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THE PARTICIPATION OF SOCIAL SCIENTISTS IN REVIVAL DIAGNOSES AND CONSULTATIONS

This paper presents the analysis of the roles social scientists play as agents of revival. Their expert knowledge may be used in the process of preparing the diagnosis, conducting social consultations, evaluating the revival projects and in interventions aimed at local social changes. The aim of the article is to point out to possible ways of engaging scientists in revival activities. It focuses on the increasing scope of actions a social scientist may conduct participating in the revival, due to new social needs and formal requirements. The article is divided into two parts. The first part presents a new approach to revival and new formal requirements formulated in the 2015 Act on revival (in Polish: Ustawa o rewitalizacji). This is crucial for understanding the important role social scientists play nowadays. The second part includes a concise description of research methods and techniques used in diagnosing, consulting and evaluating, with a focus on the possibilities of benefitting from the expert knowledge. The paper delineates the ways of modifying and adapting these methods to be used on different stages of revival. Finally, new aspects of the role social scientists play in revival, due to their increased role in the process, are discussed.

The social scientist as the agent of revival in the light of formal requirements

In Poland, revival is associated mainly with building renewal and the improvement of technical infrastructure. In contrast to these associations, revival is first and foremost aimed at making places more agreeable for the inhabitants and visitors, and at making people use these places more frequently. Therefore, changing buildings is only a means, not – the aim of revival. The adjective “social” is sometimes added to the word “revival” in order to distinguish between the narrowly understood renewal of infrastructure from

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the complex, holistic one. Social revival is conducted “for people”, even though the one that is done “with people” has been shown to be more effective and bring long-term results.

There is a broad definition of revival in the Act on revival of October 9th, 2015. As stated in the Act, revival is “*a complex process of lifting degraded areas out of the critical state, by conducting integrated activities for local society, space and economy in a certain defined area, conducted by the stakeholders of revival and based on the Communal Revival Programme*” (Act on revival 2015).

As stated in the Act, revival should be of participative character, in each of its stages: during the preparation of diagnosis, developing the revival programmes and when conducting particular activities. Preparing the diagnosis constitutes the first step of revival. The diagnosis aims at: determining the degraded area and the area to be revitalised and drawing or amending the Communal Revival Programme (in Polish: Gminny Program Rewitalizacji, GPR). The subsequent diagnoses serve to evaluate whether GPR is up to date and point to the possible ways of its realisation. The quality of the diagnoses is also being emphasized. The diagnoses should be based on objective and verifiable data obtained by means of research methods adequate to the needs and local situation (ibid. 2015). The Act not only permits but even obliges the local authorities to consult the agreements and projects practically on every stage of preparing and conducting the process of revival. Revival is therefore a process which can (and even should) be modified if there are substantial arguments in favour of it.

There are consultations in reference to GPR, and the outcome of these consultations should be applied in the approved version of the project. Another article present in this volume, namely: “Formal framework for participation in the Polish-German borderland communities” delineates the standards for social consultations, that should be observed in order to ensure maximum inhabitants’ participation (Mielczarek-Żejmo 2016). In this paper, only the most important aspects of these standards will be listed. These are: adequately (openly, clearly, on a large scale) informing the inhabitants about the planned actions, taking as many social interests into account as possible, and informing the stakeholders about the consultations’ outcome (Chrzanowski et al. 2013).

One could ask about the goal of uneasy and time-consuming consultations. As detailed in the Act, their aim is to meet the needs and expectations of particular stakeholders. Educational and informative activities carried out along consultations can contribute to the inhabitants’ engagement, as well as their sense of belonging and responsibility for certain places

and their fate (Act on revival 2015). The representatives of local authorities responsible for particular revival activities usually lack abilities and competences to conduct studies and analyses indispensable for formulating a good diagnosis. They not always find it comfortable to lead or chair social consultations. For this reason, administrative employees should work hand in hand with social scientists, the representatives of non-governmental institutions and other parties interested in the revival. In this paper, I focus on the potential role of social scientists whose knowledge and abilities can facilitate social changes, crucial for the whole revival process. Figure 1 presents a scheme of stages of preparing and conducting revival. Those areas which could benefit the most from the social scientists' work are marked dark grey.

