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ARCHITECTURE AS AN INDIVIDUAL
OR COLLECTIVE WORK, OR A RESULTANT
OF A SEQUENCE OF EVENTS?
ABOUT THE FALL OF THE LAST OF THE BASTIONS
OF ACADEMIC ARCHITECTURE –
THE FINAL FORM OF THE BUILDING
AS A DEFINABLE ELEMENT

ARCHITEKTURA JAKO DZIEŁO INDYWIDUALNE,
PRACA ZBIOROWA, CZY WYPADKOWA
CIĄGU ZDARZEŃ?
O UPADKU OSTATNIEGO Z BASTIONÓW
ARCHITEKTURY AKADEMICKIEJ –
FORMY OSTATECZNEJ OBIEKTU
JAKO ELEMENTU DEFINIOWALNEGO.

A b s t r a c t

The paper is an analysis of the path that led to the emergence of design solutions, ideas and realizations that contradict the paradigm of architecture as a work whose final form is influenced by the architect – demiurge. The first concepts presented architectural form as a resultant of many factors. Subsequent concepts duplicated this assumption, leaving the field to the individual user or relying on collectivism in making decisions about the shape of the future space.

Keywords: Agromere, Tempelhof, James Wines

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Niniejszy tekst stanowi analizę drogi, która doprowadziła do pojawienia się rozwiązań projektowych, ideowych i realizacyjnych, zaprzeczających paradygmatowi architektury jako dzieła, na którego ostateczną formę ma wpływ architekt demiurg. Pierwsze koncepcje ukazywały formę architektoniczną jako wypadkową wielu czynników. Kolejne powielają owo założenie, oddając pole indywidualnemu użytkownikowi lub stawiając na kolektywizm w podejmowaniu decyzji, co do kształtu przyszłej przestrzeni.

Słowa kluczowe: Agromere, Tempelhof, James Wines

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of the architect in the design process has not been questioned until recently. As recently as 2012, in a textbook on architectural design, Aleksandra Prokopska writes about architecture as a complex intellectual process involving, admittedly, multiple fields of knowledge¹, but preceded by “creative design processes carried out by specific designers and/or architectural design teams (...)”². So far, the process of architectural design has been analysed mainly in the context of individual, creative work, partly non-materialised, of the designer³, which was to ultimately lead to the creation of a work that would be the realisation of the Vitruvian triad⁴. Regardless of its form (in the most simplistic terms, modern or historical), an architectural work constitutes a finite, ‘invented’ complexity already at the stage of its immaterial or merely conceptual existence. Architecture as realisation of a finite creative idea, regardless of functional, structural or formal solutions, adopted avant-garde for a given period in history, left no room for deliberate, conscious modification over time under the influence of someone other than its Creator. Still under copyright law, modifications of an architectural work are subject to similar restrictions as interference in other works of art, requiring, inter alia, the consent of the author-designer for such modifications.

Looking at the very definition of architecture, changes of which reflected various trends in the approach to the essence of the problem, it can be seen that even during the creation of trends considered to be the avant-garde of their time, the paradigm of the importance of an architect as creator was never questioned. Even le Corbusier, giving architecture an overarching goal of emotion, writing about architecture as a play of solids in light⁵, did not question the role of architect in the conscious creation of architectural form.

Nowadays, in the era of conscious stylistic diversity, both the form and function of a building are no longer the determinants of what is avant-garde. The last bastion of what is unchangeable in architecture was the aforementioned role of the architect, as the element deciding on realisation of the entire establishment, on its final shape – both formal and functional, regardless of the accepted definition of the architectural value of the work.

But what would happen if, at some stage in the design process, a decision was made to abandon this seemingly final paradigm? If the final form of an architectural or urban design work ceased to depend on the architect alone, and part of this demiurgic power over form was transferred to its current and future users?

¹ M. Bazewicz, *Does there exist a Systemic Paradigm for The Future Intellectual Technologies?*, “Systems. Journal of Transdisciplinary Systems Science” 1996, Vol. 1, no 1.

² A. Prokopska, *Projektowanie architektoniczne. Procesy wstępne*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Rzeszowskiej, Rzeszów 2012, p. 13.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

⁴ J. Ballenstedt, *Architektura, historia i teoria*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2000, p. 554.

