

## Restoring the riverside in a city: an examination of best practices for port revitalisation

Katarzyna Świerczewska-Pietras<sup>CDFMR</sup>

Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Białą Podlaska, 95/97 Sidorska St, 21-500 Białą Podlaska, Poland; e-mail: [k.swierczewska.pietras@gmail.com](mailto:k.swierczewska.pietras@gmail.com)

### How to cite:

Świerczewska-Pietras, K., 2015: Restoring the riverside in a city: an examination of best practices for port revitalisation. In: Szymańska, D. and Środa-Murawska, S. editors, *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series*, No. 29, Toruń: Nicolaus Copernicus University Press, pp. 137–143. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/bog-2015-0030>

**Abstract.** Rivers have been an important element of urban development for centuries, affecting human life and providing a number of functions connected with commerce, defence, transport, communication and culture. Today's river-city relationship takes on a completely different dimension and is considered through the prism of the beauty which shapes the urban landscape and is a key element in integrating its inhabitants. It affects the city's economic fabric, for instance through increased tourism and investment. Besides, it provides an impetus for the implementation of numerous architectural and urban projects whose task is to integrate its space or, as is often the case, insure the future viability of the riverside, including former port areas.

Therefore the aim of this paper is to analyse projects which represent so-called best practice in the restoration of city riverside areas using examples from Western European cities which have experienced the implementation of such projects. The paper presents an analysis of cities selected due to the availability of source materials: Düsseldorf, the largest revitalised area, followed by London and Hamburg, the smallest. It should be emphasised that the author will continue her research on the former port areas, focusing mainly on the German sites.

### Article details:

Received: 07 February 2014

Revised: 15 April 2014

Accepted: 22 May 2015

### Key words:

rivers in cities,  
revitalisation,  
public space,  
urban planning.

© 2015 Nicolaus Copernicus University. All rights reserved.

### Contents:

1. Introduction . . . . .	138
2. Chosen examples of port area revitalisation . . . . .	138
2.1. The United Kingdom: London Docklands. . . . .	138
2.2. Germany: HafenCity Hamburg . . . . .	139
2.3. Germany: MediaHarbor Düsseldorf . . . . .	140
3. Conclusions . . . . .	142

Notes .....	143
References .....	143

## 1. Introduction

The revitalisation of brownfield sites was launched in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. Changes in manufacturing technology as well as a serious shift towards environmental issues meant that factories and workshops began to close. The economic and social situation led numerous companies to file for bankruptcy, which in turn deprived inhabitants of their jobs. Unemployment, deserted halls, warehouses or entire regions of industrial areas forced local authorities as well as communities to take action connected with revitalisation. They began to adopt the old production halls, docks, stations, shopping centres, slaughterhouses, apartments, offices and museums. The new trend of adaptation of the former industrial spaces was born. They were turned into lofts, mostly by artists who sought cheaper alternatives for their art studios. The loft turned out to be the best solution as it combined necessary space and layout. Artists were followed by businessmen and other professional groups from the world of show business, who took advantage of the old industrial premises.

American experiences related to revitalisation were soon adopted in Western Europe. They became especially popular in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Ireland, where activities related to industrial recovery were most often seen in port areas where rivers had provided most development in the past.

Therefore, the paper concentrates on a selection of examples of brownfield revitalisation of port areas. These examples are a demonstration of the well planned and implemented revitalisation policies which are based on the same assumptions although allowing for different national and local models. The main criteria for the selection of urban regeneration projects in Europe follow the requirements included in the Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP) 2004-2006 (1): (a) socio-economic recovery, (b) prevention of negative aspects of infrastructural degradation, (c) environmental protection, (d) increasing tourism potential, (e) increasing investment attractiveness, and (f) improving the image of

the region. On the basis of the above requirements, London (the United Kingdom), and Düsseldorf and Hamburg (Germany) have been selected.

