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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF URBAN REGENERATION PROGRAMMES IN EUROPE

AUTHORS:

Karim Hadjri[a]; Isaiah Oluremi Durosaiye[a]; Gábor Csanádi[b]; Adrienne Csizmady[b]; Gergely Olt[b]; Mirjana Devetakovic[c]; Tatjana Mrdjenovic[c]; Viera Joklova[d]; Leandro Madrazo[e]; Elina Krasilnikova[f]; Larisa Kuzina[f]

AUTHORS AFFILIATIONS:

[a] The Grenfell-Baines School of Architecture, Construction and Environment, University of Central Lancashire, Harris Building, Corporation Street, Preston PR1 2HE, UK
[b] Faculty of Social Sciences, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest, Hungary.
[c] Faculty of Architecture, Belgrade University, Belgrade, Serbia.
[d] Faculty of Architecture, Slovak University of Technology, Bratislava, Slovakia.
[e] School of Architecture La Salle, Ramon Llull University, Barcelona, Spain.
[f] Volgograd State University of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Volgograd, Russia.

ABSTRACT:

Urban regeneration is informed and driven by the causes and effects of globalization, climate change, the global economic crisis, and lifestyle changes. In Europe, there is currently a pressing demand to redevelop brownfields areas, inner-city heritage sites, post-conflict and post-disaster areas, and large-housing estates. Housing regeneration strategies range from large-scale to micro-scale interventions that lead to a complete change to the physical features of neighbourhoods and the life of their residents.

This paper presents activities and cases studied in the OIKONET Erasmus Lifelong Learning Project, by highlighting that regeneration is an important issue driving the production of contemporary housing in Europe. The presented review is part of wider research and pedagogical work aimed at identifying significant conceptual, contextual and policy changes affecting housing regeneration demand. Examples of urban regeneration programmes on different urban areas in selected European countries, i.e. the UK, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia and Russia are examined. As a result of the comparison between the cases analysed, some conclusions can be drawn to inform future research and set up pedagogical programmes to be carried out within the OIKONET project.

INTRODUCTION:

This paper presents ongoing studies on urban regeneration as part of the OIKONET network, a three-year project supported by the Erasmus Network's programme of the European Union. A major challenge of the project is to find ways to intertwine research, pedagogy and participation. The first step in this direction has been to create a platform for sharing information on research expertise and interests of OIKONET partners. As a result synergies between research, pedagogy and participation as well as potential affinities among partners were identified; one of these is housing regeneration which is the topic of a collaborative learning space currently being carried out by a group of partners.

The next sections will present urban regeneration strategies in the UK, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia and Russia that were examined as part of the research and pedagogic activities conducted by OIKONET partners during the last 18 months.

THE UK CONTEXT:

"Urban development practice in the UK often is labelled as urban regeneration"[1]. Additionally, regeneration in the UK has become a major element of urban policy, and since the 1990s this policy considered a crucial element which is the environmental sustainability[2]. The idea behind this new dimension to urban policy is that new development should make the areas "more attractive places in which to live and work"[3].

Urban developments in the UK are generally private sector-led inner-city mixed-use developments such as Bristol Harbourside and Liverpool One[4]. A case study of Liverpool's Duke Street/Bold Street revealed that economic regeneration and more precisely property redevelopment is the main driving force regenerating the area, while environmentally sustainable regeneration process will most likely take much longer to be achieved[5]. Nonetheless, development plans offer protection to key aspects such as townscape, landscape and built heritage. Good urban design and aesthetic considerations are also important drivers of these urban developments, but stakeholders' involvement in these processes is still modest[6].

The Urban Task Force commissioned by the UK Government during the 1990s proposed the development of compact cities using mixed use developments and higher density[7]. The UK government was also aiming at reaching 60 percent of additional housing should be developed on brownfields by 2008[8]. Not surprisingly there are significant regional differences in meeting this ambitious target, given that in some cities such as Liverpool, there is a large amount of previously developed land available, and the anticipated demand and associated growth in housing is small[9]. Several authors argue that urban compaction as part of the regeneration process may not be feasible or acceptable in the UK context[10] and that people in general are not aiming at this type of urban renaissance[11] or aspire to the opposite[12]. High density urban living may also have negative impacts on quality of life of residents such as smaller living spaces, less opportunities for walking, and potential for more crime[13]. Research shows that people prefer to live in quiet neighbourhood, nearer the countryside and with low crime[14]. Others argue that high density limits socio-spatial segregation but increases rates of crime[15].

