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JUSTICE REINVESTMENT STRATEGY
IN THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL REVITALISATION
OF MILLION DOLLAR BLOCKS

ZASTOSOWANIE STRATEGII JUSTICE REINVESTMENT
W PROCESIE RewITALIZACJI SPOŁECZNEJ MILLION
DOLLAR BLOCKS

Abstract

A city has always been a diverse organism, a mosaic, as called R.E Park¹ called it. This statement refers not only to the architectural, functional, financial and cultural dimensions of towns and cities but also to the social one. It means that within the city borders there are not only areas of relative wealth but also areas in which different problems of the contemporary world occur in high concentration. One reaction to the existence of such areas is the popular phenomenon of revitalisation, meaning not only the so-called urban renewal but first of all – social and cultural regeneration. O. Piron wrote: “Each city is at the same time a city of walls and people and each renewal of a city means also the renewal of people”². The aim of this text is to familiarise the readers with million dollar blocks and their needs with respect to redevelopment, with particular emphasis on the justice reinvestment strategy.

Keywords: revitalisation, crime, million dollar blocks, justice reinvestment

Słowa kluczowe: rewitalizacja, przestępczość, million dollar blocks, justice reinvestment

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Million dollar blocks in contemporary cities

In the light of the contemporary criminology it is a truism to say that cities are affected by phenomena related to crime and violence. There are opinions that cities “attract” crime\(^3\) by creating conducive conditions for it – through loosening social relations, offering many competitive norms and normative systems, enhancing social and spatial distance. Also, as the research conducted by a group of researchers led by R.E. Park and his followers – called the Chicago school in relevant literature – showed, crime tends to concentrate in particular areas. According to the Chicago school, the scale of pathological phenomena decreases with the distance from the city centre and the areas most affected by various manifestations of social, cultural and functional disorganisation are in the transition zone\(^4\). The Chicago school has contributed much to our contemporary knowledge of the “dark” side of the city. The last years brought more detailed information concerning the relations between urban environment and crime. What is interesting, this information was gathered not in urban local communities but in… prisons. The relevant research involved the so-called justice mapping used not only to identify the areas in which crime concentrates but also – as S. Tucker and E. Cadora put it – areas weakened and burdened first by the absence of the incarcerated and then by their return from prisons\(^5\). The first analyses of this type were conducted in 2003 in Sweden and they concerned social and demographical data of people placed in Scottish prisons; the analyses showed that the number of prisoners is not equally distributed in the whole country and nearly one fourth of the prisoners, before incarceration, lived in one of 50 out of 1222 districts into which the country is divided; 12 of these districts is regarded as the poorest. What is interesting, 226 districts were identified which do not “produce” any residents of the penal system. As can be guessed, these districts are socially and financially privileged\(^6\). Another research project – Spatial Information Design Lab and the Justice Mapping Center – brought similar conclusions in relation to the United States, where currently more than 1.5 million people are kept in custody or


\(^4\) A. Siemaszko, \textit{Granicz tolerancji}, PWN, Warszawa 1993, 64-76.


imprisoned⁷. These and similar analyses of the spatial origin of the incarcerated have shown that a disproportionately greater number of prisoners come from a few districts which are very similar to one another; in fact, they are not even districts but streets or even houses in the biggest cities in the country. S. Tucker and E. Cadora give the example of the Hill district in New Haven, Connecticut, where every year 20 million dollar is spent on the incarceration of 387 people from among the district's inhabitants. At the same time, no investments are made into the local community, which is characterised by a broad spectrum of social and economic problems⁸. In the state of Pennsylvania taxpayers spend twice as much money to keep in penitentiaries some inhabitants of a district in which 38% households live from the annual income of less than 25 thousand⁹. The situation is similar in New York and other American cities: New Orleans, Phoenix or Wichita, in which there are districts where half of the inhabitants have been incarcerated at one point in life. This costs taxpayers many millions dollars a year¹⁰. For this reason, in relevant literature, such areas are more and more often referred to as million dollar blocks. Apart from generating enormous costs related to the incarceration of some of their inhabitants, such areas are also characterized by: social disorganization related to the atrophy of social ties and the lack of coherent norms and normative systems, a specific ethnic composition of the population, high unemployment and dependence on social care institutions, a pervasive culture of poverty¹¹, a low level of development of trade and services, a high level of housing degradation, insufficient technical and institutional infrastructure and a low level of investments made both by the local self-government and private sector¹². The analysis of the city-prison migration of people indicates one more, crucial feature of these urban areas¹³, i.e. in the communities of million dollar blocks the criminal justice system has become the predominant government institution, organizing and overtaking the control over many spheres of the inhabitants’ life. It appropriates and transfers outside the community financial resources which could be

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⁹ According to The New York Times the average income per family in 2011 was about 49 thousand dollar.
¹³ E. Cadora, L. Kugan, op. cit., 4.
 earmarked for public investments in such sectors as education, housing, social and health care. As a result, they remain underfinanced and cease to be a natural factor preventing the occurrence of social pathologies, including crime, which in the long term usually leads to incarceration. In the light of the above, one of the questions which representatives of the judiciary system, local self-governments and urban sociologists, but also urban and town-planners, should ask themselves most frequently is how to solve the problems of million dollar blocks communities. It seems necessary to find a way to bring these areas back to the city.

