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Archetype of city in the modern city space on the example of Cracow

Introduction

Most of the cities in Poland have their historical lineages. More and more new cities are built. On the other hand, the existing modern cities must face the issue of their development, although it must take place in accordance with their cultural continuity. Our observations of various transformations in the historical city scope are based on the example of the city of Cracow. Cracow was fortunate enough to escape the Second World War destruction. This is a great benefit because many invaluable works of national and world culture survived which evidenced the magnificent cultural continuity of this city existing since the 10th century. Cracow is a good example of a model historical city. It is placed among the leading European cities which are said to possess phenomenal and unique features which confirm its genius loci [6, p. 208]. Apart from the aforementioned merits, we can observe that each historical period introduced various stigma (positive and negative as well). Two world wars left specific traces of impoverishment in the city architecture. Particularly, the period of post-war avant-garde and Socialist Realism created a new style and aesthetics of buildings and urban system spatiality. An unprecedented

example here is Nowa Huta situated in the eastern part of Cracow. This part of the city built totally from scratch, as if to counterbalance the existing development tissue, is a classic example of a Stalin époque town, the so called Socialist Realism. According to Professor of architecture Stanisław Juchnowicz, a co-creator of Nowa Huta and a remarkable urban planner "Nowa Huta was built against common sense and it was a violation of history, tradition and law; it had unimaginable consequences for the environment of Cracow at the moment this decision was made" [1, p. 88]. Poverty of the post-war years, lack of any basic building materials, ideological slogans and political guidelines influenced decisively the choice of location and methods of building new fragments and districts of the city. Permanent transformations in time are quick and it still seems that there are delays. For example, this may refer to strategies in working out target visions, in solving transportation problems as well as in making decisions on comprehensive investments in technical infrastructure which is the basis and main backbone of urban development in the context of contemporary comprehensive needs.

Role of spatial planning

Spatial and architectural planning, already by definition of architecture, should constitute the art of shaping space while taking into consideration the needs and good of man with all consequences of retaining the requirements of interdisciplinary knowledge. Land development plans are determined by urban guidelines for the areas des-

ignated for the development with various ways of usage of the terrain. Being aware of the fact that each space is a limited and common property with a social character, managing the space requires a social approval and social understanding as to the methods of its shaping. Land development for various needs as well as benefits of culture and technical knowledge constitutes a priority principle of coexistence of man and nature. Having a responsibility for all urban planning decisions, we cannot fail to take into

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account humanitarian relations of man with the world of nature. The last experiences in this range confirmed that in planning urban spaces and the city environment this humanitarian accent is expressed by the green and the so called biologically active area. A characteristic contemporary phenomenon, the so called 'crowding of the city', causes the increase of various nuisances which degenerate the existing natural environment in the city. The growing anomalies are directly negatively reflected in the biological sphere and they can be seen in exceeding "the limits of human endurance and adaptation possibilities after which the nuisance becomes unbearable" [6, p. 208].

In such situations, various sorts of pathological phenomena are possible to occur along with the so called emotional burnout or lack of identity with the place and surroundings. Urban planners in the name of well understood social good must object to the pressure of the increasing economical needs which are often directed towards immediate profits and a short-term shining form of 'kitsch' in its broad understanding.

Historical past of Cracow and its present day

On the example of Cracow, we can brilliantly follow the origins of the city since the 10th century with its magnificent Roman examples of town architecture. Excellent examples of the Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Classicism or the 19th-century structures of the then new urban compositional ideas, in spite of their style differences, retained this basic feature of unifying and merging due to their scale and proportions. A logical medley of styles and urban coherence constitute a unique magnificent example of a specific 'symbiosis' of selecting modules, proportions, sizes of buildings along with their details, etc. This uniformity is confirmed by a special ability to find solutions for squares and streets with particular almost theatrical scenery and with exposing perspective closures which are accented by, for example, height dominants (Fig. 1).

According to Professor Bogdanowski, "A characteristic feature of interiors of the city complex constitutes a dominant of the specific interiors. We could even say that this advantage provides an indispensable factor of reception of the complex as a historic city" [1, p. 88]. The particular complexes of urban interiors and streets for various fragments of the town create a variety of climates and moods. These signalled values contribute to the fact that the atmosphere of this city is authentically unique in the opinions of various specialists such as historians of art, restorers, architects and town planners. These values are perceived by people from diverse cultures coming from all parts of the world. It is interesting to note that regardless of a nationality, delight and admiration for the old Cracow architecture is great with no exception[1]. A readable arrangement of urban and architectural compositions is very characteristic and, consequently, it is well identified among other urban developments. In the contemporary urban arrangements of growing cities predominant features are housing estates with blocks of flats, big shopping centres, etc. These estates are mostly characterised by a rather accidental system of

