

CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC SPACES AS MEETING PLACES

Kinga PALUS ^a, Joanna ZABAWA-KRZYPKOWSKA ^b

^a PhD Eng. Arch.; Faculty of Architecture, The Silesian University of Technology, Marcina Strzody 10, 44-100 Gliwice, Poland
E-mail address: kinga.palus@polsl.pl

^b PhD Eng. Arch.; Faculty of Architecture, The Silesian University of Technology, Marcina Strzody 10, 44-100 Gliwice, Poland
E-mail address: joanna.zabawa-krzypkowska@polsl.pl

Received: 17.11.2015; Revised: 12.01.2016; Accepted: 11.04.2016

Abstract

Examples presented in the paper are focused on functional and formal elements that have a positive impact on the attractiveness of the use of public space in the city. They show how in different scale and using various architectural and urban elements to create or transform a space that has gained acceptance and responded to the needs of different user groups. The study used methods of observation and comparison of selected examples in different locations in the world and the method of analysis of the sources. Based on observation and analysis of literature the authors have drawn up a list of criteria allowing the assessment of the quality of space with emphasis on the validity of the social aspect.

Streszczenie

Zaprezentowane w artykule przykłady są próbą zwrócenia uwagi na elementy funkcjonalne i formalne, które wpływają pozytywnie na atrakcyjność użytkowania przestrzeni publicznych w mieście. Pokazują jak w różnej skali, operując różnymi środkami tworzyć lub przekształcać przestrzeń, aby zyskała akceptację i odpowiadała na potrzeby zróżnicowanych grup użytkowników. W badaniach zastosowano metody obserwacyjną i porównawczą wyselekcjonowanych przykładów zlokalizowanych w różnych miejscach na świecie oraz metodę analizy źródeł. Sporządzona lista kryteriów pozwala na ocenę jakości przestrzeni z podkreśleniem rangi aspektu społecznego.

Keywords: Recreation and meeting space; Social aspect.

1. INTRODUCTION

The article presents selected examples of attractive and original spaces, which attract a variety of multi-functional program user group. The work is based on case studies, which were analyzed in several aspects such as: readability, concept originality, compliance with tradition, public communication availability, pedestrian traffic, access for disabled users, quality of small architecture, outdoor flooring/ paving, greenery, social activity, playgrounds, recreation places for adults etc.

Public space is a valuable place of human relations which influences the image, way of functioning and

identity of cities. It may constitute a space where culture, events, information exchange, communication, and trade mingle, a means of conveying content and meaning.

The selection of examples for the paper was based on originality of solutions enhancing active social life.

The aim of the research is an analysis and discussion around selected examples of public spaces which were chosen as original solutions to help enhance the activity of society.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHED PROBLEM

Along the development of cities public spaces have undergone changes. Their shape and character have significantly been influenced by technological advancements. Suburbanization and transport development have damaged the former urban tissue introducing large arteries aimed at car traffic capacity. Car production and availability caused defragmentation of cities and the former multi-functional role of a road was reduced to a transport function. Transit roads have created obstacles for pedestrians and districts have become completely separated from one another and the city center. Cars replaced pedestrian traffic and appropriated many public spaces.

Since the sixties of the 20th century a debate over the negative image of the city has started [7]. The awareness was raised by such phenomena as public spaces appropriation (offices, closed housing estates), changes in urban spaces, the emptiness of centers and migration of inhabitants to suburbs. The postmodernist movement returned to the values of the space with an urban character developed throughout history. It took into account cultural values, identity, local character and values connected with the diversity of places [6].

At the beginning of the 90s in the 20th century a new movement called New Urbanism, begun by Andres Duany, Elisabeth Plater-Zyberk and Jeff Speck, gained dynamics. The authors rely on tradition but also introduce their individual studies concerning, inter alia the problem of American suburbs and research on urban space. They searched for an ideal urban space which would integrate local communities.

3. REQUIREMENTS FOR DESIGNING PUBLIC SPACES – CHANGE DIRECTIONS AND RISKS

In Poland many disadvantageous phenomena in the sphere of architecture and urban planning are noticeable. The most important problems are annexation of space by cars, privatization of public spaces, diminishing public areas, dividing areas, housing ones in particular, which prevent outsiders from entering them. It negatively influences the quality of life in a city.

The 3rd Congress of Polish Urban Development in 2009 defines public spaces in social and economic categories: as a commodity commonly used, shaped on purpose by man in accordance with social princi-

ples and values, whose aim is to meet the needs of local and other communities. A common manner of taking advantage of a space decides about its public character [2].

