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ARCHITECTURE AND THE CITY – TRANSFORMATION OF SPACE BETWEEN BUILDINGS AND CITY SHAPING

ARCHITEKTURA A MIASTO – PRZEKSZTAŁCENIA PRZESTRZENI MIĘDZY BUDYNKAMI A KSZTAŁTOWANIE MIASTA

Abstract

The city consists of buildings and the space between them. Buildings perform a specific function depending on their purpose, which largely affects the solutions in their interiors. However, it is the space between architectural objects that can become an important factor in shaping urban space, as well as defining the relationship between architecture and the city. The quality of these spaces plays an important role in the functioning of the city, as well as the perception of the city by its inhabitants. The article will present the possibilities of transforming urban spaces of various types on selected examples.

Keywords: city, transformation, space

Streszczenie

Miasto składa się z budynków i przestrzeni między nimi. Budynek pełni określoną funkcję w zależności od ich przeznaczenia, co w dużym stopniu wpływa na rozwiązania w ich wnętrzach. Jednak to przestrzeń między obiektami architektonicznymi może stać się ważnym czynnikiem w kształtowaniu przestrzeni miejskiej, a także określeniu relacji architektura–miasto. Jakość tych przestrzeni pełni istotną rolę w funkcjonowaniu miasta, a także odbiorze miasta przez jego mieszkańców. Artykuł przedstawi możliwości przekształceń przestrzeni miejskich różnego typu na wybranych przykładach.

Słowa kluczowe: miasto, przekształcenie, przestrzeń

1. INTRODUCTION

Cities are inextricably linked with architecture, which is one of the elements that creates them. The buildings themselves are visible objects in the urban fabric, their facades and interiors are often shaped by their direct users or owners. The interiors are often invisible from the outside and even inaccessible. On the other hand, the space between buildings, its quality, proportions, and the way it is used play an important role in shaping cities. In that space every person spends time in a more or less conscious way. Its accessibility, degree of security and the way it functions play an important role in shaping the quality

of life of city dwellers. The space between buildings can be shaped top-down by architects and officials, but it can also be transformed as a result of activities related to, e.g. social participation.

2. SPACE BETWEEN BUILDINGS

The issues of shaping the space between buildings are explored by Jan Gehl, who pays special attention to public space and its social aspect. In his opinion, in a properly functioning public space, it should be possible to engage in outdoor activities in three categories, and therefore he distinguishes three types of activities: necessary, optional and social ones. Necessary actions are related to the current needs, e.g. moving around and using public transport; for these activities, the quality of the space is not of great importance. Optional activities that are not mandatory result from a person's natural desire to perform them, e.g. a walk or spending time in a recreation space. In this case, the quality of the space in which the activities take place is of great importance. On the other hand, social activities are related to interactions between people, which can take place both in the area of necessary and optional activities. The solutions of these spaces will influence social behaviour between their users.

Also Christopher Alexander believes that public space should serve to create social bonds. In "A Pattern Language" he discusses topics related to, among others, giving identity to the cities and the spaces within them.

The traditional form of public space is considered to be the areas between buildings, not inside them. These are not only city squares, but also streets where the space of the sidewalk can be a place of lively activities between users.

Chmielewski believes that an important feature of a properly functioning public space is its accessibility, as well as a sense of security. It is also important to plan the space in a way that facilitates orientation, as well as to introduce clear and qualitative aesthetic and informative solutions.

In the literature, many studies are devoted to public space, but it should be noted that this is not the only type of space between buildings. Taking accessibility as a criterion, as well as the manner of use and ownership, we can distinguish public and private space, as well as spaces between these two extreme types, defined as semi-public and semi-private.

Jan Gehl stated that life takes place between buildings and the way of arranging the space between them has an impact on the shaping and quality of social relations between its users.

2.1. LIVING SPACE IN THE CITY

A special type of development where shaping the space between buildings plays an important role is the residential area. The housing environment is the one where a person spends the biggest amount of time. It is important to shape that space in a way that ensures its proper use and prevents creating places that do not belong to anyone, which could make them neglected and dangerous. For this purpose, zoning of space between residential buildings is introduced. It may also involve determining the availability of given places for given groups of users.

