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back to the sense of the city

## RETURN TO THE CITY

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### Abstract

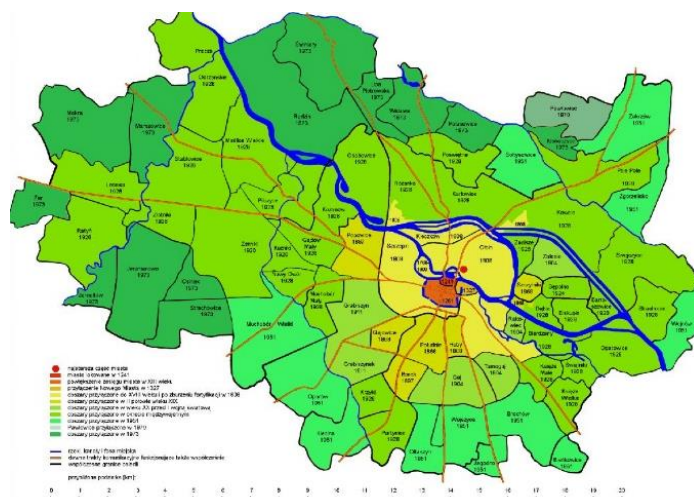
Attempts to revolutionize the spatial structure of Wroclaw emerged in the early twentieth century. Max Berg introduced, in the years 1919 -1925, redevelopment plan of the city center involving the demolition of inter-market buildings and introduction of modern skyscrapers which are based on the American model of high buildings of the city from the late nineteenth century. Ernst May postulated the decentralization of Wroclaw by building a grid of the satellite districts for 50 to 100 thousand inhabitants, acting as independent towns with their own administrative, economic and cultural services. Adolf Rading in his visions expanded Wroclaw linearly adjusting the shape of the city to the course of the Odra River and the main rail-road trail. Expansion - intense urban sprawl - began to realize half a century later. Bedroom suburbs of metropolis started to surround Wroclaw, without adequate facilities and links with the city. The chaotic development model of urban agglomeration was in conflict with thoughtful assumptions formed half-century ago. In the nineties, together with the political economic and social transformation, buildings in Wroclaw were intensively built. These were mostly single-family houses. Sprawl, as previously global phenomenon, has now become a nationwide problem. Some residents, tempted by attractions of suburban house, moved out of the city. It took only two decades that enthusiasm waned. Reality and sociological studies have begun to argue that this model of functioning, without the execution of all elements of the spatial model surrounded by the satellite housing estates (mainly communication connections) is not optimal. The latest concepts of development of Wroclaw assume a "return to the city" and making better use of its urban potential. A few peripheral districts of the city try to be subjected to activation and revitalization, aiming at creating there new identity, remaining well connected to the city center. This is achieved, among others, by the creation of local centers with markets, using the tradition of

places. These are mainly: Psie Pole, Leśnica and Brochów. An interesting experience also seems to be the implementation of the new WUWA on Żerniki. The analysis of the indicated cases can formulate initial conclusions concerning the reasonableness and attractiveness of "back to the city".

## Territorial development of Wrocław

The imperfection of the urban space, both functional and formal, performed in varying degrees at every stage of development of the city, but only the age of industry and the associated rapid urban growth has caused that problems of cities were multiplied. Sigfried Giedion, assessing the urban development in the 50s of the last century, wrote: *"Starting from 1870, the development of big cities is still sought in their current state - the state of useless instruments"*.<sup>1</sup> Territorial expansion of Wrocław acted in accordance with the economic development, contributing in turn to an increase in the number of inhabitants. The administrative boundaries of the city in subsequent extensions were incorporated not only undeveloped areas, but also the surrounding towns and villages that were previously independent bodies. Fig. 1.

Figure 1. The territorial development of Wrocław – indicative map



Source: [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podzia%C5%82\\_administracyjny\\_Wroc%C5%82awia](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podzia%C5%82_administracyjny_Wroc%C5%82awia), access 25.02.2016, time: 18:40

Wrocław, in the nineteenth century, faced with a shortage of vacant land, the city was overcrowded and thousands of residents lived in substandard conditions. Attempts to extend the area of the city ran up against resistance from the rural district, which feared the amount of earned taxes. Finally, despite the great cost to the city, the territory was expanded in 1868, and again in 1897<sup>2</sup>. The growth in the XX century held in principle in some of the most spectacular

<sup>1</sup> Giedion S.: *Przestrzeń, czas i architektura. Narodziny nowej tradycji*, P.W.N. Warsaw 1968, p. 748.