The Charter enumerates the following actions which help to protect a public space and use it rationally:

- application of a complex analysis of advantages – costs in processes concerning the management of public spaces;
- education of the local community to show new laws and regulations of the global economy and a role of public space in the sustainable development as well as its value for inhabitants;
- integrated management and planning of the development of territorial units;
- mobilization and activation of local communities for participation in processes of planning spatial management and development;
- conducting investment activities in the area of management and revival of public spaces, exclusively on the basis of the local law consistent with the local spatial policy, with a large participation of the society in writing the law and formulating the local policy;
- excluding administrative procedure and decisions which are not under public control as the basis for conducting an investment activity.

The Charter defines eight principles of shaping and using public spaces in cities:

- maximizing the value of the city and its properties by creating a high quality of public spaces;
- complex local planning and urban designing of public spaces based on the results of urban and architectural contests;
- social participation in creating tools of shaping and managing public spaces with active participation of local communities in the process of developing planning documents;
- protecting cultural heritage and local uniqueness as special values of public spaces;
- a balance in creating new public spaces in relation to revived historical spaces;
- an access to public spaces and minimizing conflicts during their development and using;
- shaping public spaces which integrate social groups while respecting their different needs and values systems;
- active usage of public spaces for organizing local events.

The Charter defines the principles, which are found in the following examples. They refer in particular to the context of the environment to create space integrating communities. Presented examples show the consistency in the trend, which constitute the essence of the research topic.

4. RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

Contemporary cities need attractive and original public spaces which should trigger:

- identification of inhabitants with a place of living or the whole city,
- serving mostly pedestrians and cyclists,
- the direct human communication and relations,
- recreation and relaxation as well as realizing many other contemporary needs of inhabitants and tourists.

The largest institution promoting a social model of transforming space is Project for Public Space, a non-profit organization founded in 1975 in New York, whose aim is to aid local communities in creating human-friendly public and semi-public spaces – the so-called placemaking. The method introduced by the Project for Public Space helps communities to define aspirations, needs and priorities. The solutions of specific problems result from deep knowledge and multifaceted evaluation of a place. Experts play a secondary role by realizing a social idea. The method is based on constant evaluation and improvement of both the project and the completed space.

While evaluating public spaces, Project for Public Space stated that good solutions must meet four criteria:

- accessibility and connections, good links with the rest of the city;
- comfort and image;
- usage and level of activity;
- enabling social relations – building links in a community [13].

5. SELECTED EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC SPACES

The paper presents three various examples of spaces which are connected by their social character, layout attractiveness and inventive approach to the landscaping solutions in the proposed assumptions.

5.1. Rike Park, Tbilisi, Georgia

Rike Park is the most recently constructed public space in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. It constitutes an area situated in the heart of the city. The recreation area was created in the picturesque surroundings of the Old City, among the hills on the bank of Mtkvari River adjoining modern buildings, and it is popular both with inhabitants and tourists. Its main idea was to connect the old Tbilisi with the new city districts. The location allows to contemplate breathtaking views: the fortress, the monument of Mother Georgia (Kartvlis Deda) and picturesque buildings in the Old City, churches, among others Metekhi Georgian Orthodox Cathedral and Russian Orthodox Cathedral of Tsminda Sameba (Holy Trinity). In the nearest surroundings there are modern constructions of the Bridge of Peace by Michele De Lucchi, Italian architect, the Presidential Palace on the hill, also by Michele De Lucchi.

On the grounds of the Park there is Aerial Tramway Terminal leading to the hill whose attraction is the Narikala Fortress. The place constitutes an active public space, the city's lounge. It is vibrant with life, especially in summer as it holds concerts, shows and performances. The space is diversified and offers areas for a variety of activities: one can play chess, listen to music or relax. There are picnic places, a fountain, playgrounds and areas for different sports activities, for instance jogging or climbing. The area shows interesting solutions, which are reflected in the architectural and urban details. The variety of greenery (among others native plants) delights with color, form and fragrance [12].



Figure 1.
View over the Rike Park; (Photo: Joanna Zabawa-Krzyzkowska)



Figure 2.
The Rike Park; Photo: (Joanna Zabawa-Krzyrkowska)



Figure 5.
Forms of architecture; (Photo: Kinga Palus)



Figure 3.
Landscape architecture; (Photo: Kinga Palus)



Figure 6.
Amphitheater; (Photo: Kinga Palus)



Figure 4.
Benches in the Rike Park; (Photo: Joanna Zabawa-Krzyrkowska)

5.2. Garscube Landscape Link (Phoenix Flowers), Glasgow, Scotland

A good example of transforming a dangerous and unpleasant space into a user-friendly one is Garscube Landscape Link (Phoenix Flowers) designed by 7N Architects, Rankin Fraser Landscape Architecture in Glasgow, Scotland. It used to be a degraded area sev-

ered from the city as a result of constructing in the 60s of the 20th century a section of M8 motorway. According to the architects from N7 Architects it was an extremely unpleasant surroundings – dark, noisy, dirty and terrifying. The proposed solution made the space more friendly. The most visually striking symbol of changes is the bright red colour of the resin bound surface covering a significant part of the renovated ground and creating a lively contrast with the surrounding elements of the motorway infrastructure. A spectacular effect is also created by fifty aluminium colourful flowers-lamps situated along the promenade [8].

