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THE MULTI-FACETED NATURE OF THE CITY

WIELOWĄTKOWOŚĆ MIASTA

Abstract

This paper discusses the city understood as a place to live, where the needs of its inhabitants and their ambitions are realised. The city evokes a variety of emotions, as do its fragments, interpreted and experienced by the audience as their favourite places. Numerous academic conferences, studies and exhibitions have been dedicated to this subject. Among others, these conferences included the *New / Old City* conference, which was the subject of the authors' earlier reflections, and the national joint exhibition – *Multifaceted Nature of the Place*.

This paper describes the premise of the *Multifaceted Nature of the Place* conference. The conference depicted the complexity of the city and the impressions it evokes.

Visits to sites in selected areas of Krakow and cognitive analysis based on studying the images of photographs of fragments of cities presented during exhibitions were the main methods used in this study. This made it possible to prove the hypothesis that the complexity of the impressions that the city evokes contributes to its diverse interpretation and the individual feeling that it shapes. This is evidenced by field studies and the exhibition that presented the individual character of the images of photographs by different authors, who photographed the same subjects and had the same presentation assumptions. It was found that despite adopting the same assumptions, the images differed in the way the photographs were presented; they showed their authors' individual sensitivity despite being centred on the same theme.

The results of the research are significant not only academically, but also in terms of artistic presentation, which can be applied in practice (exhibition arrangement).

Keywords: architecture, city, photography exhibition

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiona została problematyka miasta rozumianego jako miejsce do życia, w którym realizowane są potrzeby jego mieszkańców i ich ambicje. Miasto wywala różnorodne emocje, w tym także jego fragmenty, które przez odbiorców interpretowane są i odczuwane jako ich ulubione miejsca. Temu tematowi poświęconych zostało wiele Konferencji Naukowych, opracowań i wystaw. Między innymi na ten temat zaprezentowana została zespołowa wystawa międzynarodowa – *New / Old City*, która była przedmiotem wcześniejszych rozważań autorów, oraz krajowa, zespołowa wystawa – *Wielowątkowość miejsca*.

W artykule opisane zostały założenia wystawy *Wielowątkowość miejsca*. Obrazowała ona złożoność miasta i wrażeń jakie ono wywołuje u odbiorcy.

W pracy wykorzystano także jako podstawową metodę badawczą – wizję lokalną wybranych obszarów Krakowa jak i analizę poznawczą polegającą na zapoznawaniu się z obrazami fotografii fragmentów miast prezentowanymi podczas wystaw. Wykorzystana w pracy metoda badawcza pozwoliła udowodnić przyjętą hipotezę, że złożoność wrażeń, jakie wywołuje u odbiorcy miasto przyczynia się do jego różnorodnej interpretacji i indywidualnego odczuwania, które kształtuje. Świadczą o tym zrealizowane badania w terenie oraz wystawa prezentująca indywidualny charakter obrazów fotografii różnych autorów, którzy przyjęli tę samą tematykę obrazów i te same założenia ich prezentacji. Jak wykazały badania mimo przyjętych tych samych założeń obrazy różniły się sposobem prezentacji fotografii; ukazywały indywidualną wrażliwość autorów choć skupioną wokół tego samego tematu.

Wyniki badań są ważne nie tylko z punktu widzenia wartości naukowej, ale także artystycznej prezentacji, co może mieć zastosowanie w praktyce (aranżacja wystawy).

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, miasto, wystawa fotografii

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many definitions of a city. Some emphasise the role of society in the city, while others refer to urban conditions. In his work, Kevin Lynch writes about city observation, which can be an enjoyable but lengthy process¹. He believes that “the city is a construction in space, but one of vast scale, a thing perceived only in the course of long spans of time. (...) At every instant, there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear, a setting or a view waiting to be explored (...)”².

In this work, the authors focused on two aspects related to the city – its multifacetedness and the desire to identify with it. Both issues are directly related to understanding the city and its perception.