<sup>2</sup> Kononowicz W., *Wrocław. Kierunki rozwoju urbanistycznego w okresie międzywojennym*. Wrocław University of Technology, Wrocław 1997, p. 17.

stages: during the Second World War in 1904; 1920 and 1928<sup>3</sup> (at that time, the leading architects in Wrocław promoted their own concepts of development of the city, one of them based on decentralization of Wrocław was developed by Max Berg<sup>4</sup>), and in the postwar period in 1951 and 1973. After 1973, the administrative area of Wrocław was not increased. The number of areas involved in the city was sufficient for both the construction of new housing estates as well as for infrastructure development. Including new, territorially large areas on the outskirts of the city in the post-war period, was the procedure not completely understandable and justifiable from an economical point of view. Wrocław at the time had too many free and fully improved areas in its borders for possible development.<sup>5</sup>

### The post war period - the time of prefabricated housing estates

In the period after the Second World War, when the housing needs far exceeded supply, the systems of prefabrication resulted especially in communist countries, in which *modern housing estates* also were affected by the low level of performance that the already fragile ideological foundations of the *functional city* started crack.<sup>6</sup> The unified way of living for the unified citizen and his family contributed to the imbalance between humanism and technology<sup>7</sup> (*"In the 60s and 70s, on the wave of post-modern conception of science and social development, scientists and journalists began to regret the imbalance between the two basic forces of the development of modern human environment: humanism and technology. The advantage of technological civilization on humanism caused the loss of sight of the primary societies, the highest value, which is the man. About the humanist attitude, we can talk when in relation man - technique - human needs are preferred (Aleksandrowicz, 1974), [...] urban architectural creations are nothing other than exemplification of the above relationship. They integrate, or at least should integrate the technical, functional, semiotic, aesthetic, psychosocial and environmental elements and they co-create the human environment with nature and the landscape. However, while adjusting metropolitan housing environments, one comes to the conclusion that, in most cases, the considerations of the humanities or the wider ecology were not so important to create*

<sup>3</sup> The interwar period was of great importance for the development of spatial Wrocław. It was then that because the city authorities, through the development of the first master plan (1924) and the new construction law (1926), effective tools to influence the construction development of the city in the aspects: technical economic, health, social and cultural, were granted. Also, a significant expansion of the boundaries of the city in April 1928 marked a further, consistent phase of the planned expansion of Wrocław. Kononowicz W., *Wrocław. Kierunki rozwoju urbanistycznego w okresie międzywojennym*. The publishing house of the Wrocław University of Technology, 1997, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> The originality of the concept lies in Berg peering centers of decentralization of Wrocław in towns distant about 30 km from the city. The principle of decentralization has taken in the twenties by Ernst May in the system of the so-called "Satellites". Despite the apparent convergence, concepts of Berg and Maya differed widely. Berg, was a strong supporter of limiting the spatial Wrocław and expand it by independent suburban satellites, also those subjected to the limitation. He protested against the sprawl of the city by annexing municipalities. Berg insisted the next annexation of municipalities. Kononowicz W., *Wrocław. Kierunki rozwoju urbanistycznego w okresie międzywojennym*. Wrocław 1997, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Czajka R., *Granice współczesnego miasta a ekspansja terytorialna (with an example of Wrocław)*. in: ULAR 5, *Między miastem a nie-miastem*. p. 273.

<sup>6</sup> Functional zoning within the spirit of the city (*The Athens Charter* 1933) helped to change the form of cities. The standard housing unit, co-created with different sizes and lengths of blocks, apartment blocks and super-credits have been located since on the outskirts of cities.