⁵ Le Corbusier, *Verso un'architettura* (1923), Longanesi, Milano 1973, p. 16. after: A. Monestirol, *Osiem definicji architektury*, “Pretekst: Zeszyty Katedry Architektury Mieszkaniowej” 2004, Nr 1, pp. 9–16.

2. WHERE DID IT START?

The first attempts to change the role of the architect in the design process and the related necessity to delegate part of the decision on the functional and formal layout of the final work to its future users by excluding these elements from the design process itself date back to the early 20th century. At that time, it was assumed that the architect's formal interference in the body of the building would be limited. In this way, part of the formal solutions could be decided by the owner/user within the property.

One had to wait over half a century for the first attempts to implement this assumption. The turn of the 1960s and 1970s brought the first attempts to apply the concept of increased individualisation of architectural solutions, especially in the area of multi-family housing architecture, but not only. The freedom of arrangement, as a compromise between the complete variability of form and complete imposition of design solutions, is associated with the dissemination of the concept of an open plan in multi-family, office, commercial and other constructions.

Until the construction of the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 1972–1977, considerations about the ideal exhibition or concert space remained only theoretical. However, the reality of the construction, or even the physical parameters of the building with its pre-set height, width and length, and the need for utilities meant that these ideas remained purely theoretical. The building by Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano caused, apart from a technological and style revolution, a revolution in the way architecture is understood not as a work of art but as a whole, in which each of the elements has its place, from the general to the smallest detail. This building meant that suddenly, in a visual way, architecture began to be understood as a place where the designed social relations take place, and the space itself serves only as a 'packaging' for phenomena much wider than architecture itself.

In case of the Pompidou Centre, there is talk of creating a new aesthetic, of changing the way architecture is valued, but the truly valuable element here, according to current considerations, is the creation of a fully adaptable free space – a packaged void in which the future user can make any changes and transformations for their own purposes and for the presented art.

Experiments on this scale did not only concern public buildings. There were also experiments with residential buildings, trying to create individualised solutions in multi-family housing development, leaving urban layout and the external form of buildings to the architect's vision. There were attempts to smuggle such solutions also in Poland, an example of which is Przyczółek Grochowski by Zofia and Oskar Hansen from 1968–1974⁶.

The period of ideological transformation in design and the associated formal search as a result of the implementation of the sustainable development principles in design in particular resulted in several currents in design that were significantly different in formal expression. One of these included the surrender of much of the right to decide on architectural form and urban layout of settlements to their owners.

In addition to this, an increasingly common formal solution, which enables the development to be personalised from an equal scale, is the creation of a form reminiscent of

⁶ F. Springer, *Zaczyn. O Zofii i Oskarze Hansenach*, Wydawnictwo Karakter, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, Kraków–Warszawa 2013, pp. 140–141.

a large-scale colouring book, adapted to be filled in and completed with personalised elements – equipment layout, colour or texture. These elements are adapted to the possibility of frequent change also by the fact that the architecture created for them is in fact a form of background – a neutral setting for the individual expression of each user. Such solutions are necessitated by the need for a space that can be changed quickly, easily and relatively inexpensively, such as changing the colour of a designated part of the façade or re-arranging a rented interior. The compromise that has been developed between the space users need for self-determination and the need to reduce construction costs in the first place results in a phenomenon that could be called personalised architecture. Such personalised architecture has many typical features and solutions, but some are left unrealised, leaving the decisions to be made by the user himself. An extreme case of this is the increasingly common standard of developer-finished flats, in which the flat owner is given only the space bounded by the outer walls of the premises, in which he or she must make all the interior furnishings, including partition walls, themselves.

Increasingly, however, also in case of so-called high architecture, defined by analogy with the concept of high culture as original work, the full reading of which requires proper intellectual preparation on the part of the viewer, we are dealing with the conscious construction of a background architecture, adapting it to be given character and ‘colour’ by users in the same way that a colouring book with only black outlines becomes an individual work. Only by filling the shape with colour content does it become complete.

In the process of changing the role of architect, we can distinguish several turning points which revealed new perspectives on the avant-garde approach to the problem and placed the architect-designer in a different role in the whole process than hitherto.

