URBAN ISSUES

Mixed use and diversity as a New Urbanism principle guiding the renewal of post-industrial districts. Case studies of the Paris Rive Gauche and the New Centre of Lodz

Abstract

The revival of post-industrial areas, understood as a factor determining contemporary urban development, is a key process in regeneration. Such areas attract strategic renewal projects, because despite their perfect location next to city centres, they have long been inaccessible to city residents. The backbone of the projects is provided by programmes laying out the future functions of such areas and their target users. In the past, mono-functional districts were popular but their numerous weaknesses have meant that mixed use and diversity are increasingly being introduced into urban areas today. Mixed use and diversity underlie the urban design movement known as the New Urbanism. This article assesses the role of mixed-use and diversity as the New Urbanism principle guiding the renewal of post-industrial areas. It is based on desk research and a comparative analysis of two case studies: the Paris Rive Gauche (France) and the New Centre of Lodz (Poland). The article concludes that regeneration based on the New Urbanism principle of functional and user diversity leads to an effective renewal of run-down urban areas. The applicability of other New Urbanism principles stressing the need to ensure harmony between an urban design strategy and the human scale in the revival of urban neighbourhoods is also worth considering in the long term.

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Introduction

More than 20 years after they were announced, the principles of New Urbanism are still relevant. Although the movement emerged in response to urban sprawl in the USA (Piatkowski & Marshall 2011), it primarily draws on the experiences of historic urban districts in Europe. Among the prominent pioneers of the New Urbanism there are Peter Calthorpe, Andres Duany, Elizabeth Moule, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Stefanos Polyzoides, Daniel Solomon, Scott Merrill and Peter Calthorpe. The cornerstone of the movement is harmony between the design of an urban space and the human scale (Plaut & Boarnet 2003). Its key principles, formulated by the Congress for the New Urbanism (Marshall 2003) and systematised by E. Talen (Talen 1999), include permeability, accessibility, walkability and social interaction. They were defined to enable the creation of a safer and denser environment with high-quality public spaces and a convenient public transport network, but most of all to ensure diversity and mixed use in urban areas (Elsawahli, Ahmad & Shah Ali 2014; Hutton 2015; Medved 2017; Kim & Larsen 2017). The principles were strengthened by Ch. Alexander’s philosophy of design (Alexander et al. 1977; Hebbert 2003).

This study analyses the mixed use and diversity principle of the New Urbanism because large-scale projects of strategic importance for urban development require that the future functions of the area designated for regeneration and its target users must be programmed early on. As the popularity of mono-functional districts (residential suburban enclaves and business districts deserted after 6 p.m.) is waning, the mixed use and diversity principle comes to the forefront today. The principle states that urban areas should have different functions and that their residents should vary in age, income, education, race and ethnicity (Schuyler 1997; Trudeau & Kaplan 2015; Foster et al. 2016.). The research hypothesis to be tested is that mixed use and diversity are central to an effective renewal of neglected urban areas. The analysis is set in the context of regeneration, which is promoted today as a strategic instrument capable of stimulating the development of contemporary towns and cities (Lorens 2006; Masierek 2016). By introducing new uses and converting spaces in neglected urban areas, regeneration stimulates their socio-economic development, as well as improving their aesthetics and functionality (Billert 2010; Kaczmarek, S. 2001, 2015; Kaczmarek, T. 2001; Parysek 2005, 2006, 2015, 2016; Parysek & Mierzejewska 2014). In discussing the principles of the New Urbanism and the practice of contemporary urban design, special attention should be given to strategic urban renewal projects involving vast brownfields in city centres that have long been inaccessible to the residents.

