

## Track 9: Transforming SBE Policies for People

### Session 1.12: Regenerating Urban Space in Neighbourhoods

#### Cultivating a Village Impulse in the Midst of Warsaw, the Jazdów Settlement of Finnish Houses

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#### ABSTRACT

A unique low-footprint settlement with small wooden houses in the Warsaw's centre has escaped vanishing and enters its new phase.

It has been perceived in contrasting ways – either as a living structure, a peaceful green enclave challenging the mainstream life, or as an un-modern, shameful village-like insert, occupying expensive land that would be attractive for potential prestigious investment.

The Jazdów's history dates back to the beginnings of Warsaw. Through ages, its prevailing functions related to residential, gardening and curative purposes.

Today's Jazdów Settlement, situated on the former garden and hospital grounds, is a remnant of the larger estate started in 1945 when housing was scarce for those engaged in Warsaw's reconstruction. The Finnish-made pre-fabricated houses were part of war restitution to the Soviet Union, and brought to Poland to help emergency needs.

In 2013, the settlement avoided destruction initiated by the previous district authority (tenants pushed-out, homes demolished, eco-niche endangered). Now it has a chance for preservation and balanced development, taking a role of the socio-cultural hub, with limited residential function retained. Some houses are being adapted. Land-cultivation and eco-development impulses are expressed.

There is a chance here to build a transferable model for civic-management. The process of forming a partnership of organizations and individuals (most remaining tenants included) as well as a broader neighbourhood within the institutions in a larger area is led by such values as cooperation and openness.

The research of civic-managed areas across Europe is pursued, with the involvement of sociologists, architects, landscape architects, activists.

**Keywords:** *sustainable neighborhood, generated structures, civic-management*

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#### 1. UNIQUENESS OF JAZDÓW SETTLEMENT

The Jazdów Settlement in Warsaw is hard to be defined in clear urbanistic categories. It's few hectares' territory is part of a long green stretch of the Vistula Escarpment. The enclave is situated within the complex of city's remarkable parks and is considered as something between an urban village and an inhabited park.

From the point of view of sustainability, its wooden houses, other historic buildings and rich vegetation have formed a niche, where substantial urban interventions should be strictly limited. On the other hand, as being part of the central district of Warsaw, close to the Parliament, government buildings and embassies, it bears the risk of becoming an attractive plot for investment of stereotypically prestigious character. Those who would like this area to be developed in a more intensive way, have their arguments against its village-like features, describing the Finnish houses settlement as being shameful, un-modern, while occupying expensive municipal land. Clear ownership rights, like in a case of Jazdów, are quite rare in Warsaw where much of property, nationalized after the World War II, tends to be claimed back by previous owners or speculators. On the other hand, those who would like to protect the Jazdów's nature and buildings, describe its values as "priceless", non-material. Many even

propose that the existing landscape should be saved “just as it is”, without major changes in its structure and specific atmosphere.

### 1.1 The place's history, character, atmosphere

The character of the Jazdów Settlement's landscape has been shaped by the morphology of the Vistula Escarpment, the land-cultivation and curative impulses. The identity of Jazdów has always been bound with the core of the history of Poland.

**Jazdów dates back to the times of the Dukes of Mazovia's presence (12th-15th Centuries), their castle situated on the cliff, securing a strategic river-crossing nearby to the east. Bona Sforza, the queen of Poland (in the years 1518-1557) had her manor in Jazdów, with an Italian garden. She is famous for introducing a number of vegetable species that are basic attributes of Polish kitchen. In the 18th Century, Jazdów became part of one of the largest urban east-west axial layouts of Warsaw (Stanislas Axis), with sophisticated geometrical compositions, parks, gardens, residencies. On the today's site of the Jazdów Settlement, there existed a village (relocated to the main line of the Stanislas Axis around 1780). To this day, the Polish Parliament has the address at Wiejska (Village street).**

