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Identity of place and culture of urban development



Fig. 1. The City of Arts and Sciences. Valencia

What is associated with a city? Cities and places are associated with their culture. That culture is often associated with unique architecture but not always.

Valencia is associated with the Old Town which evokes the spatial culture of the past centuries. All historical buildings must be restored but the approach to that is different in different countries. The architectural space restoration culture in Spain is defined by local development plans. They specify which buildings must be restored completely, namely both their interior and exterior shall remain as they were. However, a large part of his-

torical architecture is restored by restoring only the historical front facade while the remaining of the building is demolished and built again, taking into account the modern functional and material requirements. It is characteristic of the protection of the cultural heritage of the whole Spain. Usually a few levels of protection of architectural spaces are determined. The first level is the preservation of all elements of a building (shape, exterior and interior decorative elements). The second level protects the buildings which are important for the urban landscape and not necessarily of high architectural value. These buildings should preserve the body of the building and construction system, whereas the change of internal walls is allowed. The third level protects only some important elements of the building such as facades characteristic of specific epoch and style in which a building was designed or remod-

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Fig. 2. Gdańsk. Old Town

eled. The front of the building is fixed to a special scaffold and the rest is demolished. A new, functional system is created in line with the latest technology and the facade is finally restored. At this level the buildings which significantly affect the urban landscape, however, not due to their shape, which can be changed to some extent, are also protected¹ [3]. Culture of places with historical buildings is connected also with the way in which that urban fabric is replenished. In Valencia most of the new buildings which are built to restore the missing urban fabric of the old town are designed with their dimensions to fit the historical buildings. What is more and more appreciated and applied is the culture of presentation of buildings which are nicely lit so their beauty can be admired also at night.

The contemporary urban space of Turia pedestrian walkway has become a competition for the Old Town which was associated with the culture of Valencia. Everybody can find something interesting here, for instance the City of Arts and Sciences, active and passive recreation or the Nature Park. It is the area whose culture of development and numerous, interesting functions – especially those connected with art and education – attracts crowds of visitors. The modern “City of Arts and Sciences” in Valencia is one of the biggest centers of culture in Europe. It has theaters, opera, science museum, halls for different kinds of artistic events. Is the architecture of these buildings associated with their function? I don’t think so but it does not change the great qualities of the whole design. The whole space of the City of Arts and Sciences connected with culture and science is located along the pedestrian walkway. All events are held in individual buildings as well as in the open air. This interesting design does

not need to be advertised today; it promotes Valencia and attracts tourists from all over the world. This new space culture has been enthusiastically embraced by both the city dwellers and the visitors. People who are asked what they associate with the culture in Valencia answer: the Old Town, Turia and some with paella (traditional dish).

Szczecin became world famous when the tall ships visited the city in 2007. The event was televised all around the world. Then what is Szczecin associated with? It is associated with the Chrobry Embankments where all major, open air events are held and with the water by which the city is located. A lot of people connect Szczecin with the shipyard and the sea although the Baltic Sea is 100 kilometers away, but what is positive is that they identify it with water. The lack of regular international events is the reason why the knowledge of Szczecin is poor. The development of the most important places of that city does not attract people to spend time there. The architecture alone is not enough. The creation of interesting places for pedestrians with numerous attractions and especially with regular events held there would provide a possibility for these spaces to be always full of people. The other place which should play the role of a hallmark is the old-new town. Just like in Gdańsk, only many years later, an attempt was made in Szczecin to revive the old town. At the turn of the centuries, new buildings were erected on the historical urban layout whose design was stylized to resemble the historical design. However, the buildings alone will not attract crowds. No walkways or squares were built and instead there is one huge parking lot. The culture of a place is not only its urban development but also its character and the people who are supposed to spend their time there, so they need to be provided with a possibility to move around freely without any cars. The development around the buildings is not less significant and sometimes more important than the buildings themselves.

¹ Prepared on the basis of E. Czekiel-Świtalska, *Zatrzymanie przemijania starówek*, Technical Magazine 1-A/2009, Publication by Cracow University of Technology, Cracow 2009.

The hallmark of Gdańsk is undoubtedly its Old Town with its events and the Great Crane; these are the most immediate associations with its culture and recognizability. Although today's old town is a original reconstruction of the old town, it was the buildings, their function, the development of the area as well as advertising of all events that made it the symbol of Gdańsk. A friendly atmosphere of the historical and architectural space, numerous places for meetings and recreation, outdoor and indoor events, care for provision of attractions are the things that make people want to come and spend their time in that charming place. *As a result of changes in social and economic changes as well as changes of needs and habits, people more often than before spend their free time meeting socially in public places such as cafes, pubs and restaurants. These places are most often connected with city centers and old towns. All cities look for ways to attract people to their centers to prevent the old towns from dying. It should not be forgotten that a totally new model of spending free time, especially among the youth, emerged – shopping*

idea that the historical layout of that space should be restored. Fortunately the latter idea prevailed. The restoration of the old town combined two ideas: in general the historic layout of the streets and facades was preserved but the interiors of the buildings were restored and some elements were developed in compliance with then modern technology. (...) *The more specific guidelines for the plan of space development of the historical districts of Gdańsk (...) provide instructions which constitute a kind of synthesis of historical and modernization postulates – for instance it was claimed that despite their historical external forms the tenement houses to be restored should have a “modern layout with modern amenities” (Borowski J.) Especially evident modernistic principles were demonstrated in the recommendation that despite preservation of the historical layout of the streets the urban development of the space between buildings should be significantly open, providing huge open spaces for backyards and green areas. That way of thinking shall soon result in creating an extremely interesting hybrid of history and*



