Social and Cultural Role of Greenery in Development of Cittaslow Towns

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Abstract. The beginnings of the Cittaslow movement date back to 1998. Italian towns became a model for other European towns, and subsequently for others, around the world. This is how an international movement came into being, founded on the idea of improvement of the quality of life of residents, savouring "slow", healthy lifestyle, drawing on the tradition and history and respecting the natural and cultural environment of small towns. Green areas play a huge role in creating the image of Cittaslow towns. They constitute the so-called "green urban corridors" or "green spots" and have cultural, educational and social significance, including recreation and spa functions. They are not only a complement to architecture, but can play a superior role in the structure of cities. The aim of the work is to analyze the state of parks, squares and green areas management in the Cittaslow towns in region of Warmia and Mazury (Poland). There are 20 environmentally, spatially, economically and demographically diverse towns in the region of Warmia and Mazury that acceded to the association. The international network includes towns with a population under 50 thousand. An analysis of the source materials involved gathering and interpretation of information obtained from monographic and cartographic documentation, both current and archival, from websites of Cittaslow towns and mentions in the media. Apart from a monographic study, the authors carried out a landscape and spatial analysis, pre-project studies and made original designs for selected urban parks and greens in Cittaslow towns. All the Cittaslow towns in the Province of Warmia and Mazury under analysis have high potential in terms of using greenery areas with the social and cultural function. Parks and squares are perfect places for integration of communities and for conducting educational and cultural activities. However, diversity regarding land development and programme offer is observed (utility programme). In some towns, greenery areas cover only space with planned (not always in accordance with the art of gardening) plant compositions. However, parks and squares should be planned not only with their visual aspect in mind, but emphasis should be placed on their utility side (active use). Therefore, the article points to the directions of development of new places, as well the possibility of adding socio-cultural functions to existing greenery areas.

1. Introduction

The beginnings of the Cittaslow movement date back to 1998. It was then that representatives of several Italian towns met with representatives of Slow Food – an organisation promoting healthy food and regional cuisine. The town of Orvieto in the Province of Umbria was chosen as the seat of the
association. Italian towns became a model for other European towns, and subsequently for others, around the world. This is how an international movement came into being, founded on the idea of improvement of the quality of life of residents, savouring “slow”, healthy lifestyle, drawing on the tradition and history and respecting the natural and cultural environment of small towns. Towns that apply for membership in the association undertake to meet the qualification criteria, which include: preserving the identity of the place, caring about historical buildings, creating people-friendly places, promoting local businesses and local products, development of sustainable tourism, landscape protection activities of the authorities and communities. The development of Cittaslow towns is supposed to be based on respecting the historical urban fabric, protecting old buildings and cultural objects of exceptional value and cultivating cultural and artistic activities. Therefore, the spatial and social assumptions on which the Cittaslow network are based include the ideas of rebuilding, renovation, revitalisation and creating places friendly to local communities.

There are 20 environmentally, spatially, economically and demographically diverse towns in the region of Warmia and Mazury that acceded to the association. The international network includes towns with a population under 50 thousand. In the Warmia and Mazury region, these are usually towns with populations of up to or a little more than 10 thousand and only two of them have a population exceeding 20 thousand. They occupy an area of 2.16 km$^2$ (Bisztynek) to 16.84 km$^2$ (Lubawa). Due to the physiographic specificity of the region, these towns are usually situated at lakes, surrounded by open agricultural land or forests. Apart from the neighbouring open areas, the environmental potential of the towns is affected by various forms of designed greenery. Areas of greenery play a significant role in creating the image of Cittaslow towns. They can make “green corridors” or “green spots”, connecting built-up space and communication passages. They should not only complement architecture, but also play a superior role in the structure of settlement units.

The aim of the study was to analyse the degree of development of parks, squares greens in Cittaslow towns in Warmia and Mazury. It was assumed in the study that the analysis would use as its starting point the composed greenery as compact spaces (parks, squares), because of the following:

1. These areas are accessible to all residents.
2. Parks and squares are located at or near the centre, i.e. at places with the largest concentrations of people.
3. They play diverse functions. In this regard, an important role is played by cultural, educational, social as well as recreational and rehabilitation measures.
4. Parks and squares are perfect places for integration of the town’s population and for encouraging people to be more active.
5. Projects of renovation and revitalisation are most often carried out in such areas.