Methodology

This article has been prepared using methods such as desk research, interviews with professionals engaged in the implementation of different stages of two urban renewal projects – Paris Rive Gauche (France) and the New Centre of Lodz (Poland) – and field visits to the project sites. The interviews with the experts in urban policy were performed according to the IDI method, where the respondents have been selected based on their expertise in the subjects investigated and their role in the projects. The interviewed experts included: Anne-Lise Burgert (the General Secretariat of the City of Paris), Ludovic Vion (SEMAPA), Robert Warsza (Urban Planning Office in Lodz) and Rob Krier. Although relatively few, the interviews played an important role in the research, allowing the researcher to gain novel, previously unpublished information about the sites investigated. Moreover, several semi-structured interviews with the employees of institutions responsible for the promotion of the Paris Rive Gauche and the New Centre of Lodz (Maison des projets and ECI, respectively) provided more insights into the historical context and choice of location. These data were subsequently verified during field visits to the project sites. Two visits were made to Paris, in 2016 and 2017, whereas the studies related to the transformations and the efficiency of implementation of the strategy in Lodz were carried out continuously in between the research visits to France.

The two projects were selected for analysis on the grounds of their strategic importance and the fact that both involve vast post-railway areas in the central parts of their cities (Paris Rive Gauche – 130ha and the New Centre of Lodz – 100ha). Although perfectly located next to the historic centres of Paris and Lodz, the sites of both projects were long inaccessible to residents and obstructed the flows of pedestrian and vehicle traffic in these cities. The transformation of the urban tissue of Paris Rive Gauche commenced more than 20 years ago and is not yet complete. Some parts of the New Centre of Lodz (NCL) were regenerated and made operational several years ago, but the rest of it awaits redevelopment according to the zoning plans.

In the analysis below, factors determining mixed use and diversity in an urban area are compared based on the French and Polish projects. The comparison focuses on the project sites, planning documents and project management approaches. The projects are also compared in terms of the scope of metropolitan functions, the accessibility of redeveloped spaces to various users, and the desirable forms of mixed use. Reference is also made to local and national legislation as a factor in the
diversity of urban areas. The main functions situated in Paris Rive Gauche and the New Centre of Lodz are contrasted to determine differences in the level of mixed use, to see whether or not the project sites are at risk being dominated by a single function, and to assess the significance of public buildings and the integration of historic architecture in the urban tissue. The results of this research are presented for each project separately and then the conclusions are interpreted in the discussion and conclusion sections. A comparison of two cities that are so different in size and character offers the possibility of testing the universality of the mixed use and diversity principle. Moreover, because the projects are at different stages of their life cycle, they can also be analysed with respect to temporality.

Paris Rive Gauche: diversity encouraged by urban legislation

Paris Rive Gauche, situated in the 13th arrondissement in the very heart of the city, has been seamlessly connected with the rest of the conurbation. The deep transformation of this district started with a major project involving the construction of the National Library (Bibliothèque Nationale de France) named after France’s former president François Mitterrand. According to Françoise Fromonot, an architect and architectural critic, the entire urban planning scheme of the Rive Gauche was precisely devised as an alternative to former modernist development (Mayer 2012). The project to renew Paris Rive Gauche was inspired by the spirit of Freiburg (Seron-Pierre 2008). It was...
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Because a substantial amount of funding is necessary had to be raised by 7 metres in relation to the old one. The new ground level had to be constructed connecting those parts of the site that had formerly been separated by the railway tracks. As a result, the new ground level turned the former railway site into a modern district, and had an impact on the district’s new functions.

In the opinion of Ludovic Vion, the SEMAPA’s Director of Programming and Urban Development, all forms of mixing are desired and appreciated: offices and housing rental/accession, private/social, family/student, local and metropolitan. Consistent with this view, Paris Rive Gauche was designed to have a variety of public buildings, services and shops (Fig. 1). The district’s heterogeneous elements designed by Christian de Portzamparc, which programmatically and formally break with strictly prescribed urban planning, show that a new type of urban fabric was also sought (Mayer 2012).