As a place to live, the city can trigger many emotions. We want to perceive in it what is associated with our ideas of a friendly, safe, beautiful city. It is difficult to be objective in evaluating the space with which we identify as residents. Due to the fact that the city evokes feelings, it is also difficult to define it – as emotions are an important factor in understanding the city. The city is often understood intuitively.

The authors of the exhibition under study did not present the same objects and the same spaces. They made individual choices in what fragments of cities to present, focusing on that which, in their opinion, was unique about them. This provided freedom in terms of what to photograph and experience.

The term ‘multithreaded city’ as used in this study is understood as the diversity of the city due to its architecture and spatial solutions, as well as urban conditions. Multithreadness is conducive to finding unique, favourite places in the city that can be admired and one can identify with.

The complexity of the city itself became the subject of study, including the complexity of the impressions it evokes. This is evidenced by the individual character of the photographs by the authors, who have adopted the same subject matter and the same assumptions for their presentation.

The results of the study, in addition to their academic value, can be useful in practice, in the organization and arrangement of various forms of exhibitions. The exhibition

¹ K. Lynch, *Obraz miasta*, Archiwolta Michał Stępień, Kraków 2011, p. 1.

² *Ibidem*.

Multifaceted Nature of the Place was hosted at the Cracow University of Technology gallery at Kanonicza Street. The exhibition allowed us to find whether emotions change when viewing images of cities presented in different ways, and whether the presentation method affects the interpretation of the works on display.

To engage in the study, a review of the literature and the existing state of research on issues of the city and exhibitions was necessary.

The literature on urban centres is extensive. In addition to describing phenomena that accompany cities, it focuses on new solutions intended to prevent negative processes such as urban sprawl, spatial chaos and climate change. A number of scientific conferences are also devoted to these problems, as well as to understanding the phenomena and processes that have resulted, for example, in the idea of a walkable city or the 15-minute city, where most essential daily needs can be satisfied a short distance away, at a walkable distance from one's home. Previous studies showed that aspects such as walkability, the functional diversification of development, the presence of greenery and the degree to which a space is well-maintained affect how a city is perceived and can define its perception. The analysis of city space was chosen as a supplementary tool for the exhibition-based study, and its objective was to determine the properties of specific areas of the city, namely housing estates. The main research question for this section concerned possible links between objective, measurable parameters of urban fabric and its perception and reception.

The use of numerous methods and tools – exhibition, review of the literature, and the urban analysis of selected areas of the city (Krakow), gave the Authors a broad outlook on how cities and their fragments are perceived.

From standpoint of the main subject of the study, the previously mentioned publication by K. Lynch³ was of particular importance. The compositional elements that build the image of the city described in it are important in experiencing it. Thus, they are also important in the interpretation of images of photographs of cities that are, among others, the subject of this study. Another important literature item is the work of W. Kosiński⁴ on understanding the beauty of the city. In addition to analysing specific examples, Kosiński presented his view – supported by studies of other authors – on how beauty, namely the beauty of the city – should be understood. It is an important element in perceiving urban space, as well as in experiencing it and presenting fragments of cities (as in the case of the exhibitions in question).

Another position on Polish cities, this time presenting the opinions of local government officials, activists and users of urban space, is a collective work by Hubert Barański, Łukasz Frank, Hanna Gill-Piątek, Jacek Grunt-Mejer, Piotr Kempf, Elżbieta Koterba, Paweł Kubicki, Piotr Mazik, Hubert Mazur, Olivier Schneider, Janusz Sepioł, Marcin Wójcik and Marta Żakowska⁵. It presents the authors' opinions on the way urban centres function, their aspirations, the phenomena that accompany them, and the processes they undergo.

Publications on cities are plentiful. Their issues are explored by many researchers from various academic disciplines. Often these works are interdisciplinary in nature. Among those in the field of architecture, one can find items that address issues related to the compositional qualities of urban centres, the way city spaces are shaped, the way they function.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ W. Kosiński, *Miasto i piękno miasta*, Politechnika Krakowska, Kraków 2011.