The analyses did not take into account such forms as greenery in residential quarters, greenery near sports or education facilities, greenery near sacral objects, near transport facilities and others because of their restricted accessibility and because their social and cultural functions are not as diverse as those of parks and squares.

2. Methodology
This study addresses the issues of revitalisation of small towns - members of the Cittaslow association in the Province of Warmia and Mazury in the context of developing green areas. Issues related to parks and squares were analysed with focus on their socio-cultural role. Parks in Warmia and Mazury are public places which are important for education, health and recreation and whose aim is to
improve the quality of residents’ lives. This study is both theoretical and analytical. An analysis of
the source materials involved gathering and interpretation of information obtained from monographic and
cartographic documentation, both current and archival, from websites of Cittaslow towns and
mentions in the media. Landscape and spatial analysis, pre-project studies and original designs for
selected urban parks and greens in Cittaslow towns have been made. Interviews and consultations
have been conducted (Olsztynek, Bartoszyce, Dobre Miasto, Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, Lidzbark
Warmiński). These provided the ideas for change, taking into account the nature of the place. In
another important part of the study, the cultural features distinguishing individual towns that could
have provided inspiration for designs of greenery were identified. Workshops and training sessions for
residents (Biskupiec, Bartoszyce) were conducted, combined with practical implementation of the
residents’ ideas (developing of the squares in Biskupiec). These actions allowed determination of the
role of social participation in creating the urban space. In another important step, community
interviews were conducted, both with local government members, town mayors and their residents, on
the role of green areas. The study identified issues regarding developing green areas of diverse
function, followed by preparing guidelines for their proper development.

3. The role of greenery in the spatial development of Cittaslow towns
Public green spaces in Cittaslow towns are compact spaces of defined plan and diverse function. These
are usually parks and squares, with the term “park” applied to customarily in some towns to denote an
area which is not more than a large square (e.g. in Sepopol or Bisztynek). However, the name used by
the residents was adopted for this study. The following can be identified among the parks and greens
in the towns under analysis:

- green areas of historical importance (e.g. parks in Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, Reszel, Bartoszyce),

- green areas created as a result of a change of their function after World War II (squares at town
centres, e.g. in Olsztynek, Biskupiec, Bartoszyce, Goldap, Lidzbark Warmiński)

- green areas which are being restored or renovated (e.g. parks in Biskupiec, Goldap, Dzialdowo,
Lubawa, (documents often mention revitalisation of parks and greens, which - as a rule - is not an
entirely precise term)

- green areas designed “anew” (a square in Ryn along the harbour and marina, park in Dzialdowo)

Parks and squares are usually situated at, or close to the centre. Sometimes, a park is situated at the
town border, at a considerable distance (an area with graduation towers at the spa in Goldap, Park
Zatorze in Biskupiec, Ethnographic Park in Olsztynek, see table 1). Squares occupy the space at the
very centres of towns, at market squares, near public places (municipal offices, schools, churches) or
at intersections of major streets. On the other hand, other forms with functions similar to those of
parks and squares, referred to in this study as space for recreation and leisure, are situated along rivers,
or shores of lakes or ponds (table 1).

Table 1. Forms of green areas in Cittaslow towns in Warmia and Mazury.

| City       | Form of greenery | Location                                                                                           |
|------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sepopol    | Park/square      | Centre (Kościuszki Str, Moniuszki St./Town Hall (Wojska Polskiego Ave., 22 Lipca St.)             |
| Bisztynek  | Park/squares     | Centre (near Town Hall)/3 squares direct. N-E                                                 |
| Pasym      | Boulevard        | Along the lakeline                                                                                 |
| Ryn        | Square           | A marina and an ecomarine along the lakeline                                                      |
| Jeziorny   | Park and recreation complex/2 squares | Park near downtown (former moat)/centre (1. Kosciuszki St., 2. Plac Jedności Narodowej) |
| Górowo II. | Park/squares     | Centre (direc.W)/centre: 1. near Garncarski Pond, 2. Sybiraków Square, 3.                      |
3.1. Greenery areas as spaces for residents’ integration

