", "On the other side of the mirrors" or "The Bald Penguin") are appreciated by guests: intellectuals, artists, students and also tourists looking for a specific, bohemian-chic atmosphere. Food enthusiasts could enjoy local ele-

gant restaurants, located next to Praski Park (Le Cedre with Middle East atmosphere, luxurious interiors, colourful flowers, not to mention outstanding flavoursome meals) but also numerous "traditional" bars, definitely budget friendly (Bar Mleczny in Zabkowska Street). Two new restaurants, Papparazzi and Porto Praga were established by British entrepreneur, who gave a new lease to a 300-year old flour mill. The location is important, in the next two years the neighbourhood is scheduled for comprehensive streetscape improvement project. The dominant structure will be newly erected ultramodern stadium designed for the EURO 2012 Football Championships, surrounded by vast outdoor recreation greens. As cultural tourism attraction itself does not make a 'tourist product', it needs to be embedded in a whole range of services and facilities (hotels, travel agencies, tour operators, guides, transport infrastructure). In the last few years several hotels have been opened at the Praga District ("Hetman", "Rejtan"), tourist guides are trained especially for the Praga District tours. A strategy of "Agenda 21" was adapted: "Think locally, act globally", meaning international standards for tourist services but local flavours to be offered. In the contemporary competitive market, tourist product should satisfy the rapidly changing needs and wants. To be able to respond to hospitality industry expectations, in 1990 a new University of Hospitality, Food and Tourist Management has been opened at the Praga District with the undergraduate and graduate courses offered. As it is hoped, newly trained hospitality employees will possess required skills.

However, undergoing a fast-paced metamorphosis, it does not mean that the Praga District has stopped struggling with its poverty. One can still spot beat-up buildings with characteristic laundry draped outside, with claw-shaped rusted metal pipes piercing through walls, gritty storefront windows and rambling courtyards with numerous dust bins but neither greens, nor children playgrounds or outdoor recreation areas. This dichotomy (modern versus tradition, progress versus poverty) could be clearly exemplified on Zabkowska Street. In line with the new, significant cultural clusters (Fabryka Wodek Koneser, numerous clubs, fashionable boutiques, drama studios and art galleries) and some recently renovated pre-war houses, just across the street one can spot a rundown urban landscape. Located on the eastern bank of the Vistula River, the Praga District was the least destroyed by enemy activity in World War II. Consequently the area cultivated its own culture, spirit, dialect (lingo), isolated by the river had a notorious image, gritty reputation due to the high crime rate. However, over the past decade Praga has partly shaken its shade image to become "bohemian quarter", tourist attraction. The area became more attractive for middle class and now is inhabited by different society groups: working class, students (six universities have been founded) (Tab. 1), scholars, writers, poets, musicians, designers, actors, architects and young professionals. Naturally, the concern remains that "new society" is polarized (economically, culturally) and have a long way to become truly democratic and inclusive. Perhaps next generation...

This shift from a dilapidated industrial landscape to tourist attraction was by no means a straightforward transition. Development of art-related activities (numerous art galleries, newly founded museums, off-theatres) triggered process of built environment and social revitalisation. This example of urban cultural and social renaissance also shows how the successful local project could enhance property values and generate employment growth. Summarising, it is also necessary to underline the importance of social problems and the role of local community contribution in the Praga District revitalisation process. It goes without saying that without their active participation, as well as approval and support for the local government spatial policy, all efforts would not be crowned with such a promising, for further development, success.

**Table 1.** Major data on the Praga District in the context of Warsaw\*

Specification	Praga District	Warsaw
Area	22.4 sq. km (4.3 %)	519.9 sq. km (100%)
Population	186 400	1 692 900
Working age population	123 300	1 113 400
Primary schools	23	279
Secondary schools	19	227
Higher education institutions	6	77
Total ascertained crimes	10 879 (in 2005: 11 348)	90 727 (in 2005: 91 838)
Business activities	10 199	146 616
Hotels and restaurants	982 (4%)	18 803 (100%)

\* Source [5, 14]

In summary one can state:

1. The broad definition of culture implicates the complexity and diversity of cultural tourism. The great attraction is not only well preserved historic built environment, but also arts and cultural institutions activities, the local community heritage expressed not only by architecture but also diversity of local gastronomy, local dialects, traditional rituals, festivals, songs, jokes (presented by tourist guides).

