

ReNewTown

Brochure

On Transnational Development Strategy

Transnational Development Strategy
for post-socialist cities of Central Europe

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Strategy for post-socialist cities

The brochure is to present and promote the final document of the ReNewTown project – Transnational Development Strategy for post-socialist cities of Central Europe. The research within the ReNewTown project entitled “New post-socialist city: Competitive and Attractive”, funded by Central Europe Programme and conducted in the period of 3 years (April 2011 – March 2014), aimed at responding to the following question: “What to do with the socialist cities in Central and Eastern Europe?”

The research was based on surveys, market research and the study of good practices (available online at www.renewtown.eu). It was advanced by four investments in Krakow (Nowa Huta district) in Poland; Prague (Jižní Město district) in the Czech Republic; Velenje in Slovenia; and Hnúšťa in Slovakia.

The strategy outlines how to shape the new face of the post-socialist cities as competitive and attractive places of living.

The investments served as model solutions for districts with socialist legacy.

In the case of Nowa Huta in Krakow, the problem was the shortage of space for and the lack of cultural and social events; in Velenje, it was associated with poor conditions and quality of public spaces between blocks of flats; in Jižní Město in Prague, it was unemployment and low number of enterprises; and in Hnúšťa, it was the lack of ideas for modern functions of public buildings constructed in the socialist era.



Land-use change - the prominence of the 'socialist realist' architecture of The Palace of Culture in Warsaw (Poland) reduced by post-socialist skyscraper offices



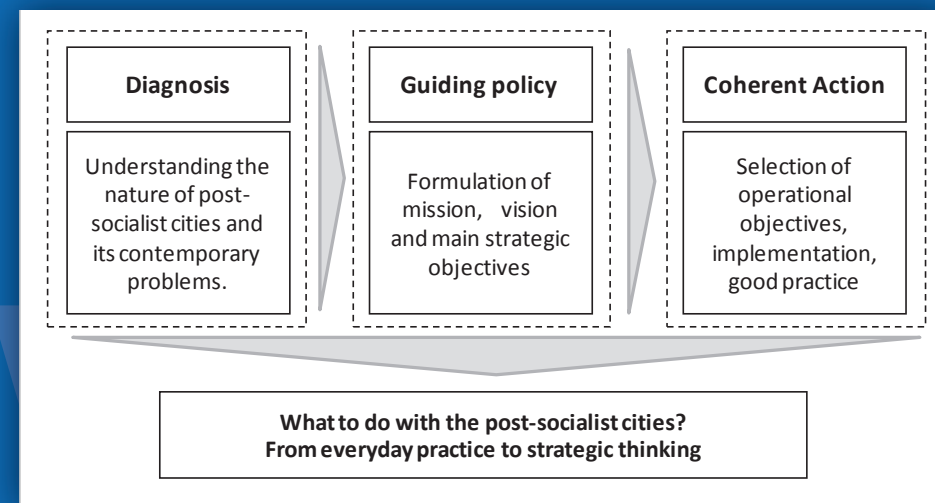
How to formulate a strategy for post-socialist urban areas?

The strategy is not for the “cities”, but for individual and collective actors and urban communities.

Target groups: policy makers, public officers, social scientists and, above all, resident organisations, as well as active ordinary citizens wishing to be involved in the improvement of their living environment.

Urban problems and challenges usually concentrate in particular neighbourhoods or they concern selected social categories or groups. The strategy should also deal with the issues on that level.

The assumption was made that the strategy aiming at creating a more cohesive society should begin at the very bottom level of social categories of spatial concentration, blocks of flats or houses, housing estates, and larger units like district zones, which was partly implemented in the project.



Strategy building plan

How to formulate a strategy for post-socialist urban areas?

Why do the post-socialist urban areas need attention?

Current problems and challenges faced by the urban areas with a socialist burden originate, in general, from low housing standards, unattractive architecture, lack of space management and insufficient number of local cultural and social events.

Post-socialist districts are in many cases deteriorating and are often inhabited by a high share of poor and elderly citizens. Such an increasing scale of social and wealth contrasts, together with the lack of participation in the common lifestyle of the urban society, is the basic challenge for urban policy on a national and local scale.

