

Wrocław, Poland

Maximum leverage from limited resources

The Silesian capital of Wrocław was extensively destroyed in the Second World War and after it, but it is becoming a thriving city. Just across the river from its mediaeval old town stands the district of Nadodrze, one of the most deprived urban areas in the city. Through the ERDF, Nadodrze has benefited from an integrated revitalisation programme. Public participation and local NGO involvement is a major feature of this programme, which represents one of the first attempts in Poland to launch a multi-stakeholder area-based process. This relatively modest €30-million programme has worked simultaneously on infrastructure, local economy and social issues.

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Wrocław, the 630 000-strong capital of the Polish region of Lower Silesia, has recovered a great deal of its stature since its near-total destruction in 1945. In particular it has restored its mediaeval old town on the banks of the River Odra, which has become a major tourist attraction. After joining the European Union in 2004, it wanted to continue the process in its other districts, which had been neglected for decades. Being a relatively prosperous community, Wrocław could embark on an ambitious plan of regeneration of several deprived urban areas implementing an integrated approach. The municipality decided to focus first on the district of Nadodrze, which ranks among the most deprived urban areas of the city. The regeneration process of Nadodrze is intended to function as a pilot project for the renewal of other areas in the city.

With the support of the ERDF and knowledge exchange with other EU cities through URBACT, the municipality designed an integrated plan for urban regeneration, which included several stakeholders in a local support group, with the presence of the district administration, the municipality and local NGOs. Working on three fronts – infrastructure, economy and society – requires a coherent approach by the public authorities. Therefore to achieve this, the mayor set up a special co-ordinating office which could exercise clear leadership, management and coordination of action related to this strategy.

The regeneration aims to improve the municipal infrastructure in Nadodrze such as public transport, schools and security, as well as boosting the local economy. It is also renovating the exteriors and courtyards of a number of apartment buildings. This plan is strongly supported by the collaboration of local NGOs (there are around 80 in the neighbourhood) which focussed on a series of micro-projects involving the weakest groups of residents in Nadodrze. Some of these initiatives have secured support from the ESF.

For the purpose of involving the local population, the city opened an 'InfoPoint' which became the focal point for community discussions and NGO action. However, it appears that the social programmes focused too intensely on employment, for instance by introducing residents to traditional handicrafts which are nowadays in demand from visitors to the town. This meant that issues regarding access to housing, regeneration and maintenance of blighted apartment buildings could not be tackled. Some of the population remains sceptical of the value of a communal effort, and it seems that more community development work and planning including housing issues needs to be done.

Overall, the programme has been a success. The way it has addressed a complex and multi-dimensional problem has earned it the title of the *Wrocław model of revitalisation* which represents an innovative model in the Polish context.

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The revitalisation of the district of Nadodrze in Wrocław has shown how complicated neighbourhood revitalisation can be, but also that complex problems can be solved when people work together. The truth of this was not known at the outset. A three-year learning process had to be undertaken before the solution was achieved. This is now being recognised across the country as the *Wrocław model of revitalisation*. A series of large-scale actions were planned here, to ensure long-lasting results. Transformations in this district are now being used as an example for actions in other areas. The key is to convince inhabitants and businesses that profound change is possible, if only everyone gets on board.

Wrocław is one of Poland's main cities, and its importance transcends the borders of the region of Silesia, and even of the country. In national spatial policy this metropolis has many key functions, the first of these being as host for higher education, research, technology and culture. In 2016 it will be a European Capital of Culture. Over the last 20 years the city authorities have implemented a development policy which has become well-known at national level. Wrocław has become nationally known for its successful renewal of the 'old town' in the last decade of the 20th century. This regeneration effort was admired by the local community, but also by an increasing number of tourists and guests. The growth of the city's attractiveness had a significant impact on the economic and social situation, making Wrocław one of the winners of political transformation in Poland.

Like other cities in western Poland, Wrocław has a complicated history, especially in the last century. It was nearly destroyed during the Second World War. The destruction culminated in the war's final months, when the city was turned into a 'fortress' in which the Nazi rear-guard resisted even longer than in Berlin. In an attempt to survive the siege, they demolished a large part of the city centre to build an airfield.