Fig. 3. Marina in the center of Marseille with the view of Notre-Dame de la Garde Basilica

malls are fighting with city centers for visitors. As a result their interiors are kind of “new marketplaces” where one can buy something but first of all be in the public eye and meet with friends. The spiritual growth of the visitors was also taken care of in those spaces by opening multiplexes and presenting some art by organizing temporary exhibitions there² [5].

The culture of urban development of the old town in Gdańsk is the post-war idea of rebuilding the destroyed old town as an original reconstruction of the historical space. The post-war discussions on the city old town space development were very different and often extreme. Some perceived the culture of that place as a modern and modernistic architecture, whereas others advocated the

modernity which the restored Main City in Gdańsk shall become³ [2]. It is because of the culture of urban space development of the old town in Gdańsk that today both the citizens of Gdańsk and tourists from all over the world are happy to visit it. All the time the residents of the city and its authorities care for the culture of that place, including both the maintenance of the space and provision of such attractions as for instance the annual Dominican Fair [1].

It may be surprising to realize what Marseille is associated with. A lot of people say it is associated with white taxis which they know from the film titled “Taxi” and with crime. The idea of the culture of that city developed to a large extent on the basis of films. Only after people visit that place do they notice a yacht marina in the center

² Hołda K., Przesmycka E., *Uwalnianie przestrzeni*, kulturaenter.pl monthly magazine of exchange of ideas, No. 15, 2009.

³ Jacek Friedrich, *Problem nowoczesności w kulturze architektonicznej powojennego Gdańska*, http://www.buero-kopernikus.org/_pl/article/31/7.



Fig. 4. Amsterdam

and beautiful buildings, including the Notre-Dame de la Garde Basilica overlooking the city. It can be said that the culture of that city is created by its monumental buildings and water which is connected with a lot of sailboats in the very heart of the city. Every day in the morning the places where you can eat something are filled with the locals and tourists who want to drink coffee and eat breakfast. In the evening finding a free table in the cafes, pubs or restaurants located in the center by the marina is sometimes almost impossible. The friendly character of the streets that open to the waterfront with dozens of boats makes people like to walk there and enjoy that specific culture of architecture and landscape of that place.

Holland is associated with wind mills, tulips and bicycles as well as narcotics. The perception of Dutch cities, however, is different. The combination of historic architecture and water canals next to it forms the culture of Amsterdam space. The specific, full of life character of the streets running along the waterfront attracts a lot of tourists who visit the city again and again. The specific character is created by the architecture surrounding the numerous canals surrounded by green areas. Between the buildings there is pedestrian and road traffic with numerous speed bumps. Pedestrians and bicyclists use those areas freely and there is a speed limit for cars. The number of parking places for cars is very limited but there is enough room for bicycles. In spite of the diversity of modern and older architecture, the culture of Amsterdam is associated primarily with the architecture around the canals. A lot of buildings feature great historical details and appealing beauty and there are numerous meeting places on their ground floors. The opposite banks of the canals are connected by a lot of bridges which makes the division of the space by water insignificant. The water is here not only an interesting landscape feature providing the place with a specific charm but it also serves as a communication

route used by water trams and taxis, connecting different parts of the city with the ocean or places of residence. It is a specific approach to the culture of residing and living because it is rare that people live on water on such a large scale in cities located by water.

The association of a place with culture can develop through events which were or are held in a given city or their form of power. This is the case with Monaco which, perceived as a principality with monarchs, is full of culture connected with water as well as with yachts. Monte Carlo is often associated not with its being a district of Monaco but with its Formula 1, casinos and rich people. The culture of that place is not at all associated with the development of its architectural spaces. The picturesque architecture located among rocks climbing higher and higher as well as marinas with vessels which cannot be seen anywhere else is the culture of space appreciated only by few people, usually those who visited the city. Photo No. 5 shows the picturesque location of Monte Carlo whose landscape has everything: mountains, warm sea, beautiful green areas.