There are various forms of consultations listed in the Act. Collecting opinions in the written form (electronic or hard copies, i.e. paper questionnaires, e-mails, electronic forms) is required. In addition to that, one is obliged to conduct at least two activities out what follows: meetings, debates, workshops, study walks, surveys, interviews, consulting groups of representatives and collecting oral opinions (*ibid.* 2015).

Social studies and consultations are indispensable also at the stage of evaluating whether GPR is up to date and doable. These activities have to be conducted at least once in 3 years (*ibid.* 2015). By emphasizing the importance of social studies and analyses, as well as social participation, the Act's requirements constitute a challenge for the authorities. However, they at the same time provide for the opportunity to benefit from expert knowledge about social processes and conducting research. By the same token, social scientists are engaged in local revival initiatives, and science is combined with practice.

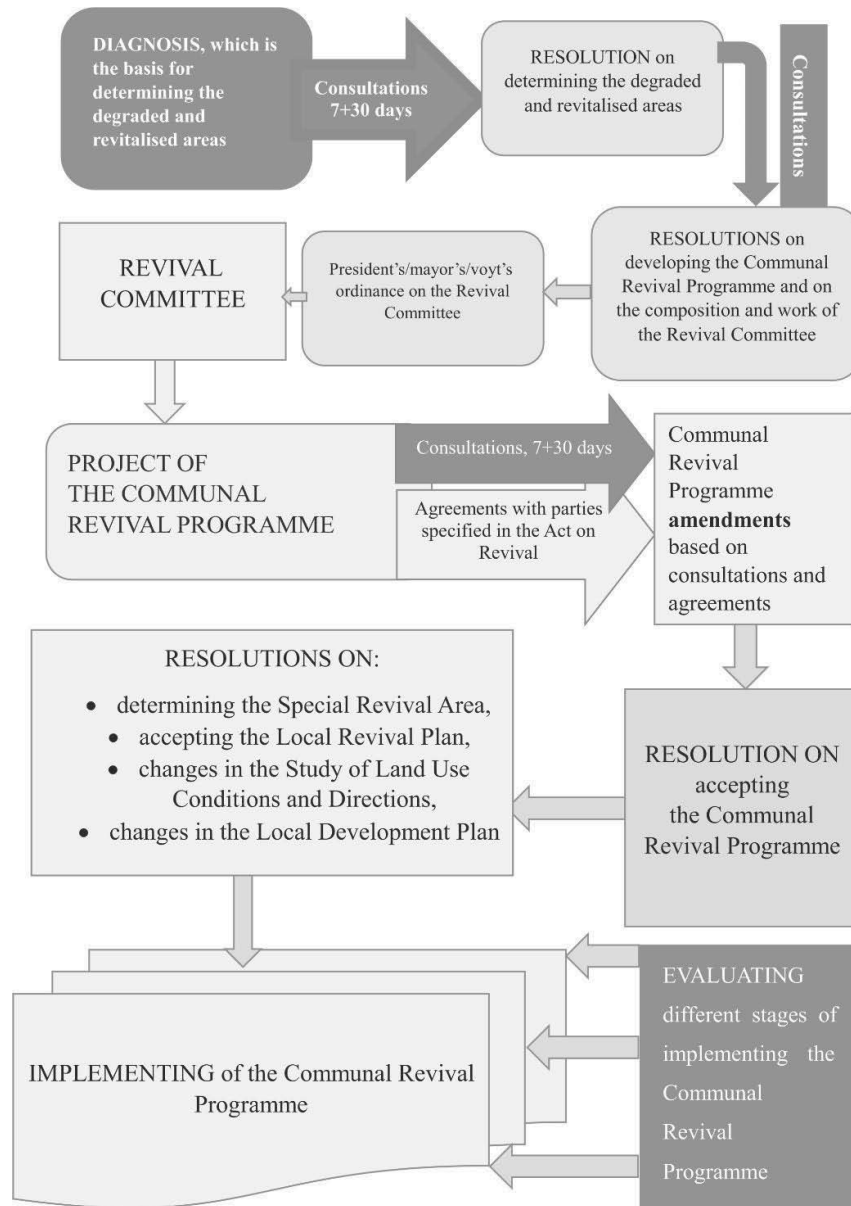


Figure 1. Scheme of preparing, conducting and evaluating revival, in reference to the requirements of the Act on revival, 2015.

Source: the author's own illustration.

Selected research methods used in diagnoses and consultations

Studies and consultations usually serve the following purposes:

- a) Determining the markers of crisis in the area under revival,
- b) Determining the needs, expectations and the potential of inhabitants and the stakeholders related to revival,
- c) Determining other conditions of revival,
- d) Defining the directions and scope of revival actions.

It would be difficult to point out to one universal model encompassing all goals and tasks to be fulfilled in a certain place and for a certain community. In order to determine the potential and the barriers in revival, it is also important to know the degree of social engagement, the bases for building identity in a certain place, cultural context and economic conditions. Moreover, the diagnosis should include the causes of satisfaction (or its lack) from living in a certain place and the sense of security (or its lack). It is also vital to define the neighbourhood relationships and bonds (or the lack of them). These relations might trigger and facilitate or, on the contrary, inhibit changes made in the course of revival. As elucidated above (see Figure 1), knowing the inhabitants' needs and expectations increases the chance to adjust particular programmes to real needs.

Triangulation, i.e. using several mutually complementary methods and techniques, allows to answer the questions raised in the diagnosis and during consultations. As shown above, the Act forces triangulation to some extent. That notwithstanding, taking different points of view on the social structure or the area into account is indispensable for drawing a real and accurate revival programme.

