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## **URBAN REGENERATION IN RUSSIA THROUGH NEGLECTED CHURCHES**

**Abstract.** *The paper analyzes how urban fabric can be regenerated through cultural heritage. The proposal proves that sustainability means modernized vernacular solutions which corresponds with the needs of modern society. Namely, several worldwide cases of urban renewal were analyzed in order to find an answer to the following question: What vernacular features of neglected Russian orthodox churches should be preserved in order to provide its prosperity and sustainability? Moreover, the factors of qualitative urban transformation are discussed by means of economic, cultural, social, and environmental perspectives. Finally, the paper proposes a business-oriented approach in re-use of the neglected sacred buildings instead of an obsolete budget-oriented one.*

**Keywords:** *sacred architecture, neglect orthodox churches, qualitative urban transformation, vernacular solutions.*

### **Introduction**

The creation of healthy urban environment is a part of global economy. Thus, the aspects of urban development are seen from environmental, cultural, social and economic perspectives. In every part of the world, heritage buildings and sites, historic landscapes and settlements can foster economic development and enrich societies with new added value. Everyone in every country, whether living in cities or smaller communities, now recognizes cultural resources to be assets capable of generating exports and jobs (Grefe, 2009). In recent years, the growing urbanization and world globalization lead to redouble attention to the ways of achieving sustainable development. The sustainable development scenario focuses more on social and intangible themes; governance, quality of life, environmental psychology, green space, and natural and cultural heritage are reaching policy-making attention (Colantonio, 2007). Moreover, Placido Domingo states that “cultural heritage is a key resource for sustainable development” (CHCfE, 2015). Nevertheless, current studies give little information about the role of cultural heritage in sustainable urban development (Shmelev & Shmeleva, 2009). What is more, the lack of well-structured cultural heritage management in urban development and urban renewal was identified.

Urban regeneration is the process of improving derelict or dilapidated districts of a city, typically through redevelopment. The term ‘regeneration’ is often used as a near synonym for economic development. The paper aims to analyze the role of sacred buildings in urban renewal because a church has to be considered not only as a building itself but also as a church side and its relations with surrounding territory. A church has always been one of the most important attractions in urban or rural settlements, thus it can be seen as a public space. Actually, as social, economic and cultural habitat for community, public spaces are drawing increasing academic attention, since there is the tendency that city centers risk becoming theme parks of heritage or banal aspects. In response the new urban planning is focused on priorities such as production and the regeneration of public spaces, as specific areas of identity, social changes and life (Quattrone, 2017).

It is important to note, that cultural heritage, which is seen as a part of urban regeneration, needs to respond to new requirements of continuously changing society, hence it should be

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flexible as regards of the use and adaptation. However, every cultural heritage object has its unique identity that has to be preserved through the process of renewal. Hence, the current paper discusses how deep vernacular features of the heritage should be preserved in order to provide sustainable development and meanwhile not to lose its unique character.

### **New vision of vernacular**

Temples and monasteries are the most stable architectural objects in urban context and time. In Russia, the above objects are a kind of space and time constants in urban environment (Yakubchuk, 2014). Evident, that even neglected churches still continuously affect the environment with its emptiness and urban exclusion zones. Glazychev (1996) highlighted that a Russian temple is the founder of the county's architecture and urban behavior culture. Particularly orthodox temples became the first disputes of the urbanized space in the country. Once built, they caused the self-organization of urban space around them, becoming city-forming elements. Both Catholic and Orthodox churches were studied in detail as independent architectural objects and not connected with other urban elements, they have been insufficiently explored as objects of town planning and town-forming. Often new churches (also abandoned) are missing on urban log maps of architects. Hence, churches in many cases are not considered as particular urban elements. They are not studied as a complex of churches and social net which exists and develops in urban environment (Sedova, 2018).

Nowadays, several thousand neglected orthodox churches in Russia are situated in urban context in historical settlements in the central part of the country. Hence, they do not fit the times anymore from environmental, cultural, economic, and social perspectives. Moreover, they cannot provide the sustainable development of cities and rural settlements. It is obvious that these churches need re-use or adaptation not as independent single urban elements but as a part of urban environment that affects the whole urban regeneration and renewal. The key to Russian architecture are still in the temple (Yakubchuk, 2014). What vernacular features of neglected Russian Orthodox churches should be preserved in order to provide sustainability and prosperity of obsolete urban districts?

