

## **Progress of rehabilitation of large housing estates in Katowice (Poland)**

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### **Abstract**

Large housing estates (LHEs) built during the communist era in the countries behind the 'Iron Curtain', nowadays, are places of residence for 20–30% of their population, covering a considerable amount of space in many cities. Therefore, changes that LHEs are undergoing are crucial for the quality of life of millions of people in Central and Eastern Europe. The aim of this study is to present the recent rehabilitation progress of LHEs through the example of three case study estates from Katowice – the historical centre of the Upper Silesian industrial agglomeration in Poland. Through inventory, mapping and observation, a set of data on the technical and visual state as well as on the functional aspects of the estates in question were gathered. The analysis led to the conclusion, that the general state of the investigated LHEs is satisfactory, but there are considerable differences in the speed of the rehabilitation process, which may result in a deepening polarisation of the quality of life on the estates in the near future.

**Keywords:** large housing estates, urban rehabilitation, Katowice

### **Introduction**

The city of Katowice investigated in this paper, with around 300,000 inhabitants and not a very long history, has quite a typical look of a socialist town. Besides, Katowice is the capital of the large Upper Silesian conurbation shaped by intensive coal mining and the massive development of the connected branches of heavy industry during the past decades.

Most of the Katowice's LHEs were erected for the migrants who arrived to work in mines and steelworks. Nowadays, those areas are affected by some typical problems: the ageing of both the population and the housing stock; technical problems of the buildings and the infrastructure due to low quality building materials and the poor workmanship. Those problems were

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deepened by the damages caused by mining as well as by social problems like the unemployment induced by the post-socialist transformation. Nevertheless, the prospect of a given estate is not automatically so bleak. Many of them are still appreciated as a suitable place of living by young families and young singles due to their relatively low prices and good access to basic amenities. Next to old blocks of flats new residential buildings are being erected, which brings along new challenges in managing the estates' residential environment.

After the collapse of communism – and especially in the last decade – the conditions of the large housing estates has attracted the interest of a growing number of scholars and research groups. Most of the research projects have focused on the diagnosis of the nature and the scale of the LHEs' problems and, eventually, they have also put an emphasis on the LHEs' future perspectives throughout Europe (like the overall papers of the RESTATE Project, e.g. DEKKER, K. and VAN KEMPEN, R. 2004; ČERNÍČ MALI, B. *et al.* 2008), in particular countries (GORCZYCA, K. 2009; TEMELOVÁ, J. *et al.* 2011; CONSTANTIN, D.L. 2006, 2007; DIMITROVSKA ANDREWS, K. and SENDI, R. 2001; ČERNÍČ MALI, B. 2005) or at the local level (e.g. GÓRCZYŃSKA, M. 2008; WARCHALSKA-TROLL, A. 2012).

In a broader context, the investigation of the residential environment of LHEs is closely connected with the issue of the quality of life in an urban environment. This research field has been in the focus of interest of many geographers of Central and Eastern Europe, too (e.g. ANDRÁŠKO, I. 2005, 2006; ZBOROWSKI, A. *et al.* 2009).

The large housing estates of Katowice – their histories, locations, dimensions and other characteristics – are described in a monograph written by L. SZARANIEC (2010). Their susceptibility to physical and social degradation was the subject of a research carried out by the author (WARCHALSKA-TROLL, A. 2012). Currently, a Polish-German scientific project entitled 'The past, present and future of Polish and German big housing estates. Comparative study of urban development models and their approval - examples of Katowice and Leipzig' is being conducted by the Faculty of Architecture, Silesian University of Technology in cooperation with UFZ – Helmholtz Institute – Environmental Studies Centre in Leipzig (Large housing estates... 2012). However, to the author's knowledge, no scientific paper with the outcome of that project has been published yet (as for 17. December 2012).