The set of commonly shared problems that we have worked on in the ReNeTown project includes:

- © shortage of space for and lack of local cultural and social events;
- © poor conditions and quality of buildings and housing;

- © low quality of public spaces between blocks of flats;
- © unemployment and low number of enterprises in the districts;
- © depressing appearance of socialist architecture;
- © low identification with the place of living and the lack of established local communities;
- © lack of the concept for the allocation of a new – modern function to public buildings created in the socialist era.

The most challenging problem, however, is the lack of explicit urban policies on national and local level. The elements of such policies do exist, but they are split and dispersed in various legislation documents and planning concepts. There are also the problems concerning urban policy instability due to frequent changes and the lack of long term perspective and strategic planning.



Prefabricated housing estates in Prague



Prefabricated housing estates in Warsaw

Research conducted within the ReNewTown project: surveys, databases and manuals

The best approach to the regeneration of post-socialist cities and districts is to improve attractiveness and functional diversity of public spaces. The unsuitable structure of public spaces in post-socialist cities results in the limited availability of: retail services, cultural events, recreational infrastructure and parking places. First of all, public spaces should be used for recreation, entertainment, organization of cultural, sport and leisure time activities. Secondly, local governments should play a key role in initiating the regeneration processes. Thirdly, the development of a specific quarter/location should involve local communities in planning and decision-making process.

These first conclusions came from the surveys conducted in 10 locations in 5 countries (327 residents, 52 local entre-

preneurs, 79 professionals and officials representing local governments and NGOs). Based on the outcomes, market research and good practice reports were elaborated. It led to the creation of 3 comprehensive databases showcasing 150 examples of revitalization ideas and completed investments in Central and Eastern Europe (available online at www.renewtown.eu).

Some pieces of the puzzle were also provided by the **four ReNewTown project investments**: in Krakow (Nowa Huta district) in Poland, Prague (Jižní Město district) in the Czech Republic, Velenje in Slovenia, and Hnúšťa in Slovakia. They serve as model solutions for typical problems of districts with a socialist burden.



Art workshop for children organized in ARTzona, pilot investment of ReNewTown project in Nowa Huta - district of Krakow



Renewed public space as part of the pilot investment of ReNewTown project in Velenje

More examples were presented in the **ReNewTown Handbook of Models “Post-socialist city: A Role Model for Urban Revitalization in the 21st Century”**. Each model approach is put into a relevant theoretical framework and illustrated with a comprehensively evaluated example of how the model was put to life in practice. Valuable lessons learned are provided for those wishing to implement a similar project in their local community.

Transnational Manual for Urban Revitalization “Engage. Brighter Future in Your Hands” offers inspiration on how to initiate activities and projects on the neighbourhood level. It explains how to formulate a project plan, involve your neighbours, speak to experts, get publicity, raise necessary funds and finally make your dream come true.



Transnational Manual for Urban Revitalisation
“ENGAGE. Brighter Future in Your Hands.”



Renewed public space as part of the pilot investment of ReNewTown project in Velenje - final result



Centre for SMEs in Prague, the pilot investment of ReNewTown project



Museum of Socialist Curiosities in Hnusta, the pilot investment of ReNewTown project

A stylized illustration of a city skyline with various building shapes in shades of orange and yellow. The sky is blue with white clouds and a flock of small blue birds flying in the upper left. The entire graphic is set against a dark blue background.

How the post-socialist districts and cities should look like in the decades to come?

The mission:

“to achieve much better living conditions”

The vision:

“The post-socialist cities and their districts are attractive for inhabitants, offering modern infrastructure and economic base, comparable to other leading European cities, and having well governed and organised urban communities, and internal potential for future dynamic development”

Four main strategic objectives for post-socialist districts and cities include:

1. Formation of a civil society and improving human capital
2. Increasing economic activity
3. Improving the quality of housing and landscape
4. Sustainable development and energy efficiency

Transnational Development Strategy for post-socialist cities in Central Europe is cross-linked with strategic documents on the EU level: Europe 2020, Horizon 2020 and Financial perspective 2020.



Block of flats as a garden, one of the concept of enhancing the attractiveness of multi-family building in Warsaw

A stylized illustration of a city skyline with various building shapes in shades of orange and yellow. The sky is blue with white clouds and a flock of small blue birds flying in the upper left. The entire graphic is set against a dark blue background.

Examples of inspiring solutions for Transnational Development Strategy

The comprehensive sets of operational objective must be adapted to the specificity of particular cities or urban districts.