From 1794, army barracks and hospital brick buildings were developing in the area. In the end of the 19th Century the romantic Ujazdowski Park was laid out on the site of the former military drill square between the main avenue (part of the Royal Route and Calvary Road - Aleje Ujazdowskie) and the hospital grounds. The dominant hospital function remained here till 1944, in its last years serving the war victims. Some of the hospital buildings are still on their positions (three of them among the Finnish houses; one still used as day-care department of the Nowowiejski mental hospital). In the history of the area's military and curative usage, local gardens served self-sufficiency, but during the war and until 1951 they were partly used as a provisional burial ground. From the summer 1945, first inhabitants were moving to Finnish prefab houses assembled fast in free spaces of the former hospital site. Their tenants were mostly architects and builders employed in Warsaw's reconstruction. The new settlement, being a council estate, planned as temporary (for some 5 years), but much of it has survived to this day. What is remarkable is that the single-family houses from the war period, having the size of huts (about 50-60m<sup>2</sup> area each) served tenant families well enough to spend most of their lives here. Compared to all other council flats in Warsaw, they were so different; not easy to maintain but very much appreciated and often arising jealousy among those who looked at them as an example of luxurious location in the most attractive city district.

The houses were ready-made, but many of them have undergone transformations. Some were extended according to family needs, in spontaneous but modest variations. Features of this green enclave may be associated with generated structures of which Christopher Alexander writes in the context of living processes. “ALL the well-ordered complex systems we know in the world, all those anyway that we view as highly successful, are GENERATED structures, not fabricated structures”.

The houses themselves were, literary speaking, “fabricated structures” in respect to their primary design, but after decades and transformations, they play a subtle role in a generated landscape, where nature has got a dominant role. The houses' special feature is that they could have been called “sustainable”, if this term were used in the time of their construction. This is for many reasons, not only because organic materials were used, but also for their modesty and flexibility to adjust to needs of their users. To continue the Alexander's language, the Jazdów Settlement, as a whole, would most probably arise “more from the process than from an imagined design”. There was never any carefully detailed lay-out plan for the Settlement. Some houses were situated in line but mostly in clusters. Modest hedges, low fences and more organised paths came later, when inhabitants felt it necessary to achieve some privacy and protection from intruders. They also wanted to care for their gardens much better than the municipal services could.

One can feel all grades of spaces here – from public to private. Similarities can be found between the Jazdów Settlement and habitats of a similar history in Poland. Comparison can also be made of the atmosphere of Jazdów to the Finnish examples – like Puumäki, the first larger area of wooden prefabricated houses (1926), based on the garden-city models. The other Finnish reference are the same types of prefabricated houses as in Jazdów that are still in a good condition in locations in Finland.



Figures 1 and 2: The landscape characters of Puu Käpylä in Helsinki and Jazdów Settlement in Warsaw.

## 1.2 Contemporary planning and ideas versus the identity of the Jazdów Settlement

When Poland was recovering from many years of annexation and from 20th Century wars, this part of Warsaw was to play its role in renewal efforts.

Two years before the time Poland gained its independence in 1918, there was a concept drawn for the general plan of Warsaw, in which a large complex of major Polish state administration buildings was proposed on the Warsaw Escarpment in the area of Jazdów. The competition for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters followed (1926). The entries presented gravely visions exchanging the hospital buildings with monumental edifices. The competition results were met already then with strong criticism in professional circles, as showing the proposed solutions as inadequate for the area. Anyway, the Parliament complex, developing next door, seemed to be a kind of neighbourhood good enough to give way to situate similar functions here. Although there have been a few major urban ideas or interventions (including decisions now and then to remove the Finnish houses), a “real” urban plan for the area has never been elaborated. The French and German embassies (1967-71; 2005-2007) were supposed to be first to start the “cleaning” of the site (to build the embassies, tens of houses were removed). The years 1971-74 marked a major change on the map as the motorway crossing the escarpment and cutting through Jazdów was built, dividing the area and causing removal of another number of Finnish houses.