Weyer (2016) considers the vernacular feature in the measurement of emotional impact of architecture, moreover the vernacular gets value through its adaptation and not through itself. Ostling (2011) argues that the vernacular can be seen as the massing organization of the building, as the original landscape that acts as an urban identity element, as the envelope of the building that have strong relation with urban context. Moreover, the vernacular is something that gives the sense of a place (British Property Federation, 2013).

Moreover, British Property Federation (2013) takes up the position that the urban regeneration through the vernacular features of heritage buildings may:

- Determine the presence of landmarks that the community is identified with;
- Add a distinctive identity to the new built part of a regeneration scheme – enhancing townscape and lifting the overall quality of the built environment;
- Assist in achieving sustainable development objectives;
- Attract tenants/occupiers who would not be interested in less distinctive buildings;
- Feed people's interest in the past.

### **Vernacular regeneration**

Significantly, there are not so much successful cases of urban regeneration through cultural heritage worldwide from the sustainable perspective for the reason that heritage can become a threat to regeneration. There are examples of comprehensive regeneration schemes which have swept away heritage assets in the name of efficiency, cost, viability and meeting occupier requirements (British Property Federation, 2013). Often, historical buildings are considered too complicated and troublesome to work with because of high risks and maintenance costs.

The paper aims to see what features of the cultural heritage were preserved through the regeneration in order to ensure sustainability. The World Bank (2018) issued the study analyzing cultural heritage, sustainable tourism and urban regeneration in Seoul. Firstly, the most important lesson learned from the use of historic buildings is “Ensure That Urban Regeneration Does Not Damage the Aesthetic of Cultural Heritage Sites”. Secondly, the process of regeneration does not have to follow a cookie-cutter approach. Each project brings its unique features and context, has its threats and opportunities, cultural heritage objects demonstrate it clearly. Thirdly, the surrounding areas must respect the site’s cultural appeal, it means that the construction of modern buildings or spaces neighboring the heritage site must not lead to disrepair of it. The vernacular in the project is seen as a respect of historic structures which are able at the same moment to host new functions and performances for urban residents and guests. If the vernacular is addressed to sustainable solution, it can provide leisure and education opportunities for the society. The study does not prove that vernacular solutions are solutions that respect the original structure but the projects that allow to percept the object. Thus, heritage sites can play as multi-purpose venue in urban regeneration. To sum up, the effective urban regeneration must respect residents’ needs and aspirations (The World Bank, 2018).

In China (Pendlebury & Porfyriou, 2017) by contrast, rapid economic and demographic growth has made urban change an astonishingly rapid process, with the risk of heritage erasure. Often Chinese heritage is seen in relation to tourism, whilst in Seoul the researchers suggested to protect heritage from vast tourist flows. Thus, the vernacular in some cases is considered as sensitive original structures, at the same time vernacular solutions for cultural heritage are seen as the opportunity to adapt the object to tourist requests. Hence, outcomes of regeneration vary enormously from sensitive conservation following international benchmarks of good practice to removal and reconstruction (Pendlebury & Porfyriou, 2017).

In Mechelen, Belgium researchers performed a survey in order to understand the opinion of inhabitants about a trade-off between heritage and non-heritage buildings. This indicator is in a way linked to the non-use values of heritage: do people get satisfaction from the existence of heritage in their surroundings (CHCfE, 2015)? This indicator was also used for the evaluation study of the Hoge Kempen Park. Johan Van Den Bosch stated during the interview that in this case, “a trade-off can give an idea of the impact of heritage on people’s lives: do they value recreational buildings over monuments?” (Bosch, 2014). The results were achieved through the questionnaire where 74.7% of respondents answered that they prefer to keep Hanswijk Basilica in heritage Basilica’s building. Thus, the Basilica is highly valued by the inhabitants of the city, it has higher functional value for the community than new proposed buildings (CHCfE, 2015). To sum up, the cultural heritage in this particular case is an important part of the cityscape, hence it was important to preserve it within its original function. This case study proves that vernacular solutions for heritage preservation which embody in the maintenance of original structures and functions of the above buildings, can also lead to sustainable urban regeneration. The most important factor is neighborhood’s satisfaction and harmonization of its minds and needs.