The socio-cultural role of greenery areas should include integration, culture and education, sport and recreation and health promotion (therapeutic) measures. Urban parks and greens are mainly public spaces for all the residents (unlike areas of greenery in enclosed zones, e.g. in residential areas). They are, as Cömertler [1] points out after Dunnett et al. [2], a neutral place accessible to all groups of the society. Thereby, they prevent social exclusion. In Cittaslow towns of Warmia and Mazury, of great importance is the integration of various groups in an urban space and parks, e.g. of the elderly and young people (family fairs in many towns), the disabled with non-disabled people (e.g. "Marsze Godności" - Marches of Dignity in Biskupiec), people of various cultures and religions (festivals in Górowo Iławeckie, Bartoszyce). Greenery areas in small towns are often living spaces of the community (especially squares at the centre), creating permanent neighbourhoods and strong local communities. Some parks, especially those with a cultural value, can be elements of public education and something the community can be proud of. For Warmia and Mazury, this image can be a little blurred because of the lack of historical continuity (the post-war period, migrations, replacement of communities, the formerly German property). However, some projects seem to relate to the pre-war character of towns, by the pattern of planted vegetation, by the kind of vegetation itself, road pavements, street furniture in line with the original intentions of the creators. There are symbols associated with history at the squares (towns’ coats of arms formed by flower beds, elements of
cultural landscape, patterns used in street furniture). In recent years, “Cittaslow squares” have been created in some towns with a characteristic symbol of a snail. This may be a sign of commitment to the association. Modern greenery areas (created or modernised after World War II, especially during the past 20 years) increase the towns’ feeling of identity and are a sign of their cultural interests. They are places where people meet as citizens, but also for religious and political purposes. They are an important element which determines the quality of life in a town. They provide an opportunity to live in contact with nature, to enjoy leisure and recreation. The social function is also linked with a decrease in crime rate, although it could be quite the reverse in devastated, uncared-for parks. But they undoubtedly have an effect on individual and social attitudes by promoting proper social relations and a decrease in the aggression level [3] Greenery areas with a dominating social function (in parks, squares) include:

- greenery areas as everyday meeting places (walking routes, leisure sites, squares and greens with benches)
- greenery areas for families with children (e.g. playgrounds for children)
- greenery areas as places for periodical meetings (festivals, state celebrations, religious festivals)
- greenery areas as places for meetings of various social groups (elderly people with the young, disabled people with non-disabled ones)
- places for feasting, for barbecues, etc.

3.2. Greenery areas as spaces for cultural and educational activities

Parks and squares are perfect places for implementing cultural ideas. Because of their size (especially parks) and accessibility, these are places where concerts (Barczewo, Bartoszyce), meetings devoted to literature and theatre (e.g. “Wspólne Czytanie” - Reading Together in Sępol), are organised. These are usually places with an amphitheatre or stage. The space in parks can be used in an interesting manner by holding plein-air workshops and creating places for exhibiting works of art (e.g. for sculptors in Biskupiec). In some parks and squares, thematic paths have been organised where the town history is presented (description of places, archival photographs, maps and plans). These areas are of educational importance as places where science (biology) lessons can be held (park in Reszel). The park space is often regarded as an “outer cognitive laboratory”, and out-of-school (“green”) lessons provide diversity in the teaching and education process. Such lessons are conducted at squares and school gardens. An extremely important cultural and educational role in propagating the history, tradition, folklore and architecture of the region is played by the Ethnographic Park in Olsztyniec. Areas with the cultural and educational function can be classified as:

- green areas where artistic open-air workshops are held,
- green areas where concerts, music and theatre meetings are held (amphitheatres in parks, stages),
- Exhibition space in parks (open space galleries, exhibition space for works of art, sculptures, objects, performances)
- exhibition space associated with the town history and culture
- specialist museums (ethnographic parks, open-air ethnographic museums)
- arboreta and botanical gardens
- places for holding “green lessons”, “green schools"