## 2. Chosen examples of port area revitalisation

### 2.1. The United Kingdom: London Docklands

The history of London's docks goes back to the nineteenth century, when in 1802 the first of the West India Docks was opened. Others followed soon ending in 1921, when the King George V Dock was put into operation (it lasted only till the 1950s). Since 1909 the docks have been managed by the Port of London Authority (PLA). Each dock specialised in handling certain goods, for example, St Katherine dock managed deliveries of wool, gum and sugar. After World War II, as a result of war damage, reconstruction started. However, in the 1960s, due to the emergence of a new form of freight transport - containers, London docks were unable to accommodate the larger ships being prepared for their transportation. Thus, water transport was moved to deeper ports such as Felixstowe and Tilbury. By 1980, all of the docks in London, occupying an area of 120 000 m<sup>2</sup>, had been closed. Stagnation followed and unemployment increased which in turn brought some social problems. The revitalisation process started but it was rather due to the poor state of infrastructure and environment at that time. Undoubtedly, stagnation in the shipbuilding industry contributed to the crisis, which consequently led to an emergence of large undeveloped port areas. Some, due to the urbanisation process, began to turn into city landmarks and only then did the value of port areas become appreciated and real revitalisation started (Kacaj, 2009).

In order to revitalise the former port areas bordering the Thames, the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) was established in 1981. This state quango agency would take care of the following: (a) acquiring land and its management, (b) supporting the development of the new

and existing industrial and commercial firms, (c) creating an attractive natural environment, (d) providing housing and social facilities, so as to encourage people to settle down and look for employment. The agency was funded by the central government and functioned as the body planning the revitalisation process. Among its achievements by 1998 (according to the LDDC annual report of 1998), were (a) public sector investment amounting to £1.86 billion, (b) private sector investment amounting to £7.7 billion, (c) sale of 1,066 acres of land for redevelopment, (d) construction and improvement of 144 km of new roads, (e) construction of the Docklands Light Railway, (f) construction of 24,046 new dwellings, (g) creation of 2,700 trading companies, (h) construction of health centres, (i) creation of 11 primary and two secondary schools as well as nine vocational training centres, (j) employment of 85,000 people, (k) receiving 94 awards in the field of architecture, conservation and development of landscape.

In 1982, a special economic zone was opened in the Docklands, an area where businesses, in addition to tax exemption, were given other incentives in order to invest. This contributed to an increase in the investment attractiveness of the area and consequently to economic growth in real estate development.

Over the past thirty years this well-thought out revitalisation policy has led to a transformation of London's docks area, which includes the boroughs of Greenwich, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Newham, into a financial centre and an enjoyable living and leisure space. The revitalisation of the area enabled the docks to re-establish their position in the structure of the city. At the same time, it restored the river for the city.

## 2.2. Germany: HafenCity Hamburg

The beginnings of revitalisation in Germany were primarily caused by economic conditions. In the 1960s the cost of construction projects in undeveloped areas increased which resulted in investors paying attention to degraded areas. In comparison to undeveloped areas earmarked for development, existing areas had been already improved, which significantly decreased construction costs.

It soon turned out that private investors did not care about saving the degraded infrastructure but its demolition. This in turn led to social conflicts and triggered a need for new legislation that would determine some major principles of a revitalisation policy.

The revitalisation Act was passed in Germany in 1971. It regulated the rules of conduct in the regeneration process and initiated financial support for revitalisation schemes (The Regeneration Manual of 2003). In 1986, the Act was connected with the Building Code Law. The next step was the adoption of ARGEBAU at the Ministerial Conference in Potsdam. It was a nation-wide programme of revitalisation of urban quarters in need of revitalisation (*Districts with Special Development Needs - the Social City*), which took into account social aspects of the process. The programme became operational in 1999. In 2002, another programme - Rebuilding cities in the new Länder (Stadtumbau West) was launched, and in 2004 the implementation of urban rebuilding of the old Länder began. Furthermore, all these programmes became part of the law that would correspond to European legislation (2). In 2008, there are several projects to support revitalisation process in Germany (Bryx, Jadach-Sepiołło, 2009). They include the following: (a) revitalisation and development of urban construction - launched in 1971, (b) protection of historical municipal buildings (in the new Länder) - launched in 1991, (c) urban quarters in need of revitalisation - a social city - launched in 1999, (d) reconstruction of the cities in new Länder - launched in 2002, (e) reconstruction of the old towns in Länder - launched in 2004, (f) activating urban centres - launched in 2008, (g) energy investment pact for the modernisation of social infrastructure - launched in 2008.

According to Bryx and Jadach-Sepiołło (2009), among the most important achievements of the revitalisation process in Germany are the following: (a) analysis of positive and negative experiences of the implementation of regeneration projects, (b) creation of stable law, (c) spreading knowledge about the procedures of revitalisation through wide dissemination of best practices.

The regulation of revitalisation policy in Germany enabled taking comprehensive action towards rebuilding of degraded areas in a planned way which would determine constructing the ur-

ban space in detail. Preparation of guidelines for the revitalisation of former river port brownfield sites in HafenCity in Hamburg and MediaHarbor Düsseldorf can serve as examples of the new practice.