After the war, the region suffered the wholesale exchange of urban communities as a result of shifting frontiers. The existing population was displaced to the west, and the city was occupied by a new immigrant population, mostly from around Lviv, now in the Ukraine. Most of the incomers had no urban tradition. The political situation meant that this population perceived its living situation as unstable and did not identify with its new place of residence. Also in general this new population was smaller than before the war, so many buildings and much of the infrastructure were superfluous. As a result the authorities did not provide enough resources for maintenance, repairs and rebuilding. This interim state of uncertainty lasted almost half a century. The centres of cities in western Poland were especially neglected. The best-known example of this type is Wrocław – the largest city within the new post-war borders of western Poland.

Besides the careful restoration of the main historic buildings, the post-war spatial development of Wrocław, especially in the 70s, relied mainly on the construction of new suburban housing estates. Historic city centres became abandoned and neglected. They also often became social problem areas, as low-income or socially problematic families were housed there. So the city's historic core and adjoining districts were first ruined by war and subsequently downgraded in communist times. The old town core has been revitalised over the last 20 years and now is one of most attractive urban centres in this part of Europe. But the remaining historic districts are examples of destruction and social degradation. One such area was Nadodrze, with 35 000 residents. This was formerly one of the most vital parts of the city, competing with the old town, but until recently has suffered an accumulation of negative features.

A complex revitalisation

Just after Poland's accession to the European Union, the Wrocław authorities carried out several ERDF infrastructure projects, which concerned the Nadodrze district among others. These were mainly projects to improve public transport and upgrade streets and bridges. The total budget of these projects can be roughly estimated at €40 million. These projects brought with them knowledge and experience, which Wrocław municipality also gained from pilot actions undertaken as part of the URBACT and Central Europe programmes. They gave access to the experiences of other European cities, and led to the more efficient and less risky planning of revitalisation processes in Nadodrze. Gradually the idea of the complex revitalisation of the district was born, embracing both infrastructure and social issues.



**The renovation of courtyards in Nadodrze
(Photo: M. Kulczynski, UM Wrocław archive)**

Such a complex and comprehensive project had not been realised elsewhere in Poland on the scale and with such determination as the revitalisation in Wrocław. The success of the renewal and reanimation of the old town, which engaged the local community and private capital on a large scale, encouraged further actions. In 2005, directly after Poland's accession to European Union, Wrocław municipality adopted the Local Revitalisation Programme to prepare the city for new urban projects, similar to the URBAN II programme, which was active in the 15 'old' Member States until 2006. However the new ERDF regulations did not continue the URBAN programme and European resources intended for revitalisation were to be reduced in the main programme. It was therefore decided to amend the Local Revitalisation Programme and to limit it to the selected 'support area'. The idea was to concentrate efforts and resources on a smaller area, to make the effects of actions more visible and, according to Deputy Mayor Adam Grehl, to cause a 'snowball effect'. The goal was to engender endogenous development processes with the participation of private capital and the local community. The programme aimed to affect development processes in entire town, breaking organisational and mental barriers, and proving the efficiency of coordinated actions.

Several possible 'support areas' were considered, and each was carefully analysed. Most districts of town had poor infrastructure, and several areas were in a similarly bad social situation. The choice of Nadodrze was influenced by its position next to the old town, which had been transformed several years earlier. Also the area is centrally located and very accessible, which strengthens the potential for economic stimulation and may promote the authority's new development policy. Another reason was the district's urban texture, which includes attractive public spaces, including green spaces, which may serve residents from the wider area, stimulate business and attract new residents. Although the district was neglected, its spatial arrangement is an outstanding piece of town planning from an earlier age. Also the size of district was appropriate to the resources which would be available. In

addition the number of empty communal properties would facilitate the process of transformation.

From the outset there were differing opinions about the strategy and priorities for action in the neighbourhood. First of all, owing to its central location in town, the idea came up to make it a continuation of the city centre, with services typical of such areas. The housing function was not so important in this approach. On the other hand the social situation of the district required a special social programme, to bring the inhabitants into the mainstream of the transformations and to improve their situation. A second option treated housing and inclusion as most important. A wide-ranging debate ensued. From these discussions emerged the practical model of collaboration, engaging various organisations, involving and strengthening the local community, realising simultaneously many goals and using highly differentiated financial resources.