Therefore, in this section case study solution are presented, which have been successfully implemented in reality. A more comprehensive set of models and good practices is presented in the Handbook of models “Post-Socialist City: A Role Model for Urban Revitalisation in the 21st Century” and in the database available online at: www.renewtown.eu

Revitalisation of Targówek – a socialist large housing estate in Warsaw (Poland)

The lack of national revitalization programmes or policies in Poland aiming at the improvement of the quality of life in urban areas with a socialist burden,

leaves the problem to the communes (local governments) and non-governmental organizations. One of the most interesting projects aiming at the regeneration of socialist large housing estates is the RE-BLOK project.

Within the framework of the project, conferences, workshops and happenings were organized by artists, urban planners and cultural animators. Such an approach provided the creative means to involve Targówek's diverse residents in the process of adapting and transforming the community's fabric. One of the workshops entitled “Afternoon on the roof” aimed at showing the possibilities to develop recreational function of the roofs of typical socialist housing blocks.



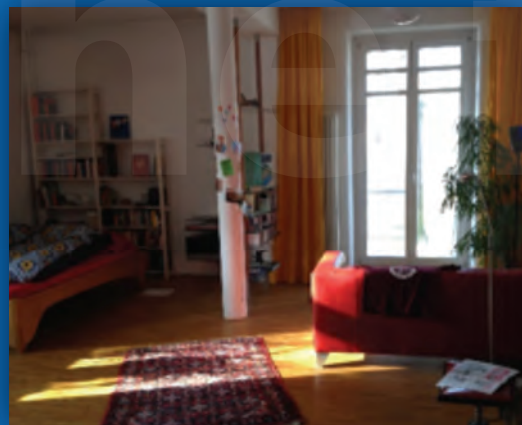
Roof gardens, image by Tom Turner,
www.gardenvisit.com

Urban regeneration project led by a cooperative – Mika project from Karlsruhe (Germany)

It is a community-oriented housing project that started in 1997, when around 100 people decided to refurbish former military barracks using a bank loan and carrying out most of the work with their own hands.

The first tenants moved in 1988. The Mika cooperative consists of 8 independent house groups, the apartments' size varies from 50 to 200 m², and they are located just 2.5 km away from the city centre. The houses were built in 1938 as a military base and until 1995 they had served as a US military facility.

Mika Project is an example of a cooperative that is not interested in making any profit but the idea relies on social integration of people with stable and low income, offering affordable, barrier-free and energy efficient housing.



The MiKa Tenant Initiative

How to involve residents in the decision-making process? - Inner courtyards in Prague 11 (the Czech Republic)

Inner courtyards and other public premises represent one of the examples where revitalization initiatives are urgently needed in post-socialist districts. Prague 11 Municipal District has decided to carry out initiatives to change their appearance. Revitalization of these areas, featuring a lot of concrete items, obsolete playgrounds and other facilities that are no longer in use, has been carried out within the so-called community approach. In other words, these are the residents who decide, through their representatives and based on their needs, on the future look of the premises.

The Municipal District organized a meeting with the representatives of housing and owners associations who identified the needs and defined the desired out-

come of the revitalization process. Based on that, studies and project documentation were drafted and, prior to their implementation, they were submitted for the residents' comments.

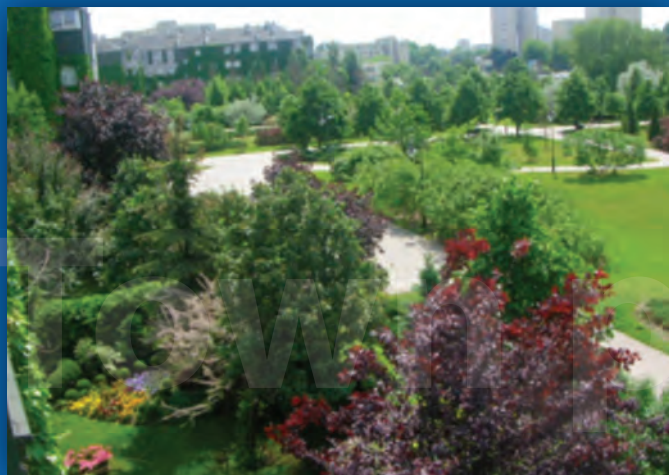
Such an approach ensures that the residents are not only happy with the outcome of the revitalization, but they also feel involved in the decision-making process concerning the area they live. Moreover, the contact between the Municipal District and local people, once established, has been maintained to provide feedback, possibilities for further cooperation, as well as an example of good practice for projects of similar nature.