<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, developed, among others, by Helena and Simon Syrkus, advocates cooperatives and modern architecture in the 30s of the twentieth century, methods for humanizing residential environment have been abandoned in socialist construction of housing estates in Poland.

the".<sup>8</sup> Luxembourg architect Léon Krier speaks about industrialization construction not so well and I quote: *"The industrialization of construction on a large scale in many ways turned out to be a fiasco. It has not led to any significant technical improvements. It did not reduce the amount of time of the construction or costs. However, it significantly reduced the life of the building. It did not affect the increase in labor productivity. It did not improve working conditions on the site, nor did not create more jobs. On the contrary, industrialization has caused the destruction of most of the thirty-nine building trades with their huge resource of technical knowledge. The industrialization also proved to be incapable of developing satisfactory solutions to the typological, morphological, social and economic problems, associated with urban centers and the landscape."*<sup>9</sup>

In addition, unification of dwellings differentiating them only by the surface depending on the number of people living in them brought the man to the role of another, even though the mobile piece of furniture in her/his apartment. The man from the subject became an object. The right of individuals and families to be different, to individual needs and interests was violated and yet *"apartment belongs to the life circle of the man and the satisfaction of the apartment is the same as life satisfaction, which again affect labor relations and work environment, the possibility to form free time or for example, a sense of overall safety and purpose of action"*<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, the prefabricated large housing structures confirm the thesis given by P. Johnson that *"architecture is the art of wasting space."*<sup>11</sup>

It is also not a coincidence that these large housing estates colloquially known in Poland as "blokowiska" and although the name is derived from the technology of construction buildings, the translation would trace also in the French word *bloquer*, which means encumber, fence, taking the place unnecessarily. (sic!).

Among many negative implementations, there were also positive realizations in which the known disadvantages of *modern housing estates* have been eliminated, thanks to the creativity of designers, through the subordination of structures built from elements of nature. They made serious steps towards reintegration into the housing function of nature, treating the environment as an *"extension of the apartment and stating that it should provide the possibility of regeneration, recreation and social development for a resident"*<sup>12</sup>, in line with the demands contained in Cologne Recommendations from 1957 and their update actualization from 1971.

Therefore, one of the most important points on the agenda of the twentieth Congress of the International Union of Architects (Beijing, 1999) was a postulate of the need to continue the personalized forms, rooted in local culture and tradition, which clearly demonstrates the importance of the problem.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Borowik I., *Blokowiska, Miejski habitat w oglądzie socjologicznym*. Wrocław 2003. p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Krier L., *Architektura. Wybór czy przeznaczenie.*, Arkady, Warsaw 2001, p. 194.

<sup>10</sup> Schmidt B., *Ład przestrzeni*, PIW 1981.

<sup>11</sup> Schneider-Skalska G., *Kształtowanie zdrowego środowiska mieszkaniowego. Wybrane zagadnienia.*, Krakow 2004, p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> Schneider-Skalska G., *Kształtowanie zdrowego środowiska mieszkaniowego. Wybrane zagadnienia.*, Krakow 2004, p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> Chwalibóg K., *Architektura na progu milenium.*, Komunikat SARP 9-10, Warsaw 1999.

### The complements of urban breaches - infill buildings and urban sprawl

Wroclaw as a result of war and massive destruction in 1945 was not really entirely rebuilt. Urban planning policy operating in the period of socialist economy, which the main goal was to build as much as possible unified housing units, which often do not respect the historic building systems, resulted in a large spatial chaos. It manifested itself, among others, the creation of a number of gaps and breaches in the compact city tissue, in which the pseudo-modernist projects were formed with difficulties and with the violation of fundamental canons of design. Lack of consistency and continuation in building the city deformed its whole quarters, which traditionally understood urbanism defined the city center of a major European center. Simultaneously, the process of supplementing empty and free spaces in the building, which although individual projects represent different architectural level should be assessed positively, was started. Its basic value was just bonding urban tissue lacerated by war. You can also talk about the fillings in the context of the model to continue to live in the city, city center, as an alternative to housing in remote new, industrial, bedroom house estates.