Depending on the scope of social control, two leading typologies of space between buildings in housing complexes can be distinguished. Both of them specify public and private space, but the difference lies in the way the space between public and private is defined. Newman distinguished semi-public and semi-private spaces. Chmielewski, on the other hand, defined three main types of open spaces: public, social (group, neighbourhood) and private. In his opinion: "Private space is the domain of the family. Group space delineates areas where direct interaction between individuals within a particular social group may happen, and public space may be defined as one that creates conditions and encourages indirect interaction between individuals and social groups." Nowadays, it can be noticed that these spaces in many cases interpenetrate, and zoning between them is done in a soft way. Housing estates are not physically fenced, but there are elements of small architecture that indicate a change in the character of a given space.

In Schoonschip estate in the Buiksloterham district in the north of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, the site of the development is located on the water, and it is open to the public. In front of the entrance to the piers to which the buildings-boats are moored, there are only information boards with a request to keep silence. There are no fences or gates. Due to the educational and social nature of the estate, it was decided to make a social, semi-private space available also to the people from the outside. Anyone interested can take advantage of this space, as well as of the elements of small architecture that are located in it. The space is arranged in a way that promotes proper relations between residents and visitors (due to its educational nature).



III. 1. View of the pedestrian area intended for residents of the Schoonschip floating residential complex in Amsterdam (photo: author).



Ill. 2. View of the semi-public/semi-private space between the buildings of the Schoonschip floating residential complex in Amsterdam (photo: author).

3. TRANSFORMATION OF THE SPACE BETWEEN BUILDINGS

The space between buildings, regardless of its nature, can be transformed in various ways: top-down and bottom-up. Top-down activities may be related to the revitalization process and be implemented under specific programmes. One of the elements of the revitalization program is social participation in which stakeholders from a given area can participate. In such a situation, they can influence the transformation of this area. There are also cases where, in a bottom-up way, the inhabitants of a certain part of the city form a group and start striving to achieve some change in it.

3.1. TRANSFORMATIONS OF UNUSED SPACES

An example of the transformation of unused space in the city is the High Line project, a former railway flyover located in Manhattan, New York. It was established in 1934, when, due to many accidents, it was decided to place the railway tracks on a flyover built 6 meters above the ground level. It functioned in this form until the 1980s, and at the end of the 20th century the first projects of its demolition appeared. Such ideas met with opposition from the residents, who founded the High Line association and focused on persuading the city authorities to stop the plans to demolish the facility. The process lasted many years,

until finally the simulation of potential economic benefits for the city changed the way the authorities thought about this area. Residents maintained that it plays an important role in the identity of the district. A competition for the project was announced, with 720 entries. The winning design was the work by the Diller Scofidio + Renfro architectural studio, who, together with the landscape designer James Corner from the Field Operations studio, proposed the introduction of a green area on the flyover. In this way, a green public space above the ground level was created. A variety of vegetation has been introduced into this park with a linear layout – one part is more wild, while another one is more structured with more paved surfaces. Throughout the flyover, there are many elements of small architecture, e.g. in the form of seats. The buildings directly adjacent to the flyover were renovated, and many new facilities with service and residential functions were built. The project, which was implemented in three stages, contributed to the gentrification of the entire district. It turned out to be a great success and it should be noted that everything was initiated in a bottom-up way as an initiative of the inhabitants, who believed that the overpass was of great importance in maintaining the identity of this place.



Ill. 3. View of part of the walking route with railway tracks and vegetation on the High Line flyover in New York (photo: author).



Ill. 4. View of the High Line flyover in New York City, buildings under construction are visible in the background (photo: author).

3.2. TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE STREETS

Transformations of space between buildings do not only concern unused areas. They are often conducted in the part of the cities that are currently in function, but there is a need to introduce a change or the possibility of improving the current functionality of a given place.