From the beginning of the Polish transformation in 1989, the area started to draw attention again – as a valuable potential ground for investment. With the end of the communist era, there came the time for independent architectural and planning practice. Andrzej Kiciński – architect and urban planner, proposed the formation of the National Park of Art and Culture in the area of Jazdów, as an expression of the idea of the “Agora of Polish Democracy”. The concept was to preserve some of the characteristic features of the area (small scale, new buildings scattered among greenery). Any residential function was excluded though in the concept (the houses meant to be removed). In the year 2012 the municipality decided to take down all the houses and four of them were taken away from their sites for a start (they were later found in pieces in other places in Poland, advertised for sale). The demolition caused protests of inhabitants supported by active citizens. In result, workshops were organised within the framework of public consultations on the future of Jazdów.

The recommendations of the consultations were promising both for the development of citizen-democracy in Poland and the future of the Settlement playing an important socio-cultural role in Warsaw. In 2015, the newly elected district authorities decided, that no more Finnish houses would be demolished, no more tenants removed and that there would be a possibility to enliven empty houses with various activities. First agreements with non-governmental organisations having socio-cultural and ecological profiles, were signed for the period of one year (the time contested by new tenants as too short). In spite of the new decision, promising a new perspective, no clear future for Jazdów, from the point of view of planning, has been inscribed. Nothing is stabilized from the formal longer-term point of view. Aside of actual policies of the district authority, there is an undercurrent of contradictory opinions among urban planners and architects concerning the Settlement’s future. The non-governmental organisations are often felt as associated with city-activists who often protect vulnerable areas from over-investment.

The local plan has been in its design phase for years now. Its latest concept has been very simplistic, technocratic, taking neither the genius loci, nor any wider civic-society's needs into consideration. It just followed the general Study, in which Jazdów's destiny is administrative functions, eventually joined by services. In order to be able to get a realistic input into the local spatial development plan, the architectural and urban design competition has been prepared but not launched. The competition would not solve the problems which are being successfully dealt with on the grass-root level and according to the public consultations' results, with the perspective that a bottom-up plan could be prepared.

### 1.3 The potential gathered in Jazdów over last years

In 2012, as the process of displacement of tenants was pursued and houses started to be taken down, an important role was played by the Finnish ambassador, who even called upon sentimental bondage with his father supposedly working in the factory in which the houses were prefabricated. The working group was co-organised and hosted by the embassy and the Jazdów's tenants association, to discuss the future of the Settlement, or at least just save a few houses, where cultural activities would take place. Wider interest arised later on as many houses and gardens opened for activities (exhibitions, talks, meetings, concerts). The openness and inventiveness widened when the Open Jazdów (Otwarty Jazdów) initiative was non-formally established, with many of the houses and gardens coming back to life for a few months of summer. During the following season, the Social Dialogue Square was created in the centre to host music shows, film screenings, etc. Garage sales were organized. An apiary was situated around one of the houses and the Queen Bona's gardens were in a way re-started. Some houses and their gardens started to partially re-used. That year was marked by much pressure from the side of organizations and enthusiasts but there was little activity on the municipality's side.

Social process once triggered, is encroaching larger and larger areas in and around the Jazdów Settlement. There has been a large potential gathered of activities like workshops, study visits, architecture education activities for youth. Diploma works were made on the re-usage of Finnish houses by students of the situated nearby Interior Design Department of the Academy of Fine Arts. There were landscape architecture workshops of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences. The Faculty of Architecture of the Warsaw Technical University students had their surveying practices and workshops. The results of Polish – Finnish interdisciplinary design workshops on the themes connected with the visions of the future for Jazdów were shown during the exhibition "Warsaw under Construction". These are just some initiatives, but there have been many more – adding to the potential gathered for civic-management and bottom-up planning.