There is a plethora of methods used in diagnosis and consultations. There are also many opportunities for using them in a flexible and innovative way. Methods rooted in social sciences and marketing studies are used. Modern technologies facilitate attractive and easy data, projects' and actions' presenting. Adequate software and the Internet access allow for sharing opinions about revival while at home. Consolidated projects are understandable for inhabitants, which makes it possible to obtain opinions, information and ideas from the inhabitants. Mapping is an example of such a method, and will be further discussed in this article. Traditional research methods used in diagnosis and in consultations include: analysing documents and available data, conducting interviews (qualitative and quantitative; individual and group) and observations. These methods were detailed by several authors

(Babbie 2003, Hammersley, Atkinson 2000, Sztumski 1995, Maison 2001, Lisek-Michalska, Daniłowicz 2007). For this reason, this paper focuses on those methods which are often modified and adjusted to particular needs and the specificity of revival-related activities.

Interviews play an important role both at the stage of diagnosis and during the preparation of the Communal Revival Programme, as well as when evaluating particular activities. Conducted among the inhabitants and other stakeholders, they allow to learn about the needs and expectations of those stakeholders. Both the quantitative (questionnaires – ideally conducted in representative groups) and qualitative (with invited people, selected based on inclusion criteria such as: age, gender, place of living, type of activity, etc.) interviews are conducted. Yet, in order to obtain information related to more complex issues or details, interviews with experts are conducted. Experts are people who represent various branches or domains, and are able to describe a given situation from their domain-specific point of view, benefitting from their in-depth knowledge and experience. Sometimes meetings are organised in expert groups. These groups are composed of representatives of a given branch, domain or business, e.g. of architects, designers, urban designers, etc. The group interviews are aimed at providing answers to more detailed questions, in the course of looking for particular solutions from the “expert” point of view. Interviews can be of various forms. There are: a) individual in-depth interviews, b) interviews accompanied by local surveys, called study walks (and detailed in this volume, Kwiatkowski 2016), c) group interviews – focus studies and d) STEEPVL analysis, related to the group interview. In addition to the crisis and potential diagnosis, preparing the revival project includes drawing a tentative plan of changes which are supposed to contribute to problem solving in a given area. Workshop and creative work methods are particularly useful.

