

Waterfronts, Public Spaces and Tourist Potential

Agnieszka Wójcik

Cracow University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture, Kraków, Poland

email: aga_vv@op.pl

Abstract

Contemporary cities also known as postindustrial cities are created by dynamic urban development. One of the most significant processes is related to waterfront areas and their new public spaces. What does it mean for the identity of a city, for its potential on the “tourist market”? How deeply can new urban structures change the image of a city? The author would like to describe this topic exemplified by two Polish cities: Gdańsk and Kraków.

Keywords: waterfront, public space, identity, urban structure

Introduction

Contemporary cities also known as postindustrial cities are created by dynamic urban development. One of the most significant processes is related to waterfront areas and their new public spaces. What does it mean for the identity of a city, for its potential on the “tourist market”? How deeply can new urban structures change the image of a city? The author would like to describe this topic exemplified by two Polish cities: Gdańsk and Kraków.

Gdańsk and Kraków are two dissimilar cities with different roots and origins, different climate as well as spatial, social and cultural character. One element they share is the Vistula River upon which they are located. The author is interested in the relation between the structure of a city and its waterfront edge as well as its usages in the creation of a new urban quality. The inclusion of waterfront areas into the systems of the public spaces of both cities is one of the elementary guidelines in their municipal strategies. The construction of a new level of identification, which may be created by the public spaces of waterfronts, is also related to their location within the urban structure. In the case of Kraków, it is a central position resulting from the historical growth of this city; in the case of Gdańsk, the transformation zone is situated more peripherally and may lead to the formation of a new centre.

We can state that the phenomena which take place in contemporary cities are spread on the axis: the competitiveness of a city – the shrinkage of a city. The same phenomena determined the development and sometimes degradation of cities over the span of epochs; these days, we can notice their escalation. The tourist attractiveness of a city, based on its historical tissue or created by contemporary structures which shape new urban identification, could be treated as a kind of antidote.

Gdańsk – The Young City

The Young City is the area between the so-called Main City and the Dead Vistula waterfront. Founded by the Teutonic Order, it was expected to become the natural competition for the Main City which supported the Polish cause. However, the strong economic development of this district became a very troublesome fact for the bourgeoisie attached to the Old Town. In 1455, a postulate led to the total demolition of the structure of this part of the city. An additional barrier to the northward development of the city was the construction of the city walls whose defensive functions required the creation of a fortress foreground which made it impossible to rise any permanent buildings in this area¹. For 400 years, the area was virtually devoid of urban buildings.

The mid 19th century opened new possibilities of development. Johann Klawitter, an industrialist from Gdańsk, initiated the construction of a modern shipyard which dominated the structural, functional, social and cultural character of the waterfront up to this today.² In parallel with activities related to the formation of the structure of the shipyard, plans of developing the Young City, after removing the remains of the earth fortifications and opening it to the structure of Gdańsk, appeared. The most interesting ones included a design based on J. Stubben's instructions – he planned to introduce a *ring-strasse* which was supposed to become the main public space in this area³.

Plans to separate the shipyard area from the structure of the city, prepared in the 1930s, were challenged for a short time by Prof. W. Czerny's design. He suggested drawing a "shipyard axis" from the Central Station area which would connect both separated districts structurally and functionally. His concept was replaced with a plan of the spatial development of the centre of Gdańsk, prepared in the 1960s, which finally legitimated the separation of both zones. Another period of the development of the Dead Vistula waterfront opened in the autumn of 1994 when a team supervised by Prof. M. Kochanowski from Gdańsk University of Technology was commissioned to prepare a Study of the Development of the Northern Part of the Centre of Gdańsk.

The Study of the Development of the Northern Part of the Centre of Gdańsk was completed in 1996. It comprised most grounds of the Shipyard, the Gasworks and the "Elmor" Factory. The main assumptions of the Study included the creation of a new transport artery whose course is supposed to have a decisive impact on the spatial shape of the structure of the New City – Nowa Wałowa Street. It is expected to take the east-west direction, parallel to the waterfront yet inside the area under transformation which makes it possible to open the waterfront edge for a public space.