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[1] The author of this article personally experienced a certain reflection while showing the city to a group of students of architecture from Germany. One beautiful afternoon we took the students to the Forum Hotel viewing deck. Right before our eyes a view of Cracow panorama appeared with numerous accents and dominants. The entire group gave out a sigh of admiration and one of the students nearly fell to the floor – we thought that she lost consciousness…

Fig. 1. Characteristic fragment of Cracow (magical place) – view from Floriańskia Street on Mariacki Church (photo by H. Mełges, 2011)

Il. 1. Charakterystyczny fragment Krakowa (magiczne miejsce) – widok z ul. Floriańskiej na kościół Mariacki (fot. H. Mełges, 2011)

Fig. 2. Characteristic block development of Łobzów district (photo by H. Mełges, 2011)

Il. 2. Charakterystyczna zabudowa blokowa dzielnicy Łobzów (fot. H. Mełges, 2011)

Fig. 3. Example of a great shopping centre complex
– Galeria Krakowska (photo by H. Mełges, 2011)

Il. 3. Przykład zespołu handlowego wielkopowierzchniowego
– Galeria Krakowska (fot. H. Mełges, 2011)

Fig. 4. Car parks situated at shopping centres occupy huge areas
of the concrete surface (photo by H. Mełges, 2011)

Il. 4. Miejsca parkingowe przy centrach handlowych zajmują
bardzo dużo powierzchni betonowej (fot. H. Mełges, 2011)

urban composition with geometrical spatial forms. Urban concepts were often adjusted to technological needs, for example, for building cranes tracks. As a result, the interiors had monotonous geometrical walls and simple gray façades with hundreds of identical windows (Fig. 2).

Following such progressive town developmental tendencies, it was often the case that the town archetype resulting from long-term historical actions lost its expression. Therefore, it seems that these long worked out town archetype forms are often neglected in the scope of town development. A spatial and aesthetic expression of towns was dominated by economical aspects and new fashions. A simultaneous lack of land development plans for many towns deprives architects and town planners of any control over the main objective, namely, liquidity of sustainable architectural and urban actions based on appropriate experiences and realisations of predecessors.

A new phenomenon for the majority of modern towns is a process of locating a great number of big shopping centres with the accompanying areas for car parks within the borders of cities (Fig. 3).

As a result of such activities, the enormous (as for the city conditions) spaces are changed into 'biologically dead areas'. By necessity, on the one hand these shopping centres contribute to creating new transportation solutions, while on the other hand they accumulate a great number of vehicles, which causes changes in the microclimate around these structures and generates huge pollution from car fumes (Fig. 4).

Among a multitude of diverse problems of the contemporary Polish towns, an apparently insignificant problem comes out which is very annoying for our sense of aesthetics. The main entrance roads leading to cities as well as major streets are often full of various billboards at the area of many kilometers. Quite frequently, these billboards carelessly obscure great panoramic views of cities (Fig. 5).

We must bear in mind that some characteristic panoramic views which are seen by a tourist who is entering a city constitute a foretaste of emotional effects which are reflected in a general assessment and the image of the city emphasising "its panoramic and townscape logo" [5, p. 46].

Expansion of towns on the adjacent rural areas

The fact that rural areas border closely on administrative limits of towns sooner or later involves the risk for villages of being incorporated into the structures of rapidly growing cities. We deal here with a popular phenomenon of 'swallowing' rural areas along with their cultural and agricultural tradition by dynamically developing cities. As a result of such transformations, there is no alternative for suburban villages which are annihilated. Suburban zones fulfil the function of delivering food and providing a place for recreation and rest; however, they are still moved and limited territorially [4]. This is a complex problem and requires a particular attention from urban planners because it disturbs the city ecology. It also refers to rural issues connected with historical plans of villages, their history, culture and cultural areas of fields, forests and meadows. The issues connected with widely understood recreation, sport, relaxation, green areas which are significant for developing
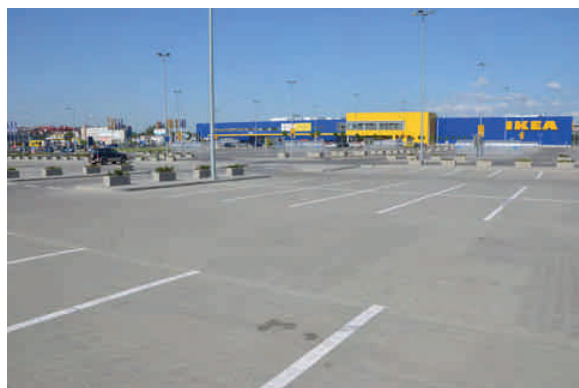