- greenery areas near schools, used for educational purposes (school gardens, at after-school clubs)

3.3. Greenery areas with health-promoting, therapeutic and recreational function

The health-promoting function of greenery comprises mainly: relations between man and nature, improvement of the mental and intellectual health (relax, balance, sensitisation [4]), physical condition (motor coordination and balance) and sensory reception (vision, hearing, touch, taste). The social and educational role fulfilled by Cittaslow towns includes: creating places for leisure, entertainment and relaxation. Integration of healthy people with those with physical or mental dysfunctions, or elderly people with younger people, is also important. Joint use of space and establishing new contacts prevents social exclusion. Such places as parks, squares, greens, encourage adults to practice sports and provide space for the little ones to play. In classic hortitherapy, the social factor is emphasised by learning to co-create garden forms and participation in the process. The therapeutic effect of various forms of greenery is linked with a person’s physical and mental condition. The condition of one’s spirit, feeling the “green” space in a metaphysical sense, is also important. Properly designed green spaces both provide place for relaxation and meditation (condition of spirit) and improve concentration, help to refresh one’s mind, but mainly help to improve one’s physical fitness [5].

Greenery areas with a health-promoting ad therapeutic function can be divided into:

- urban parks established to improve the residents’ physical and mental health

- parks in spas

- parks situated near healthcare facilities, such as hospitals, centres for people with varied abilities or social welfare centres

- parks at nursing homes, residential quarters for elderly people

- parks (sometimes their fragments) intended for hortitherapy (active participation in setting up gardens and caring about the plants).

- fitness trails with sport facilities, open spaces for sport and leisure

4. Issues related to designing, developing, nurturing and social perception of urban greenery

Pressure on starting new construction projects is present not only in big cities (although a bigger scale generates bigger problems), but also in small towns. This results in a decreasing area of parks and green areas, which is also visible in Cittaslow towns. They are replaced with new buildings or parking lots. Another issue involves the purposeful reduction of larger forms of vegetation and of the number of species (loss of biodiversity) and replacing them with low-growing plants and lawns. “Shrinking" parks and their species uniformity results in reduction of places for integration of residents and for education (e.g. field lessons of biology in species recognition, ecology).

As has been said before, parks are an inherent element of an urban structure. And although their role in the urban landscape is emphasised increasingly often, they are not always included in renovation programmes. Modernisation of parks and squares often involves only the most basic facilities (street furniture) and selection of vegetation, without changing their functions or the utility programme. Sometimes, newly designed greenery areas do not respond to users’ current needs (e.g. lack of properly arranged playgrounds, places for elderly people to relax, sports and leisure facilities for the young). Another problem is posed by acts of vandalism in newly established public spaces (parks, squares in Górowo Iławeckie, Biskupiec, Bartoszyce, Dobre Miasto, Lidzbark Warmiński),
which is why the cost of project execution must be increased to include installation of a monitoring system.

Apart from making changes in parks and designing “new” space, which includes form, contents, general design trends, it is necessary to employ an individual approach to each object by highlighting the distinctive features of a place (e.g. showing its links to tradition or natural features). However, in most parks and greens this has not been done, which has deprived these spaces of their individual character. Sometimes, it resulted from a change of the designer’s idea at the final stage, when the project was being executed. However, newly created and transformed green spaces fulfil their basic functions and the residents are usually satisfied with being able to use the renovated areas because “it’s better to have something than nothing”.

Problems with development of greenery areas with therapeutic functions can be attributed to insufficient use of the potential of parks in Cittaslow towns as places of active therapy with therapeutic elements and places for classic hortitherapy. Public spaces are usually used as walking or jogging grounds (pedestrian paths) or bicycle routes running through parks (e.g. the parks in Lubawa, Górowo Iławeckie, Reszel). In most parks, especially those embraced by renovation programmes, there are elements of minor sports facilities, including outdoor gyms (e.g. a boulevard in Lidzbark Warmiński, the park in Olsztyn, the wharf in Ryn, the park in Gołdap). These features are important beyond doubt, but programmes of park renovation lack therapeutic space in a broader sense. Among the parks with an extended therapeutic function, only the one in Gołdap can be distinguished. The therapeutic space in this park was organised by adapting it to the needs of people who come here (patients of the sanatorium) rather than only those of the local residents. However, the slogans of “improving the quality of life”, “slowing down the pace of life” and “relieving tensions”, that advertise Cittaslow towns should apply to improving the health and perception of the natural environment by people living in a town permanently. This is why park designs should include a diverse health promotion and therapeutic programme. The situation is better when it comes to places in parks intended for recreation. Such places have been designed in all parks. However, they are largely places for passive recreation.