2.1. THE HIGH RISE OF HOMES

As early as 1909, a first concept was published, not intended to be realised, being an example of architecture created in such a way that the final effect could not be defined and proposed before the whole concept was completed. The proposed solution was to provide a framework for the entire work co-created by the inhabitants. Consequently, architecture as a whole, combining function with final form, is only finally defined by the user. The only strictly definable element in this case remained the structure, which is the physical element actually originally defined, requiring detailed calculations for the site.

In 1909, *Life* magazine published a sketch as a voice in a discussion of the then emerging social phenomenon we would now call the ‘American lifestyle’. The caption to the diagram depicting typical suburban villas piled on riveted steel frames already used as part of the construction of skyscrapers in New York or Chicago was annotated in the style of the then nascent advertising touting all the benefits of owning a country house located in the centre of the city. In 1978, this illustration was used in the work of Reem Koolhaas in his book ‘Delirious New York’.

In 1981, a concept by James Wines and the SITE (Sculpture in the Environment) studio was developed on the basis of both earlier works⁷. As the author himself points out, although the concept, which remained only in theory, was realised, it would result in the

⁷ J. Wines, *Architecture as the Inversion of Architecture*, “Oz” 1987, Vol. 9, no. 1–1, pp. 24–31, doi.org/10.4148/2378–5853.1136.

demise of the last of actual bastions of architecture as a work, referred to as academic formalism in architecture. We are referring to the concept of an architect-demiurge – as the individual who gives total formal expression to the architectural work. The concept of the ‘High rise of Homes’ is primarily the realisation of the concept of architecture as a collective work, in which both the skeleton, i.e. system of reinforced concrete platforms supported by steel frame structure with communication risers, and the infill, i.e. the individual houses with their immediate surroundings, have independent designers. In this concept, nothing but the shape of the structural grid and location of particular buildings could be determined in advance.

In the physical terms, the concept, stacking up rural settlements, involved two variants of construction depending on the wealth of future residents. The first variant was presented as a two-wing block of flats between 8 and 15 storeys. A vertical community would be created based on freely developable plots on each floor. The ground floor and one of the intermediate ones were to be used to locate the primary services, including shops, a market, offices, recreational areas and an estate greenery. In the variant envisaged as the economic one, accessible en masse to less affluent citizens, Wines noted the suitability of the abandoned factory buildings for adaptation to a new type of housing by removing the façade and rebuilding the communication risers. This option also involved the introduction of cost-reducing modularity, the possibility of houses’ prefabrication and reduction in the size of houses while maintaining freedom in the design of their façades and garden zones⁸ (Ill. 1).

Although the concept was not directly described as being linked to an agricultural function, it did involve the introduction of a typically rural form of development with more extensive – than in the case of urban development – gardens. On the roof of the structure, greenhouses in their typical form and open greenery were designed in each variant of the design, creating and enclosing compositional frame of the complex, the content of which – that is, the form of urban living – is variable.

2.2. ALMERE – OOSTERWOLD

The newest district of the Dutch city Almere – Oosterwold is being built on the basis of a plan assuming minimal designer interference and the smallest possible restrictions in shaping the future development. This project contributed to the emergence of popular terms such as *DIY urbanism*⁹ or *organic urbanism*¹⁰. The concept proposed by the MVRDV studio in 2011 presupposes the freedom to shape both form and function of sites, with only basic requirements for the proportion of various functions on the plot¹¹, hence the emerging term for Europe’s greatest experiment in the search for ideas for new urbanism¹².