Public buildings were given the special role of the Paris Rive Gauche landmarks. The François Mitterrand library mentioned above borders on the university campus with its iconic post-industrial buildings of the Grands Moulins (Photo 1) and the SUDAC factory that house the university departments and the School of Architecture Paris Val-de Seine, respectively. The historic buildings of the Halle aux farines, too, have been converted to educational uses and serve today as lecture halls and teachers’ offices. The former house of the SUDAC director is now an information centre about the Paris Rive Gauche project. Other post-industrial buildings – Magasins Généraux and cold storage warehouses Frigo – are used as exhibition spaces and arts centres. The regeneration of the Paris Rive Gauche heritage: ‘reflects […] a changing attitude and keener appreciation for the role of industrial architecture as significant sites of collective urban memory’ (Weiss 2009: 137). The decision to convert historic buildings to new uses created numerous problems for the architects and had an impact on the district’s new functions. To turn the former railway site into a modern district, a transfer slab had to be constructed connecting those parts of the site that had formerly been separated by the railway tracks. As a result, the new ground level had to be raised by 7 metres in relation to the old one. Because a substantial amount of funding is necessary to finance a public project of this scale, a decision was taken to sell off parcels in some parts of the district for office development (Mayer 2012). As a result, some areas such as the avenue Pierre Mendes-France are predominantly developed with office buildings.

To introduce diversity into the Paris Rive Gauche, a general rule was established that residential development projects should consist of social-rented housing units and units meant for private owners in equal shares. Following the concept, an experimental housing block with 96 private housing units and 92 social housing units was constructed on the Avenue de France (Photo 2). As of today, the housing stock in Paris Rive Gauche consists of 6,000 family housing units, 1500 units serving as accommodation for students, and short-term stay establishments such as hotels and company flats for local workers. An important element of the district is provided by the green spaces that account for 98,000 m² of the 2.5 million m² redeveloped during the project.

It is relevant to note that local laws and national legislation played a significant role in ensuring a high level of social mixing in the district. The French national law (loi Solidarité et au renouvellement urbains art. 55) requires that new housing development projects in towns with populations in excess of 1,500 that form part of conurbations with populations greater than 50,000 should incorporate 20% of social housing units by 2020. Special local residential development programmes (Programme local de l’habitat) raise this target rate to 30%. The city of Paris has made it mandatory for all building projects larger than 800 sq. metres to provide a certain number of social housing units. This approach is consistent with the welfare-oriented policy followed by the French government. Both authorities and urban planners make efforts to ensure an urban mix favouring social interaction (diversity on every floor). There are certainly lessons that countries considering the implementation of housing diversity policies can learn from the French experience.

From the perspective of contemporary urban planning the redevelopment of Paris Rive Gauche is perceived as an example of successful dialogue (Seron-Pierre 2008: 49), but there are certainly things that can be improved. To find out what they are and how to increase the integrity of the district, Semapa commissioned a research study (Lab’Urba; conducted from October 2016 to March 2017). A reasonable suggestion is to introduce retailers and service providers in the area that will also be affordable to the less prosperous residents (Fig. 2). Paris Rive Gauche is promoted today as a place for young, active and prosperous local residents and for visitors who come to use the district’s leisure facilities, but some places in the district are still at odds with this image.
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NCL: diversity through attractive public projects

The concept of the New Centre of Lodz (NCL) evolved from the vision that Rob Krier – an urban planner and a firm advocate of the New Urbanism – developed for this area in 2007. Krier presented an outline grid of public squares and streets lined with buildings done in heavy neoclassical style, but did not specify the area’s functions (Fig. 3). The current layout of the NCL adopted Krier’s vision regarding the grid of streets and density of development, but the style of individual buildings now follows the aesthetics of modern architecture.

The NCL project is now well underway. One of its central elements, a new multimodal railway station, is already operational. Capable of serving 200,000 passengers a day, the station is one of the most efficient transport hubs in this part of Europe. Other major structures in the NCL area, one of which is the City Gate building, are either being designed or completed. They will offer a wide range of office spaces and limited spaces for services. In recent years...
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Drawing on the experiences of other cities, the planners decided that the three parts of the NCL should have a slightly different character. The central part with the new railway station (Photo 4) has been designated for offices with supporting service, retail and hotel uses. The residential area will be very limited (Fig. 1). The density of development is projected to increase towards the railway station that will be surrounded by the highest buildings in the area. The western part of the NCL, where historic tenement buildings predominate, will retain its residential function. The eastern part was intended for high-profile cultural projects, but to date only infrastructure projects, e.g. wide roads providing access to the underground part of the railway station, have been completed. From the perspective of the principle of facilitating mixed use and diversity, the NCL seems to have a problem with run-down, socially mixed areas situated on its peripheries. Some of them suffer from social problems that may threaten the construction of high- and medium-quality residential and office space (the parcels of land strategically located next to the railway station sold for the highest prices in the city’s history).