Social revitalisation and justice reinvestment

The more than two thousand-year history of the development of cities abounds in important events which, on the one hand, contributed to the increase in the meanings of cities, but on the other hand – have led to a number of problems which have not been solved so far. At the turn of the 70s and 80s sociologists such as M. Castells, M. Dogan and B. Jałowiecki wrote about the crisis of the city, emphasizing also its social effects. The existence of million dollar blocks seems to confirm the argument that the crisis has not been resolved and the life in an urban environment is still not free from traps and problems. This, of course, does not mean that no measures are taken to change the situation. One ways in which societies almost in the whole world try to solve the problem is the policy of urban renewal and revitalisation of endangered areas. Gradually – also as a response to numerous critical voices, the most heard of which was the voice of J. Jacobs – revitalisation expands and encloses new dimensions and elements, starting from the technocratic through market, social and environmental aspects. In simplified terms, it can be said that contemporary revitalisation involves broadly understood (re)development and not – as it was the case in the 60s – demolishing of everything which was old and ugly. What has changed over the years is also the spectrum of areas which undergo the processes of revitalisation. Originally, revitalisation was intended only for the areas in the centres of towns and cities, which were important from the perspective of culture and whose destruction was often the result of wars and natural disasters. With time, however, revitalisation started to spread to other kinds of degraded districts (e.g. post-military or post-industrial areas). Today,
we can agree with K. Skalski in his opinion that “revitalisation is composed of technical aspects – such as renovation – and policies aimed at bringing economic revival and solving social problems of unemployment, crime and demographic imbalance”\textsuperscript{19}. At the same time “areas requiring revitalisation are not areas selected due to their historic value but rather areas cumulating social and economic problems (including also and the most frequently – problems related to the state of the architecture and the need for renovation). Such areas are often the oldest parts of historic European towns and cities, and they are characterised by historic architecture. Nevertheless, it is not their historic value which predisposes them to revitalisation but rather this special accumulation of many social and economic problems”\textsuperscript{20}. Whereas the question of “technical” revitalization is solved quite easily, which is manifested in the large-scale modernization of blocks of flats in old housing areas or in the processes aimed at restoring the former glory of downtown districts – the process of the social revitalization of areas which educators call “culturally neglected”\textsuperscript{21} still leaves much to be desired, which is confirmed by numerous, unsuccessful urban renewal projects\textsuperscript{22}. There is no denying that failures in this field stem to a large extent from the so-called human factor: on the one hand, people “from the outside”, unrelated to the community they want to revitalize, imposing their own vision of revitalization which they have not consulted with the inhabitants of the area in question, on the other – the inhabitants of degraded areas themselves – used to the conditions they live in, often deprived of any points of reference, having no need for any changes with this respect. The residents of such areas are used to social pathologies and have already managed to develop different defence strategies which help them maintain a sense of security and limit the risk of falling victim of crime. They are often convinced that this is just the way it is and has to be. Many of them do not live in their communities on a daily basis anyway, as they are imprisoned, which – as it was already mentioned in this article – is not a rare phenomenon in such areas. Therefore, an important postulate seems to be to enhance the social dimension of revitalization. A detailed description of inhabitants, including their frequent contacts with the criminal justice system, indicates that there is a need to complement revitalisation policies with solutions included in the \textit{justice reinvestment} strategy.

\textsuperscript{19} K. Skalski, \textit{O budowie systemu rewitalizacji dawnych dzielnic miejskich}, Krakowski Instytut Nieruchomości, Kraków 1996.

\textsuperscript{20} W. Klokowski, \textit{Metodologiczne problemy rewitalizacji obszarów miejskich w kontekście poddziałania 3.3.1. ZPORR}, Ministerstwo Gospodarki i Pracy, Bielsko Biała 2004, 2.


Justice reinvestment assumptions were formulated at the beginning of the 21c. by S.B. Tucker and E. Cadara\textsuperscript{23}, but the works to make it more specific\textsuperscript{24} and practical last also today. According to T. R. Clear, justice reinvestment understood as a philosophy assumes that instead of spending money on incarceration it is better to invest them in the development of a given community in order to create conditions in which lawful living is possible. As a strategy, justice reinvestment proposes transferring financial resources from the budget of the criminal justice system to the budget of local communities, which are supposed to be able to spend them much more wisely and effectively, generating benefits not only for particular people but also the whole community\textsuperscript{25}. It is also assumed that it is communities which have the best knowledge about the direction and profoundness of changes which they need.