The so-called creative group, i.e. a type of focus interview, is an example of such a method. Administering this method is not aimed at learning the participants’ opinions, but at obtaining and using the group effect to find a solution or come up with an idea. The method consists in using the effects participants exert on one another, i.e. benefitting from a mix of group effects: synergy, stimulation, snowball, spontaneity and security (Malinowski 2007, p. 130). Individuals able to think outside the box, tackle a certain problem from different perspectives and open to confronting their ideas with those of others are invited (Maison 2001, p. 28). The participants represent different organisations, institutions or businesses. Diversity is desired. By means of workshop techniques, such groups generate ideas which can be subsequently used in the revival.

A well prepared revival requires a diagnosis, as well as pointing to the predicted directions of development and potential threats to it. Therefore, in order to spot potential negative and positive effects of one's actions, the so-called foresight methods are used. These methods are rooted in management theory and are to serve predicting long-term consequences of actions (Kanoniuk 2012, pp. 93-102). The most frequently used one is the SWOT strategic analysis. As SWOT is highly popular and well-known, there will be a different method described in this paper, the one based on creative ways of working (most often by means of brainstorming), namely: the STE-EPVL¹ analysis. The method consists in determining seven categories of the development potential (the area potential if a certain place is taken into account). The name of the method is an acronym composed of the first letters in the names of factors' categories discussed: a) social, b) technological, c) economic, d) ecological, e) political, f) values and g) legal (Kanoniuk 2010). The participants brainstorm, and the process of brainstorming is supervised by the person who conducts the interview. The group enumerates particular factors, attributing them to the seven categories listed above. This usually generates a long list of several dozens of factors. Next, in the second stage of the study, the strength of the impact the factors have on revival is determined, most frequently in the course of voting. After summing up all categories separately, those categories which are characterised by the highest number of votes, i.e. the ones that were assessed as the most important by the voters, are identified. Consequently, a shorter list of factors is generated (Kanoniuk 2010, 2012).

Mapping is another method, more and more frequently used during consultations. It consists in using maps to mark important information about places, e.g. about where people feel safe, or which places need intervention (the so-called problem mapping). Mapping allows to obtain information referring to public places. A study conducted by means of this method can be carried out in a traditional way – by resorting to surveyors equipped with maps and sets of questions. That notwithstanding, modern technologies make it possible to use this method without making the respondents leave their homes, i.e. without risking high costs of the study. Irrespective of the questionnaires, questions can be asked during group meetings, although using freeware and maps online (Geonition, MySociety tools, websites such as Google Maps, etc.) is cheaper and more comfortable.

The "Count on green" (2014) ("Licz na zielen" in Polish) project, reali-

¹Determining development factors by means of individual interviews is less popular. Yet, if gathering several experts in one place, at one time, is very difficult, individual interviews become the only method applicable.

sed in several large Polish cities, is an example of such an initiative. The city inhabitants had the chance to put their remarks (both positive and negative), regarding green areas, on the maps. Figure 2 presents a map generated for Poznań. Although Figure 2 is black and white, the online version of the map is in colour. Numbers in circles stand for the number of opinions given about a certain place.



Figure 2. The website of “Count on green” project.
Source: <http://poznan.licznazielen.pl/mapa-1/>

This type of consultations is referred to as geo-consultations. Appropriately conducted, they can ensure a higher number of inhabitants sharing their opinions and remarks, as well as contribute to a smaller number of conflicts about developing public areas. Online maps can be used in a number of ways: to map problems, visualize projects and propose their different versions, inform about planned space changes, collect information regarding a certain place, etc.