The HafenCity terrain lying beside the river Elbe covers an area of 240 hectares and is planned to change its character to a cultural, commercial and housing on the basis of the MasterPlan (3) approved in 2000 and the revised MasterPlan for the Eastern part in 2010. It has been presumed that the reconstruction will create 45,000 jobs and 5,500 dwellings for 12,000 people. The project is expected to be completed between 2020 and 2025 and it is assumed that the investment will attract around three million tourists a year. The main objective of the project is to create a modern urban space that would take into account the historical remains and its aim to restore the connection between the river Elbe and the city centre. Its initiator is the city council of Hamburg and it should be noted that the project will cause around a 40% expansion of the city centre. The factor that distinguishes this among many similar projects of urban development in Europe is its central location and standards. The high level of innovation will positively affect the quality of architecture and landscape. The new district is to become a model city for the Europe of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

According to a report on the implementation of the MasterPlan from December 2013, 56 component projects have already been completed in the area. The remaining 48 are to be implemented soon. The amount of private investment involved is approximately 8 billion euros, while public spending is about 2.4 billion, of which approximately 1.5 billion will come from real estate revenues in HafenCity. The major cultural projects planned or already completed include (Stiller, Jeske, 2010): (a) the Philharmonic project of Elbphilharmonie – which includes a large concert hall (2,150 seats), a small concert hall (550 seats), a rehearsal room (100 seats), a hotel (250 rooms), guest rooms (about 47 units), restaurants, conference rooms and a health club. It is approximately 97,300 gross square and its total construction cost is approximately 480 million euros, (b) the International Maritime Museum in Hamburg - opened in 2008, (c) the Automobile Prototype Museum, also opened in 2008.

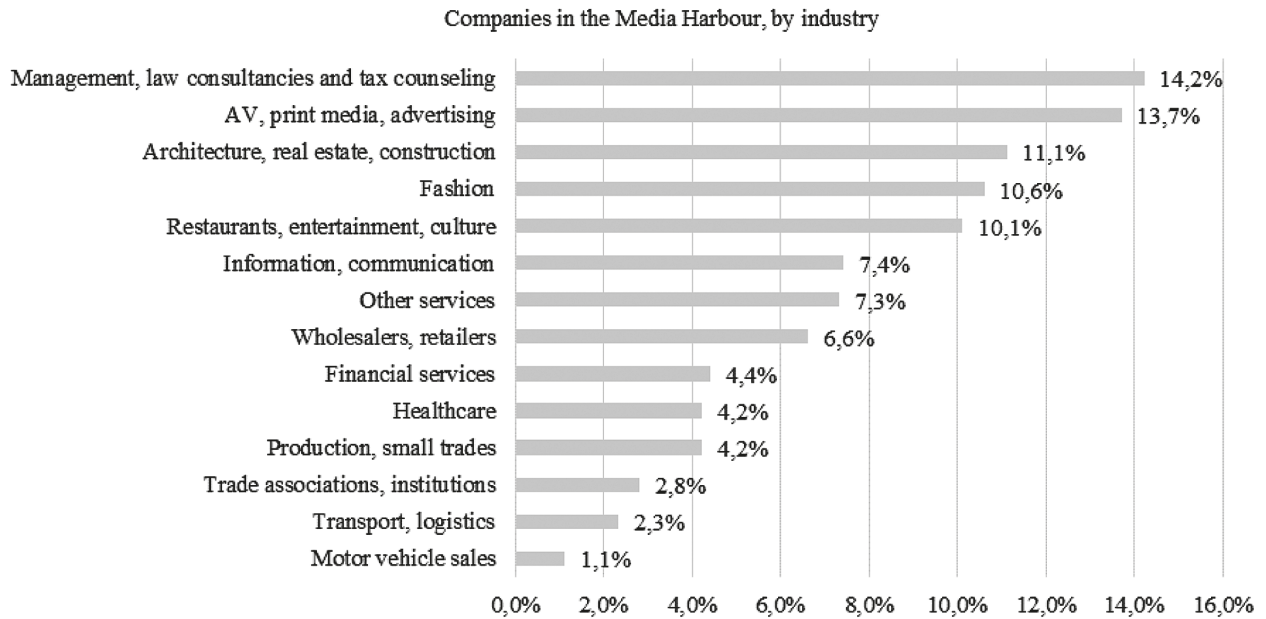
A waterfront promenade was constructed as well with a length of approximately 10 km, 28 acres of public parks, as well as squares and pedestrian streets.