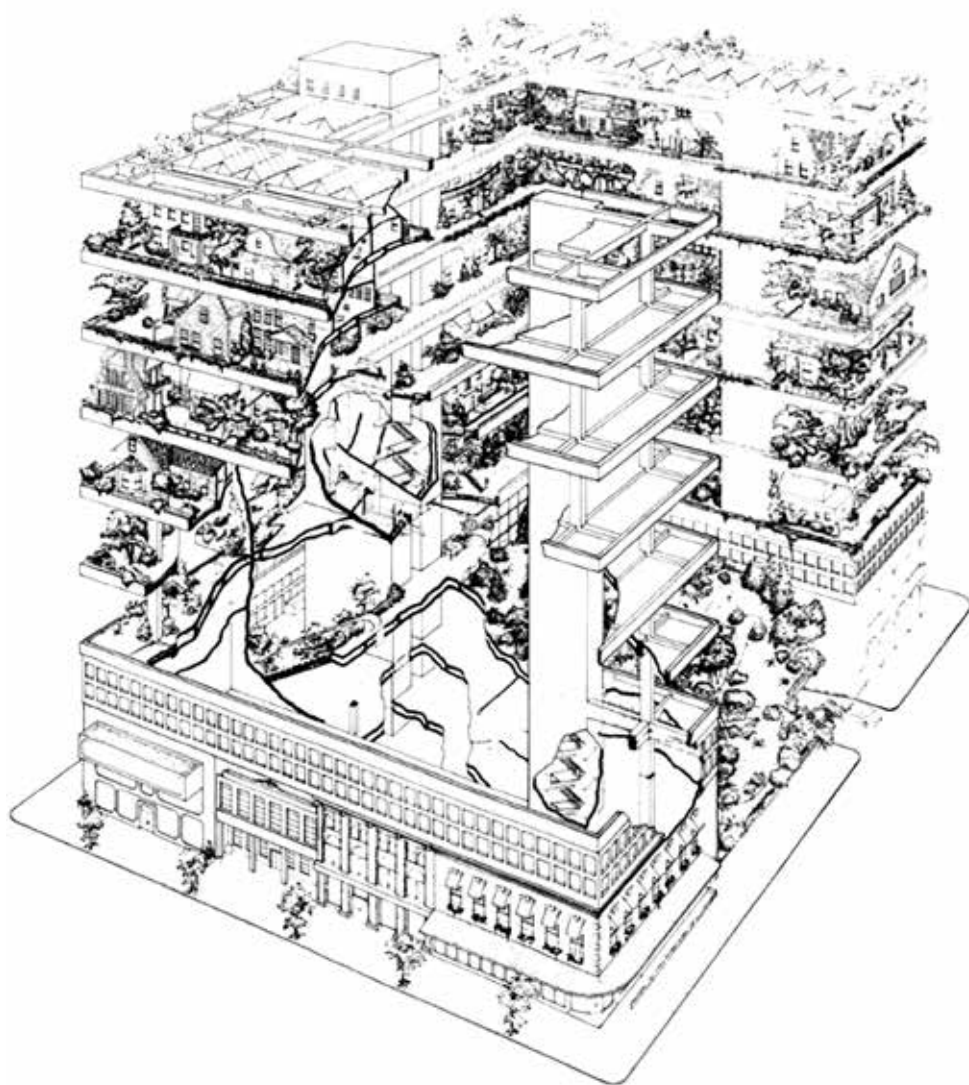
⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

⁹ I. Vinnitskaya, *D.I.Y Urbanism: Almere Oosterworld / MVRDV*, 2012, <http://www.archdaily.com/227503/d-i-y-urbanism-almere-oosterworld-mvrdv> (access: 31.08.2017).

¹⁰ C. Stefano, E. Buitelaar, S. Moroni, N. Sorel, *Experimenting in Urban Self-organization. Framework-rules and Emerging Orders in Oosterwold (Almere, The Netherlands)*, COSMOS+TAXIS 2017, 4(2+3), pp. 49–59. J. Kleszcz, *Bio-polis. Wizja miasta nie-antropocentrycznego*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, Zielona Góra 2020, p. 199.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 200.