What makes geo-consultations outscore other methods? Linking opinions with concrete spots, marked on a map, is one of its advantages. It makes people focus on, re-consider and re-analyse concrete places in order to mark them. The method limits the possibility of posting general opinions, which add little to the study, to the minimum, as it requires concrete answers. An inhabitant’s statement that he or she does not like the way of developing green areas in the city is not enough – the same inhabitant has to mark the disliked place and describe its problem. The method allows to collect a number of various opinions. Although there is a risk of obtaining too few opinions about a given place (due to the fact that every inhabitant

might mark different places), examples show that different respondents in fact point to the same problematic spots.

Mapping by means of online tools gives the chance to benefit from the expert knowledge of inhabitants who cannot (or are not willing to) participate in traditional consultations, but feel connected to the matters of the city and want to have an impact on the development of spaces they use. Its availability is an advantage of the method described, contrary to the fact that it may appeal only to those who are not afraid of new technologies. Despite numerous advantages of mapping, this method should be supplemented with another one. Even though its availability is an asset, the method needs additional promotional and informational activities, otherwise the inhabitants might be unaware of consultations taking place. Another challenge lies in the large amount of data which need to be analysed, possibly by social scientists. Geo-consultations constitute an interesting supplement to other types of consultations and well illustrate the special character of conducted or planned changes.

As mentioned above, revival projects can benefit from creative ways of working. Ideas may be generated by means of: brainstorming, preparing individual or group drawings, mock-ups and/or collages. It might be sometimes easier for the inhabitants to draw what they wish for that describe it. Apart from supervising creative thinking activities, social scientists should be able to monitor and lead group work. In such cases, the scientist at the same time facilitates certain activities, chairs the process of reaching consensus, as well as triggers creativity among the participants and encourages them to share their ideas with others.

In recent years we have seen an increased demand for cooperation between research and public institutions. On the one hand, it gives the possibility of using expert knowledge and developed on the basis recommendations. On the other it is also an opportunity for the academics to look at certain phenomena from the perspective of practitioners. That is also the case of activities related to revival, which requires collecting information about citizens' needs and expectations for changes in the space they use. In the new context (partly forced by the requirements contained in the 2015 Act on revival) the role of social scientists can go further than the classical implementation of social research. The social scientists can be in fact also an animators, facilitators of social initiatives for the community. The intervention activities are directed towards social change in local communities which according to the participatory approach encourage residents to co-participation. Examples of methods used in the diagnosis and public consultations show that the participation of researchers in the social processes

of revitalization can be significant.

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Keywords: urban renewal, urban regeneration/revitalization, urban revival, STEEPVL, geo-consultations, mapping.

The article presented possible ways of engaging social scientists as agents of revival. Their expert knowledge may be used in the process of preparing the diagnosis in conducting social consultations, evaluating the revival projects and also in interventions aimed at local social changes.

A new approach to revival in Poland (described in the first part of the text) underlines that the revival should be of participative character.

The same expectations are formulated in a new formal requirements in the 2015 Act on revival. The Act defines methods which can be used as a source of information to know the needs of inhabitants and to plan changes in public spaces.

A concise description of research methods and techniques used in diagnosing, consulting and evaluating was presented in the second part of the article. The paper delineated the ways of modifying and adapting these methods to be used on different stages of revival. Revival projects can benefit from creative ways of working. Ideas may be generated by means of: brainstorming, preparing individual or group drawings, mock-ups and/or collages.

Two methods were especially pointed out in the text as useful in case of revival. First one is STEEPVL analysis, related to the group interview. The second one is mapping as a method more and more frequently used during consultations. It consists in using maps (paper ones or more often on-line versions) to mark information and suggestions on places.

The text was focused on the increasing scope of actions a social scientist may conduct participating in the revival, due to new social needs and formal requirements.