Other significant assumptions concerning the crystallization of a new framework of public spaces are the continuation of the public space of the waterfront edge in the shape of a

¹ Lorens P. (2004/12), *Historia miejsca i tradycje planistyczne Młodego Miasta*, Urbanista, Warsaw

² On account of its excellent location, the shipyard was praised highly. The Prussian authorities developed warship building which soon led to its nationalization. After World War I, the shipyard was taken over by an international consortium; 60% of its capital belonged to the Allies. The period after World War II brought about another nationalization which facilitated the construction of the Lenin Shipyard. The political events in the 1970s and 1980s turned the Shipyard into a place with symbolic significance and built its new image in national and social consciousness.

³ This design was implemented in a residual form only – cf. Lorens P. (2004/12), *Historia miejsca i tradycje planistyczne Młodego Miasta*, Urbanista, Warsaw.

boulevard extended from the Long Littoral to the grounds of the Imperial Shipyard⁴ and the development of two basic connections between the waterfront edge and the existing central structure. They were supposed to come into existence as “The Road to Freedom” and extended Hevelius St. At the same time, some work was done on a plan of the spatial development of a fragment comprising Solidarity Square at first and then almost the entire area located on the southern edge of the Dead Vistula.

After the Shipyard went broke, the Synergia'99 Developer⁵ was founded – it took over the responsibility for further programmes and designs. The team from Gdańsk University of Technology (still supervised by Prof. M. Kochanowski) and an American urban planning office – Sasaki Associates Inc. (under the supervision of Dennis Pieprz) were asked to cooperate. In 2000, this cooperation bore fruit in the form of “Vision Master Plan” which comprised the entire area of the Young City and the northern part where shipways are still active. The master plan maintained the basic premises of the Study concerning the principal connections in the zone of the continuity of the system of public spaces. A new system of public spaces was supposed to continue the existing channels of public spaces and direct them to the waterfront edge. In a clear manner, this operation binds the structure of the city with its trump card – the vicinity of the waterfront. New channels of public spaces stretch in the direct neighbourhood of former docks which – in the authors' intention – are to become elements of the identification of the new structure together with a promenade.

Two channels remain particularly important: The Road to Freedom (connected with Solidarity Square), which is expected to become a public space dominated by historical meanings, and extended Hevelius Street with an unconventionally shaped square by the Imperial Shipyard dock. The Imperial Shipyard is turning into a new heart of the public life of the new district, while Leniwiki Square, located within, is supposed to become the most attractive public space of commercial character. Its very good accessibility makes it possible to introduce a number of public services⁶.

New designing premises include a proposition of connecting the Imperial Shipyard grounds with the area which is still industrially active (east-west connection). The introduction of the principle of shaping a structure on the basis of a traditional block of buildings was an important assumption for the whole system of public spaces.

Work on a concept of the Young City was complemented with the International Conference “Large-Scale Developments” organized by Gdańsk University of Technology in 2000. It attracted many European specialists in the field of shaping waterfront transformations and finished with a publication with the same title.⁷ In 2002, work on a development plan was taken over by the Office of the Development of Gdańsk. In effect, two plans were prepared: “The New City⁸ – the Shipyard, Solidarity Square” and “The New City – North”. Their future

⁴ relicts of the 19th-century shipyard layout

⁵ Synergia'99 acts as a ground developer and coordinates designing work.

⁶ Pieprz D. (2000/08), *Wizja zagospodarowania terenów po Stoczni Gdańskiej – Sasaki Associates, USA*, www.mlodemiasto.pl

⁷ Participants in the Conference: Prof. R. Bruttomesso (chief of the *City on Water* Centre, Venice), Prof. H. Meyer (Technological University Delft), Prof. D. Frenchman (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Prof. R. Schaefer (Berlin), Prof. Z. Zuziak (CUT, Kraków), Prof. S. Gzel (WUT, Warsaw), Prof. N. Juzwa (SUT, Gliwice) and others

⁸ This name was introduced while the ODG was preparing the plan (mistranslation: Jungstadt (German) – Young City, not New City).

implementation will have a strong impact on the formation of a new image of the city based upon its most recent 20th-century history.