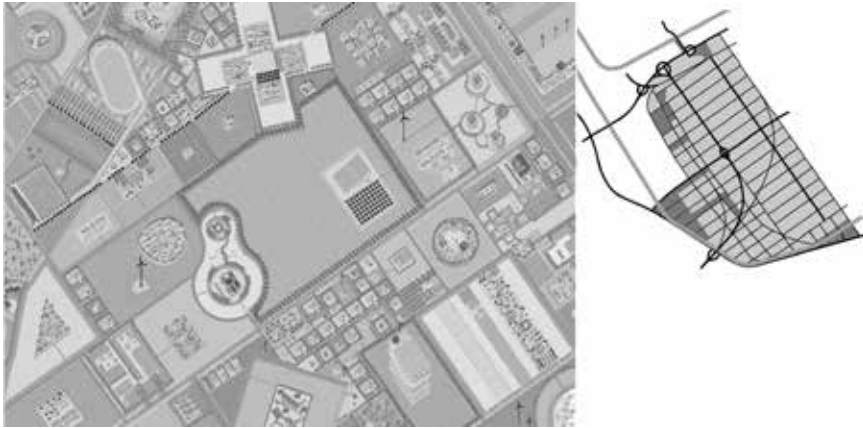
¹² L. Bullivant, *Masterplanning Futures*, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, New York 2012, pp. 239–244.



Ill. 1. James Wines, *The High Rise of Homes*, concept sketch from 1981. Source: Wines, J., *Architecture as the Inversion of Architecture*, "Oz" 1987, Vol. 9, no. 1–1, p. 30.

The idea of a 'golden ratio' – proportions between various functions implied more than 50 per cent green space of various types, including crops, in the total plot area. Providing only a connection to the city's main transport network is an example of a far-reaching freedom in the right to decide on space. Designers themselves tried to call this effect *evolutionary urbanism*¹³, focusing on the process of urban space transformation, following the original development (Ill. 2).

¹³ MVRDV, *Almere Oosterwold*, n.d., <https://www.mvrdv.nl/projects/oosterwold> (access: 20.06.2022).



III. 2. Site diagram and concept drawing of the Alemere – Oosterwold project by MVRDV. Source: press materials from MVRDV studio and Author's own elaboration.



III. 3. Development scheme for the Alemere – Oosterwold estate by MVRDV. Source: press material from MVRDV studio.

The idea of urban planning without any formal framework, but only guidelines relating to the expected size parameters, not the quality of urban space, emerged as a result of cooperation with Wageningen University and the combination of this vision with the idea of Agromere, a theoretical concept developed by Jan Eelco Jansma since 2005¹⁴ (III. 3).

¹⁴ J.E. Jansma, *Agromere, a great idea for the Netherlands?!*, <http://www.wur.nl/en/Research-Results/Projects-and-programmes/Agromere/Why-Agromere.htm> (access: 31.08.2017).

2.3. TEMPELHOF FELD

The Tempelhof Feld concept in Berlin, which is set to run from 2008 to 2014, is an example of a government and municipal project, the most important element of which is essentially the decision not to undertake the urban development measures originally planned. The site, located in the Tempelhof – Schöneberg district, covers more than 386 ha. Until 1994, it was the site of one of the most important airports in German and European history. The need for and feasibility of developing such a large area at the heart of the metropolis has given rise to a lively discussion on how to use it.

The public consultations, which have been carried out on a planned basis since 2007, met with an unprecedented response from tens of thousands of Berliners¹⁵. They resulted in more than 900 ideas in the first and 400 in the second round of consultations, which made it possible to clearly define the direction of creating cultural park called park of freedom in an investment-attractive area. In fact, at the same time as the monumental airport building itself was placed under conservatory protection, the construction of which began in 1936 together with the new government district (designed by Ernst Sagabel)¹⁶ and was ultimately never completed, an attempt was also made in 2009 to settle a competition for the design of the airport site. The assumption here was to make maximum use of the ideas collected during public consultations. As a result, 6 out of the 78 entries were selected for public discussion¹⁷. These included partial development of the airport parts adjacent to terminals and the Neukölln district to the east, west and south, in order to provide a framework for the proposed cultural park and to allow for the completion of transition between the historic, compact buildings and an open area of the airport runways. While it is true that the Tempelhofer Feld development plan was passed by a resolution of the Berlin City Senate in 2013¹⁸, it was violently opposed by residents and ultimately did not enter into force. On 25 May 2014, a referendum was held in which more than 64 per cent of the voters voted in favour of leaving the Tempelhofer Feld area unchanged¹⁹, leaving room for already existing social initiatives there such as an urban farm, a wild bird sanctuary or community gardens ('100% Tempelhofer Feld' social programme) (Ill. 4).

