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**A DANGEROUS STREET – AN EDUCATOR’S COMMENTS ON THE REVITALISATION  
PROCESS OF WŁÓKIENNICZA STREET IN ŁÓDŹ**

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**Abstract.** Włókiennicza Street in Łódź is currently undergoing a revitalisation process, which is also to include specific social activities for its residents. The revitalisation aims to raise the urban and architectural standard of this street, formerly known as Kamienna Street. The author describes Włókiennicza Street’s cultural transformation in the context of the theory of the relationship between the physical environment and crime. In particular, the author analyses the transformation from a street of wealthy residents to a street that is notorious for crime and poverty, and the contemporary hopes for changing the character of this part of the city as a result of a revitalisation project. Based on this, he raises the question about the necessary pedagogical and social measures in addition to strictly architectural measures.

**Keywords:** urban planning, revitalisation, crime, rehabilitation, prevention of exclusion.

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## 1. Introduction

In the middle of Łódź runs a not very long street called Włókiennicza, formerly called Kamienna. It is currently undergoing intensive revitalisation.<sup>1</sup> This area is well known to the author for biographical reasons. Today it is an area of revitalisation and the negative specificity of the street may disappear. All the more reason to take a look at the process. After all, this was an area of the unique change of the street for the worse as a result of specific social processes, including the rehabilitation efforts of the Tsarist administration, which continued also in independent Poland. What happened on Kamienna Street?

The transformation of Kamienna Street. Initially, it was an attractive area and settled by Łódź notables, including the chief architect of the city, Hilary Majewski. His decision to build a house in the area may have set a settlement trend (Kowalczyk-Kacperska, 2018). On the corner of the street, Władysław S. Reymont used to rent a flat in his times, gathering materials for “The Promised Land”. There was also a girls’ boarding school. In addition, there stands a modest monument referring to Agnieszka Osiecka’s poem “The Lovers of Kamienna Street”. It is a kind of tribute to the residents of the street and the result of the poet’s post-war observations,

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<sup>1</sup> Project entitled “Area Revitalisation of the City Centre of Łódź - an area of 7.5 ha delimited by the streets *Wschodnia, Rewolucji 1905r., Kilińskiego, and Jaracza* together with frontages on the other side of the aforementioned streets” carried out under funding agreement No. UDA-RPLD.06.03.03-10-0002/17-00 concluded on 29 August 2017. The project is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund as part of the *Regional Operational Programme of the Łódź Voivodeship for 2014-2020*.

from the period of her studies at the Łódź Film School. Is this enough to deal with the area in a pedagogical context? The link between the fate of the street and rehabilitation, as well as the relationship between the terrain and human behaviour, is most interesting. In the nineteenth century, the Russian authorities decided to settle the so-called sojourners (Kaczyńska, 1983), or *prijutniki*, in the nearby area (Puś, 1998) of the city; they were a large group of Russian criminals who were to be transformed and rehabilitated through their proximity to the elite of Łódź. What was the result of this experiment? Pathetic (Piotrowski, 2017; Wolański, 2019). We can read about the effects of the settlement of “sojourners” in towns in many sources, here is an excerpt from “Echo Płockie i Łomżyńskie” of December 1903 (No. 100 (591)) concerning the perception of their presence in the town of Płońsk: *One can hear that some unknown people hit a priest with a stick, probably because he reprimanded thieves from the pulpit; then, that someone in the market was hit in the back with an enormous stick for no apparent reason at that moment; or threats of revenge, and so on. In general, relations in our city are not very pleasant, caused by the sojourners, who by general opinion should be settled elsewhere, not in cities and settlements. Recently, “Echo” rightly advised that such people should be incarcerated in some kind of correctional colony.* Warsaw (Wola) and many other cities were also the territory of the forced settlement of “sojourners - *prijutniki*”. They usually caused trouble everywhere.

The criminals quickly affected the climate of this part of the city. The last three decades of the 19th century saw a process of gradual change in the character of Kamienna Street through the settlement of poorer people, Jewish and Polish, in tenement houses. According to Wiesław Puś, in 1982, 57.9% of the properties on Kamienna Street belonged to Jews, and in 1913, already 72.7% (Puś, 1998). This stabilised the character of Kamienna Street, which was inhabited by different nationalities – Jews and Poles (Puś, 1998). However, there were certain moments when the situation escalated and the street was destroyed; for example, during the massive riots in 1892 caused by the sojourners inspired by the police (Wachowska, 1982). At that time Hilary Majewski died and his tenement changed owners. During the 1905 revolution barricades were erected in this area (Wschodnia Street). Then, the Germans moved the Jewish population to Bałuty and the Poles from Bałuty to the city centre when they were organising the Łódź Ghetto during World War II. After the war, the flats were occupied mainly by poor Polish people. It was probably this wartime and post-war influx that ultimately decided to perpetuate the “pathology” on this street during the communist era, while some process of “passing on negative traditions” due to its neighbourhood with Bałuty certainly took place. After all, the transfer of the population from Bałuty also meant the transfer of the influence of the “sojourners” who had previously influenced its residents. The resettlement process when the ghetto was created included the Polish population of Bałuty.

The street’s character changed from decent to potentially dangerous, and it was also inhabited by people described as “*Lumpenproletariat*”. The mentioned “readaptive” intention of the Tsarist city authorities is almost a pioneering project from the point of view of modern trends (e.g. in the concept of creative rehabilitation of Konopczyński). A real social experiment. Place the thieves next to the townspeople and see what happens. Unfortunately, Russian criminals, forcibly settled in the nearby Bałuty district, proved stronger and treated the city as a “hunting ground”. Interestingly, this transformation became permanent through their negative impact on the customs of the other residents of the nearby neighbourhoods. The city boundary between the centre and Bałuty ran only on paper. In fact, it was an organically functioning whole. Bałuty formally entered the city limits very late. This made it easier for the Tsarist authorities to carry out a specific settlement campaign for the “sojourners”, while it made it easier for them to function in their traditional role. After all, their first massacre at Kamienna Street was in 1892. The residents were changing, but this street was ultimately inhabited by people from socially vulnerable groups. It smelled of cheap booze and you could hear frequent brawls, especially after World War II. The plaster was falling off, and the so-called “pathology” was literally nesting in the small flats without conveniences.