Kraków – Sewing the City Together

The development of the City of Kraków was determined by its contact with the Vistula River. In spite of its huge influence on the economic and cultural development, the waterfront did not seem to stimulate the development of the system of public spaces in the urban structure. The topography of this area was responsible for such a situation to a large extent. Big differences in heights prevented direct contact with the river⁹. For Wawel Hill, located next to the waterfront, the Vistula acted as a defensive barrier. The layout of public spaces (following the main trade routes), axial in relation to the riverbanks, was finally strengthened with a new urban structure resulting from the foundation charter¹⁰. Another significant fact for the further development of Kraków was the foundation of the independent town of Kazimierz in 1335.

Kraków itself remained within the boundaries demarcated in 1257 till 1791. Then, the reforms of the Grand Parliament incorporated some neighbouring administrative units, mainly Kleparz and Kazimierz, into it. It ultimately determined the northward-southward direction of the development of the city and – considering the location of Kazimierz – brought the city closer to the river. Kraków owes its characteristic spatial construction to the annexation of some separate urban units which often acted as independent towns¹¹.

In the partitioning period, two decisions of high importance to the further spatial shape of Kraków were taken on the Austrian authorities' initiative: the foundation of the new town of Podgórze on the opposite bank of the Vistula (1772) and the issue of a decree on demolishing the city walls (1806) which opened new possibilities for the urban development of the city. Another important event in the historical development of Kraków was the design of arranging its streets and squares as well as improving its sewage and water supply system (1871). In 1880, this design, suggested by the President of Kraków J. Dietl, led to the construction of the first modern transport course – Dietl Avenues in place of the filled-up Old Vistula riverbed. The intensifying urban development and the annexation of the neighbouring communes imposed a new regulation of the city structure. A survey awarded at a competition for “The plan of regulating Greater Kraków” became the basis for the development of the city in the interwar period¹².

At the same time, the demilitarization of the stronghold of Kraków facilitated the further development of the peripheral areas and, consequently, the creation of a new transport artery on the fortification line. Shaping the so-called second ring road – Trzech Wieszców Avenue

⁹ A. Pancewicz classifies Kraków as one of the cities which lie on a hill by a river or on high terraces of its valley – cf. Pancewicz A.B. (2004), *Rzeka w krajobrazie miasta*, Silesian University of Technology Press, Gliwice, p. 54.

¹⁰ The foundation charter was issued by Boleslav the Bashful in 1257. More information on the historical development of Kraków in: Zin W. (ed.) (1986), *Zabytki architektury i urbanistyki w Polsce. Odbudowa i konserwacja. Miasta historyczne, t. 1*, Arkady, Warsaw, pp. 215-260.

¹¹ The expansion of Kraków through the annexation of numerous urban complexes is described by: Motak M. (2004), *Transformacja historycznych struktur urbanistycznych we współczesne “miasta w mieście” na przykładzie Krakowa* [in:] „City within the City”, 9th International Conference at the Institute of Urban Design, Kraków.

¹² 1st award – a survey supervised by J. Czajkowski, W. Ekielski, T. Stryjeński, L. Wojtyczek and K. Wyczyński.

– enriched the urban structure with a new public space, important in the scale of the city. Both Dietl Avenues and Trzech Wieszców Avenues made corridors of public spaces directed towards the Vistula River.

Another significant moment in the process of integrating the river with the urban structure was the incorporation of Podgórze into the administrative area of the city (1915). This act changed the position of Kraków from a city located on one side of the river into a city annexing both riverbanks which facilitated its concentric development. The dominating direction of the development of Kraków altered visibly in 1949 when it was decided to locate Nowa Huta¹³ northeast of the city centre. Other plans of the spatial development of Kraków did not solve the problem of connecting the new structure with the city centre. Some of them were repealed¹⁴. Therefore, the structural development of Kraków was not closely related to the waterfront edge anymore.