### 2.3. Germany: MediaHarbor Düsseldorf

MediaHarbor Düsseldorf is a port district with an area of 385 hectares. It has about 130 inhabitants and is situated at the mouth of the Düsseldorf River. The revitalisation has lasted since 1988. The area has now become one of the most attractive and eye-catching modern architectural sights. Activities that started in the mid-1970s have led to its transformation into a modern residential and business area, which currently constitutes a centre of creative architecture, advertising, art and media in Europe. The new port space was specifically planned by the city council and involved some leading German and international architects including Frank O. Gehry, David Chipperfield and Fumihiko Maki. The new buildings are a part of the port environment and the old ones, listed in the heritage register, have been renovated and converted. The buildings are mostly offices of various institutions for advertising, communication and tourism, hence its name - MediaHarbor.

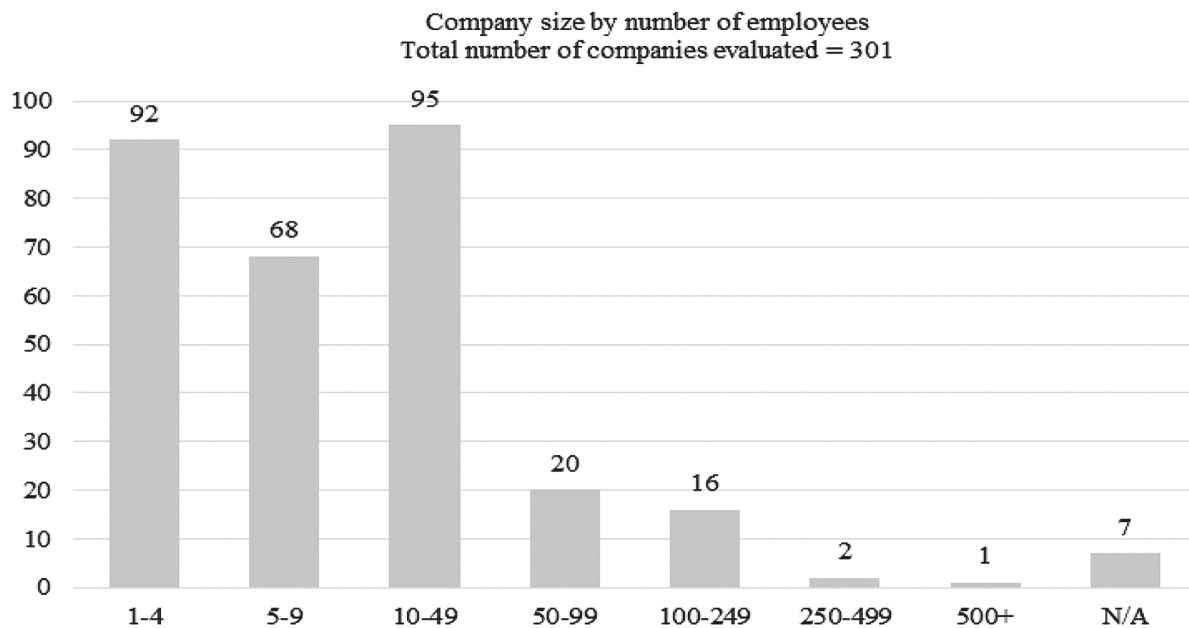
The revitalisation has led to a growing interest among private investors. As of December 2013, more than 800 companies had opened their offices there (more than a 6-fold increase from 1999) (Fig. 1). Most companies have between 10-49 employees (Fig. 2) and in total approximately 8,600 people have found employment in the area (Fig. 3). Plans for the next few years involve the construction of dwellings for 200-250 and the creation of additional 600 jobs.

Based on the indicators provided by Markowski (2005), used to monitor changes in sites to be revitalised, a thorough review of the work done in areas which had regained their ability to function independently in the city structure (Table 1) can be presented. It should be stressed that the author has compiled the available data for the three analysed areas. Due to the fact that she is going to continue to examine the former port areas, the database will gradually be expanded and presented in subsequent articles.