### **Introduction of research sites and the field survey**

This study aims to focus on the rehabilitation of LHEs in recent years through the example of selected case studies from Katowice. The main research questions are the followings: What is the general state of the housing stock and how great are the differences between the particular estates? Has the rehabilitation

advanced over time or it is just at an early stage? Are there any general ideas behind the rehabilitation actions or are they rather limited and chaotic? Does the rehabilitation cover public spaces, too? Are there really enough basic amenities? In order to answer these questions, three different estates were selected in Katowice, erected mainly between the late 1960s and up to the mid-1980s:

- Tysiąclecia estate, today divided into Upper and Lower Tysiąclecia estates, is the biggest housing estate in the city, having a population of around 25,000. It is also famous for the height of the blocks (most of them have more than 10 storeys while some have even more than 20), and it is well-connected with the city centre and the recreational areas;

- Paderewskiego estate, situated close to the centre of Katowice and the recreational areas. The estate has especially good reputation within the city many intellectuals from local scientific and cultural institutions as well as the local media used to live there. The size of the estate is medium (by Polish conditions) with around 9,000 inhabitants;

- Witosa estate situated near a closed mine and the run down district of Załęże at the outskirts of Katowice. Its size is medium (with around 11,000 inhabitants) originally built for workers of a coal mine and the nearby factories. Nowadays, it has a bad reputation in the city.

The research was conducted in September 2012, by means of techniques such as inventory, mapping and observation. The acquired information was compared to the results of a similar research conducted by the author on the same sites in 2009 (WARCHALSKA-TROLL, A. 2012) when the social aspects of life on the LHEs were also tackled (mostly through questionnaires).

The features considered in the field survey included (*Table 1*) buildings of several types and their close surroundings; playgrounds; the location and the number of amenities such as shops, schools, medical centres, etc.

*Table 1. Types of buildings considered in the study*

Name of the building category used in this paper	Description
Old high-rise residential	A building of more than 5 storeys, built before 1989
Old low-rise residential	A building of less than 5 storeys, built before 1989
Old single-family	Detached house, semi-detached house, built before 1989
New high-rise residential	A building of more than 5 storeys, built after 1989
New low-rise residential	A building of less than 5 storeys, built after 1989
New single-family	Detached house, semi-detached house, built after 1989
Non-residential	Shops, shopping centres, schools, kindergartens, medical centres and private practices, culture clubs, libraries, churches, kiosks, administrative buildings, restaurants and pubs, banks and financial services, post offices, etc.
Under construction	Every building which hadn't been finished by September 2012

The progress of rehabilitation was considered mostly according to three dimensions:

- Physical conditions of buildings (e.g. full renovation, only painted, under renovation/construction, no renovation) including the state of the building's surroundings – substantial changes (pavements, driveways etc.) as well as minor changes (street furniture, entrance doors to the blocks, waste containers, etc.);

- State of playgrounds (representing public spaces and social infrastructure at the same time);

- Functional structure of the estate and access to basic facilities.

The state of buildings was evaluated according to visual signs of whether they were freshly painted or insulated. The state of playgrounds was evaluated according to features such as surface type (concrete or other hard materials, soil, Tartan, grass, etc.), fence (no fence, short fence, taller fence protecting against vandals), the state and the diversification of the recreational equipment (new, old, the number of pieces).

## Results of the survey

### *Types of housing stock*

In all three cases high-rise residential buildings erected before 1989 (the beginning of political and economic transformation in Poland) predominate. They usually represent the typical features of housing in the 1970s: concrete panel blocks made of pre-fabricated materials, following very simple design, with flat roofs. There is only one interesting exception: a group of five blocks on the Lower Tysiąclecia estate. Having a flower-like figure for base, they are called 'corns' as their silhouette remind people heads of maize (*Photo 1*).

The largest variety of housing can be found in Witosa estate – in addition to the 'old high-rise residential' category, also old and new low-rise and single-family residential houses occur (*Figure 1*). In contrast, Tysiąclecia and Paderewskiego estates have new housing stock under construction which means that they are still perceived as perspective residential areas by developers and investors.

The high rate of single-family housing on Witosa estate can be explained by the provision of higher standard housing for the managerial class of the former mine situated nearby. They were luxurious in the past, but from nowadays perspective they are not attractive any longer. Old low-rise multi-family residential housing at Tysiąclecia estate includes the oldest buildings of the area dating back to the early 1960s, before residential tower blocks became popular in Poland.



Photo 1. 'Corn' houses in Lower Tysiąclecia. (Photo by WARCHALSKA-TROLL, A.)