Examples of such spaces are streets, which in the era of modernism were primarily designed for cars. Attention was drawn to this problem in the 1960s thanks to Jane Jacobs, who was against the demolition of buildings and allocating land for the construction of a big artery in the Greenwich Village district of New York. Also Colin Buchanan played an important role when in the 1960s he prepared a report related to car traffic in the city. He also proposed many solutions aimed at limiting car traffic, drawing attention to pedestrians and improving public transport. An advocate of designing streets for people was also Donald Appleyard, who conducted research showing the relationship between the traffic volume on a given street and the social life within it. The aforementioned Jan Gehl, in many of his publications since the early 1970s, draws attention to the appropriate shaping of public spaces, including streets, which are the place where all people in the city live. At the beginning of the 20th century, many street transformations were successfully carried out, some of which were intended only for pedestrian traffic, e.g. Times Square in New York. All thanks to Janette Sadik-Khan, who served as the commissioner of transportation in New York. She described

a number of changes introduced together with Solomonow in the book “Streetfight: Handbook for an Urban Revolution”. During this period, New York also managed to build many bicycle paths, introduce city bikes, and improve the public transport system.

Nowadays, after a period of development of individual vehicular traffic, in which many roads were built at different levels and, therefore, priority was given to car traffic, the time has come to pay attention to the pedestrians. People, not cars, are the main users of cities. They move in the space between buildings, use squares and sidewalks. It is extremely important to design the space of streets in cities in a way that minimize the possible collisions of pedestrians with car traffic, preferably without introducing level differences. In the residential areas, the aim is to limit the speed of vehicles, and introduce streets with calm traffic, as well as the so-called woonerf streets, which in Dutch means “a street for living” where pedestrians are given priority, followed by cyclists.

The idea of “woonerf” streets was born in the late 1960s in Delft, the Netherlands, by Niek De Boer, who was inspired by the solutions proposed by Buchanan in the report. He introduced dead-end streets in the city centre, as well as located playgrounds for children and green spaces within them. He wanted to slow down the traffic, as well as give the drivers the impression of driving through a garden, and not a typical street intended for cars. “A street for living” solutions are being successfully introduced not only in the Netherlands, but also in many other countries. An example of woonerf in Poland is the project at Abraham Street in Gdynia. Designing streets of this type is primarily intended to focus not on cars, but on pedestrians. The social dimension of designing woonerf streets is important. By making it difficult to move around with a car, drivers have to pay more attention to what is happening on the street, while seeking eye contact with pedestrians. Pedestrians are also required to look at the driver. In this way the chance of establishing contact between these two different street users is increased. Woonerf is also a great place to introduce various types of activities between residents within it.

3.3. BOTTOM-UP ACTIVITIES (TACTICAL URBANISM)

An important phenomenon functioning in urban space is tactical urban planning. It is related to tactical interventions, which include, e.g. urban prototyping. Activities carried out as part of tactical urbanism are characterized by a bottom-up nature, low budget and temporary nature. Urban space transformations are initiated by groups of residents. Usually, these are simple and spontaneous activities, focusing on the introduction of, for example, greenery in pots, seats made of recycled elements. Parking spaces are also occupied by gardens for residents. All these activities are aimed at enlivening the space – they are not always introduced permanently. Usually, these changes are temporary, but repeated cyclically, they can change the way the city authorities think about these spaces. The perception of these areas by the inhabitants changes, they begin to function differently in their consciousness. The most important thing is that these activities allow people to see the potential of this type of urban activities and its possibility to influence the city space. The author and popularizer of tactical urbanism is Mike Lyden. This trend has many supporters – a catalogue of tactical interventions has also been created, in which suggestions for using various types of objects in space in a way that they contribute to achieving change in the city can be found. These activities may include, e.g. spreading artificial grass in the car park area and using the square for recreational purposes. This is what happened in Miami, Florida, USA, where in

2012 part of the land occupied by parking lots on Biscayne Boulevard was transformed into a green pedestrian promenade for a week. It became possible thanks to the involvement of 30 partners. This action had many supporters, money was obtained for the implementation of a pop-up park in 2017. This time, the transformation was scheduled for three weeks. The public space was visited by 17,000 people, and events were held both during the day and at night. The temporary replacement of the car park with a public space for pedestrians for several times changed the strategy of the city authorities for this area. In 2021, a traffic analysis report was prepared to analyse the potential transformation into a pedestrian boulevard. The Miami Parking Authority (MPA) in August 2021 announced a partnership with developer Property Markets Group to increase the amount of green public space in the area. Despite the suspension of implementation, the MPA management maintains that the project is still valid.