Revitalized inner courtyard in Prague 11



The example of how an empty area in the middle of a housing estate in Ursynów (district of Warsaw, Poland) was transformed into attractive public space comprising a park, playground and sport fields



Grey and unattractive buildings from the socialist period look as good as modern housing developments – an example from Wrocław (Poland)

The Society for Beautifying the City of Wrocław (TUMW) is developing a list of best practices in modernisation, which is expected to be an inspiration to all persons responsible for the level of aesthetics of the renovated blocks of flats. The designs show that renovation does not have to be expensive and there is no need for a serious reconstruction of buildings to significantly improve their appearance. There is no need to be ashamed of buildings constructed in the socialist period, as many of them have interesting architecture, which simply needs to be highlighted.



Projects (visualizations)
of prefabricated
blocks of flats
after renewal
source: www.tumw.pl

Archa retirement home in Bratislava (Slovakia)

The building at 25 Rozvodná Street in Bratislava originally served as a nursery during the socialist times. It is located between the blocks of flats. After 1990, the building was adapted to the needs of seniors. In 2004, the reconstruction commenced and it was completed in 2007, when the building was extended and renovated. The home offers various forms of social services for seniors suffering from Alzheimer disease and a 24-hour day care centre for Bratislava citizens.



Vibrant cultural and social centre in Ljubljana – Metelkova City (Slovenia)

Metelkova City (full name in Slovenian language: Avtonomni kulturni center Metelkova mesto, 'Metelkova City Autonomous Cultural Centre') is an autonomous social and cultural centre in the heart of the capital city of Slovenia, Ljubljana. It is located on the site of the former military barracks which served as the Slovenian headquarters of the Yugoslav National Army, the ultimate symbol of the socialist Yugoslavia. The area was squatted in



September 1993, and it has been maintained mostly with volunteer work ever since. The site consists of seven buildings. Most of them originate from the pre-socialist era, but during the socialist period they underwent alterations necessary to accommodate them to the needs of the Yugoslav National Army.

The squat played an important role in the co-called Slovenian Spring of 1988, which was the first of the milestones on the road towards Slovenian independence. In Metelkova City a range of activities has been held. These include an art gallery, bars, artists' studios, space for designers, offices of cultural organisations and concerts featuring various types of live music from free jazz, heavy metal, noise, to dub and techno. The Metelkova area also features a very popular Youth Hostel called Celica, located in the renovated building of a former military prison.




Conclusion. What to do with the post-socialist cities? From practice to strategic thinking

This conclusion is derived from a number of sources of information, of experience, of expert knowledge and of conceptual perspectives: research conducted jointly with the participants of the ReNewTown project; review of a wide range of research literature; perusal of various databases and websites; conferences and consultations with various professionals and experts in relevant fields and discussions pursued via networks of these and other interested parties; and our own long standing research on mechanisms of transformation in the cities and metropolitan areas of Poland and other parts of Central Europe. The answer to the question posed in the title of this section in fact draws on experience and everyday practice from over 20 years of observing political, social and economic transformation processes in Central and Eastern Europe. In conceptual terms (and possibly

in some practical ways too) a significant number of the concepts, proposals and solutions put forward here for cities and their development are relevant not only to the post-socialist realms of Central and Eastern Europe but may be relevant also to many cities elsewhere in the world. Moreover, in this wider context, it is worth emphasising that the concept of the post-socialist city as a framework for guiding analysis and explanation can have the drawback of imposing a way of thinking about the cities involved which puts too much emphasis on seeing them purely as products of ideology i.e. as cities initially shaped for over 4 decades by the 'ideology' of socialism then reshaped by the new dominating ideologies of an intermediate or transitional stage between the former and neo-liberalism. Putting these historical and ideological blinkers aside, in the last decades a number of broad models for the future development of cities have been proposed which may well have some relevance to post-socialist cities: the compact city; smart growth or smart cities; the



Demolition of a prefabricated building in Leipzig (A. Haase)



sustainable city; the inclusive city; the resilient city; the just city; cittaslow; the new urbanism; and many others.