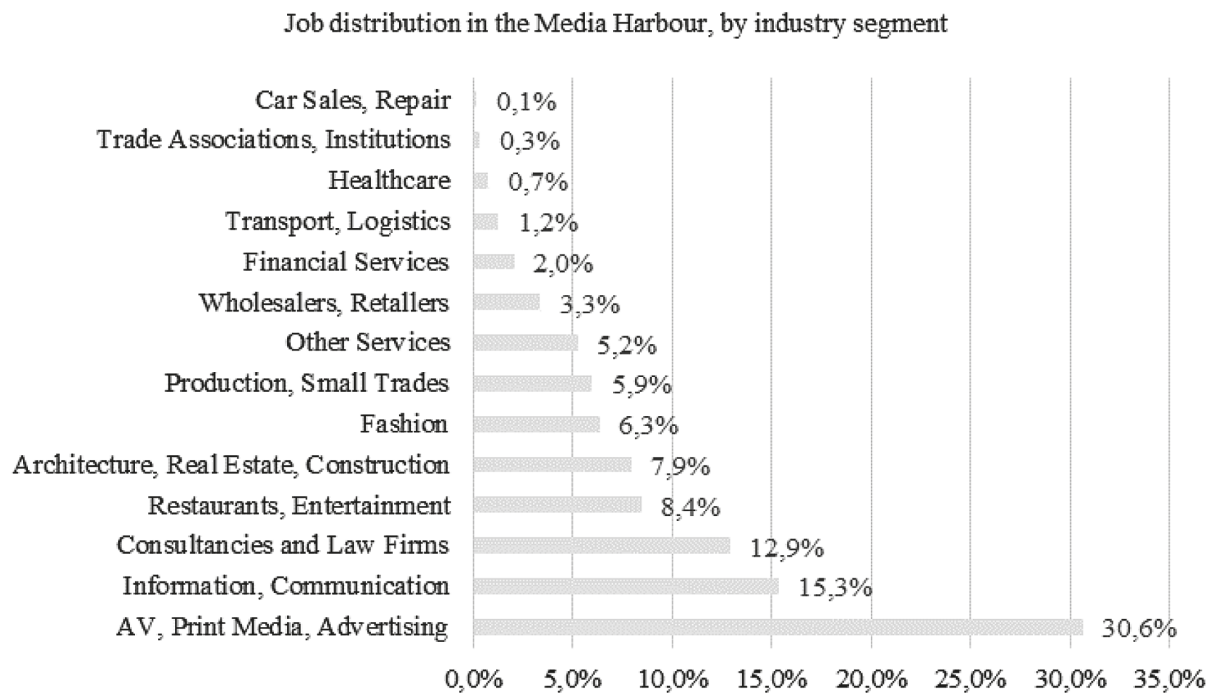
**Fig. 1.** Companies in the MediaHarbor by industrial sector

Source: MediaHarbor Art, communication and creativity, City of Düsseldorf, The Lord Mayor's Office of Economic Development, DoA: 24.01.2011.



**Fig. 2.** Company size by number of employees

Source: MediaHarbor Art, communication and creativity, City of Düsseldorf, The Lord Mayor's Office of Economic Development, DoA: 24.01.2011.



**Fig. 3.** Job distribution in MediaHarbor by industrial sector

Source: MediaHarbor Art, communication and creativity, City of Dusseldorf The Lord Mayor's Office of Economic Development, DoA: 24.01.2011.

**Table 1.** Comparison of selected indicators assessing the development of the areas analysed

Indicators of the revitalisation process	Unit	Indicator	Studied cities		
			Düsseldorf	London	Hamburg
			385 hectares	344 hectares	240 hectares
New houses	number	infra-structural	No data	24,046	6,000 The area of approx. 690 square kilometres
Inhabitants	number	social	130	No data	No data
New educational institutions	number	social	No data	22	5
Newly created jobs	number	industrial	8,600	85,000	45,000
Newly created companies	number	economic	821	2,700	500
Private sector funds invested	billions of euros	industrial	1.2	8.8	8
Total public assets invested	billions of euros	industrial	No data	2.5	2

Source: Own study based on data from reports on work related to revitalisation available on the websites of the studied cities

### 3. Conclusions

Western cities show that a well thought-out policy of revitalisation of degraded public port areas can create successful examples of the restoration of riversides for cities. At the same time, it can serve the

development of social and economic infrastructure. These spaces are becoming not only places of leisure or work but they also turn into landmarks of urban and tourist activity no less important than the traditional historic urban complexes. The examples presented above indicate that the process may become attractive to a variety of cities, economic develop-

ments and geographical locations as long as they have one thing in common - a river, currently the main development asset in the desire to regenerate the degraded urban fabric.