5. Guidelines for developing new, and transformation of existing greenery areas

The research identified issues regarding the development of green areas of diverse functions in Cittaslow towns in Warmia and Mazury and enabled formulation of recommendations for developing new, and transformation of existing greenery areas.

The following should be done when planning new areas of greenery or renovation and restoration of existing ones:

- adapt to the size of the town and selected space and its surroundings
- adapt to the tradition and character of the place, which may prevent repeating ideas and using the same materials for carrying out the product
- take measures to restore the original layout or only fragments or features (depending on the nature of the park arrangement)

The following should be done to enable carrying out educational, integrational and cultural activities in parks:

- hold consultations at each stage of the design process, including consultation among the community
- engage members of the local community in the design process and organise education and training programmes for them

- engage members of the local community to organise cultural and educational events

- create places for integration of various societal groups (interactive playgrounds, exhibition spaces, educational elements)

- develop a programme of diverse use of land (with a prospect for the following years)

- plan diverse forms of vegetation (species diversity) and material-related solutions (pavements, street furniture)

The following actions are postulated with a view to developing parks and greens in Cittaslow towns in Warmia and Mazury with an emphasis on therapy and recreation:

- include in designs vegetation with positive effects on health and such that is suited in regard to its features (shape, leaves, stems, colour)

- develop a diverse health promotion programme suited to a specific group of users (hortitherapy - activities associated with setting up and nurturing of vegetation, physical exercise in the park, places for practicing yoga and contemplation)

- use sensory techniques, prepare places and facilities for sensory therapy (sensory paths, sound gardens, smell gardens, music therapy, art therapy)

- make use of the natural conditions, e.g. the presence of natural water bodies, rivers in therapy (e.g. in Kneipp Cure)

- create places for playing in the open air.

6. Results and discussion

The assumptions on which the idea of Cittaslow towns were founded in regard to environmental protection, spatial management and development of local businesses, include: a system for air quality control, supporting alternative energy sources, planning public space, including greeneries, restoration of original historical buildings in the town, creating urban infrastructure improving the residents’ comfort and quality of life, making architectural spaces usable for disabled and elderly people, cherishing tradition, creating tourist products based on the landscape features. Green spaces play a role in attracting tourism [6], in integration and participation in local community [7], in urban regeneration strategies [8].

In sustainable development of towns in accordance with the slow idea, spatial planning aims at improvement of living conditions and enables residents to use “green” spaces. Among all greenery areas, the most important socio-cultural role is played by parks and squares because of their location and because they are public places. There are places for recreation and health promotion created in towns, which are connected functionally, spatially and socially.

Since the way in which parks are used changes, it is important to adapt the programme to the society’s needs. Natural, historical, spatial and landscape values must be preserved. The renovation process should take into account preserving the place’s identity and improvement of the town’s image. This should be borne in mind, especially when funds for renovation provided for in the Supralocal Programme of Towns Revitalisation are distributed. These funds will enable carrying out new
greenery area development projects. This will open new opportunities that take into account the residents’ needs.

7. Conclusions
All the Cittaslow towns in the Province of Warmia and Mazury under analysis have high potential in terms of using greenery areas with the social and cultural function. Parks and squares are perfect places for integration of communities and for conducting educational and cultural activities. However, diversity regarding land development and programme offer is often not observed (utility programme). In some towns, greenery areas cover only space with planned (not always in accordance with the art of gardening) plant compositions. However, parks and squares should be planned not only with their visual aspect in mind, but emphasis should be placed on their utility side (active use). Therefore, the article points to the directions of development of new places, as well the possibility of adding socio-cultural functions to existing greenery areas.

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