The UK government introduced the Sustainable Communities Plan in 2003 to provide a vision for developing these communities over the next 20 years[16]. This plan aimed for instance to regenerate northern England's industrial urban belt acknowledging thus the need for urban development and regeneration programmes in cities like Liverpool and Manchester. It is argued that "new sustainable communities can be a driver of urban regeneration, and sustainable communities are the essential ingredients of any regeneration scheme", and that regeneration particularly in deprived area can be a mechanism for creating sustainable communities[17]. This will require demolition of empty properties, creation of new towns[18], and improving the physical, environmental, social and economic conditions which are necessary to achieve sustainable communities[19].

More research is needed to establish the effects of contemporary urban renewal and housing regenerations strategies in the UK on communities in order to identify the challenges facing the creation of sustainable communities and the type of physical environments needed for their development. This is with the belief that urban regeneration or renewal should in principle improve the physical, social, environmental and economic conditions of neighbourhoods and communities. Research exploring these themes is timely in light of recent increase urbanisation of cities in the UK. In the UK, interesting case studies to examine in more details are the regeneration of the Liverpool and London Docklands in terms of their challenges, achievements, and physical regeneration[20].

THE HUNGARIAN CONTEXT:

An interesting environment full of stimulus influence may play a role in attracting and keeping residents, enterprises and tourists in the inner city[21]. This is integrated in the planning document in many cities as i.e. "cultural" or "cultural flagship" developments[22] [23].

Such transformations in the inner city can be realised in different ways. Besides the intentions of urban planning offices, there are spontaneous processes changing the environment temporarily or for a longer period of time. In some cases the cultural 'milieu' lasts long enough to raise demand for the area and the market processes can raise real estate prices so high that the initial artistic use gets displaced, and the area undergoes gentrification[24].

The engines of change are on the one hand the local authorities that use these tools in city development strategies[i]. On the other hand there are bottom-up initiatives, which are based on the unique and alternative milieu of a neighbourhood and play important role in the formation of a cultural cluster[ii]. These clusters are usually related to a physical centre, a building or a neighbourhood[25] [iii]. Zukin (1982) noted in the early 1980s, that despite positive intentions creative quarters can become exclusive consumption places of the middle class, excluding lower social groups and dissolving the 'milieu' that was once a factor in the development of these neighbourhoods. The economic success of a fashionable neighbourhood may also bring about changes in residential composition resulting in the displacement of the poor, so the groups of a lower status cannot be the recipients of (often public) inner city investment[26] [27].

The Hungarian case study[iv] attempts to demonstrate these transformations from the point of view of the residents affected by the cultural investment on the example of District VII of Budapest (Erzsébetváros). The local authority of District VII was consciously looking for tools that can render the neighbourhood more attractive for certain social groups and accelerate the gentrification processes[28]. This interest is understandable since the population of the capital - especially the inner city of Budapest and the inner Erzsébetváros - was decreasing substantially[v] until the late 2000s[29] [30] [31] [32]. On the other hand, the policy is questionable, since this type of interventions may result in the disappearance of affordable housing and retail places that are attractive for cultural producers and new (usually younger) residents[33]. These changes are effected by two methods: reconstruction and changing the function or intensifying one of the functions of the area, usually supplemented by the rehabilitation of public spaces. The first method was facilitated by the increasing interest from the side of the investors for the area, the second by the urban rehabilitation funds of the European Union.

The spontaneous changes were made possible by the large number of empty buildings that were rented first from the local authority and then later (after the privatisation of the remaining local authority owned buildings) from private investors. The empty ruins of those buildings became first temporary and later stable hospitality venues and cultural places, establishing the so called "ruin bar scene" in Budapest[34] [35]. The ruin bars were followed by a swarm of customary small and cheaper pubs, more expensive wine bars, "economy ruin bars" targeting young and less affluent people, large and more expensive "ruin night clubs", as well as smaller clubs. In parallel with these developments, the projects supported by the urban rehabilitation funds of the European Union were launched. One of these projects was named "Street of the culture", meaning a thematic profile for a section of a street, treating culture as a form of entertainment. But the project failed to facilitate cooperation between

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[i] It is also influenced by national level governance typically in the form of representative investment, government level support for arts and enterprises and also by the national level changes of authority and the funding system of the local power.