Perhaps this permanence of transformation from the late 19th century to the early 21st century is the street’s greatest peculiarity, illustrating the relationship of territory and architecture to social phenomena? (Lawnicki, 2019). This street was a genuine “risk factor” for crime (The Urban Institute Washington, 2004). Social problems on Włókiennicza Street still exist (Sayed, 2017). Here lived a tenant known for his enduring love of ethanol. He set fire to his lodgings. He was not killed, but the smoke killed a young mother and her two daughters

on the floor above his flat (Grabowski, 2011). The question arises once more of the sources of the permanence of customs. Currently, due to the revitalisation, most of the residents have been displaced to alternative accommodation. Whether they will return and in what condition is an open question.

Already in ancient Rome, there were good and bad districts. One of the worst was Suburra. A massive fire curtain wall separating the good districts from the Suburra has survived to this day in the Eternal City. Probably every city had and has its “forbidden” neighbourhoods. To this day there are clear interactions between buildings, architecture, and the state of security, respect for the law and the fate of the area’s residents (Kuo, Sullivan, 2001). It is not difficult to draw up a “local crime map” in any city (Davidson, 2019). Significant social science discoveries were made when it became clear that the state of the physical environment influences people’s behaviour (Sousa, Kelling, 2015). Including criminal ones (Bieniek-Ciarcńska, 2017). The worse the physical environment (in an aesthetic sense) the more criminal behaviour (Kelling, Coles, 1998). And vice versa. In a famous experiment (1969) by Professor Zimbardo (Zimbardo, 1970), two worn-out cars were placed in the street. In a good neighbourhood the car stood intact for days, while in a “poor” one it was quickly vandalised, starting after just... 10 minutes! There have been many similar experiments concluding that the state of the physical environment carries normative messages – what is allowed and not allowed here (Braga, Welsh, 2016). In a neighbourhood with neglected facades, the propensity for criminal behaviour increased. In other words, attention to external architectural qualities affects the level of local crime (Braga, 2016; Taylor, Harrel, 1996). In “suburras” it is easier to commit a crime, somehow it fits into the surroundings, it is a social norm. These observations contributed to the launch of the famous “Zero Tolerance” strategy with the help of which crime in New York was significantly reduced, for example, as a result of the renovation of the underground (McManus, Robin, Engel, Cherkauskas, Light, Shoulberg, 2020). The same happened on Kamienna Street (Stolarek, 2013). Perhaps this observation was one of the premises for the ambitious street revitalisation programme currently underway? In any case, let’s hope it’s not the case that the street again changes the people who settle there, rather than them changing the street. This is a very important question within social pedagogy. After all, once before, at the end of the 19th century, the beautiful surroundings collapsed under the influence of settlers – the “*prijutniks*” (ironically, this name meant someone who was gladly welcomed, a guest!).

## **2. The question of the conditions for reducing risk?**

The question arises about the determinants of such processes. What determined the failure of the Tsar’s “rehabilitation experiment”? What has determined the permanence of the street’s negative character? What could determine the possible success of revitalisation efforts? Questions posed in this way naturally lead us to historical analyses (Potkański, 2014). However, they clearly go beyond the social sciences (Noworól, 2010). Certainly, local educators ask themselves such questions. What would need to happen for the street to take on a new light and permanently change its character?

The answer seems simple. After all, it is enough to renovate the street. According to the study, alcohol and drug supply outlets should disappear. Is that so?

The answer is not so clear-cut. Even if the local tenements are “by some miracle” (based on the allocated European funds) renovated and inhabited by a richer elite, it is by no means certain that the specific spirit of Kamienna Street will not win again. This is quite possible, as everything depends on the strategy within the planned revitalisation. Are there no people with addiction tendencies or family problems among the rich elite? Money alone may not win over the “spirit of Kamienna Street”. Perhaps it is still hovering over Włokiennicza Street?

## **3. Key effective assistance for the excluded**

The current situation is the basis for valuable scientific observations (Sullivan, 2001). The street will become more beautiful after the planned treatments. However, to remove the “curse of Kamienna Street” it is necessary, according to the author, to take a serious approach to the issue of supporting residents who face multi-generational problems. It is not enough to evict them to social housing but to try to help them, instead. This is

a very difficult task. However, if successful, they would enhance their street themselves. The aesthetic quality of the surroundings is important, but it can be created over time by the residents themselves, following “social revitalisation” (City of Katowice, 2007). The author is aware of what this means, as well as the fact that the human-urban environment is a bundle of all kinds of dysfunctions. Addiction and violence, as well as the learned helplessness of entire generations, are like a boulder hanging at our necks. And yet... Łódź was an area where social pedagogy developed intensively, including based on such authorities as Prof. A. Kamiński or Dr. A. Majewska. “Social revitalisation” is a challenge for researchers and practitioners. Certainly, a lot is being done already, the voices are getting through. Appropriate institutions, community centres, and cultural centres are being planned. Perhaps these measures need to be presented as something of a priority? The author is also firmly convinced that if the proverbial “enthusiasts of Kamienna Street” are not saved, various development measures may simply fail. The relentless “spirit” of the street will take its revenge on the innovators. Of course, this is only a metaphor. The core of the transformation is still the human being.

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