2. On the example of the Praga District case study one can see how cultural tourism can provide alternative sources of revenue, when traditional industries have declined. The use of cultural events and art promoting initiatives has become there a common means of transforming urban landscape. The research results showed that urban tourism has not only improved the socio-economic status of the Praga District, contributed positively to local community life, but also helped to develop concept of regeneration historical buildings and sites. What should be underlined, this successful regeneration strategy also contributed to social integration and community cohesion (however at present only to some limits). Furthermore, these effects of cultural regeneration initiatives are cumulative, they encourage investors, improve infrastructure, better local facilities and services (as affordable housing at Zabkowska Street, Nieporecka Street, Minska Street, Terespolska Street, better public transport, education), increase local green spaces. There are also signs that culture clusters are spreading further across the district. Why it is so successful? Over the past decade spatial and social regeneration strategies developed for the Praga District have been integrated, urban policy treated inseparable from cultural and social revitalisation. That is why local communities benefit so much from this regeneration project.

3. Urban renaissance policy developed in the Praga District (Warsaw) showed, that revitalisation of built environment in decline cannot be satisfactory in isolation from the culture and society determinations. Effective planning involves architects, urban planners, and also winning community support. In Warsaw we witness many political declarations claimed to prioritise community needs, but unfortunately often these promises are not been born out in reality. The Praga District case is very different. Much of the regeneration project (on all planning and implementation stages) was managed through the local self-government, Non Government Organisations, school children participation also informal groups' contribution. The private-public initiatives were necessary to examine and solve problems of spatial and social regeneration. The importance of the local community presence in the decision-making process and interests in district regeneration were consequently respected and in effect local residences benefited directly from this revitalisation strategy. The former district "famous" for anger and aggression (everlasting "battlefield" to be avoided) is a good example of possible change for better now. Today, social fabric is different and the strong sense of community

identity, patriotism helps to shape further visions. The most important factors for this sustainable urban resurgence can be named:

- economic use of land (avoiding urban sprawl);
- community participation (democratic, inclusive and participatory);
- economic strength (good promotion of tourist attraction and services; public and private investments: art galleries, museums, hotels);
- ecological awareness (environment protection, increase of urban greens, outdoor recreation areas, efficient use of energy);
- cultural heritage protection (post industrial built environment, architectural relics, arts and cultural institutions activities, local gastronomy, tradition and dialects);
- good governance and good design (attractive architecture, landscaping, public space management, approved and consulted with local community members, with their active commitment and participation).

4. The satisfactory recovery of built environment in decline is an important and difficult challenge for citizens, for urban planners, for public institutions at all levels (including self-government and Non-Government Organisations). It requires creativity and innovativeness, vision of urban vitality and sustainability, interconnected efforts of all stakeholders. The urban tourism plan should be prepared as part of the urban comprehensive redevelopment plan to achieve integration of space use.

5. Planning for tourism development in towns presents different problems than in resorts, such as competing demands for prime sites for hotels, retail or traffic congestion, which may be caused by tourism development or over-use of primary tourist attractions. Moreover tourism should not be seen as solely chance for inner-city revitalisation, as not all culture clusters have the sufficient resources for tourism, lacking attracting power. Therefore, the extent of use of these by local community (offices, residential uses, culture/educative centres) should be considered. Bearing this in mind, each site must be individually evaluated. Although cultural tourism and leisure cannot be the only panacea for urban renaissance, tourism alternative could be one of the possibilities to save urban heritage. Furthermore, as its capacity to create new jobs and its dynamic is considerable, it makes this choice very serious.

## Conclusions

It is not claimed that this text covers all issues of the Praga District regeneration process, as this was beyond the research scope. The intention was to highlight the implications of culture tourism and urban resurgence, to show how much the concentration of culture clusters could be a powerful formula. The aim was to identify substantial issues that are relevant to built environment regeneration in the context of culture and society. Although based on the concrete case study in Warsaw, final conclusions were formulated as irrespective of location or national boundaries with a hope to be applicable for other space contexts.

Tourism can yield enormous socio-cultural benefits as providing much-needed funds to help restore industrial sites in decline. Examples of such a good practice can be found in many European countries, also in Poland. The net effect of further segments of the Praga District project and its foreseen success will depend upon the responsibility exercised by various stakeholders, including the public and private sectors, tourists as well as local community members. It is beyond any dispute that the forthcoming large-scale events connected with Euro 2012 Games in Poland and the fact of location of the National Sta-

dium at the Praga District represents huge business opportunity and might underpin many further regeneration schemes – these chances cannot be underrated and disregarded.

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