The framework of justice reinvestment is based on three basic elements\textsuperscript{26}. First of all, justice reinvestment focuses on the costs of incarceration. It indicates alternative goals for which public money could be earmarked if the “demand” for the “vacancies” in prisons was reduced. It is assumed that the transferring of funds so far used for incarceration to local communities would make it possible to break the vicious circle of socially marginalizing and criminogenic urban areas. All the previous experience related to investing funds in local communities instead of in executing imprisonment punishments show that this solution is much more effective and efficient than incarceration\textsuperscript{27}. The change in the direction of financing –


\textsuperscript{24} For R. Allen justice reinvestment is one of the buzzwords, just like crime prevention and restorative justice which through the dispersion of meaning can mean different things to different people, which results in ceaseless discussions. See: R. Allen, Justice reinvestment and the use of imprisonment. Policy reflections from England and Wales, Criminology & Public Policy 2011, Special Issue: Special Issue on Mass Incarceration, 617.


\textsuperscript{26} A slightly different division, but resulting in similar conclusions, may be found on the websites of The Council of State Governments, where four main stages of the justice reinvestment approach are described: 1) justice mapping and the analysis of the prison population as well as related public expenses in the community to which the prisoners return after they are released; 2) providing opportunities for policymakers to make savings and increase public safety; 3) implementing options, determining the amounts of savings and re-investments in the target high-risk communities; 4) measuring the impact, evaluating the results and ensuring the efficient implementation of the policy; internet address: http://csgjusticecenter.org/jr.

\textsuperscript{27} See: F.T. Cullen, Ch.L. Jonson, D.S. Nagin, Prisons do not Reduce Recidivism: The High Cost of Ignoring Science, The Prison Journal 2011, vol. 91 (3), 57; Ch. Fox, K. Albertson, F. Warburton,
from the criminal justice system to local communities – is an opportunity to give
the communities institutions able to enhance the level of integration and social
control. As F. Fukuyama expressed it: “ideally, the best form of control is not the
developed and repressive police but the society which brings young people up so
that they obey the law and so that those who break it come back to the society as
a result of informal group pressure”28. Secondly, the justice reinvestment strategy
draws attention to a widely known and – especially in the concepts of social ecol-
yogy – emphasized fact that persons incarcerated in prisons are over-represented in
specific areas or neighbourhoods. As opposed to other approaches, the strategy of
justice reinvestment does not only accept this fact but also tries to go a step fur-
ther and indicates that because of this fact, such areas in particular require actions
which reduce the risk that their inhabitants will enter into conflict with the law and
such actions should be of greater interest for local authorities, the communities
themselves and – of course – the criminal justice system29. In other words, justice
reinvestment is aimed at bringing back the balance between the expenditures of the
justice system and the use of funds which would otherwise be spent on supervision
in prisons, in order to implement local initiatives aimed at counteracting the causes
of crime. The application of justice reinvestment is to break the vicious circle in
which, as the problems of million dollar blocks escalate, they lose more and more
funds because decision-makers do not see first the effects and then the sense of
investing in areas which “cannot be helped”, moving those areas, more or less
consciously, outside the scope of the decision-making of local authorities and to-
wars the criminal justice system. Justice reinvestment is therefore a decentralized
approach focusing on specific local communities which – due to problems occurring
in them – require financial support. Thirdly, the justice reinvestment approach
formulates serious reservations about the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of in-
carceration, looking for more appropriate mechanisms of organising and funding
the criminal justice system. It proposes solutions in which part of the financial
responsibility is given to the local organs, which can use the resulting savings to
achieve their own goals, if they can find ways to reduce the level of incarceration
statistics30. Justice reinvestment supports revitalisation and resocialization solu-
tions based on work in local communities as those good not only for individuals
but also the whole community.

Justice Reinvestment: Can it Deliver More for Less?, The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice 2011,
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29 D. Brown, Neoliberalism as a criminological subject, Australian & New Zealand Journal of Crimi-
30 R. Allen, op. cit., 617.
Recapitulation

Analysing the goals of the *justice reinvestment* strategy one can have the impression that it concentrates mostly on improving the functioning of the criminal justice system, i.e. that it is yet another tool aimed at adapting this system to the rapidly changing reality and optimizing financial resources spent on it nowadays by societies in the whole world. Nothing could be further from the truth. The *justice reinvestment* strategy concentrates first of all on the local community, which is the main area and aim of its activity. This is in line with one of the main assumptions of revitalisation – addressing the need to “revive social and economic processes in the area in which they have declined”\(^{31}\). In this approach, the reference point is the needs of the community and the crime policy is reduced to a tool used to cause changes within the community. *Justice reinvestment* projects conducted in *million dollar blocks* in the United States, Great Britain and Australia clearly show that without efficient revitalization taking into account the guidelines included in this strategy, the *million dollar blocks* communities will still undergo worse and worse degradation and marginalization and taxpayers will continue to be burdened by higher and higher costs of keeping the inhabitants of these areas in penitentiary institutions\(^{32}\). Therefore, the *justice reinvestment* strategy must become the undisputed part of urban renewal strategies, especially the revitalisation of *million dollar blocks* areas.

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