⁵ H. Mazur (ed.), *Miasto na plus. Eseje o polskich przestrzeniach miejskich*, Wysoki Zamek, Kraków 2017.

The second topic relevant to the problem of the work is exhibitions, especially those that deal with cities. An important literature item in this area is a collective work edited by M. Kędziora, W. Nowak and J. Ryczek⁶. Among the articles included in it is a publication by B. Kietlińska⁷, who points out that the openness of an artistic work allows it to be freely understood. This is also how its authors understand their presentation of photographic images. They leave the possibility of being individually perceived.

The hypothesis adopted in the work is that the complexity of the impressions the city evokes in the viewer contributes to its diverse interpretation and its individual feeling.

To confirm this thesis, the authors presented their original joint photo exhibition *New / Old City* (Ill. 1), and *Multifaceted Nature of the Place* (Ill. 2).

The research conducted in the field and based on a review of the literature and exhibition was intended to demonstrate whether the city can evoke a variety of impressions. In the case of the exhibition, it should be noted that despite the shared subject matter adopted by each Author, they displayed highly individual presentation methods for their works, which is a confirmation that the images were able to elicit a variety of emotions in their viewers. The differences in perceiving cities were also observed in loose interviews with the users of the areas investigated.

The secondary objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To determine whether the use of the selected technique of graphical preparation of photographs affects their interpretation.
2. To confirm whether the manner in which photographs are displayed can affect their reception.
3. To determine whether there is a link between objective parameters of the urban fabric of housing estates and the perception of space on the architectural scale.
4. Confirm whether properties like functional diversity and walkability affect the perception of a given area of a city as attractive.

The scope of the study is extensive and covers both the results of an urban analysis of selected urban areas of Krakow (predominantly housing estates, both contemporary and that from the legacy of socialist times), and exhibitions associated with perceiving and experiencing the city. Due to the subject matter, only those findings that allowed for either confirming or rejecting the hypothesis were presented. The study was based on an analysis of cartographic materials, photographs, personal observations, site visits and interviews with housing estate space users, as well as the organisation of an exhibition.

The exhibition featured original works (images of photographs) whose subject referred to various problems associated with the city.

The exhibition entitled *Multifaceted Nature of the Place* was held at the gallery of the Faculty of Architecture of the Cracow University of Technology, on Kanonicza Street. It was a joint exhibition, and it was not an international event. Its authors were Professor Justyna Kobylarczyk, Professor Dominika Kuśnierz-Krupa, Doctor Małgorzata Hryniewicz, Doctor Katarzyna Kołodziejczyk, and Kamila Kobylarczyk.

Photographs of the sites moved seamlessly from one image to the next. In this way, the presentation of the multithreaded nature of the city space was strengthened. The many threads intertwined with each other in the images, just like in reality.

⁶ M. Kędziora, W. Nowak, J. Ryczek (eds.), *Co z tym odbiorcą? Wokół zagadnienia odbioru sztuki*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Społecznych UAM, Poznań 2012.

⁷ B. Kietlińska, *Znaczenie kompetencji kulturowych i artystycznych w odbiorze sztuki* [in:] *ibidem*, p. 93.

An important context for the research was the numerous discussions in the scientific field about cities – their image. Experts on urban studies agree that urban composition is an essential factor that can determine the subjective experience and perception of space and that the city's perception by its residents and users is a complex enough problem that requires a diverse array of methods to explore. These problems were also the subject of scientific conferences held at the Faculty of Architecture of the Cracow University of Technology.

The main research problem was a limitation on the number of photographic images presented in the gallery.

Before engaging in the study, the authors knew that urban issues were complex. However, they did not realise that it would be depicted so differently in the images of the photographs.