5.3. Melis Stokepark, Hague, Holland

Stokepark in Hague designed by Elger Blitz, Mark van der Eng, Renet Korthas Altes, Jasper van der Schaaf and Lucas Beukers is an example of an integrated space taking into account accessibility for disabled children. It is a public space serving as a playground whose main idea is to enable people with mental and physical disabilities to take advantage of it. Both able-bodied and disabled individuals are



Figure 7.
Garscube Landscape Link; Source: Garscube Landscape Link by RankinFraser Landscape Architecture and 7N Architects



Figure 10.
Garscube Landscape Link before reconstruction; Source: Garscube Landscape Link by RankinFraser Landscape Architecture and 7N Architects



Figure 8.
Illumination; Source: Garscube Landscape Link by RankinFraser Landscape Architecture and 7N Architects



Figure 9.
Drawing plan; Source: Garscube Landscape Link by RankinFraser Landscape Architecture and 7N Architects

Melis Stokepark consists of one unit, which is an ascending ring. It is a space accessible both to healthy children as well as those moving on wheelchairs. Like a ring it encloses a quiet inner area with a sandpit. A place separated in such a way provides a sense of safety for children who should not experience have difficulties in with keeping up in big open spaces. The vertical outer wall is made of strips of wood with perforations and round climbing holds. The interior and exterior of the space is linked by several passage-holes, which also serve as seats or shelters. On the outer ridges of the ring there are security railings, but inside the gentle slopes encourage children to jump into the sand. The railings form protection for the areas just over entrance holes. The structure creates possibilities for repetitive movement activities as turning, sliding, jumping and swinging, construction play (the sandpit) as well as fantasy games (tunnels, platforms, shelters) [1].



Figure 11.
Melis Stokepark – drawing plan;
Source: <http://www.landezine.com/index.php/2010/06/melis-stokepark/>

treated in the same way. The Dutch office firm has created such a space in which there are no “special” devices for children with sight, hearing, physical or mental impairments.



Figure 12.
Melis Stokepark
Source: <http://www.landezine.com/index.php/2010/06/melis-stokepark/>



Figure 13.
Square – Placa de Galla Placidia; (Photo: Joanna Zabawa-Krzyzkowska)

5.4. Plaza – Plaça de Galla Placidia, Barcelona, Spain

Plaça de Galla Placidia is a plaza located in the residential district of Gracia, which is famous for its narrow, small, charming streets and squares. However, the present example is located in a busy section between the streets Travessera de Gracia and Carrer de Neptuno, Carrer de Milton, Carrer de l'Oreneta, and Via Augusta. In 2010 it was open to public. Plaza is surrounded by existing buildings. Developed in collaboration with designers, residents and owners of local shops is now a favorite meeting and recreation place for local community and tourists. It occupies an area of 1600 square meters of public space. Underground parking is located under the square. Into the space of the Square there are blended technical infrastructure elements such as ventilation towers, entrances and exits of the parking an escape route for the underground railway. The existing trees have been left over and the new ones were added creating a barrier separating users from the busy streets. The part of the rest is covered with grass, bushes and flowers. There are water fountains, modern lighting and furnishing details: benches and a variety of items such as stone spheres or chess tables in the shape of flower. Traditional children games like a hopscotch, noughts and crosses were painted on the ground. Designed as a modern playground for children, it is separated but also integrated with the Plaza. Elders can rest and enjoy watching the children play and watch entire neighborhood.

On the ground floor of the buildings there are numerous shops and services: newsagent, cafe, bakery. The plaza occasionally hosts cultural and sports events for the residents of the area.