Who makes the decisions on spatial development and consequently infuse a given place with a specific culture of architecture and local development? In practice the planning decisions are made by politicians but it is the owners of real property that implement the assumptions of the plan. Designers make spatial development plans and they advocate their ideas but the final decisions are made ultimately by local authorities, as is the case in most European countries. In Poland until 2003, almost all planning decisions were made by local authorities; after that year politicians make only those decisions which are connected with the local development plans, whereas the decisions on building conditions are made without the consent of local authorities. Wherever there are no valid local development plans, it is the owners of land who decide



Fig. 5. Monaco

on property development and they apply on their own for the decisions provided specific statutory requirements are satisfied. It is possible to assure a harmonious, friendly culture of space only through local development plans. To a large extent the decisions on building conditions result in spatial disharmony and chaos. However, the culture of a specific place is not only its harmonious spatial development but also its acceptance by the society and that is why the society is consulted at the stage of preparing the local development plans, which is not practiced when the decisions on building conditions are granted. In many countries the presentation of the planning ideas to local communities is a very important factor and they consider it very seriously. This is not just a mere satisfaction of a statutory obligation but this is the way of getting as many people as possible interested in that matter [4].

The assumption ... of the systems – English and German ones – is the conviction that providing local authorities with a significant decision-making freedom is necessary to effectively balance the interests. However, the scope of discretion is limited by the obligation to respect the spatial solutions reached at higher levels of local authorities, by necessary consulting with other public institutions and by the obligation to provide the society with a possibility to participate in the planning process⁴ [6].

Widely conducted consulting with the community provides the answer to the question whether intended development is received positively or negatively. Often it is the local community, including property owners, that determines the success of the execution of the plan. For instance in Germany and England they are trying to get as big an interest of the community in the planning ideas

as possible. They keep looking for new ways of getting to the citizens. In Poland the practice shows that social consulting is only fulfilling the statutory obligation. Most local administrative districts (*gminas*) do not try to get the people who live there interested in the intentions of local authorities regarding space planning. From the very beginning, that is from the collection of applications and then at the stage of making the plan, widely conducted consulting greatly increases the possibility of execution of the plan.

In order to become famous the cities must find their gems of culture which can become known and attract people as well as make them willing to come back to a given place. It happens very seldom for such an object alone to become a hallmark which would be often visited. For example for a lot of people Paris is associated first of all with the Eiffel Tower but the city is visited in connection with its general culture and not for this famous structure itself. It is important that the culture of the whole space which apart from interesting architecture would offer interesting functions and friendly development, conducive to recreation and rest.

The architecture and space development is a significant factor in strengthening the culture of a place, a city or a country. That culture creates a character of a place, offers interesting functions as well as ambiance provided by the buildings and known elements of the culture of being in that space.

It is important how a given place is perceived by average people and not by architects. People create the culture of a given space, whereas architects and urban planners only design it. City authorities do everything to make the created culture popular and consequently draw visitors and investors who would help to encourage the growth. Undoubtedly especially in today's reality every place needs to be advertised. Even the most beautiful architecture without

⁴ Izdebski H., Felicki A., Zachariasz I., *Zagospodarowanie przestrzenne*, Sprawne Państwo, Warszawa 2007. Online edition. p. 31.

publicity will not be famous and that is why cities promote themselves more and more strongly, presenting their most beautiful places and offering popular attractions.

The image of the culture of a given place is connected with its recognizability and it is highly important that as many people as possible know it. The popularity of different places is created in different ways. The image of the culture of a place which is created indirectly varies greatly from knowing the place first hand. The persons who have visited specific places usually have associations with the architecture which impressed them, whereas the knowledge of the places which they have not visited is

usually associated with the knowledge gained from the media, especially from television and the Internet. The associations are often connected with films, songs, sports and other events. This is the basis on which an image of the culture of a given place is created.

The associations connected with the culture of the places described above have been prepared on the basis of a survey conducted among the persons from different age groups with secondary and university education in Spain and Poland. From among the cities described above Valencia and San Sebastian were least known to Poles and Szczecin was least known to Spaniards.

References

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Tożsamość miejsca a kultura zagospodarowania

Z czym kojarzy się miasto? Miasta i miejsca kojarzą się z ich kulturą.

Valencja kojarzy się ze Starym Miastem, które prezentuje kulturę przestrzenną przeszłych wieków. Konkurencją dla Starego Miasta stała się współczesna przestrzeń urbanistyczna, jaką jest ciąg pieszy Turii. Znajduje się tu Miasto Nauki i Sztuki, miejsca rekreacji biernej i czynnej oraz Park Natury.

Szczecin kojarzony jest z kulturą miasta nadwodnego, którego wizytówką są Wały Chrobrego. Symbol ten ugruntował się podczas transmisji telewizyjnych ze zlotu żaglowców w 2007 roku.

Key words: identity of place, urban development

Gdańsk to Żuraw Gdański i Stare Miasto. Kultura jego zabudowy, czy mocno reklamowane liczne imprezy sprawiają, że jest on znany.

Holandia kojarzy się z wiatrakami i tulipanami. Połączenie zabytkowej zabudowy z kanałami, przy których się znajduje, to niewątpliwie kultura przestrzeni Amsterdamu. Specyficzny klimat uliczek przyległych do wody, tętniących życiem, przyciąga turystów, którzy chętnie tu wracają.

Architektura i zagospodarowanie przestrzeni jest istotnym czynnikiem w umocnieniu kultury miejsca, miasta, państwa. To właśnie ona tworzy klimat miejsca, oferuje ciekawe funkcje, które przyciągają ludzi.

Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość miejsca, rozwój urbanistyczny