In Wroclaw, infill buildings were intensified in the 80s and 90s of the last century. The period of political and economic transformation after 1989 has activated an important factor in favor of locating the buildings as additions to the existing built-up area. The economics i.e. land prices for developers are very crucial. In a free market economy, especially in large cities, the attractive land prices began to grow. Each free land in the city was at a premium. A price per square meter of an apartment guaranteed to investors appropriate returns. And for architects designing the infill building became a very interesting professional challenge, in the context of writing the new buildings in existing, often historic, surroundings. That dialogue "old with new" is always a fascinating design experience, in which there is no ready-made templates. The scale of seal construction was so strong that the term of "Wroclaw seal" was functioned, functioned, suggesting that this type of building was at that time Wroclaw specialty. It was probably a bit exaggerated. And maybe considering the individualism of some embodiments of Wroclaw seals have become so recognizable. It is worth here to mention the certain realizations of postmodern architect Wojciech Jarzabek. Fig. 2.

**Figure 2. The postmodern infill on Wybrzeze Wyspianskiego street, Arch. W. Jarzabek.**



Source: author



Somehow in opposition to the infill construction, opposite phenomenon in a free market economy has increased - urban sprawl. Enrichment of society, the emergence of the middle class, but also the growing population reflected in new models of residence. The process of expanding urban areas and areas with a lower appropriation of urbanization took over not only the proximal and distal suburbs, but also the rural areas. Very often this process is uncontrolled, with conscious, planned suburbanization having little in common. It is characterized by great spatial chaos and architectural mess. The idea of a house outside the city captured the minds of many Poles. "Townsmen" enjoyed new estate housing without a thorough analysis of the consequences, for example, poor road infrastructure, which complicates daily work or school travel, but also without reflection on the nature and specificity of the environment (including architecture).

### Back to the city

A few decades of urban sprawl is the sufficient time to draw conclusions. The analysis of the positives and negatives of such a model of residence often leads to consider the possibility ... to return to the city. Its historically shaped attraction is not able to replace the suburban / rural idyll. The idea of a "return to the city" should be supported by the development of architecture and urban space. Living in a city must be attractive to residents also in architectural – urban aspects. Zbigniew Maćków appeals to this way of thinking, one of the most active architects currently in Wrocław. Many significant buildings have designed in his studio, which were built in the last two decades. One of them is the service - residential building built on the Powstancow Slaskich square. The building was completed in 2011 (the project was realized between 2008 - 2011). Fig. 3, 4.

**Figure 3. Thespian building in an urban context on the Powstancow Slaskich square**

**Figure 4. Terrace-shaped Thespian's building**



Source: <http://www.mackow.pl/> access 15.03.2016, time: 12:40.

In the context of the topic of the article, it is worth to cite authorial assumptions, which introduce and explain the concept of design. Zbigniew Maćków emphasizes that the starting point for thinking about this realization was the desire for contemporary, modern interpretation of a residential building - townhouse, in this particular urban architectural environment "Sweet house

*outside the city - driveway, convenient two-car garage, a terrace with awning and garden, necessarily with a gazebo, silence, birds and frail trees. This is the archetype of happy residence according to the advertising message. On Mondays overcrowded roads, breakneck combinations in front of the schools, hour and a half of listening to the radio, cinema or theater once a year, rather DVD on the way. [...] While constructing our building, we wondered if the man still wants to live in a real dense city? Is he able to adapt its physiology [...]. We architecturally tried to compose a contemporary townhouse. [...] If there are still real residents of the city, this is the house that we did for them*".<sup>14</sup> Thespian is certainly the very successful and important realization for contemporary architecture in Wrocław. It presents the successful establishment of a tradition in urban planning of its location and a completely new architectural quality. The characteristic circular square of Powstancow Slaskich where Thespian was built, is one of the most important and recognizable squares in Wrocław. As part of a few kilometers long representative axis of the two-lane street of Powstancow Slaskich, connecting the south of the city with the city centre, marks the center of a vast urban concept covering a large part of the "Krzyki" district. Before the Second World War this part of Wrocław was the most beautiful. It had the metropolitan character. A method of forming the space was very prospective. It was evident in the approach to the design, especially urban design, thinking in terms of the vision of the city, a vision in the perspective not of the immediate, but a vision of the following decades of the city's development.

This way of thinking will not seem obvious today, unfortunately if we analyze the current trends in the spatial development of many Polish cities. Thespian building also stands out architecturally. Designers have proposed a completely new Wrocław aesthetic quality of the object of the housing function. The service – office function, located in the project design on the lower levels, seems in this aspect less important, because the type of façade used in the building of this function is slightly less surprising. Thespian is namely mostly monochromatic glass lump with a double facade. Only the rear exterior walls have been resolved in a different technology.