Figure 14.
Square – Placa de Galla Placidia; (Photo: Joanna Zabawa-Krzyzkowska)



Figure 15.
Playground; (Photo: Joanna Zabawa-Krzyzkowska)



Figure 16.
Surface of the square; (Photo: Joanna Zabawa-Krzyzkowska)

6. CASE STUDY – SUMMARY OF COMPARISON

The summary is based on a comparison list, taking into account qualities of selected examples of public space. Regarding the form, the following elements were selected: readability, concept originality, compliance with tradition, equal availability for all, street furnishings outdoor flooring/ paving, landscaping, triggered social activities, playgrounds, recreation places for adults, services.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Encouraging activity is one of the main elements of the development of modern meeting places, complementing accessibility, communication links, aesthetic aspects, functional program. Creation of a public space should be preceded by selection of location, adequate to the needs. Then introduction of a suitable composition, blending into the existing fabric and respecting the context of the location is another very important element in the structure of the city. Spaces should therefore be versatile and also site-specific. Another element is the selection of appropriate equipment, providing safe and friendly surroundings. It is also important to allow access to such areas for people with disabilities in the most subtle and unnoticed way. The function of these spaces should be diversified that everyone can find something for themselves. This will allow meeting neighbors in one place, entailing local acquaintances, common understanding and integration. A well-designed public space prevents the phenomenon of havoc domineering within downtown areas.

Table 1.
Evaluation of the quality of space according to established criteria

<i>The name of public space</i>	<i>Rike Park</i>	<i>Garscube Landscape Link (Phoenix Flowers)</i>	<i>Melis Stokepark</i>	<i>Plaça de Galla Placidia</i>
localization	Tbilisi, Georgia: city center	Scotland Glasgow: space under overpass	Haga, Holand: public land in the structure of settlements	Barcelona, Spain: square in the residential district
legibility	+++	+++	+++	+++
concept originality	+++	+++	+++	+++
relationship with tradition	+	not applicable	not applicable	++
easy access by public transport	+++	+++	+++	+++
pedestrian traffic	+++	+++	+++	+++
accessibility for people with disabilities	+++	+++	+++	+++
street furnishings	+++	++	+++	+++
diversified surfaces/floorings	+++	+++	+++	+++
landscape	+++	+++	+++	+++
social activity	+++	++	+++	+++
playgrounds	+++	not applicable	+++	+++
recreation places for adults	+++	++	+++	+++
services	++	not applicable	not applicable	+++

evaluation : +++ very good , ++ good , + poor
Source: The authors

8. SUMMARY

The analyzed examples form a basis of successful solutions of reviving public recreational spaces. All presented places are recognized for their attractiveness, originality of interesting spaces both in the urban sphere as well as architectural details; they use color, variety of materials and are fully accessed by all prospective visitors. The flexibility of solutions allows wide choice of behaviors important for recreational spaces. In addition, the possibility of using space for cultural events both on the city and on local levels are important factors increasing vitality of the city.

REFERENCES

- [1] *Barańska K.*; Bez wykluczenia. Melis Stokepark. Carve (Without exclusion. Melis Stokepark. Carve). Architektura & Biznes, No.03, 2012 (in Polish) http://www.architekturaibiznes.com.pl/start.php?opt=sites&item_id=1751
- [2] *Cichy-Pazder E., Markowski T.*; Karta Przestrzeni Publicznej. Materiały III Kongresu Urbanistyki Polskiej. Nowa Urbanistyka – nowa jakość życia (Public Space Charter. Materials III Polish Urbanism Congress. New Urbanism – a new quality of life). Biblioteka Urbanisty. Urbanista, No.14, 2009, p.234-237 (in Polish)
- [3] *Cullen G.*; The Concise Townscape, The Architectural Press, London, 1971
- [4] *Gehl J.*; Życie między budynkami – użytkowanie przestrzeni publicznych (Life between buildings – using public space). Wydawnictwo RAM, Kraków 2009
- [5] *Gehl J., Gemzoe L.*; New City Spaces, The Danish Architectural Press, Copenhagen 2001
- [6] *Gyurkovich J.*; The public space of the contemporary city. Technical magazine, special series “Architecture”, Vol.9 – A / 2005, Vol.1 ed. University of Technology, Kraków 2005, p.7
- [7] *Jacobs J.*; The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Vintage Books Edition, New York, 1992, p.372
- [8] *Karpińska M.*; Flower Power. Architektura & Biznes, No.05, 2011, http://www.architekturaibiznes.com.pl/start.php?opt=sites&item_id=1553
- [9] *Krier L.*; The Architecture of Community, Publishing word / image Territories 2011
- [10] *Lynch K.*; The image of the City, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1960
- [11] *Pluta K.*; Przestrzenie publiczne miast europejskich. Projektowanie urbanistyczne (The public spaces of European cities. Urban design). Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Warszawskiej, Warszawa 2012 (in Polish)
- [12] <http://architect.com/silviavercher/project/tbilisi-rike-park>
- [13] <http://www.pps.org/>
- [14] <http://www.landezine.com/index.php/2010/06/melis-stokepark/>
- [15] <http://www.landezine.com/index.php/2010/06/melis-stokepark/>