It is regrettable that the municipality’s commitment to ensuring social diversity inside the NCL is limited. The only places that have been proposed for social housing, service establishments with preferential rents and artists’ studios are away from the centre of the NCL. It is hoped that some solution to the problem will be worked out by the Area Regeneration Programme dedicated to the NCL area.

In analysing the New Urbanism’s mixed use and diversity policy in the context of the renewal of post-industrial sites, the conversion of historic buildings is apparently an important issue. In the NCL, the heat and power plant (EC1) from the early 20th c. is emblematic of this approach (Photo 3). This structure has been turned into a conference-and-arts centre housing traditional exhibition rooms and a modern planetarium. A science and technology museum has recently been opened there. Post-industrial buildings make a significant contribution to the functional diversity of the NCL and because of their spacious interiors, most of them have been converted to public uses.
Discussion

In interpreting the results of this study, one needs to take account of the fact that the Polish and French projects are set in different socio-political and economic contexts. Polish society has had less than 30 years to adjust to a new reality after long years of central planning terminated by the political transformation in 1989. This contrasts with France, a country that has a long tradition of welfare policy and public-private partnerships. These observations confirm and enhance the results of an earlier study on the uniqueness of national determinants (Skalski 2009).

The contextual differences, as well as the different culture of project execution, seem to explain why Paris and Lodz designed their development strategies and urban planning concepts very differently. The solutions implemented in the NCL area (the size of the railway station, the historicised urban plan of Krier and generously delineated areas designated for services) reveal a preference for oversized, monumental concepts. Poland is also different from France in the still low level of cooperation between the public sector and...
private sector (the collaborative efforts to develop a plan for a festival centre in the NCL were thwarted by informal influences). More differences can be found in the scope of development strategies, which are probably attributable to the different periods of time that have passed since the decentralisation of powers over urban policy.

A major factor contributing to the different levels of social diversity in urban areas in Poland and France is the nature of local laws and national legislation on housing policy. The reliability of social housing indicators in Paris is difficult to verify, but studies confirm (Ball 2014; Droste, Lelévrier & Wassenberg 2014; Priemus & Dieleman 2001) that French legislation is effective in ensuring an even distribution of social housing across the city. This was introduced in order to tackle the problem of social housing blocks, which were constructed in huge numbers on the outskirts of the city after World War II and now stigmatisate their residents. The legislation has two aims: to increase the stock of social housing (that now accounts for about 15% of the total housing stock in Paris) and to disperse social housing dwellings intra muros. The plans to considerably increase the ratio of social housing in the central part of Paris are not surprising, given that social housing in Vienna makes up more than 40% of the stock (Lévy-Vroelant & Reinprecht 2014). Despite many problems (caused by the funding mode, the need to relocate residents, project management issues and ownership rights) with ensuring compliance with high mandatory rates for social housing (in Paris, 30% of a residential development project must be designated for social housing), surveys show that a policy emphasising mixed social housing really improves the living quality of residents (Donzelot 2012; Lelévrier 2010; CSA 2011).

This seems to imply that the centre of Lodz too needs more social flats. While locating them in the vicinity of the strategically situated railway station may have a depreciating effect on the otherwise exclusive district and presents a huge financial and legal challenge, it will promote the social diversity that the NCL needs to thrive. Care must, however, be taken that social housing is evenly distributed across the NCL area rather than clustered on its perimeter to prevent the emergence of enclaves such as the south-eastern part of the NCL with its predominantly low-standard historic buildings and social and economic problems, where the residents still don’t feel safe.

In the NCL area, contrasts are emphasised by the different functions of its quarters that are dedicated to specific types of user. Visitors walking across them will actually have no reason to stop for a while en route to their destination (e.g. cafés or other local services). The problem is intended to be solved by diversifying the NCL area, particularly with respect to the ages and professions of its users. One of the tools to be used to this end is the Area Regeneration Programme. It is expected that after all the projects are completed and the Fabryczna Railway Station has all the infrastructure it needs to provide a wider range of transportation services, the NCL area will become more coherent and its spaces will attract more users.