The expected result was to demonstrate whether a field study conducted in selected areas of Krakow can provide evidence of the complexity of the subject matter, and whether a photography exhibition can reflect the complex nature of cities and their fragments, and whether it can yield the same observations and experiences in relation to the architecture and the space around it that are photographed, similar to how they are observed in reality.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The research method adopted in the study was a combination of urban analysis, observation, freeform interviews, and a cognitive analysis of the images of photographs of the city presented during an original joint exhibition, the themes of which were related to the city and experiencing it. The exhibition made it possible to prove the adopted hypothesis that the complexity of the impressions the city evokes in the viewer contributes to its diverse interpretation and its individual experience. This hypothesis was confirmed by field analyses conducted in three selected housing estates in Krakow (the estate at Rydla Street, the Azory housing estate, and the estate at Stańczyka Street). The estates were selected based on their similar location – in the west of the city, at a distance of ca. 5 km from the historical centre of Krakow, when measured in a straight line, and due to having their origins in different periods of Krakow's urban development, which affected the formation of their architecture and common spaces. The Rydla housing estate was built in the 1950s using traditional construction technology, the Azory housing estates dates to the 1960s and was built using industrial technology, while the estate at Stańczyka Street was built after the year 2000. Cartographic material analysis resulted in a delineation of the estates' spatial boundaries, an identification of service use concentrations, and allowed for locating and assessing the size of recreational areas and determining their pedestrian accessibility. The interviews with residents were freeform and were not formalised. The question the researchers wanted to obtain an answer to concerned the comfort of use and whether the area was perceived as attractive or unattractive, and to locate areas that respondents found attractive.

Here it should be stressed that despite the same guidelines for the presentation of images, the authors presented in different ways the emotions accompanying different fragments of cities, recording their individual mood and multifacetedness.

The exhibition *Multifaceted Nature of the Place* was preceded by an earlier exhibition, which was already investigated in a published study by the authors. It featured the presentation of images themed after the *New / Old City* and was held in May 2022. It presented images of cities of Ukraine from before the war. Cities that delighted with beautiful architecture, public spaces full of life, sometimes traces of preserved Polishness (as was the case with Zhytomyr).

The authors of the exhibition of photographs *Old City* were employees of the Faculty of Architecture at the Cracow University of Technology: Professor Justyna Kobylarczyk, Professor Dominika Kuśnierz-Krupa, Professor Marcin Furtak, Doctor Małgorzata Hryniewicz, as well as a professor from Kyiv – Doctor Olena Olyinyk of the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture (CUT FoA visiting professor). The city fragments presented concerned: Zaporizhzhia, Chernihiv, Lviv, Zhytomyr and Kyiv.

The second part of the exhibition – *New City* – was devoted to the city of Kyiv and its destruction resulting from the ongoing war.

The authors of this part of the exhibition were employees of the Kyiv National University of Construction and Architecture: Professor Denys Chernyshev, Professor Yulia Ivashko, Doctor Alirza Mamedov and Doctor Olexandr Ivashko.

During the opening event, the authors presented the assumptions and main themes of the exhibition and its content. Immediately after the in-gallery exhibition, an online exhibition was set up, prepared using Sway, which makes it possible to transfer the works into the virtual space and get acquainted with the exhibition via mobile devices.

The second exhibition, *Multifaceted Nature of the Place*, which is the subject of this study, took place in April/May 2023, also in the gallery of the Faculty of Architecture at the Cracow University of Technology, and was held in-gallery only. It presented photographs of places, moving seamlessly from one image to another. In this way, the idea of “intertwining” themes, motifs, and the content of places was exhibited. Each author of their respective part of the exhibition showed places in a different way. Professor Justyna Kobylarczyk underscored that a city is not only architecture, but also common spaces and the life taking place in them. The first image preserved in colour depicted a natural landscape. This emphasised its importance for the human living environment. It requires special care today, when we are increasingly aware of its progressive degradation.

In her works, Professor Dominika Kuśnierz-Krupa focused on the architectural form that shapes the cityscape; she showed its detail and texture, so as to make the image as close as possible to the real one, while accentuating a certain repetitiveness.

Doctor Małgorzata Hryniewicz presented a kaleidoscope of different forms, fragments of space, which form a complete picture of the multifaceted character of places.