Figures 3 and 4: The multilateral communities – the Polish- Finnish working group in 2013 gathered to protect the Jazdów Settlement; the 2015 development of city-gardening (photo: Motyka i Stońce).

The public interest and debate has influenced at least the moods on the side of the official administration body (ZGN; Real-Estate Management Administration) and better relationship with the district authorities developed. The change of approach and increased visibility, meant more tolerance and the change of policy. Cultural and socially-oriented activities are being more and more imprinted in the physical space.

The generated structure, as described by Christopher Alexander, is continuing to develop as a process. Although during last few years not much has changed in Jazdów in respect of its basic structure, there are many examples of spontaneously planned and realised interventions. Some houses got new users, their surroundings got new

community gardens, some garden spaces that were “semi-privatized” are becoming still more open. There are projects realized, but until there is a more clear urban development plan, it is not possible for the new tenants (non-government organisations) to invest much in the renovations.

## **2. THE PERFORMANCE OF JAZDÓW SETTLEMENT**

The Jazdów Settlement’s everyday users can be recognized as groups having differentiated interests and rhythms of activity (residential, educational and socio-cultural, curative, gardening, recreational, administrative). There are 27 Finnish wooden houses, 7 of them still inhabited by the tenant population of about 20 persons. Inhabitants of the council flats (Finnish houses) are more or less integrated into the local community as a whole. There has never been any solid survey done, nor any research on the technical performance of the Settlement. Basic city services are in place, with the exception for heating and hot water. These were left to be solved by inventive users, usually adopting traditional wood or even coal burning stoves and electric devices. Some houses have been additionally insulated, although a larger number of them are just left as they used to be from the time they were erected – with a thin layer of fibreboards in the walls. The present purpose of efforts to overcome the Jazdów Settlement’s crisis of becoming dysfunctional, is to fill all the existing structures and gardens with activities and not to lose the all-time inhabitants.

### **2.1 Striving for sustainability versus temporary status**

The brick buildings in the Jazdów Settlement’s area are listed (remnants of the former hospital). It does not mean they are under a real protection, being maintained in a proper way, but at least they cannot be demolished in the face of law. The Finnish houses are devoid of any conservator’s protection. Some of them have been cared for by their tenants, some neglected. They are “poor by their nature” and it has always been like this with wooden structures in the Polish history. There is scarcity of timber structures, especially in Warsaw. On the other hand, the Finnish houses have their own extraordinary chance as they can be understood more as belonging to the organic and non-urban world and thus being a rarity. The other advantage is that they are characterized by natural dynamism of changes, mobility, diversity – the features looked for, when sustainability is striven for.

### **2.2 Election of study case**

The danger of neglect and destruction on one hand and the grass-root efforts to protect the Jazdów Settlement on the other, brought many like-minded individuals and organizations together. Most of inhabitants feel connected with new initiatives but there are also some that protect their privacy still more. Both strategies are set for survival. Now, there are tens of organizations either using the houses and gardens or preparing to use them for their statutory aims. The topics tackled are such as: sustainability and ecological lifestyle (low footprint; assessment methods and optimization in planning), heritage protection, city-activism, continuation and development of therapeutic character and functions of the area (development of city-gardening), cultural and educational initiatives (with a possibility to cooperate with local schools and kindergartens, with the hospital, neighbouring embassies and public institutions), sports, scouting, cooking with refugees or folk music. There are possible exchanges and coalitions with similar territories (areas or enclaves protected and developed by local communities). There is also a collaboration developing among the institutions within the city district of Ujzdów, in which the Open Jazdów (Otwarty Jazdów) as the Partnership for the Jazdów Settlement is an active member.