In the postwar period, areas lying on the right Vistula bank (Dębniki, Ludwinów) and in the eastern direction (industrial Zabłocie) were still developing, while boulevards of recreational character were implemented in the section between Wawel and the Piłsudski Bridge. However, no attempts were made to define the character of the frontages on the waterfront edge. In the 1960s and 1970s, some actions were taken which aimed at putting the structure of the city centre, especially the Old Town, Stradom and Kazimierz, in order¹⁵. No-one tried, however, to determine the role and rank of the waterfronts for the urban structure. In the process of its further development, the city has lost many of its connections with the waterfront edge in the structural layer of a public space.

In the current Study of the Conditions and Directions of Developing the City of Kraków, the Vistula waterfronts rank as strategic areas. In the municipal policy, the structural and functional quality of the public spaces of the Vistula valley are among the basic premises of the policy of sustainable development. The condition of protecting the silhouette of the heart of the city is of great importance for shaping its image and identity.

According to the municipal policy, the Vistula corridor is expected to become a new city axis of recreational and cultural character. With this end in view, a series of actions leading to a structural and functional change in individual waterfront sections were taken. One of the most significant alterations introduced in the north side was the revitalization of the 19th-century city abattoir objects. The creation of an active service and culture complex¹⁶ there was also related to the transformation of the surrounding public space. A wider scale of activities concerns the transformation of the south waterfront. Its changeable character was determined by the historic structures in the district of Podgórze and the postindustrial facilities in the district of Zabłocie. The history of the twentieth century, especially World War II, left its visible stamp on both districts.

¹³ The plan of Nowa Huta was prepared at "Miastoprojekt" under the supervision of T. Ptaszycki.

¹⁴ One plan (1952; supervised by T. Ptaszycki) assumed the creation of the third ring road and new residential complexes separated with green areas reaching the historic centre in the form of wedges, cf. Zin W. (ed.) (1986), *Zabytki architektury i urbanistyki w Polsce. Odbudowa i konserwacja. Miasta historyczne, t. 1*, Arkady, Warsaw, p. 225.

¹⁵ The first urban surveys are: "General premises, theses and an urban concept for a detailed plan of the spatial development of the centre of the City of Kraków" (1969) and "A study of functional and spatial transformations in the centre of Kraków" – more information in: Zin W. (ed.) (1986), *Zabytki architektury i urbanistyki w Polsce. Odbudowa i konserwacja. Miasta historyczne, t. 1*, Arkady, Warsaw, pp. 228-229.

¹⁶ Designed by IMB Asymetria, 2004-2005.

The strong activation of the south waterfront is related to the implementation of a footbridge with a bicycle path¹⁷ connecting Kazimierz with Podgórze. Another step will be the implementation of Cricoteka – a museum devoted to the theatrical visionary Tadeusz Kantor in the adapted 19th-century power plant in Podgórze¹⁸.

Moving eastwards, we get to Zabłocie. The history of World War II left its mark here. That is why most transformations in this area are based upon strengthened identification with the most recent and tragic history of Kraków. At present, the entire area of Zabłocie is included in the Local Plan of Spatial Development. This area consists of the eastern part of Old Podgórze and the grounds of Old and East Zabłocie to Stoczniewców St. Activities within Zabłocie are mainly revitalizing procedures which aim at improving the quality of the local residents' lives and the whole structure as well as introducing spatial order inside.

An important postulate in the Plan is the gradual development of the public zone based on the historical structure of the district. This process began with rebuilding Bohaterów Getta Square. Another stage was the implementation of the Museum of Contemporary Art – MOCAK¹⁹ which uses the historic structure of Oscar Schindler's Enamel Factory. The extension of Kraków Tertiary School is planned, too, as a significant factor in the public life of this area.

References

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¹⁷ Designed by Prof. Andrzej Getter's Authorial Studio of Designs and Arts; implementation: 2009-2010.

¹⁸ Designed by IQ2 Consortium: Wizja Ltd. – Stanisław Deńko, nsMoonStudio Ltd.; implementation planned for 2013.

¹⁹ Designed by Claudio Nardi Architects, 2010.