### **Qualitative transformation**

The proposal anticipates that sustainability means modernized vernacular solutions which corresponds with the need of modern society. Development is by all means qualitative transformation: displacement of the obsolete with something else, more complex, which incorporates all the successful from the former before as said by Glazychev (1996). Rypkema (2008) argues that preservationists often talk about the “value” of historic properties: the social value, cultural value, aesthetic value, urban context value, architectural value, historical value and sense of place. In fact, one of the strongest arguments for preservation ought to be that a historic building has multiple layers of “value” to community. Nevertheless, the values of community are continuously changing along with the changing ways of life, the appearance of new markets and new forms of management, the needs of modern society and its expectations of urban

environment. Since the values are changing, framework that breaks down significance into constituent kinds of heritage value—the views of experts, citizens, communities, governments, and other stakeholders can be voiced and compared more effectively (Mason, 2002). Thus, the process of urban regeneration should consider modern forms of stakeholders' cooperation, proper management systems and procedures among other factors that respect vernacular solutions. Namely conservation plan, carrying capacity analysis, visitor management plan, and clarity of institutional arrangements, must be in place for a heritage site to remain functional and sustainable. Disaster risk management, including fire prevention, crowd control, and vigilant site maintenance are key tools to ensuring a heritage site remains safe and usable for residents and tourists alike (The World Bank, 2018). The above actions have to be modern and go with the times that both with the respect of vernacular resolutions lead to qualitative transformations in urban environment.

### **New features of regeneration**

Having faced an increasing emphasis on culture in urban planning, new options for alternative forms of cooperation between municipal planners and cultural heritage managers may emerge. The main planning tools (municipal plan, municipal district plan and section plan) function as guidelines, giving plenty of opportunity for cultural heritage to be incorporated (Swensen, 2012). In Russia, the decisions on the use of neglected Orthodox churches are mostly made at the federal level. Hence, the policy needed to force the process of building re-use and rural renewal should consider state federal programs, tax-reduction and grants that motivate private sector to undertake development (Sedova, 2018). The use of taxation incentives together with planning activities and regulatory approach in order to encourage renewal through property development is the central feature of the regeneration model (Adair et al., 2003). Federal grants, such as through the “Culture of Russia” program, can provide positive finding resource that could force the urban regeneration through cultural heritage (Sedova, 2018).

Rypkema (2009) discusses broader understanding of “cultural heritage” that many of the economic benefits emerge, “perhaps the clearest understanding of this comes from analyses in both Europe and North America, which show that only 8 to 12% of the expenditures of a heritage visitor are spent at the historic site itself, leaving 88 to 92% of the spending in hotels, restaurants, retail shops and elsewhere in the local community”. Thus, new forms of understanding heritage could foster the new forms of its governance through public and private cooperation. Neglected Russian Orthodox churches along with their vernacular structures and dominant urban locations can be surrounded by business enterprises, education facilities, museums, and other public buildings that could renew the urban territory and religious buildings themselves.

One of the lessons of successful revitalization of Seoul, thanks to heritage buildings, is to Ensure Community and Government Partnership (The World Bank, 2018). That can be achieved through:

- Ensuring that community members are involved in the concept and planning stages;
- Soliciting the community input through study groups, town halls, village councils and/or task groups;
- Investing in the infrastructure to incentivize resident participation.

Importantly, community and government partnership in Russia is weak and in the stage of development. Community members are collecting data about neglected churches on their own through temples.ru, sobory.ru but the government does not consider the above resources. The paper proposes to ensure community and government cooperation in order to solve the problem of abandoned churches and foster sustainable urban regeneration. Partnership between concerned, active residents and local governments results in regeneration plans that are tailored, sustainable, and economically efficient (The World Bank, 2018).

What is more, the cultural heritage conservation should be based on proper heritage site management plans with identified roles and responsibilities of the public, private partnership and

the community. The analysis performed by McGreal et al. (2000) indicates a measured degree of support concerning the effectiveness of public–private partnerships in delivering development opportunities within urban regeneration locations. Undoubtedly, private organizations should understand their perspectives and opportunities in the particular heritage site, that are engaged through smart policy which aims the sustainable development and health urban regeneration.

### Conclusions

The vernacular can be seen as a scope of different features of a place (materials, structures, identity, dimension, use, location). But every time what is needed to make the vernacular work for the modern society is a modern well-prepared management model and state policy, that set the objective in cooperation of public, private parties and community. Thus, qualitative transformation of urban fabric discussed in the paper should follow upward plan development. “Top” activities need to be performed at the national level, considering the whole territory of Russia. “Bottom” solutions have to see each example in particular, studying the church and context’s regeneration feasibility, analyzing possible stakeholders, partners, imputes and outcomes. The World Bank (2018) experience shows that successful urban regeneration does not follow a cookie-cutter approach. Each urban regeneration project brings its own context and particularities, successes and failures. It is important for government and citizens to learn from these successes and failures to ensure that each new urban regeneration effort is more effective and sustainable than previous ones.

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