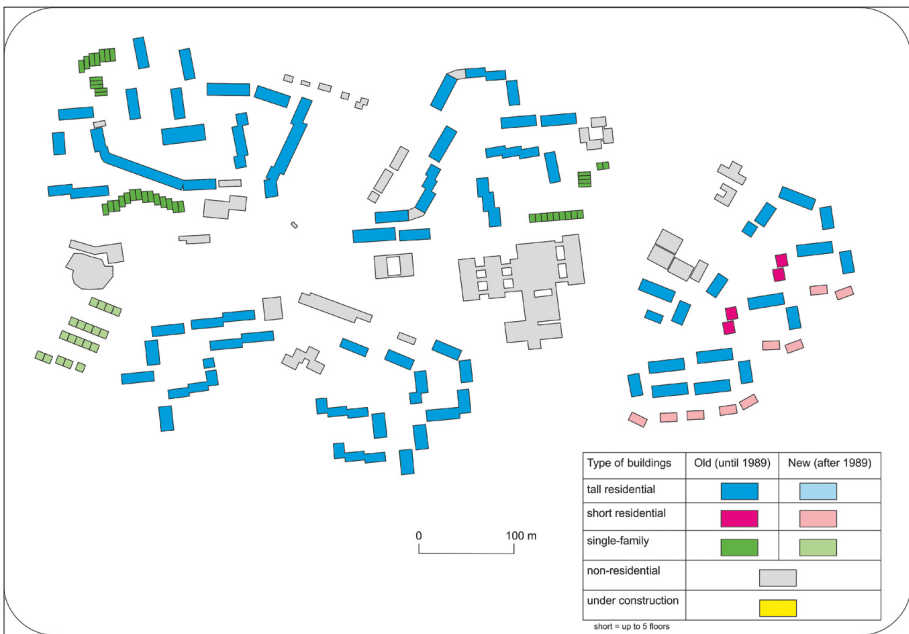


Fig. 1. Witosa estate – types of housing stock. Source: see Fig 5.

## State of housing stock and public spaces

The investigated housing estates differ most regarding the state of housing stock. Paderewskiego estate is an example for an area being rather well-maintained, although most renovation activities were conducted some time ago. Current rehabilitation actions seem to be chaotic and incoherent (Figure 2).

Public spaces like playgrounds are generally in good conditions, although they meet little the current quality expectations. On Tysiąclecia estate rehabilitation process seems to be following a cohesive general strategy (Figure 3 and 4). However, due to the poor quality performance of builders the renovations and the repairs are like a never-ending story there.

Due to its large size, the scale of problems and needs is also large. A slightly better situation can be observed in the upper part of the estate where the last built blocks can be found. Public spaces are very well-maintained and they meet modern standards in many aspects. Especially, the network of open-access sport facilities installed recently is worth mentioning. Witosa estate is an area which makes the worst impression, but at the same time it is full of contrasts. Totally neglected buildings stand in close proximity to fully renovated ones (Photo 2).

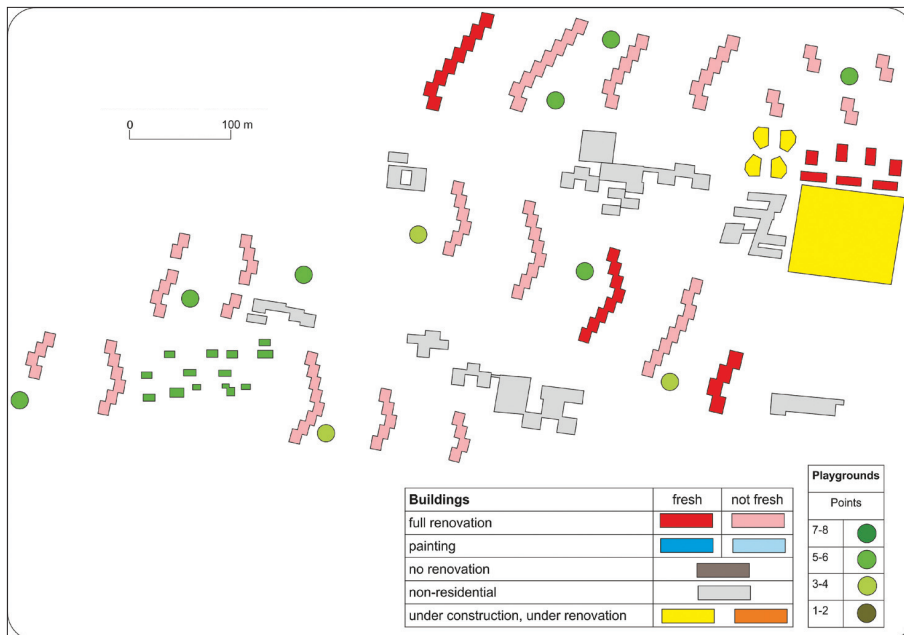


Fig. 2. Paderewskiego estate – state of housing stock and public spaces. Source: see Fig 5.