## Notes

IROP 2004-2006 - the Integrated Regional Operational Programme was one of the seven operational programmes which were used in the implementation of the National Development Plan/Community Support Framework 2004-2006 (NDP/CSF) in Poland.

In 1971-2002, the amount of funding allocated in the old Länder for the revitalisation and the development of the urban construction was 9,097 million deutschmarks, mostly spent in 1986-1987. The realisation of the Social City in 1999-2002 cost 500 000 deutschmarks. However, total revitalisation costs in the old and new Länder amounted to 18,392 million deutschmarks. In 1995-2006, the federal, Länder and Commune budgets allocated a further 15.33 billion euros for the revitalisation process. Additionally, the revitalised areas in the whole of Germany attracted 23.58 billion euros of public funds from other programmes. It is also estimated that for every euro spent on public investment in the years 1996-2006, private investment equivalent to 6.5-9.0 euros were attracted. Altogether, according to national estimates, private investments amounted to 80.21 billion euros.

The MasterPlan - Development of HafenCity is based mainly on an urban design Masterplan finalised in 2000. This document, which comprises plans and text, sets out in outline the objectives for the development of HafenCity, as well as the various neighbourhoods that will emerge within HafenCity and their land use. The Masterplan is realised in preliminary designs for individual neighbourhoods, land use development plans as well as architectural designs for individual buildings (Hafencity Hamburg Der Masterplan, 2006).

## References

- Bryx, M. and Jadach-Sepiołło, A.** 2009: Rewitalizacja miast w Niemczech (Revitalisation of cities in Germany – in Polish). In: *Seria Rewitalizacja Miast Polskich*, Vol. 3, Instytut Rozwoju Miast, Kraków, pp. 43-46.
- Bryx, M. and Jadach-Sepiołło, A.** 2009: Rewitalizacja miast w Niemczech (Revitalisation of cities in Germany – in Polish). In: *Seria Rewitalizacja Miast Polskich*, Vol. 3, Instytut Rozwoju Miast, Kraków, pp. 243.
- Hafencity Hamburg - the Masterplan, 2006: Hafencity Hamburg GmbH, Hamburg. [http://www.hafencity.com/upload/files/files/z\\_en\\_broschueren\\_19\\_Masterplan\\_end.pdf](http://www.hafencity.com/upload/files/files/z_en_broschueren_19_Masterplan_end.pdf), DoA: 24.01.2011.
- Kacaj, A.**, 2009: Rewitalizacja nabrzeży (waterfronts), Rewitalizacja według typów terenów, (Revitalisation of waterfronts, Revitalisation by type of site – in Polish). In: *Seria Rewitalizacja Miast Polskich*, Vol. 1, Instytut Rozwoju Miast, Kraków, pp. 107.
- London Docklands Development Corporation, 1998: Annual Report, LDDC, London. <http://www.lddc-history.org.uk/reports/index.html>, DoA: 24.01.2011.
- Markowski, T., Stawasz, D., Sikora, A., Turała, M. and Nowakowska, A.**, 2005: Zarządzanie, monitorowanie, aktualizacja (Managing, monitoring, updating – in Polish). *Zintegrowany Program Rewitalizacji Obszaru Centralnego Łodzi*, Urząd Miasta Łodzi, Łódź.
- Podręcznik rewitalizacji. Zasady, procedury i metody działania współczesnych procesów rewitalizacji (Policies, procedures, and methods of modern regeneration processes – in Polish), 2003: Urząd Mieszkalnictwa i Rozwoju Miast, Warszawa. [http://historiasztuki.uni.wroc.pl/sklad/azk/podrecznik\\_rewitalizacji.pdf](http://historiasztuki.uni.wroc.pl/sklad/azk/podrecznik_rewitalizacji.pdf), DoA: 24.01.2011.
- Stiller, E. and Jeske, J.**, 2010: Hafen City Projects: Insights into current development, Hafen City Hamburg GmbH, Hamburg. [http://www.hafencity.com/upload/files/files/Projekte\\_engl\\_final.pdf](http://www.hafencity.com/upload/files/files/Projekte_engl_final.pdf) DoA: 24.01.2011.
- MediaHarbor Art, communication and creativity, 2006: The Lord Mayor's Office of Economic Development, City of Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf. [http://www.duesseldorf.de/wirtschaftsfoerderung/pdf/medienhafen\\_e.pdf](http://www.duesseldorf.de/wirtschaftsfoerderung/pdf/medienhafen_e.pdf), DoA: 24.01.2011.