Doctor Katarzyna Kołodziejczyk, through the transformation of one image, showed how it can be understood, perceived and interpreted in many ways.

This was complemented by images created by a teenager showing how a child perceives the multithreaded nature of places.

The exhibition in question was an experiment to prove that despite the same guidelines regarding work presentation, the images do not only represent different photographs, but result in a different interpretation of the subject matter, mood, and understanding of the place and its multifaceted nature.

3. RESULTS

The result of the study was to demonstrate, using the research methods indicated, that the complexity of the impressions the city evokes in the viewer contributes to its diverse interpretation and its individual experience.

The analysis results, backed by site visits and observations, found that the areas around which the resident communities' lives are centred were highly accessible, typically in close proximity to service facilities like grocery stores, kindergartens and schools, indicating a link between accessibility and subjectively perceived attractiveness. In the case of 'older' estates (Rydla Street, Azory) it was also possible to identify compositionally important areas, which also acted as the public spaces of their respective estates.

In the case of the new estate (Stańczyka Street), identifying the compositionally important area was difficult and it did not overlap with the area of concentration of services. Conversations with users determined that they typically found public spaces and freely accessible green areas as attractive, yet various emotions were also expressed in their responses, which at times indicated an extremely different perception of a given space. Furthermore, the interviews found that the notion of comfort (accessibility, proximity) and attractiveness were interpreted differently by residents and users and they found the terms not to be overall similar. In this context, the observations of experts, including the author of the analysis, are different: attractiveness is linked to the logic of an urban plan and the legibility of the composition, as well as to pedestrian accessibility.

The exhibition demonstrated that, despite the strict guidelines for the presentation of images of photographs, each author displayed an individual approach in the presentation of their works, whose diversity was an indispensable and important element of the exhibition, and influenced its interpretation. Thus, the results of the study showed that the manner in which photographs are displayed can affect their reception.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research can be generalised and applied to a broader range of topics, but they can also be analysed in terms of the topic presented as embedded in urban issues. The results of the investigation of three housing estates are an interesting introduction and can form a basis for future studies on the links between measurable parameters of housing estates and their perception by users. The differences in the perception of an estate by its permanent residents, temporary users and guests merits further investigation. Exhibitions, during which images of urban spaces are presented, can be an excellent tool for this type of research. In the case of exhibitions, it appears that the assumptions and guidelines of the art exhibition used as the primary means of conducting the research are not without significance outside of the matter investigated.

The exhibition *Multifaceted Nature of the Place* in addition to the preceding exhibition *New / Old City*, presented fragments of cities. The exhibitions differed in terms of context, research subject and image presentation method. This enabled their comparative and cognitive analysis. It should be noted that apart from the exhibition elements themselves – they were hosted by the same gallery and the images had the same format – differences were introduced deliberately – one exhibition presented a fragment of the city that fluidly transitioned from one panel to the next, displaying an interweaving of its patterns.

In order to obtain objective results in this regard it is necessary to continue the research. In addition to the results' academic value – the opportunity to test and apply research methods – the field research, assuming their continuation, can be useful in planning urban areas

while considering the needs of users. Research methods that employ exhibitions are also of practical value. Their results can aid in the organisation of exhibitions, selecting works, formulating guidelines for the preparation of works, as well as their thematical assumptions.

The research presented can also be continued by expanding its thematic scope. This requires the inclusion of additional research questions that make it possible to determine, among other things: whether the technique of graphical preparation of photographs has an impact on their interpretation, whether the method of displaying photographs can affect their reception, whether such elements as the interior of a gallery, its lighting, mood, the stories told by the photographs' authors about the images of cities they present have an impact on their perception, and also to show whether there are differences in how the photographs are interpreted by their authors and members of the audience.



Ill. 1. *New/Old City* exhibition (photo by: J. Kobylarczyk, images on display by: O. Olynyuk, J. Kobylarczyk).



III. 2. *Multifaceted Nature of the Place* exhibition (photo by: J. Kobylarczyk, images on display by: D. Kuśnierz-Krupa).

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