An example of solution that is in line with the principles of tactical urbanism is, for example, the use of umbrellas over some pedestrian routes in city centres. Such use changes the character of the street, gives it colour, and also signals a different way of using the space (e.g. Dernek Sk Street near Taksim Square in Istanbul, Turkey).



Ill. 5. Top view of umbrella-covered pedestrian walkway on Dernek Sk street in Istanbul, Turkey (photo: author).

In activities related to tactical urbanism, the social aspect plays an extremely important role – it is people who are the initiators of the process, and they have an impact on the transformation of the space between buildings, and thus on shaping the city.

3.4. TEMPORARY ACTIVITIES

Another way of transforming urban spaces are temporary activities occurring cyclically in a given space. An example of such a solution is the Open Courtyards event taking place in

the neighbourhood of Möllevången (Möllan) in Malmö, Sweden. It was started in 2010 and currently 40 yards are participating in it. By opening their backyards to the public, residents have a chance to strengthen social relations. Once a year, their private and semi-private interiors become public spaces accessible to everyone. The activities include, among others: concerts and film screenings, poems readings or serving coffee. This shows the essence of interpenetration of spaces with different ways of use and different accessibility, as well as a temporary change of their character. Allt åt alla association, which announces recruitment for the next edition of the Open Courtyards event, provides assistance in organizing the activities. Backyards apply to take part in this event and then proceed to plan actions and their implementation. All these activities performed by the residents also serve to strengthen the bonds between them. They show that opening your own backyards can bring benefits to the entire neighbourhood, as opposed to fencing and closing them.

Urban prototyping is also a popular phenomenon related to temporariness in cities. It is used, for example, in the planned change of the traffic layout. Mock-ups and 1:1 scale models are also created in cities, which allow people to check how a given solution would function in reality. Then, mobile elements are created that also enable the transformation of space in real time.

3.5. SPACES FOR ART OR ART FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF SPACE?

Another type of transformations of space between buildings are those related to art. They may be of a temporary nature, but in the urban space there might be also permanent elements of art that affect the quality of the space between the buildings. These can be, e.g. murals, sculptures, monuments or fountains. However, the use of such elements in space does not guarantee the success and popularity of a given place among potential users. Always, an important aspect in the programming of public space is the time factor and the analysis of how a given place will be used. Therefore, apart from the location of artistic objects in space, it is also worth paying attention to the artistic activities that may occur in it.

Also, the transformation of the space between buildings by introducing temporary urban interventions can be defined as urban art. Renee Tribble distinguishes four categories derived from art, which are applicable in urban practices regarding shaping the space between buildings. These are: “co-production, local specificity, alternative reality and positive moment”. All these tools are successfully used as methods of alternative development of urban districts. The first of them is related to participation and co-creation, the second to the local context, the third to showing the alternative use of space in a given period of time, and the fourth to the specific location of a given action in time. The application of these solutions from the art world is successfully introduced as an alternative method, sometimes used in parallel to the traditional way of urban planning.

4. CONCLUSION

A city is not only buildings and the space between them, but it is also the way in which a given place functions in the minds of its inhabitants. Also, temporary occasional use of space can affect its perception by people, and thus the shaping of the city, which takes place not only in a physical way, but also in the feelings and impressions of the inhabitants. The

way of shaping the space between buildings, as well as their architectural solutions, affects the perception of cities. Top-down activities carried out in a standard way, as well as the bottom-up ones, which show that everyone can influence the appearance of their immediate surroundings, not only in the private but also in the public sphere, are important in shaping cities. The presented examples demonstrate the possible influence of the inhabitants on the introduction of changes in the urban space. They also show that sometimes even small, seemingly insignificant actions can have a large impact on the city on a larger scale.

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