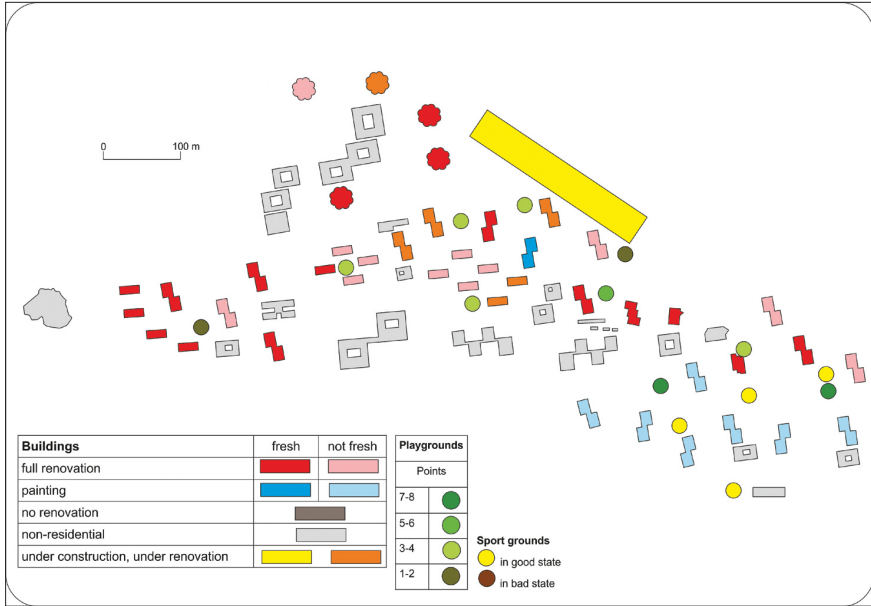


Fig. 3. Lower Tysiaclecia estate – state of housing stock and public spaces. Source: see Fig 5.

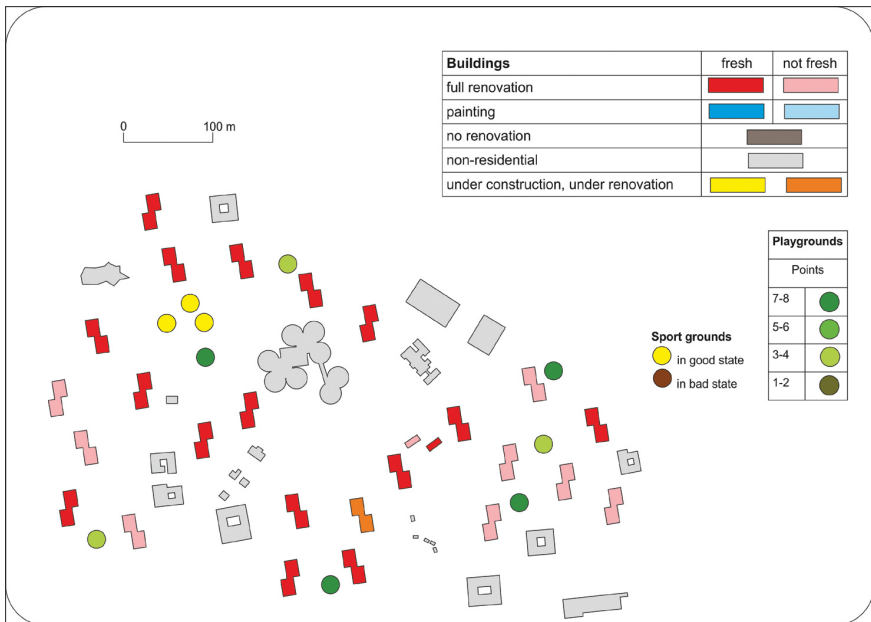


Fig. 4. Upper Tysiaclecia estate – state of housing stock and public spaces. Source: see Fig 5.





Photo 2. Renovated and neglected buildings in Witosa estate. (Photo by WARCHALSKA-TROLL, A.)