A recent new phenomenon involves devising post-crisis strategies with particular attention to concepts relevant to strategies for competitiveness. For example, OECD generally focuses on development based on 'green growth' or a 'green economy'. The latter approach stresses that greater efficiency can lead to a form of economic growth which can bring cost savings which raise well-being and improve environmental health; this involves a model of economic development based on green or renewable forms of energy.


At this point, however, the dominant neoliberal approach to the role of local government at a district or city level needs some consideration. In general, the application of market theory to the functioning of local communities remains too radical because local governments cannot be treated like markets, particularly in the European context, where cities have fol-

lowed historically diverse paths of development which have fostered and enriched cultural diversity and local distinctiveness or uniqueness. The latter diversity is the outcome of constant interaction between the state, the market and local cultural traditions, which in the case of the cultural heritage of post-socialist cities have both positive and negative consequences.

According to urban regime theory (Stoker 1998) or contingency theory, it is possible to form a coalition between citizens, local and external investors and local authorities in order to shape cities (Mossberger, Clarke and John 2012), but the final results may vary from case to case, depending on the scale of local participation in urban affairs and other economic, political and cultural factors and processes within cities.



The recent re-landscaping and 'greening' of an area in the Ursynów district of Warsaw as a model for the popular upgrading of housing estates.

A stylized illustration of a city skyline in shades of orange and yellow against a blue sky with white clouds and a flock of birds. The skyline features various building shapes, including a prominent tall rectangular building on the left and a cluster of buildings on the right.

A gradual shift from the narrow concept of 'local government' (i.e. essentially conventional formal local authorities) to the wider and more holistic idea of 'local governance' is an essential element in these approaches because, among other advantages, the latter concept takes into account the fact that conventional local government at a district or city level does not have all resources (particularly economic and legal) necessary to accomplish its goals. Therefore, ideally collaboration with citizens (hopefully, part of 'civil society') should generally be 'de rigueur' for local authorities. The first steps should involve building trust between the supporters of a strategic project and local community partners, while the second should include complete recognition and discussion of their needs and preferences. Other important features, in the contempo-

rary mobile society, should include the ability of local communities to assimilate newcomers and immigrants, who may bring innovation and progress but perhaps also some problems or difficulties, and to turn them into partners within the wider community. In practice, local authorities should adopt proactive models of governance for improving the cohesion of local society and social collaboration that take account of the wide range of socioeconomic 'spill-over' or 'externality' affects noticeable in their city. They should also put a strong emphasis on promoting and supporting local entrepreneurship, rather than mainly trying to attract outside firms. Starting this from within, they should try to diversify the local economy rather than attract one or two large companies or industries from outside. Their obligation is to recognise that a good

quality of life for highly skilled workers is a precondition for the catalytic effect of economic growth in a district or a city and improves its competitiveness.

Post-socialist urban space needs various strategic perspectives at appropriate spatial levels which can probably be articulated best in the form of long-term development plans. Such plans and develop-

ment strategies should be integrated hierarchically from the lowest to the highest levels i.e. from a local community or neighbourhood to a dis-



Undeveloped and neglected public space, illustrating also a lack of cultural facilities in Ursynów in Warsaw



trict level, then to the scales of small or medium sized cities, larger cities, metropolitan areas and urban systems at regional and national levels. Unfortunately, the urban problems of post-socialist cities and urban districts reveal only too clearly the lack of policies for managing urban growth. Some of the most important concerns here are the lack of a policy for housing at a national scale and of legislation which could prevent urban sprawl.

The first step on the path towards the creation of groups supportive of the preceding types of strategy could be the formation of an effective political coalition around pragmatic objectives like a development strategy for a city or district (as an integral part of the strategy for the whole city). Such a coalition requires the formation of a political alliance of different inter-

est groups and of a range of social groups plus a strategy likely to attract and recruit future potential allies. For example, the inclusion of various urban social movements as allies of a development strategy often still remains something of an unrealised possibility.

Clearly, there is no standard strategy for solving the place-based problems of urban areas. Each post-socialist district or city needs a coherent strategic framework which will allow its policies to be integrated within the whole city region or within the network of cities forming a metropolitan area; this should be designed to facilitate cooperation between municipalities and functional urban areas (FUA in OECD nomenclature). The final outcome of the strategy should

be a shift from 'low aspiration space' to 'high aspiration space'; but transferring problems to another part of the city should be avoided.