Architectural quality of Thespian draws attention without a doubt. Design assumptions of architects were implemented consistently and clearly. So, whether this ideological aspect mentioned by Zbigniew Maćków describing his project as a contemporary urban tenement, which can be an attractive alternative to suburban cottage has been implemented. The building is already a few years, therefore, the first conclusions can already be drawn. Interesting architecture, modern technologies to facilitate use of the building, a convenient location in the widely perceived as a good area of the city, well connected with the near center and other areas of Wrocław, proximity services, etc. - all this seems to be a sufficient basis for successful implementation. However, while observing the structure of the buyers of premises and a way of the use of them, there is no way no to note that the assumed housing function does not dominate. A large part of the residential premises became a service: law firms, the notary office, etc.

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<sup>14</sup> *Architektura – murator*, nr 04/2011, p. 48-52.

The economic aspect and the commercial values of the building and its location proved to be more viable. However, we cannot yet speak about a complete success of Thespian townhouse according the imagination of architects.

A similar approach to the functioning of the urban structure of a single object, in terms of topic of this article, we can also speak about the other Wrocław spectacular realization - Sky Tower building. The comparison seems to be at first glance ridiculous. The Sky Tower and Thespian are two completely different buildings, primarily due to the huge difference in scale. The Sky Tower is the tallest residential building in Poland.<sup>15</sup> Fig. 5.

The giant lump of skyscraper dominated the whole Wrocław. It was created at the same time as the Thespian<sup>16</sup>. The Sky Tower is located in very close to the Thespian building also on the Powstancow Slaskich street. Wealth of contexts of history of the formation of the object and its controversial impact on the spatial structure of Wrocław are here not important. Instead, as in the case of Thespian, authorial assumptions and declarations of administrator of the sky tower indicate the intended recipient of this embodiment and its operation.

**Figure 5. The Sky Tower on the background of buildings in Wrocław - contrast scale**



**Source:** [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sky\\_Tower#/media/File:BreslauSkyTower.jpg](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sky_Tower#/media/File:BreslauSkyTower.jpg), access 15.03.2016, time: 12:40.

It is also an offer for people who appreciate life in the city, close to its attractions. The object - a new symbol of the city, as you can read on the official website of the investment "was created to delight and provide residents the highest possible comfort."<sup>17</sup> [...] The excellent location makes that for selected people it will be the house, and for many - a landmark and meeting place. It represents what is most precious to the inhabitants of the capital of Lower Silesia: openness, energy and ambition. It is a place where business and trade are combined with daily life at the highest level. For the residents it will not only be address and good investment, but above all a

<sup>15</sup> The height of the main 50 storey Sky Tower is 212 m.

<sup>16</sup> Construction project of the second construction stage of the Sky Tower was completed in 2009, the executive project in 2010., the implementation of a whole project lasted from 2007 to 2013.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.skytower.pl/index.php/nowy-symbol>



*convenient and comfortable home, where you always want to come back. [...] Luxury apartments, functional offices, a modern shopping centers and extensive service and leisure centre - all this makes that life in Sky Tower will have a new flavor, and the term "city within a city" will gain a different, previously unknown dimension".* The service and recreation offer of complex, located primarily in the four-storey 'podium' of quarters of building filling almost 100% of the area (over 19 000 m<sup>2</sup>). The office - residential tower emerges from it. The residential units are located on floors from 28 to 48, the offices occupy the lower floors of the tower. The second high element: 18 - storey "sail" that includes the offices and residential apartments is added to the building. A glazed viewing point, which offers views of the entire Wroclaw and the surrounding area, including the massif of Slezy is located on the top floor of the tower (not counting the technical floor). On clear days you can also see Sudetes at a distance of 100 kilometers with its highest peak Sniezka. It is the attraction that makes the sky Tower building unique. Despite the pretentious and modern name it is not such high<sup>18</sup> and it does not reach the sky. Another unique thing, which the Sky Tower can boast is the sculpture "Profile of Time", by the famous surrealist Salvador Dali, standing in front of the main entrance to the shopping mall. As part of the service offer, which covers an area of 24 000 m<sup>2</sup>, users can enjoy: shopping gallery with gastronomy, gym, bowling alley, billiard club etc. Although the complex is already nearly three years, not all service areas are leased and developed. It is too early to talk about full commercial success of the investment. The Sky Tower did not become a new alternative for the Old city of the city center of Wroclaw, activating the entire southern part of the city.