[ii] Cluster means the geographical concentration of similar or related producers (Porter, 1998 cited by Musterd et. al, 2007).

[iii] It is also important to note that cluster is also a legal category and type of institution, also supported by the EU.

[iv] The research was funded by the OTKA grant nr. 84051 „New Trends in Suburban Development ". The interviews used in this paper were recorded between 2008 and 2012. Students of the ELTE Faculty of Social Sciences also participated in collecting the interviews.

[v] In addition, mostly higher status residents left the city and chose the suburban lifestyle of districts in the outskirts of the city.

cultural activities and was not able to support the cultural and creative use of empty retail spaces and buildings[36]. A further problem is that there was no other form of support for culture in the strategic documents of the local authority[37], possibly because the local authority was mostly against such spontaneous projects since they first emerged, therefore, to invite them to support the local authority project was now out of the question.
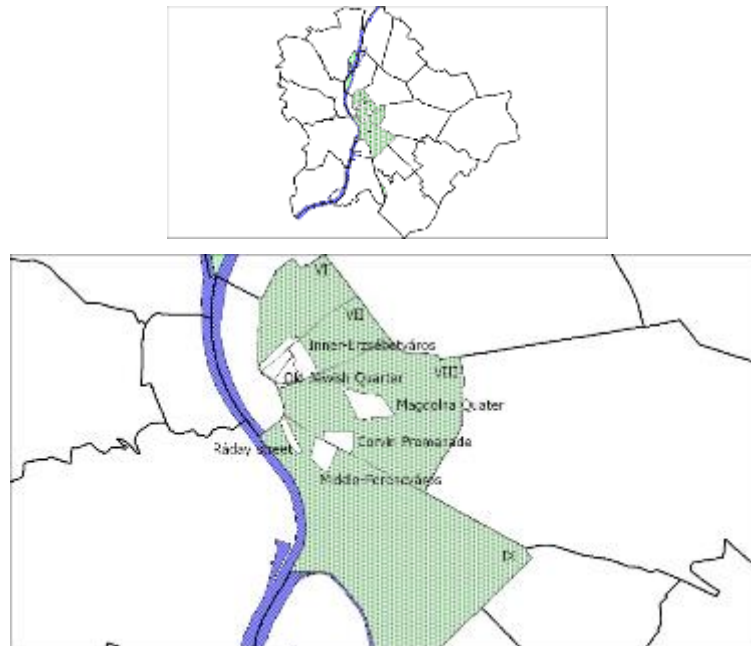

Figure 1: Map of Budapest and the map of neighbourhoods in Inner-city area

Source: Adapted by the authors.

Figure 2: "ruin bar scene" in Budapest

Source: G. Csanádi

THE SERBIAN CONTEXT:

Housing development has been an increasingly important issue in Serbia after World War II, when the process of industrialization attracted significant number of workers from rural areas towards large industrial centres, like Belgrade, Niš, Novi Sad, Kruševac, Kragujevac, Smederevo, Šabac, etc. An intensive industrialization in socialistic period required a quick solving of housing issues for thousands of newcomers. The housing developments from that period are still in use, in majority of cases with no significant changes[38]. The turbulent political period in the region in 1990s, required solving housing problems for numerous refugees from the region of ex-Yugoslavia, mainly from Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. Together with the recent economic crisis, this resulted in a lack of wider planned housing regeneration activities[39]. In addition, the post-socialist era in Serbia has witnessed the challenges of market-driven urban movements that significantly affected the housing stock in both new housing developments and intentions to regenerate the existing ones. The most popular kind of such regeneration of the multi-story housing buildings was through various extensions, mainly by constructing an additional story or a loft space. In some cases this contributed to better physical performance[40], but for a significant percent of buildings such interventions meant a degradation of ambient characteristics. The issues of energy consumption increased in recent decades, and several micro-level housing regeneration examples started to appear, mainly initiated by international institutions (GIZ, World Bank, European Development Bank, UN Habitat Sirp) and supported by international funds (IPA). Climate change in the region (2014 Southeast Europe Floods), that led to severe floods in May 2014 affected Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia, is moving the focus from the mitigation issues (saving energy and decreasing the CO2 emissions), to the problems of low resilience and a need to adapt to the new climatic circumstances.