The author’s field visits to Paris Rive Gauche showed that it is now slightly more balanced than the NCL, although it has the problem of areas being less lively after 6 p.m. (when offices become empty) or of unfriendly alleys (concrete-paved, lowered streets without any functions attractive for visitors). Nonetheless, Paris Rive Gauche has a greater diversity of functions and users (in terms of their ethnicity, economic status and professions) than the NCL. It also has more public buildings (Fig. 2), but they do not form such distinct clusters as they do in Lodz (Fig. 1).

Paris Rive Gauche and the NCL are also different with respect to the distribution of the main functions (Fig. 1). In Lodz, quarters are dominated by one or two functions, as opposed to Paris where the composition of functions is much more heterogeneous and refers to the hierarchical structure of public spaces, e.g. office buildings flank the main throughway. At the same time, both projects are similar in the percentage of functional elements (Fig. 2), excluding the amount of space designated for services, which is larger in Lodz. It is likely that Lodz has overestimated the demand for this thus creating the risk that a large part of the commercial space will not be leased (as has happened in the case of the railway station).

Conclusion

The regeneration projects carried out in Paris and Lodz reveal the central role of the cities’ post-industrial heritage in the creation of functionally diverse neighbourhoods. Regeneration turns historic buildings into local landmarks carrying the unique identity of the place. It can be made more effective by adhering to certain guidelines, which should guide the designing of projects as well as the drafting of generally-applicable legislation. Such guidelines have been proposed by the New Urbanism that now shifts its focus to the most valuable areas in city centres. The challenge today is ‘to bring New Urbanism principles into the city, where they can revive decayed neighbourhoods, rather than operating at the rural fringe; and keeping New Urbanism makeable to a wide public, without resorting to Disneyland style design’ (Campbell 1999: 54).

Naturally, the risks raised by its critics have to be taken into account when implementing New Urbanism, particularly in the case of projects as significant as Paris Rive Gauche and the New Centre of Lodz. One risk is that direct references to the historical architectural expression...
can be mistakenly interpreted as the fulfilment of New Urbanism principles that promote urban-scale solutions – rhythm or proportions – rather than the imitation of historical details. It must be also borne in mind that New Urbanism recommends a holistic approach to redevelopment projects, which emphasises the fair evaluation and balancing of needs against project size and costs rather than its large scale. Moreover, New Urbanism’s preference for pedestrian spaces has to be considered with respect to the needs of the present-day car-based society. The situation calls for well-planned parking policies and a mass transit alternative rather than allowing spaces for vehicles to sprawl.

The real principle of New Urbanism is that mixed use and diversity are vital to urban development. Regeneration projects embracing both these elements ensure effective renewal of neglected urban areas regardless of whether they are carried out in metropolises or cities. Municipalities and planners must be aware, however, that mixed use and diversity are most effective when built into regeneration early on, because they can help coordinate and streamline the transformation of the designated area, even if its sectors are redeveloped asynchronously and are intended for different uses. One also has to avoid interpreting diversity in the narrow sense, as different uses in an area, because genuinely diverse neighbourhoods also have socially and age-diverse communities. A case in point is the urban polychromy achieved in the district on the Seine. Even though most of its area is occupied by public and office buildings, space has also been found for a biotechnology park and minor but vital facilities such as a creche or a chapel (a not-so-obvious amenity in a secularised society). Projects carried out in Paris Rive Gauche not only converted the district’s historic buildings into faculty facilities but also provided the necessary infrastructure: housing units, restaurants and entertainment facilities (the local MK2 cinema is frequented both by students and visitors). The university campus is an integral part of the city rather than an island. From the social and functional perspectives, Paris Rive Gauche is now more consistent with the principles of New Urbanism and therefore it can be a learning opportunity for the New Centre of Lodz. Moreover, the way the principles of New Urbanism have been interpreted in Paris urban policy can be a valuable resource for Lodz in implementing the principles of mixed use and diversity.

Other principles of New Urbanism which emphasise harmony between urban design strategies and human scale are also worth considering in the context of the revival of urban areas.

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