The cases of two single implementation of modern town houses so far cannot be considered as persuasive answer to the problem of "return to the city" and alternatives to the phenomenon of urban sprawl. The cause of this is probably pulling away overall revitalization of urban spaces from the broader context. Solitary/single Thespian and Sky Tower are not able to restore the urban quality and prestige of "address" of this part of the city, which in the pre-war Wroclaw was an elegant and full of urban life district. Powstancow Slaskich street (pre-war Kaiser Wilhelm Strasse Street) had the nature of a truly urban alley, the second after the Market, salon of the city. War destruction in 1945 and a model of post-war reconstruction of Wroclaw already broke the historical continuity of the development of the city, which still adversely affect its contemporary functioning.

Concepts of Wroclaw development in the context of the intensification of development of urban areas and those lying within the city limits and well-connected with the center i.e. concepts of responding urban sprawl should therefore take into account a broader, multi-threaded range of activities. Plans to revive the satellite districts, formerly separate towns, which are characterized by "urban" layout of the market as a local center seem to be interesting and prospective. The project of revitalization located in the north - eastern part of Wroclaw Psie Pole is currently being implemented<sup>19</sup>. *"Before the war, the local central square existed. It was a shopping and meeting and entertainment place. After the war the district has changed – huge housing estates were created and people began to settle all matters in the center. We want to change it and make people again go there to the café or shopping"*- the project coordinator of the project of

<sup>18</sup> The highest building in Burj Khalifa in Dubai, United Arab Emirates is 828 meters high.

<sup>19</sup> The village (in 1252 r.), later the city Psie Pole was incorporated to Wroclaw in 1928.

revitalization, Dog Field, characterizes the changes in such a way. Restoring the former climate of housing estate is a part of the revival of the concept of neighborhood as a good place to live and attracting new residents who will be able to settle the majority of their cases on the spot without having to journey to the center of Wrocław. Psie Pole has become no longer unattractive neighborhood - a bedroom suburb, but an independent unit within the agglomeration, which is the right place to live. Fig. 6.

**Figure 6. Market square Psie Pole after modernization**



**Source:** <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=615834&page=74>, access 15.03.2016, time: 12:40.

Similar plans of regeneration relate to other similar neighborhoods and settlements in as Lesnica located in the west of Wrocław and Brochow located in the south - eastern part.

Very interesting intention is the project WUWA 2, implemented under the framework of the architectural part of the multi-threaded program associated with the ECC Wrocław 2016.<sup>20</sup> *"WUWA 2 is a model settlement Nowe Zerniki, which will be built in the area of the Municipal Stadium. The housing estate is a project inspired by WUWA (Wohnung und Werkrumaustellung) of 1929, which as the exposition consisting of large exhibitions and a model estate built in the area of Zielony Dab street, proved to be one of the most interesting architectural experiments of the last century. The housing estate WUWA 2 is to meet all the requirements and needs of the modern resident of the city, as well as to promote the formation of social bonds. The entire space of the estate, which includes the commercial and service buildings, school, church, the senior care home etc, corresponds to the highest standards of green building."*<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusion

Urban development is a continuous process. Various trends connected with civilization, economic, economic, political or social changes constantly have an impact on this development,

<sup>20</sup> Wrocław, together with the Spanish city of San Sebastian are the European Capitals of Culture in 2016.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.wroclaw2016.pl/wuwa2>

changing the face of cities in a short period or forever. It seems that the condition of the cities that change evolutionary is better. Urban or social experiments carried out on the urban tissue, different ideas, designed to revolutionize the structure and functioning of cities often ended in failure. Man as the main recipient and a city resident must always be the subject of thinking about the city, city planning and finally the subject of building the city - in every aspect. Despite many twists, the city seems to be the most attractive work of civilization of mankind. This thesis confirms not only rapidly growing global percentage of people living in cities.

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