A focus for community action

Maja Zabokrzycka describes the beginnings of one of the key institutions for this collaboration – the InfoPoint at 5 Łokietka Street. As previously planned by the city authorities, its task was to inform the local community and interested businesses about the municipal investment programmes in Nadodrze. But it soon turned out that pure information is not enough – it became necessary to discuss local problems and try to work out solutions. The InfoPoint started to fulfil the function of bringing the local community together. It conducted discussions on important problems such as safety. Gradually it has transformed itself into the place where social dialogue happens, supporting the major infrastructural transformations of the district. It has liberated the huge social potential, especially of young people and the number of non-government organisations acting in Nadodrze grew significantly to several dozen. Though it was not easy, it turned out to be necessary to co-ordinate their activity, while trying to avoid crushing anyone's enthusiasm or ambitions.



Involving inhabitants into renewal
(photo: M. Kulczynski, UM Wroclaw archive)

Employment was one of hottest problems. That is why the InfoPoint also started to deal with the economic animation of the area and to support both existing businesses and start-ups. One of its first initiatives was to draw up an inventory of traditional handcrafts and services. On this base it worked out a programme supporting this type of activities, to restore the commercial power of the district. At present the InfoPoint is a subsidiary of the municipal Economic Development Office and among other things it encourages new commercial undertakings, especially those of an 'artistic' character, which is becoming a speciality of the district. It has also worked out attractive visual identification rules, combining tradition with the new character of the district.

The InfoPoint has gradually changed its approach, and now tries to identify smaller groups of local people, to solve the problems of micro-communities. This is a constant process, as various new organisations are drawn into the actions in Nadodrze. One example is the Active Culture Association,

which organises workshops for children and young people. The municipality renovated a building in Paulinska Street especially for such NGOs. It houses the local athletic club as well, which offers spare-time activities for local young people. The centre also works with older people, and tries to integrate them with the new inhabitants of the district.

Partnerships bring local residents on board

The municipal institutions also needed to change their attitude and working approach when Nadodrze was included in the special urban revitalisation programme. The Municipal Centre for Social Assistance (MOPS) had been helping disadvantaged people for a long time and had maintained an office in Nadodrze for 15 years. But since 2010, within the 'Wrocław – city of active people' programme, cofinanced by the ESF, it has introduced completely new forms of action. It has prepared the Local Activity Programme, which is dedicated to Nadodrze along with three other districts. It helps people who need special support, and who are determined to make a change, to complete a two-year programme to rebuild their working and social life. This work is very difficult, but has already achieved many spectacular individual successes. The experience gained in this way has not only led the centre to modify its programme, but has also influenced the whole local community. The social life of the district and the inhabitants' approach to transformations has started to change.

This has pushed the centre to launch additional operations to promote the active integration of the whole local community. It aimed to encourage a debate with people, and to persuade them that the living conditions in Nadodrze could be changed and that it is useful to join in this process, to achieve their own plans and improve the social situation. Thanks to MOPS's efforts, new partners have joined in the actions to improve Nadodrze. A broad collaboration arose spontaneously among institutions with similar or complementary aims. Under MOPS's supervision, 19 organisations have joined together to create the 'For Nadodrze Together' partnership to develop the local community through active integration projects.

Violetta Bodnar, leading the MOPS integrative actions, says that through this partnership people have become closer, more open, more responsible, and readier to help others. This makes it easier to overcome the district's key problems and supports the huge municipal investment programme running in Nadodrze. New investments repaint the landscape of the city, and the activities of 'For Nadodrze Together' knit together the social fabric. When their environment is transformed, the existing inhabitants are inclined to be more active in changing their own social position. And once their social activity is stimulated, professional activation follows. The best participants in this programme become 'Leaders of the local community', learning how to involve others in transforming their lives.

The municipality has discovered the importance of the social problems that arise from renewal. The existing inhabitants often fear that the city's investment activity may turn out badly for them. They think that rents will rise and they will lose their apartments. So they are often against the changes, and even against repairs being made to their own houses. MOPS is learning how to use the possibilities the municipality offers to modify attitudes, change behaviour and improve education. It helps residents to change their self-image, to raise their self-confidence, to make better use of the resources they have, as well as to know how to live in the information era. It teaches them to think with the community in mind, to share the area's identity and to make use of the new spaces, thus improving their living standards.