The area of the former airport remains a huge reservoir of space so spacious that it can reconcile the existence of extremely different activities at the same time, from air sports, to family leisure and recreation, and bird species protection. At the same time, an open form proposed by residents, contrary to the designers' suggestions, allows for a quick response to changing social needs, as exemplified by the appearance of temporary buildings in the Tempelhof area and the arrangement of former hangars for a refugee camp in the years 2015–2016²⁰ (Ill. 5).

¹⁵ A. Janicka, *Tempelhof – park wolności, przykład adaptacji lotniska na park kulturowy*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego" 2013, nr 149, "Inżynieria Środowiska", no. 29, p. 25.

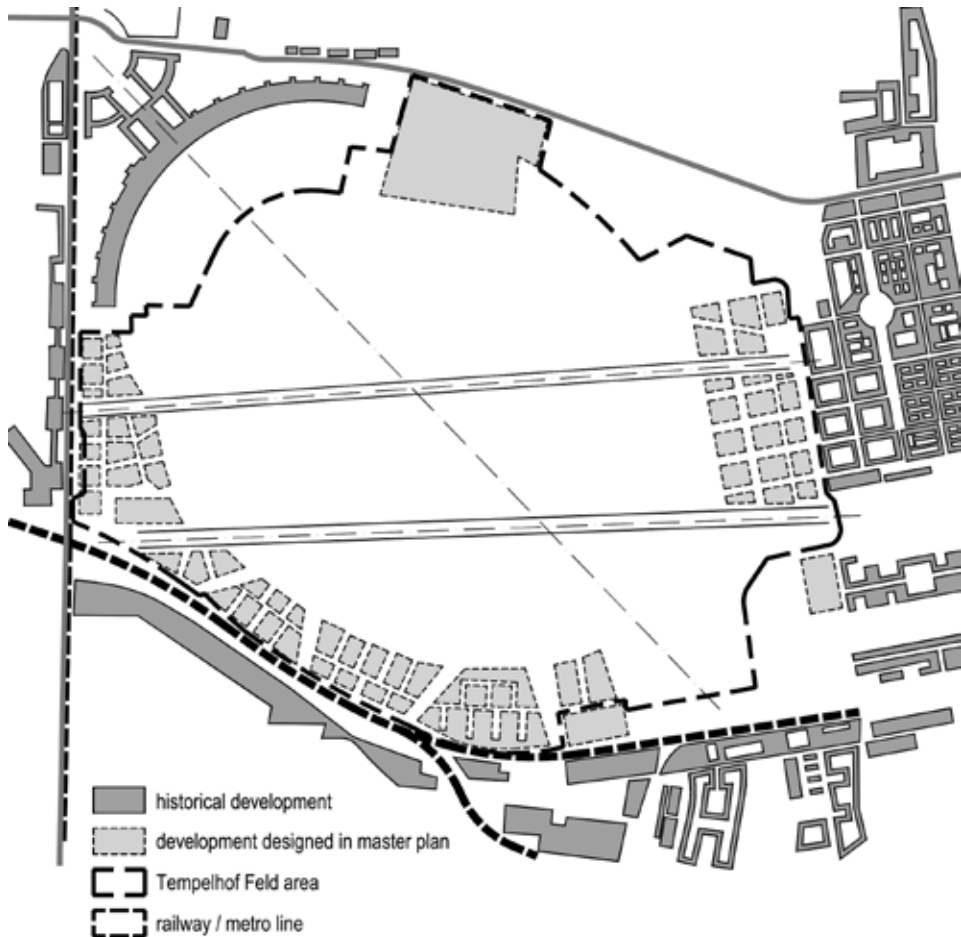
¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

¹⁹ Metropolis (The Governing Mayor of Berlin Senate Chancellery), *Activation of an urban open space through citizen participation*, n.d., <https://use.metropolis.org/case-studies/germany-berlin-tempelhofer-freiheit-urban-open-space#casestudydetail> (access: 20.06.2022).

²⁰ M. Barthe, *The story of the Tempelhofer Feld in Berlin. From a closed space to a symbol of freedom and community* [in:] J. Keller, K. Keresztely, T. Virad (eds.) *Our Neighbourhoods Heroes Stories on*



III. 4. Development scheme of the former Tempelhof airport site – current state and original master plan. Author's own elaboration.