## **3. THE PARTNERSHIP FOR THE JAZDÓW SETTLEMENT**

In the last years, the activities of the community that gathered in and around Jazdów had a character of a coalition. In 2015, the Partnership for the Jazdów Settlement was formed as an informal group of interest, gathering the interested individuals, institutions and organizations, with the hope to work with many issues concerning the everyday management in a grass-root way and hopefully in cooperation with the municipality. There are a few working groups: Environment and Building, Social Economy, Civic-management, Culture and Education. The Partnership has a chance to work out a model of such management and advocacy for the Settlement that would fit most its character and enhance the community spirit. The initiatives would not have a chance to develop this way without one person – a dedicated young inhabitant (Andrzej Górz).

### 3.1 Research into urban autonomies, to work out the governance model

The Jazdów Settlement has a chance for experimenting a certain autonomy, not having to depend on questions of land ownership. Uncertainty concerning the future plans of the land-owner (“the city”) is an understandable problem though. The fact that the land belongs to the municipality (meaning everybody) may be treated as disadvantage on one hand, but an advantage on the other (as far as there is dialogue, understanding and will to work out a common set of values). For the city administration and services, such a kind of settlement has always been an uneasy case to deal with. The routines are often not in tune with the area’s specific character and this is not only the problem of Jazdów. It has been suggested by the Partnership for the Jazdów Settlement that all projects concerning public space improvements or just changes within the public spaces in this area were postponed until a general concept or the awaited local plan are worked out. To find the best civic-management model, the study supported by the European Culture Foundation has been launched. Its goal is to research the similar cases in Europe in order to develop a practical formula for cooperative, cross-sectoral, community-based management for the Jazdów Settlement. The research phase is to choose and analyse the best practices of creating and functioning of community managed entities (the best if having a special legal status compared with such as those of cooperative housing, trade cooperatives, allotments, etc.). The development phase is to bring together partners from the municipality of Warsaw and other foreign as well as Polish partners, to tailor two solutions: the model of management for the Jazdów Settlement and the regulations for the City of Warsaw that would allow for collaboration between the municipality and the Jazdów Settlement, to sustain Jazdów in the long term.

The study is to find out what experiences are possible to share between similar places-initiatives (specially of a certain level of an urban autonomy). The criteria were set to compare the Jazdów Settlement with other places of similar character:

- inhabited (a least to some extent); - physical space larger than one building; - diversity and accessibility; - growing out of civil society initiatives; - the property status regulated; - the managing organization diversified, multi-sectoral; - the activity agenda accessible to all, with a character of public mission; - transparent (everybody may participate or follow the processes); - sharing-economy elements included;
- an ecological agenda (self-sustenance, renewable energy, ecological education).

### 3.2 Jazdów as a possible expression of citizen democracy

A few inhabitants of the Jazdów Settlement were not representative enough to be recognized as a citizen group to have a strong, valid voice. They seemed easy to be dealt with, when the “clean-up” policy was implemented. Scared and unable to react, while the steps of the municipal authorities were offensive and consequent. There were losses as some houses were taken down and a number of inhabitants have left the place. Fortunately, some of them proved to be able to stay. It seemed natural that a larger community would soon gather around those endangered as the place itself having this particular character proved to be needed by a larger population. In result a shared feeling of ownership, as well as strength of togetherness have developed.

### 3.3 Conclusion: would the model of Jazdów be transferrable?

The partnership model for a unique generative structure like the Jazdów Settlement is aimed at sustainability in everyday practice. Active communities characterized by openness and diversity have a chance to perform as hubs of urban knowledge and experience. If only they are allowed to survive and – still more – supported to develop, their feedback, or rather their mission, may be to influence the basic city policies and help with their implementation, as well as transfer the achieved results further on. Multilevel urban governance, and especially the community governance methods may be enhanced if civic-managed areas are allowed to flourish. The research in civic-management and experiences of the Jazdów Settlement shows that citizen empowerment may still become stronger through the art of working together in a challenging situation of a village-like settlement in the middle of the city. It is possible that small communities (autonomous to a certain extent) and municipalities may come to agreements in order not to govern in a schematic way but to cooperate, allow for a free flow of exchanging ideas, knowledge, experiences.

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