The School of Architecture of the University of Belgrade selected the affected town of Krupanj as a case to develop a regeneration strategy working with students. A prospective visit to Krupanj in June 2014, gave the opportunity to witness flood destruction, but also to notice some mistakes in planning and construction that could be avoided in the future. It was evident that the existing houses needed some measures of adaptation to new climatic circumstances (Figure 3).

The pedagogical work has been carried out in collaboration with other OIKONET partners, in a shared learning space under the name "Habitat Regeneration Strategies". This way, it has been possible to compare the Serbian case with other regeneration cases identified in Bratislava, Slovakia and Volgograd, Russia.

Figure 3: Krupanj, Serbia, June 2014; the destroyed and damaged housing examples and immediate, spontaneous adaptation measures

Prior to the site visit, the students learned about the principles of sustainable development, integrative urban planning, and were introduced with several European habitat regeneration examples, each with different strategies and approaches. They also collected precedent information on Krupanj and its surrounding area (Figure 4).

Figure 4: One of the precedent analysis of Krupanj and its surrounding

Figure 5: The students presenting their precedent analyses and observing examples of spontaneous adaptation measures, as well as the new post-disaster developments funded by the state and international donations

The students were asked to propose visions for regeneration of Krupanj, based on the lessons learned from the disaster and considering the immediate conversations with citizens and the municipality officials. Having in mind the integrative principles of urban regeneration, the five groups of students tried to take different visioning approaches, with the aim to contribute to a sustainable regeneration strategy. The visions included:

- Improving housing resilience with technical measures (Figure 6)
- Redesigning riverbeds
- Designing retentions within the public spaces/green areas (Figure 7)
- Encouraging economic growth through small food production businesses
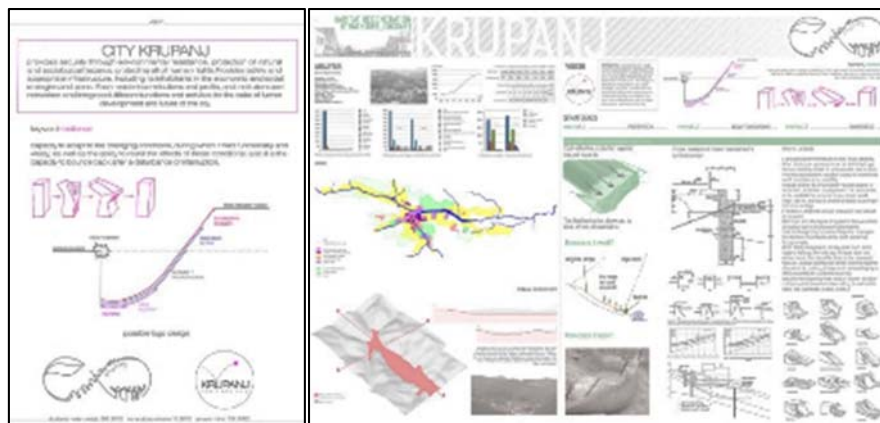- Stimulating tourism through revitalization of surrounding villages connected by funiculars.