3. SUMMARY

Already more than 100 years ago, it was realised that architecture was slowly ceasing to be a field of individual creativity, becoming more and more clearly a collective work in which it is increasingly difficult to determine the individual creative contribution of authors. Over time, the range of elements that were left to the discretion of users no longer formed part of the architect's decision-making.

Citizen Participation in Local Development in European Cities, Comparative Research Network, Berlin 2017, pp. 61. http://obserwatorium.miasta.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Our_Neighbourhoods_Heroes_Stories_on_Citizen_Participation_in_Local_Development_in_European_Cities.pdf (access: 20.06.2022).



III. 5. Temporal use of Tempelhof Feld: a) view of the runway – cycling sports space, side view of the community gardens in raised beds; b) view of the green belt separating the airport from Neukölln district; c) view of the open space of the airport, refugee camp in the background; d) place of spontaneous activity for Berliners. Photos by the author, September 2020.

The scope of what a non-architect can do in architecture, the extent to which architecture is shaped by a natural (and at the same time slow) process of change resulting from the gradual change of the user himself and his needs, has itself also been subject to an evolution towards phenomenon that we could now call the ‘experiment of freedom’. What has hitherto been the domain of grassroots social initiatives, remaining the independent invention of users of a given space once it has been ‘finished’ by the design team, becomes a conscious element of urban policy.

While examples of theoretical projects representing this type of approach mainly concern architecture, the realisation of the idea has mainly occurred in case of urban design. It thus becomes a method of creating framework for urban creativity and a way of giving formal rules to bottom-up urban initiatives, associated with the initially illegal, takeover of unused or vacant urban spaces for social purposes. Often this type of design, which leaves a great deal of freedom to the group of users, is also in a way enforced as a method of the city authorities’ formal response to the group of activities taking place here and now, thus only sanctioning what has already happened in space.

More and more elements are being left unsaid to be implemented by users themselves. These include such elements from the Vitruvian triad as:

- function, changing over time and user-transformable within the formal framework given to the object;

- function and form, modifiable within the definitive space occupied by the user;
- function and form, as open forms oriented towards extension;
- function, form and structure, as an ideal premise where the building adopts an open and fully modifiable form on each of its layers;
- urban-scale experiments.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Although the basic form of implementing an architectural work is still its design by an architect in cooperation with other professionals, the architect now ceases to have a monopoly on the possibility of defining the final effect of his activity. Some of the projects show a new direction of resignation from the possibility of ‘finalising’ the form and fully defining all possible parameters of the designed space in the name of building social bonds and an engaged society that is not just a passive recipient and user of space, but takes responsibility for the quality and form of the city.

Architecture and urban planning are increasingly ceasing to be individual works. Increasingly, it is a partnership in which architect acts as a guide in a world of spatial and formal relationships, taking on the responsibility of contacting specialists from other brands and transforming actual needs of future users into real space. Estates created in the idea of co-housing require just such an approach.

Both architectural and urban realizations are increasingly becoming precisely the resultant of a sequence of events that lead to defining only a framework of social activity and leaving space for further transformations. And this is precisely what is most difficult in the whole process. Therefore, the next question should be to define the actual scope of this framework. What can still be dispensed with, so that we can continue to speak of architecture as the art of shaping space, and not as the resultant sequence of events over which no one, apart from history, actually has any influence?

The examples described above constitute a kind of catalogue of good practice testifying to architects consciously going beyond the framework of their profession, set by centuries of tradition, in order to give space a new value. However, these avant-garde projects have their alter egos. Analogous tools for shaping the design process are now being used in the development ‘design’ processes, which have also already been mentioned. The exchange in the role of decision-making group of the collective subject – users – for the investor-developer, produces a pathological image of the design process, in which the most important element becomes the maximisation of the physical-surface parameters of the building, at the expense of the quality of designed space. As in the examples given earlier, this approach also takes away architect’s power over the shape of architecture, reducing him, however, not to the role of a guide, but of a drafter and executor of investor’s will, overseeing the fulfilment of the minimum provisions required by law, while minimising costs of design implementation.

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