Yet, not the well-maintained buildings predominate on this estate. As for public spaces, some positive changes can be observed, like St. Herbert's Square near the church or new football pitches in the northern part of the area. Nevertheless, the general quality of the estate is very poor (Figure 5).



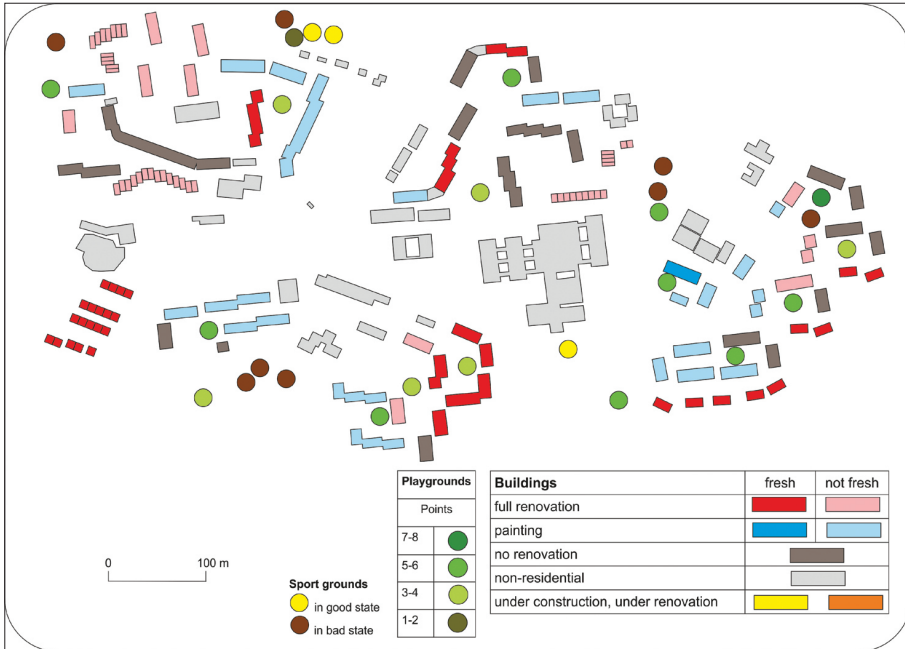


Fig. 5. Witosa estate – state of housing stock and public spaces. *Source:* Author's field research including GPS measurements; visual interpretation of the satellite images available on: [maps.google.pl](https://maps.google.pl)

### Functions and facilities

In general, the investigated estates are well-equipped with basic amenities and facilities with many grocery shops, a school, kindergartens, a medical centre, a post office, a bank and cultural institutions (libraries, culture clubs) at every estate. This provision of services is extended by shopping centres and supermarkets situated usually in the estates' neighbourhood. Paderewskiego estate has additionally a very easy access to many cultural, educational and administrative institutions provided in the city centre as it is located less than 2 km away from the Main Square of Katowice. Tysiąclecia estate is characterised by some specific institutions: secondary schools, a school of arts and two police stations.

On both Paderewskiego and Tysiąclecia estates almost all tower blocks are equipped with small grocery shops and services such as hairdresser, medical practitioners, shoe-repair workshops, etc. which is very convenient for inhabitants, especially for elderly people. In contrast, on Witosa estate there

is a relatively lower number of shops and services which can be explained by the inhabitants' generally worse economic situation.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the three investigated estates have quite a lot in common and they face similar challenges. The success or the failure of rehabilitation process will probably depend on the different social and financial conditions upon which the cooperatives managing those areas have to act. The lower class profile and grave social problems of Witosa estate seem to explain why the rehabilitation process has not advanced there yet. The unfavourable financial situation of inhabitants affects the low level of renovations and repairs. Visible social contrasts enhance the frustration of poorer inhabitants. The widespread vandalism supports the impression that any rehabilitation action is in vain. That makes people even less eager to pay for renovations.

On Paderewskiego estate social problems have not been so serious until now, the estate has always maintained a good reputation and it still makes a positive impression. However, it may change in the coming years unless the rehabilitation process is more structured and better managed, and the local cooperative pays more attention to the current small-scale renovations and repairs. Tysiąclecia estate is in the best situation out of the three investigated estates. The local cooperative seems to have both a cohesive strategy and funds for rehabilitation actions and it seems to have a social acceptance for it, too. The problem may occur when the costs of maintenance of the ageing and run down housing stock and infrastructure will reach the point of economic effectiveness.

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