Figure 6: Habitat regeneration actions/design for Krupanj, Serbia; students Tamara Mihic, Iva Teodora Vukovic, Milan Ostojic
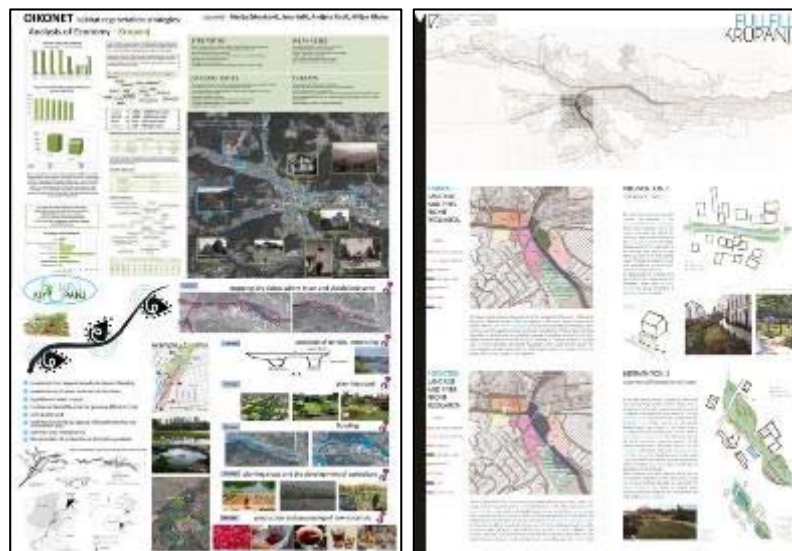
Figure 7: Habitat regeneration actions/design for Krupanj, Serbia; students Andjela Ristic, Jana Kulic, Marija Zdravkovic, Miljan Okuka

THE SLOVAKIAN CONTEXT:

Regeneration processes in Slovakia consider historical, geopolitical and socio-economic development in this Central European country. In Slovakia, substantial differences in the regeneration processes in urban brownfield areas arise from the transition from a centrally controlled economy to a market economy, new environmental standards for industrial production in residential areas, restructuring of economic activity, post-revolution 'wild privatization' and restitution of property to its original owners.[41] Regeneration processes should address the problems caused by specifics of society development, which are physically reflected in the actual conditions of built environment (including the issues of city brownfields, gentrification, suburbanisation, densification), and reflect the relationship of citizens with the built environment and public spaces. One important challenge is the physical and social reconstruction of large prefabricated residential areas and the rehabilitation of public spaces within these areas.

One of the biggest housing estates in Slovakia, and in Central Europe, is Petržalka, which lies on the bank of Danube River in Bratislava, Slovak capital. Former rural settlements with about 20,000 inhabitants before World War II have changed to large panel housing settlement for about 120,000 inhabitants in 1970s and 1980s and became thus the most densely populated residential district in Central Europe. The construction of Petržalka was preceded by an international architectural competition in 1966 with 84 submissions from all over the world. The winners were not accepted and Petržalka complex settlement was built using a different concept. At that time and with little experiences in design of large housing estates it was well designed, and even had a visionary idea.

There is no national concept of urban development at city level, and no comprehensive strategies. Best cities are based on the land use plan, but bold conceptual vision is mostly missing[42]. Building interventions in the area are regulated by the master planning, which is processed at the city level. Zonal master plans, which detail the development of public spaces, are missing. The concept of development of public spaces, together with mapping the current state is absent as well. In such situation two basic ways of realization of regenerative processes in the area are identified: top-down (or local authority driven) and bottom-up (led by civil initiatives). Activism, encouraged by the intensified interest of citizens in public spaces and the strengthening of their quality, creates interesting concepts for environment regeneration (e.g. Urban interventions – free designs from mostly young architects[43], or the initiative 'Vnútroblok[44]', regenerating the courtyards and creating community gardens).

Large housing estates have considerable problems but also significant potential for development. The question however is the extent to which the development should be regulated. Regeneration concept should rather encourage flexible, open, resilient, variable and sustainable processes. Municipality should encourage experts from all sectors affecting spatial planning and design, who will comprehensively examine the impact of the design on the environment. Much attention should be paid to the urbanity and the creation of valuable supporting spatial structure and network of public spaces. Public, communities, users of urban space, civic associations and NGOs should play an important role in the process of regeneration and transformation of large housing estates.

"Despite the known negatives large settlements remain here, and the people in them will live on" Vítkova (2009). The actual research on regeneration of large housing estates deals mostly with the humanization of the built environment and the development of human scale.