The InfoPoint Łokietka 5 is also a member of the 'For Nadodrze Together' partnership led by MOPS, though the profiles of the institutions are different. Each institution in the partnership undertakes different actions, addressed to different target groups. That's why the partnership is an effective platform of integration. For example the new artistic enterprises in Nadodrze were too distant from the interests and problems of the local community, as they were mostly addressed to customers from elsewhere in the city and to tourists. It was therefore decided to prevent this growing into a major problem by introducing local residents to artistic activities



New public spaces in Nadodrze

(Photo: M. Kulczynski, UM Wrocław archive)

too. Workshops and artistic meetings were organised, and it is planned to purchase materials so that studios can invite local people to try out a range of artistic technologies.

NGOs are playing an important role. A large programme of actions is being prepared by the Eco-development Foundation. They have received a huge grant to build their own offices in Nadodrze. Some of their activities will be directed to the district's residents, and the idea of sustainable development may help to transform many of the social behaviours connected with the use of

surrounding space. The Sparkle organisation works with young people from the Roma minority, engaging them in sports activities. This group has also produced a movie about how to counteract aggression. The Springboard Association, which works with young delinquents, has street workers dealing with more than 60 young people. It also organises a 'flying university' which tries to introduce young people in new activities, such as science or art.

The House of Columns club has also joined the collaborative structure. It offers complimentary tickets to cultural events to the beneficiaries of social aid programmes. But it has also prepared a special event which aimed to strengthen residents' social identity – a play about Nadodrze's history, with the residents playing the roles. The rehearsals for the performance lasted half the year, and the end result was an important social event for the district, as well as an artistic success. Such joint operations aim to promote local identity as well as collaboration. The formal District Council, presided over for 20 years by Jerzy Sznerch, also undertakes sports actions, where cooperation takes precedence over competition. At the sports tournaments, teams are identified with no particular faction, so as not to exacerbate internal antagonisms, but to build the sense of identity of the district as a whole.

Małgorzata Golak from the municipal Economic Development Office underlines the importance of other partnerships in the economic transformation of the district. Using the local support group organised during of the Urbameco project (part of the URBACT programme), the office has convened many institutions which are supporting the business environment. Usually these organisations try to act autonomously, within their own competences, but they started to collaborate on a project to animate the former trade routes that run through Nadodrze. Laura Pienkowska remembers how difficult it was to achieve change and to convince businesses to think anew. The 'Nadodrze Shop Windows' project aimed to update the district's image and to attract customers. It had to be clearly visible, and therefore had to include all the shops along the main shopping streets. But it was not at all easy to convince all the shop-owners it was a good idea.

There are also other projects. The construction of the Centre for Professional Development and a base for other all-town social services and activities supporting the local economy serve the city's whole population. However the development of these exogenous functions connects Nadodrze to the rest of the city and makes it more attractive for existing and new inhabitants and for businesses.

Targeting limited resources

Director Tomasz Solowiej from the municipality's Managing Office for European Funds underlines that it is very difficult to organise actions financed from different funds, because it means to collaborate with so many organisations, both inside and outside municipal structures. As a relatively rich city, Wrocław expected limitations in access to the European funds resources. It stemmed from the fact that in the last 20 years the city, as a leader in the country, has made use of almost all the new opportunities for development that were opened up by the political transformation of Poland. But other cities in the region are not developing so well or so fast, and they are considerably smaller. In many of them social and economic problems are very deep. Therefore Wrocław is not seen as a priority for help with external resources. That is why it cannot expect a high per capita support from European funds, including the ERDF. The revitalisation programme has therefore been funded to a large extent – over half – from the city's own resources.