Fig. 5. Billboards on major entrance roads to the city
(photo by H. Mełges, 2011)

Il. 5. Reklamy przy głównych wjazdach do miasta
(fot. H. Mełges, 2011)

cities and which constitute a challenge and a 'material' for urban planners and architects have a particular importance for the life of city residents as well as for the residents of the extended areas. It is also worth paying attention to the fact of changing the transformed areas by means of introducing the complex technical infrastructure. During such activities, top geological layers of soil are changed from biologically active areas to biologically dead areas.

Questions

We should pose the following questions: what can happen to the cultural past and heritage during the development of modern cities? Should the archetype of growing cities have an influence on the generational continuity with all due respect for the newest technological, material as well as engineering trends? Should we protect the cultural heritage of cities along with its identity and homeliness?

What is the most effective way of protecting a city resident and biological environment of cities?

Such doubts are plenty – they are caused by the results of changes that take place and consequently many of these questions remain unanswered. Cycles of civilization transformations give rise to a new dimension and image of a city. We can only ask: are we going in the right direction?

Translated by
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Archetyp miasta we współczesnej przestrzeni miejskiej na przykładzie miasta Krakowa

Zachodzące zmiany w społeczeństwach bezpośrednio przekładają się na architekturę i urbanistykę. Bieg cywilizacji oraz (między innymi) pozytywistyczne i neopozytywistyczne nurty myślowe, jak też trendy technokratyczne i nieograniczony dostęp do środków masowego przekazu, stworzyły szeroką sferę informacji zwaną infosferą. Świat wkroczył w odkrycia dotyczące wszystkich dziedzin nauki, w wyniku czego ludzkość, szczególnie w miastach zmieniła styl życia. W efekcie przekształciły się rodzaje potrzeb i usług oraz skala popytu i konsumpcji. Zapanował styl tzw. nadmiernej „szybkości życia". Rozwój komunikacji (w tym samochodowej) sprawił, że właśnie miasta z istniejącą dotychczasową infrastrukturą techniczną (między innymi komunikacyjną) nie radzą sobie ze zjawiskiem przeciążenia motoryzacyjnego. Nowe technologie budowlane, wraz z coraz to nowszymi rozwiązaniami materiałowymi, zmieniają dotychczasowy wyraz estetyczny miast, ich skalę i atmosferę. Obserwuje się nagminny wyścig na rynku technologicznym oraz chęć zaimponowania nowymi „kreacjami architektoniczno-budowlanymi". Polska po licznych doświadczeniach dziejowych, które głównie skumulowały się w XX wieku (jak dwie wojny światowe i okres powojennej polski socjalistycznej, a teraz proces przyśpieszonej transformacji w zakresie szybkiego nadrabiania różnic cywilizacyjnych), znalazła się w bardzo szczególnym miejscu, pomiędzy wschodem a rozwiniętym zachodem (jeżeli chodzi o bazę ekonomiczną). Próby szybkiego wyrównania skutków zapaści ekonomicznej i wynikłych z tego błędów w architekturze i planowaniu przestrzennym spowodowały, że wiele działań wymknęło się spod kontroli planistyczno-architektonicznej i ekologicznej również w miastach. Miasta o historycznych rodowodach, z wielowiekowym nawarstwieniem kulturowym, stanowią cenne przykłady ciągłości rozwijającej się myśli urbanistyczno-architektonicznej. Stanowią one swoiste „banki" interdyscyplinarnej wiedzy, można by rzec „mateczniki" myśli architektoniczno-przestrzennej miast. Architektura precyzyjnie rejestruje zmiany cywilizacyjne, które bezpośrednio obnażają całą wiedzę i poziom jej aktualnych twórców. Te przemiany są czytelne, jak w przysłowiowym „papierku lakmusowym". Brak planów zagospodarowania przestrzennego powoduje, że wiele decyzji dotyczących pozwolenia na budowę często ma charakter niezwiązany z dalekosiężnymi strategicznymi decyzjami wizji urbanistycznych. W celu unormowania tej sytuacji konieczna jest społeczna dyskusja w gronie specjalistów różnych dziedzin nauk interdyscyplinarnych, aby wszelkie rozwiązania były decyzjami odpowiedzialnymi.

Key words: archetype of a city, cultural environment, urban and architectural composition

Słowa kluczowe: archetyp miasta, środowisko kulturowe, kompozycja urbanistyczno-architektoniczna