Figure 8: Petržalka – structures of large housing estate from Bratislava castle (photo by author).
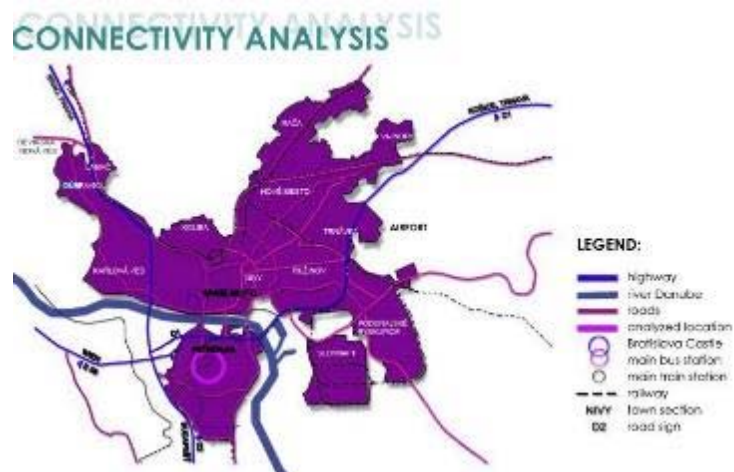

Figure 9: Petržalka in connectivity analysis (prepared by FASTU Bratislava).

Figure 10: Petržalka central development axis with water biocoridor (photo by author).

Figure 11: Petržalka central development axis, analysis of problems (prepared by FASTU Bratislava).

THE RUSSIAN CONTEXT:

The process of creating social and recreational areas as part of coastal territories is quickly developing in many Russian cities situated along sea coasts and river banks. Relying on the European experience of creating and designing socially-oriented recreational areas of coastal territories in major Russian cities, Russian architects create interesting projects of coastal territory. The project of Krymskaya Embankment in Moscow is considered to be an interesting and successful example of creating social and recreational areas on the Moscow river embankment.[45]

The problem of creating social and recreational areas of coastal territories in Russian industrial cities situated along major rivers is presently one of the principal urban planning tasks which directly affects urban planning development of these cities. An interesting and important example to comprehend the problems of Russian urban planning development is the one of Volgograd situated on the right bank of the Volga River. Regarding urban planning, especially valuable coastal territories are occupied by plants, storehouse and public utilities zones. It is the coastal territories that are one of the principal components of its landscape and urban planning infrastructure and they must be the major accelerator of steady urban development. For historical reasons, industrial enterprises in Volgograd were

situated along the Volga on its backshore. The basis of Volgograd coastal industrial enterprises system is out-of-date. The planning structure of the existing coastal territory is characterized by the presence of randomly located territories of different purpose, low density of industrial development, and vast disrupted areas not using coastal territories as active public areas (Figures 12-13).[46]

Figure 12: Krymskaya Embankment location in Moscow (By Moscow Architectural and Artistic Project Institut named after Academician Polyansky and Wowhouse Bureau: architects – Dmitry Likin and Oleg Shapiro)
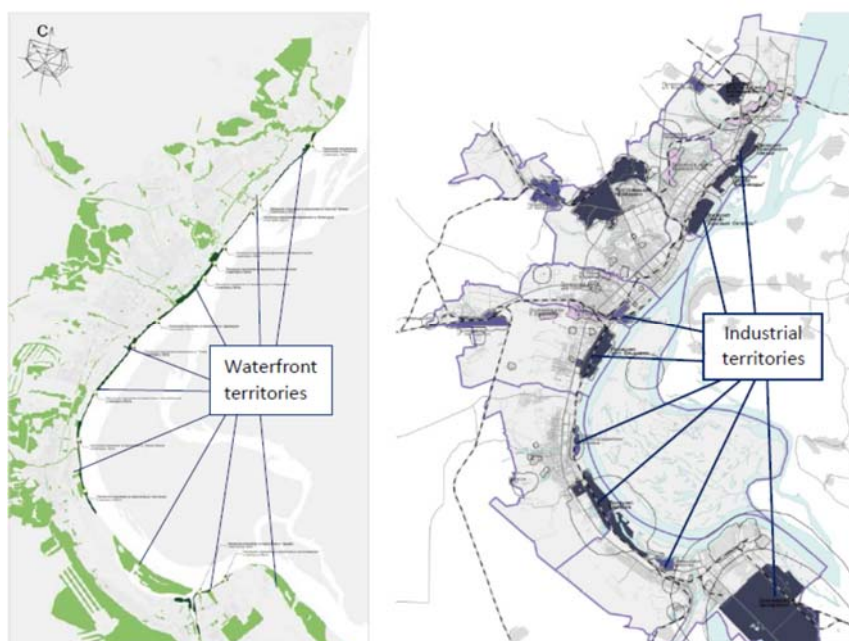
Figure 13: Plan of landscape and recreational territories of the Volgograd Embankment and the one of locating the existing industrial zones situated on the coastal territories of the city, the most part of which are presently degrading post-industrial areas.