In general, a national urban policy should be formulated as a guide for local government at sub-regional or urban scales as well as for those in government administration, the business community and any relevant social

and non-governmental organisations. This policy should set out the intentions, main objectives and strategy of central government towards urban problems. Problems which are manifest at more local levels and strategies to address them could then be formulated in more coherent way.



Dominance in the urban landscape of prefabricated blocks of flats in the Służew nad Dolinką area in Warsaw

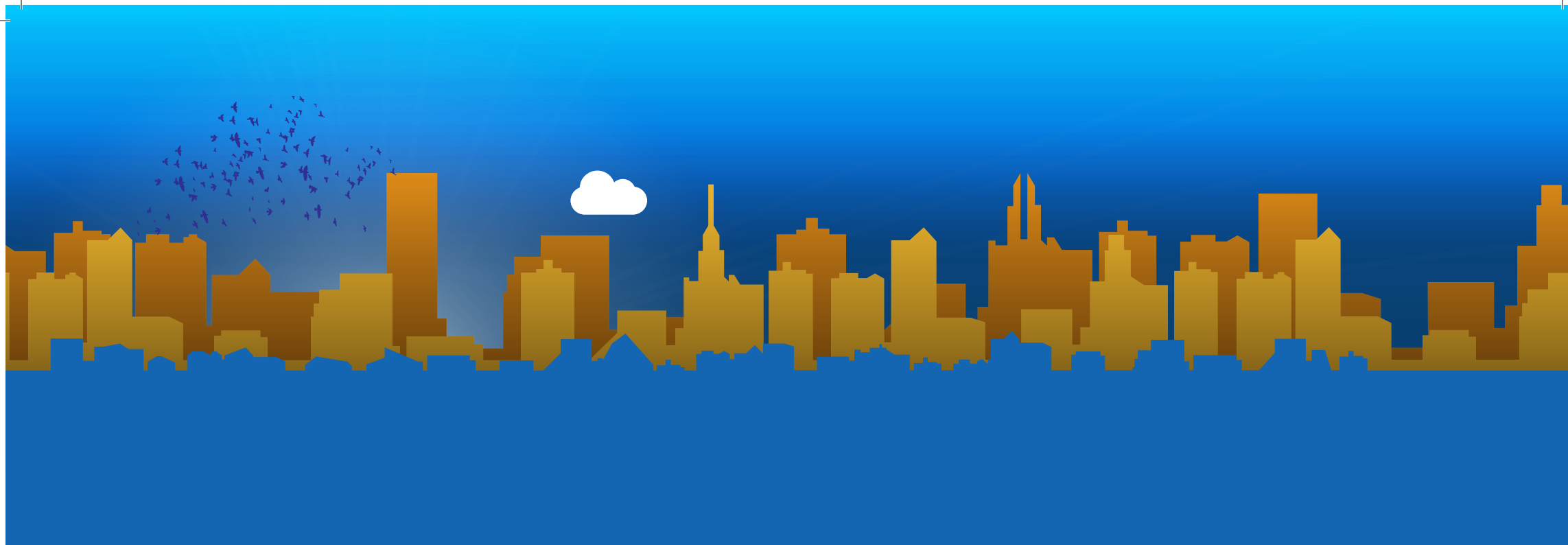
However, the most important challenge involves making urban areas less vulnerable to political, economic and environmental changes. Among other things, this requires people to change their whole mental awareness and outlook and to acquire a more modern, forward looking, resourceful and adaptable way of thinking, a process which is probably the slowest in relative terms of all the processes involved in the transformation. One of the best examples of a field where such change is needed is that of environment issues, particularly where these concern energy saving. New forms of governance and particularly a new relationship between civil society and the formal structures of local democracy and government are clearly essential for post-socialist cities to be able to respond to future urban challenges. This needs 'benchmarking' types of investigation, plus the implementation of exercises designed to gain foresight on a much wider and longer scale, as well as regular monitoring of progress.



Enrichment of urban landscape by new architecture - the National Stadium in Warsaw



Enrichment of urban landscape by new design - the palm tree (artificial monument) in Warsaw



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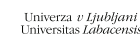
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