In such circumstances, in 2008 the municipality amended the revitalisation programme by limiting it to a spatially limited 'support area'. The idea was that to obtain visible effects with the city's limited resources. After Nadodrze was chosen, the district was covered with a number of projects and urban programmes, among others the '100 townhouses' and 'traditional shopping streets' programmes, as well as social programmes, partly implemented by NGOs. Sixteen new infrastructure projects were prepared, all within the framework of the ERDF Lower Silesian Regional Operational Programme (RPO WD). All the infrastructure projects in Nadodrze aimed simultaneously to improve the quality of public spaces, economic growth, and the social situation. The main infrastructure projects concern the local community generally. The renewal of two schools aimed to enhance learning conditions for young people and to reduce social problems. The renewal of the police station and the video monitoring of public spaces aimed to improve safety and to build positive social relations. The renovation of façades, the co-ordination of commercial development and the improvement of public transport aimed to stimulate the Nadodrze economy and to make this district commercially attractive in the context of the whole city.

Besides the technical renovation of selected public buildings, green spaces and parks, other projects were initiated to renew façades and courtyards in residential buildings, also financed using the ERDF. Renovations of courtyards concern the inhabitants of the surrounding houses, though the improvement of the quality of inner public spaces and the aesthetics of buildings also influences the district as a whole. The support for the renovation of residential buildings improves living conditions and attracts new inhabitants. These operations also aimed to encourage the residents to join the programme by renovating their flats using their own private resources. Actions of this type concern 60 or so buildings, selected from over 250 which applied for financing. Operations also aimed to renovate shopping streets, improve transport and animate the area economically. All these actions were supported by circa €30 million from the ERDF.

In addition to all these actions a rich social programme costing some €5 million was implemented, financed by the municipal social programme along with an ESF contribution of under €1 million. In parallel, the activities of several dozen NGOs were developed, sponsored from various sources, including European grants and private resources. The ERDF support in Wrocław has convinced the municipality to coordinate different projects and plans and to undertake complementary actions, which made this regeneration project participative and also enabled additional private financing. This model seems to be attractive and potentially transferable to other communities as well.

The wide-ranging action to renovate quarters of residential houses achieved spectacular results. But the local community remained dissatisfied, misunderstanding the philosophy of such projects. The municipality cannot finance private property improvements, only public ones, and this can lead to paradoxes. For example considerable resources may be

committed to repairing a staircase, preservation of the historic appearance, while the flats themselves remain unrepaired – as private property cannot be renewed from public resources. A significant part of the local community does not understand these mechanisms and probably the local population was not prepared in advance about the limited renovation works. They see huge amounts of money being invested, but their direct living conditions remain unchanged. This may evoke frustration, in some cases leading to vandalism. Yet none of the social programmes includes activities to address these issues – as actions have been concentrated mainly on jobs and the labour market. Today the deficiencies in this area are considered to be one of the basic problems of Nadodrze.

A co-ordinating unit

In this mixture of different projects the greater part of the budget was spent on infrastructure. Sebastian Wolszczak was the coordinator, representing the vice-president of the city. He underlines that revitalisation is a multidisciplinary process. In the municipality's organisational structure there are many units whose competences and operations are connected with revitalisation. So, a key problem is the co-ordination of various operations driven by fragmented bodies, and their comprehensive programming and planning. At the beginning of the implementation of the revitalisation programme, Wrocław municipality set up a special coordinating unit. It is called the Presidential Department ('president' is the title of the city's mayor) whose tasks include synchronising different sectoral units within the framework of the Nadodrze revitalisation programme. These works are supervised by the Deputy City Mayor, Adam Grehl.

The new master plan for actions in Nadodrze is now being prepared, and it will take into account the achievements of recent years and the new rules for project implementation, as well as the changes in other external conditions – the budget situation and the new programming period for European funds. It also analyses and indicates the concentrations of social problems in the district, so that it can deal with social projects for effectively and strengthen and empower the local community.

The essence of the programme is the co-ordination of various activities undertaken by the municipality in the investment, social and economic spheres in the chosen area (the so-called 'support area'). The key idea behind the Nadodrze revitalisation programme was the 'snowball effect' on development – the initiation of endogenous growth processes, through the inclusion of a wide range of local organisations and the local community. The intention of authorities was to prepare and implement 'catalyst' or 'seed' actions to achieve the critical mass that would make the process really take off. And it happened – Nadodrze became trendy and attracts new businesses and inhabitants, which come there with new power for changes. But in spite of many various soft actions the vast majority of the initial resources were invested by municipality in hard infrastructure. Nevertheless the stimulation of social activities in the city has been evaluated as the programme's biggest success.

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