Figure 14: Competition project "Urban planning concept of Volgograd's Central 62nd Army Embankment development", 2012 (Green Art Architectural and Landscape Centre LLC, by E. Krasilnikova, N. Yarovaya, Y. Ivanitskaya, L. Kusina, O. Shtro) – "Silver Diploma" of the Russian National Awards for landscape architecture and garden and park art within the frameworks of "Zodchestvo-2012"; "Golden Diploma" of the Union of Architects of Russia at the XI Forum of Southern Russia Architects; First place diploma at the competition named "Landscape Architecture – view from a house. House at Brestskaya" – Moscow, 2012.

The project named Urban Planning Concept "Tsaritsyn Valley landscape and urban planning complex" in Volgograd relates to one of the most troubled places in the city and sets a goal to arrange the area of the Tsaritsa river flood plain which is a natural axis connecting with the Volga. At the moment this territory is partially developed. The project suggests preserving vast green areas and recreating the environment to increase the power of this 'green foundations' of the city (see figure 15).

At present, the modern landscape and urban planning activities are outrunning creation of theoretical basis and concepts of developing and creating public and recreational coastal territories. The project of Zariadiye Park in Moscow may be considered a good example (Figure 16). The basis of creating public areas of the park includes the principles of landscape urbanism which allow to transfer flexibly from an urbanized environment to the natural one. Such an approach united the Zariadiye Park and the surrounding China-town district by means of a street and area system that is convenient for pedestrians[47].
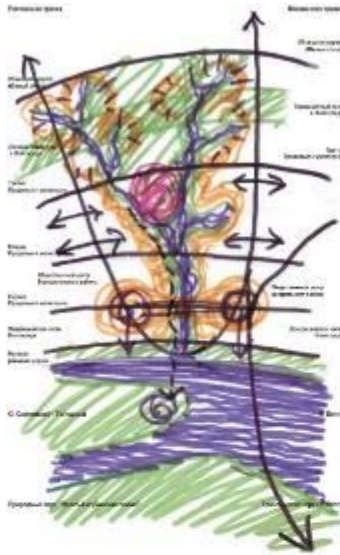

Figure 15: Urban Planning Concept "Tsaritsyn Valley landscape and urban planning complex" in Volgograd. Architects – Professor A. V. Antyufeev, V. V. Tolochko, I. A. Kagaikin, N. A. Litvinenko.

Figure 16: Zariadiye Park competition project. Moscow Embankment (Diller Scofidio + Renfo group of companies, Citymakers are the winners of the 2013 competition). http://archi.ru/russia/51824/proekt-parka-zaryade-v-detalyakh

CONCLUSION:

This study summarised current activities and cases within the OIKONET project, and highlighted that regeneration is an important issue driving the production of contemporary housing in Europe. These cases are part of wider research, pedagogic and participatory activities around housing and urban regeneration strategies within the network. Cases showed in the selected European countries, UK, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia and Russia have similar features in terms of drivers and actors, and highlight the need for bottom-up approaches to achieve sustainable housing regeneration and sustainable communities.

Reading and coursework material produced as part of these exercises will be used in the pedagogical, research and community participation activities planned by the network. These case studies have provided network members with topical themes which can be addressed in a pedagogical/research/participatory processes.

The challenge of the OIKONET project is to intertwine these three aspects - pedagogical, research, participation - so the issues that were identified from this comparative study should consider these three components. Therefore, the issues identified in this study may give rise to further research, pedagogical and participatory activities to be carried out during the rest of the project, and to increase the knowledge base on contemporary housing regeneration in Europe.

3,562 words

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